

poverty cycle." Yet the War on Poverty was a modestly funded effort designed to help the poor pull themselves out of poverty. The massive social spending of the post-Johnson years came mainly from spending on social security and federal health-care programs. Similarly, Greenstein argues that the Iran-Contra scandal "erupted at the lower levels of the White House," attributing this "misadventure" to aides who exploited Reagan's organizational deficiencies. Contradicting this conclusion is the well-documented finding of Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh that Iran-Contra was not an organizational lapse, but a set of deliberate policy decisions that "were fully reviewed and developed at the highest levels of the Reagan Administration."

Despite his good intentions, Greenstein does not advance the quest for a Philosopher's Stone for decoding presidential performance. But the failure is a significant one because it illustrates the limitations of attempts to deconstruct the conduct of the presidency into separate parts. The American presidency cannot be understood in terms of rigid, ahistorical categories without consideration of the values that each president brings to the Oval Office.

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## Down In Africa

By Joshua Hammer

THERE WAS PROBABLY NO more harrowing assignment for a foreign correspondent in recent years than sub-Saharan Africa during the early 1990s. The abrupt end of the Cold War, mounting pressures for democratization, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism all unleashed destabilizing forces that resulted in an era of unprecedented carnage. Yet unlike the recent wars in Kosovo and the Persian Gulf, access to the battlegrounds was largely unhampered. For anyone with the stamina and the courage to get around, that posting was a reporter's dream—and nightmare.

Scott Peterson is just such a journalist. As the Nairobi-based correspondent for Britain's *Daily Telegraph* and a photographer for the Gamma Liaison agency, he covered the fall of the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre and Somalia's subsequent disintegration into anarchy and famine. He witnessed the intervention to feed the starving and the disastrous pursuit of the warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid. In between, he somehow found the time to make frequent forays to Sudan, where a little-noticed conflict between the Islamic government and Christian and animist southern tribes has resulted in two million deaths in two decades. Along the way, he was attacked by machete-wielding mob in Mogadishu, shot at by the rebel army in Kigali, shelled by Sudanese forces and nearly done in by a bout of cerebral malaria contracted in the Rwandan bush.

Now Peterson has produced an extraordinary book about his years on the front lines. *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* is Peterson's very personal account of that catastrophic era on the African continent. Vividly written and deeply researched, filled with compassion and moral indignation, the book takes its place alongside Keith Richburg's *Out of America*, Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish To Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* and Mark Bowden's *Black Hawk Down* as one of the indispensable works about that time.

Peterson's account of the Somali debacle is probably the most detailed study of the country's disintegration at the hands of its feuding warlords and of the well-meaning but hapless United Nations peacekeeping operation that followed. He begins his tale with the final days of Siad Barre, whose bloody dictatorship set the stage for the country's collapse into rival clan-based fiefdoms. Mogadishu, the capital, became the lawless domain of teenage militiamen stoked on 'gat,' who raced around the ruined city in

souped-up stolen vehicles known as "technicals," armed with an awesome array of weaponry. Into this vacuum stepped Aidid, a brutal killer who was nevertheless arguably the only man strong enough to unite Somalia. Peterson traces the series of missteps that turned a U.S.-led humanitarian mission into a bloody urban war against him.

It is hard to argue with Peterson's central thesis that the arrogance and bungling of top U.S. military and political officials—notably Jonathan Howe, the supremely naive ex-Admiral who became obsessed with arresting Aidid, even spreading Wild West-style "Wanted" posters throughout Mogadishu—led America headlong into a quagmire. His reporting breaks some new ground, including a fascinating account of the spy vs. spy gamesmanship between the American military and Aidid's Habr Gidir clansmen during the warlord's months as a fugitive. Still, some of Peterson's conclusions are debatable. The author faults U.S. special envoy Robert Oakley, for example, for cozying up to Somali faction leaders during the American humanitarian intervention in December 1992, rather than pushing immediately for disarmament. But such a policy would almost assuredly have provoked Aidid and other warlords, and it is highly dubious that President Bush would ever have authorized such a risky mission.

Like many other western correspondents, including this writer, Peterson was mesmerized by Somalia's stark beauty and hallucinogenic violence—yet he steers clear of the macho tone that defines so much writing about the country. His tone is measured, compassionate, and evocative, whether describing the air of paranoia at the fortress like U.N. headquarters or the smell of the capital: "a mix of hot sea and salted, rotting ocean waste and the decomposing refuse of sweating human beings."

The United Nations' humiliating failure in Somalia, of course, set the stage for what was undoubtedly the organization's low point; its abject

### ME AGAINST MY BROTHER :

At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda

by Scott Peterson

Routledge, \$26

abandonment of Rwanda. Peterson's descriptions of those 100 days of bloodshed will be familiar to readers of Gourevitch's award-winning book. Peterson's prose is less elegant, but his account of the genocide possesses a greater sense of immediacy. For Peterson was present nearly every step of the way: flying into Kigali on a U.N. plane days after the massacres began on April 6, touring the ravaged countryside with the Rwandan Patriotic Front, talking his way through roadblocks manned by drunken Hutu militiamen, and following the French army as it launched a last-ditch military operation—dressed up as a humanitarian crusade—to save the Hutu regime. The author presents little new analysis here, but his descriptions are unforgettable. In one highly effective set piece, Peterson wanders through President Juvenal Habyarimana's abandoned palace, using the detritus he finds in the inner sanctum of the dead dictator to launch into an exploration of the three pillars of the genocide—the Catholic Church, the French government, and the regime's proponents of "Hutu Power."

*Me Against My Brother* is a depressing book. Squeamish readers may have trouble with the relentless descriptions of rotting corpses, the smell of death, and numerous scenes of violence. Yet nothing feels gratuitous. Still one longs for more analysis and perspective, for a deeper inquiry into the reasons that states such as Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan collapse. Are there threads that tie these places together, or does each stand alone as a unique example of societal failure? Are such physically and psychologically devastated nations capable of renewal, or are they condemned to a relentless cycle of violence? Peterson leaves such questions largely unanswered. He ends the book with a tiny scene of hope—a mother and daughter, Tutsi survivors, at play among the ashes of Rwanda. But coming at the tail end of a long litany of woe, one senses that Peterson finds that moment hollow.

JOSHUA HAMMER is *Newsweek's* Berlin Bureau Chief and the author of *Chosen By God: A Brother's Journey*.

## How To Grow

By Kenneth Arrow

THE QUALITY OF THIS POSTHUMOUS volume only makes those of us who respect and are indebted to the late Mancur Olson regret his untimely death even more.

*Power and Prosperity* is the last in Olson's series of works analyzing the effects of government and social interactions on economic growth. His method has been the construction of relatively simple models of rational choice based on selfish motives to explain the course of economic growth. Even relatively elementary reasoning can give raise to surprising results. Olson does not consider that free markets are the entire solution to the problems of growth, though of course their vitality is a necessary condition. Collective action is also needed, though in his earliest work, Olson argued that collective action is unlikely to occur if there are many participants in the economy; each individual will have an incentive not to participate but to benefit from the collective actions of others (what economists call the "free-rider" problem). For example, if fires are handled by a volunteer fire department, it will pay any specific individual not to volunteer. Only if there are relatively few participants (or few organized groups of participants) will it be easy to recognize the gains from collective action.

This issue leads to a broader view. Suppose a nation is controlled by some autocrat acting entirely in his or her own interest. The autocrat may still have an interest in increasing the growth of the country, instead of simply stealing everyone's wealth, because over a period of time the autocrat will have more income to tax. Olson very neatly works out the implications of this remark. In particular, he shows that there will be an optimal tax by the autocrat which balances his or her desire for immediate consumption against future better prospects. The assumption is that the lower the tax

the higher the rate of growth, since growth is fueled by private incentives. Of course, as Olson emphasizes, a good deal depends on the time horizon of the autocrat and thus the prospects of growth are greatest when the autocrat has a long horizon, as in the case of a royal dynasty.


In a democracy, the majority will generally have a stronger focus on overall growth than in particular interests, though this can be offset if some particular interests can express themselves more easily. In his

classic *The Rise and Decline of Nations* Olson argues that democracies tend to decline in efficiency over time because special interests have more time to organize themselves.

Olson's latest (unfortunately, last) book concentrates on the disappointing transition of the formerly communist countries which were parts of the Soviet Union or satellites in Eastern Europe. Given the gross inefficiencies of the communist system, one would have expected the transition to a privatized market economy to yield a large increase in output. In fact, the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Ukraine, which together include the great bulk of the population of the former Soviet Union, have national incomes equal to about half of what they were before the fall of the communist system. Even the more successful Eastern European states, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, are only marginally better

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