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Clifford repeated variations of the mantra to every prospective client, but how could it be taken as anything but a confirmation that Clifford was very well-connected indeed?

Clifford did quite well for himself, until the BCCI scandal. (He did so well, in fact, that at the time of his indictment in 1992 he had more than \$19 million in cash and securities in two New York brokerage accounts, all frozen by court order.) The affair was complex, but it boiled down to the takeover of a U.S. bank by the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), a Pakistani bank, which used dummy investors to conceal its real control.

Clifford was hired to help BCCI with the needed U.S. government approvals—and then was hired as chairman of the Washington-based bank. In sum, he lent his name and reputation to the foreign bankers, and they in return gave him a highly lucrative and prestigious position. BCCI got credibility; Clifford got a lot of money and the added clout of being a banker.

The banking connection was an important addition to Clifford's network of influence. That network already included many figures critical to the image of the lobbyist-as-fixer: presidents and press, regulators and prosecutors, senators and representatives, judges, captains of industry and celebrities. To this list was now added "bankers."

Frantz and McLean tell the story of Clifford's association with BCCI in detail. Their account is clear and unsparing, despite the complexities of the matter. The authors stop short of declaring Clifford guilty, but the evidence they put forward seems very strong indeed, particularly on the question of whether he knew that the bank of which he was chairman was in fact illegally controlled by BCCI. Perhaps it is enough to say of that question what Clifford himself said: "I have the choice of either seeming stupid or venal."

BCCI wasn't the first time that Clifford had displayed a willingness to accept unsavory associates in his desire to add the banking card to his hand. A couple of decades earlier, he had served as a director of the National Bank of Washington when it was controlled by the then-corrupt United Mine Workers union. President A. W. "Tony" Boyle, when he wasn't conferring with Clifford in the board room, was busy plotting the murder of a union reformer, a crime for which he was later convicted and imprisoned.

When investigations revealed that union pension funds were being invested for the benefit of the bank and union officials, instead of for the retired miners, their widows, and orphans, Clifford offered no public criticism of either Boyle or the union. He resigned quietly a year later.

From the BCCI affair, though, he could not slip away. But he remained, write Frantz and McLean, defiant to the end: "He saw no reason to give up the notion that a small group of right-thinking men could exercise power and influence without offending anyone." One day in October 1991, Clifford sat before a Senate committee explaining how he could have been unaware that BCCI controlled his bank—in spite of all the evidence. Clifford lectured the lawmakers: "Do I ask you to take my word for that? I do," he declared. "My word has been important for a great many years in Washington."

*Charles W. Bailey is a member of the editorial advisory board of The Washington Monthly.*

**1939: The Lost World of the Fair**  
*David Gelernter*

*The Free Press, \$23*

**By Nicholas Lemann**

This is an immensely charming book that aims to evoke the spirit of the 1939 World's Fair in New York—not just of the fair itself, but also of the city and of American culture generally. In clean, elegant prose,

Gelernter lovingly describes the fair's exhibits and the architecture, technology, movies, magazines, urban culture, and social mores of the day; and, Doctorow-like, he weaves a narrative about fictional characters amid all the precise nonfiction details. He does quite a good job of bringing the moment back to life. Even the fictional characters' ways of speaking and thinking feel as if they belong to a different time from our own.

To call Gelernter nostalgic would be like calling Bill Gates affluent—it wildly understates the case. He regards 1939 as the halcyon moment in American life, the peak from which we have been descending ever since. What he loves about that time is the pervasive tone of optimism, civility, and respect, and the enthusiasm about applied technology. (It's impossible to avoid thinking of 1939 as a riposte to the Unabomber. Gelernter, a computer science professor at Yale, is the Luddite terrorist's best-known victim.)

The fair itself was a paean to a streamlined future, with particular emphasis on consumer goods like automobiles, suburban homes, and refrigerators. The surrounding city was, by today's standards, nearly crime-free, and otherwise pervaded by a social trust that has since disappeared. Roosevelt on the radio, Fred Astaire movies at Radio City Music Hall, Moses and LaGuardia at the helm of New York, the music of Gershwin and Duke Ellington wafting through the air—that's the idea.

By moving the good-old-days baseline back from the fifties to the thirties and focusing on technology as well as family values, Gelernter has gotten more freshness out of nostalgia than it usually has. And because he has done his homework, he knows enough not to over-burnish the picture. He duly notes the much greater pervasiveness than today of poverty, discrimination, and war. Realizing that at the time he's apotheosizing, a majority of America's leading intellectuals proba-

bly were Communists in spirit if not actual membership, he doesn't bother to claim that 1939 was free of political correctness either. (After all, the term was invented around 1939.)

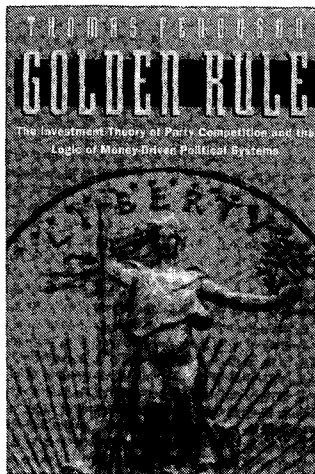
But he firmly insists that something essential and precious existed then and doesn't now. The word he returns to again and again is "authority": "Authority has all but vanished. Its disappearance from American life is just as significant an event, I believe, as the closing of the frontier." In other places, groping for a different term, he refers to the prevalence in 1939 of an "ought culture" or a "civic religion." People followed rules. Children obeyed their parents. No excuses were made for deviant behavior. Men wore neckties when they went out in public and stood when a woman entered the room. There was a real shared excitement about the future.

1939 has something of the quality of a piece of music in which the melodic line is playfully varied but

the underlying theme is rigid and unchanging. It's finally more interesting as a narrative experiment than it is intellectually, because the basic point is made over and over in almost exactly the same way without being developed. The one fresh turn that Gelernter makes is to suggest that the disappearance of the mood he admires is mainly attributable not to such familiar villains as the ACLU, psychologists, and liberal judges, but to the dreams of 1939 having come true to such a remarkable extent. Back then what made the society cohere was a shared longing for a bountiful future; once this was achieved, around 1970, no new organizing principle emerged to replace it, and the society disintegrated into individualism and relativism.

The obvious objection to make to a book like *1939*—so obvious as to be almost unsportsmanlike—is that things weren't as great back then, and aren't as terrible now, as Gelernter

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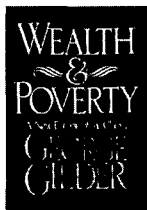
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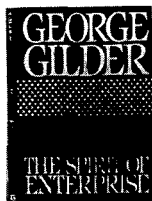
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says. It's more interesting to take him on his own terms and say that he's right to be nostalgic for 1939 but delineates that time's virtues too narrowly. His 1939 is too much *Top Hat* and not enough *The Grapes of Wrath*. He is so completely focused on an orderliness that has vanished that he badly underplays 1939's other main virtue: a democratic spirit of empathy for people in trouble and of universal obligation to help personally in trying to solve America's problems. The erosion of that democratic spirit by snobbery and duty-shirking on the part of the leadership class has contributed greatly to the erosion of Gelernter's beloved authority. Authority holds only when everybody likes and trusts the people who have it.

*Nicholas Lemann is a contributing editor at The Washington Monthly and a national correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly.*

**The Nightingale's Song**

Robert Timberg

Simon & Schuster, \$25

**By Michael R. Beschloss**

Historians eager to explain Iran-Contra in terms of the hubris and secrecy of the Reagan White House will be startled by this dramatic volume by a former Marine, Annapolis graduate, and current *Baltimore Sun* reporter.

Throwing new light on one of the more bizarre episodes in the modern history of American foreign policy, Robert Timberg traces the lives of Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter, and Oliver North of the Reagan National Security Council staff, along with Reagan's Navy Secretary James Webb and Arizona Senator John McCain, a former Vietnam POW. With novelistic skillfulness, Timberg weaves the lives of these men from their days at the U.S. Naval Academy, through the Vietnam War, and into the tapestry of the eighties.

"They are secret-sharers," Timberg writes, "men whose experiences at Annapolis, during the Vietnam War

and its aftermath, illuminate a generation, or a portion of a generation—those who went. Each in his own way stands as a flesh-and-blood repository of that generation's anguish and sense of betrayal."

McCain was the son of an Arizona family of old Navy tradition. He was a rebellious, "hard-rock kind of guy" who at the Naval Academy showed himself to be a "natural leader." During the Vietnam War, his plane was downed over Hanoi and he was taken prisoner for five-and-a-half years.

McCain's Annapolis classmate Poindexter was a Boy Scout and banker's son, first in his class, a "cherubic gray eminence" who "thought through a problem and crafted a solution before anyone else realized that a problem existed." After receiving a doctorate in physics from the California Institute of Technology, Poindexter went to sea and was eventually assigned to the staff of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.

The son of a Texas Congressman who rode the Democratic tide in 1932, McFarlane was, from his youth, "vulnerable to intimidation and to a disquieting, at times unseemly haste to accept blame when things went wrong." At Annapolis, he was "unflappable, self-contained, at ease with the system."

North, the grandson of a British emigré, had a far tougher time than McFarlane at the Academy, fighting injury and despondency throughout his years there. But for all their differences, their experiences in Vietnam and their bitterness upon returning from the Far East were strikingly similar. McFarlane was confused and angered by the U.S. press coverage of the war and the demonstrations against it. North, who was wounded in Vietnam, returned with the same sense of national betrayal.

Webb was the son of a World War II Air Force major, who, Webb says, "taught me a lot about leadership" and "taught me how to fight." Webb chose