
POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal. Townsend Hoopes, Douglas Brinkley. *Knopf, \$30.* Townsend Hoopes tells us in the preface of this book that as a "recent Marine lieutenant who aspired to meaningful public service," he found in James Vincent Forrestal "the model hero." Hoopes, who became a "young-man-of-all-works" for the first secretary of defense, considered Forrestal's 1949 suicide "a towering loss to the country and a profound personal tragedy."

In 1987, Hoopes was offered the research papers of the late Charles J.V. Murphy, a prodigious Time Inc. cold warrior who had begun work on a Forrestal biography. With the Murphy papers came Douglas Brinkley, now a Hofstra University history professor, who had worked with Murphy for six months. Hoopes, who rose to be Air Force undersecretary and who wrote the well-received *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, is now 70. Brinkley is 30. Although they collaborated, the judgmental tone is clearly Hoopes'.

Hoopes rightly felt there was "a major gap in the biographical history of World War II and the postwar period," and he and Brinkley have helped to fill it with this well-researched, exhaustive, and mostly favorable biography. This is not revisionist history; it is mainstream and conventional. It is sympathetic yet probing, right down to the title. Forrestal was a driven patriot, and how he came to embody this epithet is the essence of this book.

An Irish immigrant's son, Forrestal was born in 1892 in Matteawan, New York, in the unfashionable southern part of Westchester County. His mother, says Hoopes, was "a stern, rather dour matriarch and an unreluctant dis-

ciplinarian" who wanted the boy to become a priest. But his "natural affinity" was for "the wealthier, more socially accepted Protestant families," and he seemed "somewhat embarrassed by the whole ambience of his lower-middle-class Catholic Irishness."

Much of this biography has to do with Forrestal's successful efforts to flee that environment. He made it to Princeton, a "poor boy in a rich man's school," where he ran *The Daily Princetonian* and was voted "most likely to succeed" as well as "biggest bluffer" and, presciently, "the man nobody knows." He quit Princeton months before graduation and soon was well on his way to Wall Street wealth as a bond salesman. During World War I he became a Navy pilot but sat out most of that conflict at a desk in the office of the chief of naval operations. After the war, Forrestal came back to New York for the Roaring Twenties.

A nose twice broken by a professional boxing coach gave Forrestal a life-long "slight touch of menace" and provided, Hoopes says, "an attractive incongruity between his battered face and his well-cut, double-breasted suits and English shoes." A "pervasive and powerful sexuality" made many women his easy conquests both before and after his 1926 marriage, at 34, to Vogue writer Josephine Ogden, a "bold and creamy beauty" of 26. Their two boys, Michael (who would work in the Kennedy White House) and Peter, were badly neglected. Josephine became an alcoholic whose boozy antics would embarrass Forrestal. But he never seemed to understand or try to help.

Forrestal's Princeton connections led him to his great mentor, Clarence Dillon (father of Douglas, JFK's

Treasury chief) of Wall Street's formidable Dillon, Read. Forrestal commuted by Rolls Royce from his elegant Long Island home, surviving the 1929 crash with \$5 million or so. In those years, Hoopes reports, he was a "self-centered, ambitious, tireless striver—but also the serious reader of history and philosophy, driven by a powerful urge to expand his knowledge and experience, to realize the strong potential of a questing mind. . . ."

Forrestal became Dillon, Read's president at a time when the New Deal began probing Wall Street's excesses. That and signs of the coming war in Europe turned his aspirations toward Washington. His good friend Justice William O. Douglas called President Roosevelt with "a strong recommendation," and on June 29, 1940, at age 48, Forrestal began what would be almost nine years of government service. He quickly became Navy undersecretary, then secretary in 1944. Soon thereafter he began recording what was published in 1951 as the *Forrestal Diaries*—an intimate account of top-level Washington.

He was a whirlwind executive. Once he "managed four business conferences during lunch—soup with [Navy] Secretary Knox, the main course with his own guests, dessert at the White House, and coffee at the Metropolitan Club." He did cocktail parties "in eight minutes flat," turned tennis into "a cult of violence," and rushed through golf "with a clenched jaw."

His Navy tour began as a battle to get control of the admirals' baronies while creating the two-ocean navy. After the war, as first Defense secretary, Forrestal was Laocoon in the Pentagon, struggling to make the self-

centered Navy and Air Force serve national, rather than parochial, interests—as the Army was far more willing to do. Accounts of these seemingly endless intra- and inter-service battles remind the reader how much of the past is prologue.

At the end of World War II, Forrestal toyed with running for office or buying a newspaper, but he simply couldn't leave Washington. One reason was his suspicion of the Soviet Union; he began searching for an American rationale to deal with this new menace. He found it in George Kennan's "long telegram" of 1946.

Kennan's containment doctrine became Forrestal's foundation; he soon became Kennan's aggressive patron. Years later Kennan would characterize Forrestal as "sharp, tense, inquisitive, potentially very much a hard-liner. . . . He was surely one of the first senior figures in our government to realize that Stalin and the men around him were brutal and high-stepping gangsters."

His fear of Moscow led Forrestal to support Truman's military unification

plan, but only in its weak 1947 compromise version. As Defense secretary he could do little toward real unification, trapped by his own devices. Before long he was, as Robert Lovett said, "a burnt-out case."

The culmination of the Hoopes-Brinkley account focuses on Forrestal's deterioration, his fraying judgment, and his inability to see the need to take "time out" from the Cold War contest. He came to see himself as the only strategist who could save America from the communists, and in his delusions of grandeur he even sought to control the newly created National Security Council as his, not Truman's, adjunct.

Forrestal's opposition to the creation of Israel—oil was the reason—led to bitter personal assaults by columnists Drew Pearson and Walter Winchell—the kind of criticism Forrestal's thin skin could not endure. He began to see enemies everywhere. When John McCone came to lunch at Prospect House, his Georgetown home, Forrestal pulled the shades, explaining that he wanted to avoid giving a

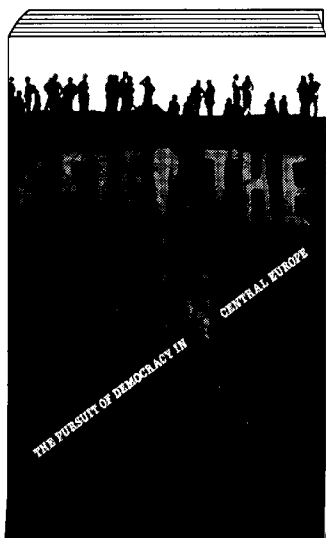
sniper a good target. Forrestal soon learned that Truman was going to fire him and install Louis Johnson, a party fundraising hack.

When Forrestal finally left office, his friends sent him to Florida but, in alarm, soon rushed him to the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. How he came to jump from a 14th-floor pantry window remains today as excruciating a story of bungling medics and lax security as it was nearly 43 years ago.

The authors' judgment is that Forrestal's "complexities and contradictions were traceable to his roots," including his lapsed Catholicism. He was also "cursed" by "the ability to see both sides of every hard question."

Unfortunately, the finale of this book is so loaded with lavish praise for this "public servant of great talent, influence, and accomplishment" as to be almost idolatrous. Still, it is plausible to conclude, as the authors do, that Forrestal's "inability ever to pause, look back, disengage himself even temporarily from the swift onrush of impersonal events led inexorably" to

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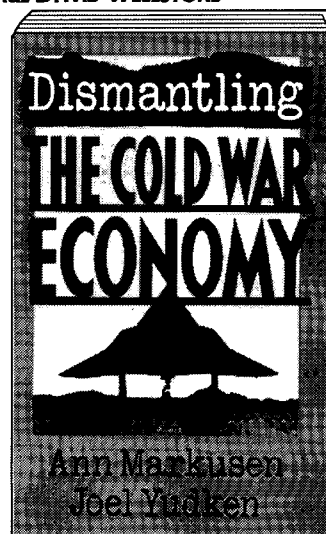
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his suicide. And it also is plausible, as his son Michael said, that had he been more balanced, he would have been less interesting.

—Chalmers Roberts

The Science Gap: Dispelling the Myths and Understanding the Reality of Science. Milton Rothman. *Prometheus*, \$24.95. The thrust of *The Science Gap* is the rebuttal of an alluring fallacy: the assumption that, because the history of scientific progress has witnessed a constant overturning of previously inviolate knowledge, claims made by scientists today will, inevitably, be similarly rejected. What makes this belief so tempting is what also makes it so dangerous: It allows us to continue to assume that science will eventually cure the ills afflicting our planet and threatening its future. One reason we've failed to adequately address the greenhouse effect, toxic dumping, deforestation, destruction of biodiversity, acid rain, ozone depletion, and the like is that the technological triumphs of the past century have given us an idiotic sense of invincibility. Science is not without its limits, Rothman argues—and indeed, many of those limits will soon be reached.

Rothman, a former research physicist at Princeton, points out that vastly improved technology and methodology allow today's scientists to better prove, expand upon, and corroborate their findings, thus they are much more certain of the validity of their theories than scientists of previous centuries could ever be. Much of what we know now, we know with far more certainty than was ever before possible. Furthermore, Rothman asserts, the term "theory" is often misleading, because many of the concepts labeled theories are, instead, well-defined and exhaustively tested principles of nature—they will not be reversed, only refined.

The moral of Rothman's story should be that, because science will not solve all our current or future problems, we will have to rely on a combination of scientific study and smart planning to do the job, so let's get cracking. Instead, he presents a series of chapters, each aimed at debunking a specific contemporary "myth" about science. Unfortunately,

most of the "myths" Rothman attacks are better described as "tiresome aphorisms," making the book little more than a long complaint about a bunch of trivial slogans that nobody really believes anyway. Chapter titles include "Nothing is Known for Sure," "All Scientists Are Objective," and "Advanced Civilizations on Other Planets Possess Great Forces Unavailable to Us on Earth." It turns out that Rothman is less irritated by those scientific beliefs that allow us to keep squandering resources and overrunning the globe than he is by our alleged preoccupation with psychic powers and UFOs. These do present, as he says, a wave of irrationality, but they are only distractions—symptoms of a much deeper foolishness.

Yet distractions dominate this book. For instance, Rothman provides a long discourse on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle to prove that it's not true that "nothing is impossible." But who, honest to God, really believes that nothing is impossible? Rothman points to "teachers, coaches, cheerleaders." But every kid in the history of the world who has tried to fly to Mars by flapping his arms and jumping off the top of the jungle gym knows that some things simply aren't possible. Many of the early chapters are spent reexplaining the principle of conservation of energy—indeed, the subject affords him one of the few attempts at levity in an otherwise humorless text. After mentioning for the fifth time that perpetual motion machines are impossible because energy simply can neither be created nor destroyed, and that the patent office rejects claims on such machines out of hand for just this reason, Rothman points out that some gullible souls are still willing to invest in perpetual motion schemes, because "There is no law of conservation of money or credulity."

Rothman also condemns animal rights activists for their belief in the myth "All problems can be solved with computer modeling," and instead argues that we will always need to run tests on animals. He opines, "The more extreme animal-rights activists are little more than the modern version of the old-time antivivisectionists"—as if this were a stinging indictment. He goes on to assert that such

activists hope to create a "knee-jerk revulsion to the 'elitist' idea that some animals are higher on the scale of evolution than others." However, only the most dogmatic of PETA members would claim that humans aren't higher on the evolutionary chain. But many would argue that such a belief is largely irrelevant, because all life is intrinsically valuable. Secondly, most of the opposition to animal testing stems from the fact that animals are used to test frivolous stuff like new brands of mascara. The horror of this doesn't occur to Rothman. Few reasonable people would suggest giving up cancer research for the want of a few rats—just that we ought to curb our hubris in the matter.

Though he claims to live in a universe that consists of "elementary particles and the forces by which they interact, *and nothing else*" (his italics), it is clear that Rothman actually inhabits a world of loopy activists, insensible piano instructors, New Age gurus, astrologers, and bad science fiction writers, all of whom are conspiring to eradicate common sense from the face of the earth. But the question that looms in the mind of the reader is this: Who's listening to these people? No one, surely, who would bother to read past this book's introduction.

Less airy individuals who do read on are rewarded much later, when Rothman marshals some terrifying statistics on the nature of exponential growth and its relevance to the future of world economic and population growth. He also presents some thought-inducing information on the state of medical technology, which, he points out, is geared towards helping the population of our country get sick later in life. That isn't a terrible thing, except that we end up apportioning ever more of our medical resources to people who have already lived most of their lives. But these weighty topics—around which the entire text ought to have revolved—are buried.

John Allen Paulos wrote a bestseller a couple of years ago called *Innumeracy*, in which he showed how our country's widespread inability to deal with math hurts us in our daily lives. I hope Rothman in his next book chooses to focus his clear sight on the more important issues that are