Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory
Cripps, Thomas
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pg. 344

the book appears to meander. The early sections of the book show how thinkers grappled with the idea of classifications within society. Thus Federalists identified two separate "interests" in society, one of the landed and the other of a combined artisanal and commercial community. Each classification transcended social and economic differences. Jeffersonians held to a distinction between the productive elements of society and the unproductive elements—those who labored and those who lived off the labor of others. But they, too, did not see this division cutting across economic lines.

Somehow, by the 1820s and 1830s, these notions began to change as articulate spokesmen for the workingman's movement started to identify the distinction between worker and capitalist. Burke, however, does not trace a clear linear development for us. That these later thinkers built upon the Jeffersonians is apparent. But the connections between these sets of ideas remains vague. In reaction to this tradition of identifying class conflict, which is sustained by labor leaders for the rest of the century, some thinkers, speaking for the middle class, argue that America is really a classless society. These men—Burke identifies them as the "literary champions of capitalism" (156)—pursue the dream of American exceptionalism. They argue that the United States is an inclusive society in which nearly everyone can be labeled a laboring man, from the worker in a factory to the owner of that factory.

The end of the book sets up a dichotomy between labor leaders espousing class rhetoric and the "defenders of capitalism" urging a "republican" ideal of a unified society that cannot be sustained. Burke makes it appear that the middle class turned its back on any acceptance of the idea of class conflict. However, if one goes beyond the sources used by Burke, class conflict emerges as a major concern for the growing urban middle class. As one commentator put it after the Astor Place riot, "the rich and well-bred are too apt to despise the poor and ignorant, and they must not think it strange if they are hated in return" (*Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot*, 16–19). After the Civil War, urban disorder terrified the middle class and defenders of capitalism even more. William Osborn Stoddard's 1887 account of the draft riots declared the "undisputed fact that social volcanic forces continuously exist in great cities," ready to erupt into class violence at any moment (*The Volcano Under the City; By a Volunteer Special*, 1887, 316).

These examples and others (Burke ignores literature and authors like Hugh Henry Brackenridge and James Fenimore Cooper), suggest the largest shortcoming of Burke's analysis: while he does a fine job working with the writers in his bibliography, the selection process missed other key expressions on the idea of class. Burke outlines his research base in the introduction. He claims to have surveyed every political speech, treatise, and book in the period that addressed the debate over "classifications and class relations" (xiv). This has enabled him to cover many of the key political figures of the period, but there were other expressions of class that were important to the public discourse on social America.

In the final analysis Burke has written a useful, if not comprehensive, examination of class in the first 100 years of the American republic.

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Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory. By Mike Wallace. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. xiv, 318. $54.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Historians in recent years have been dismayed by intrusive corporate efforts to expropriate history to their own uses as symbols of unearned goodwill. Yet the ac-

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counts of this corporate intervention into public museums (and theme parks) survive only in fugitive reportage of conflicts over exhibits and in the editorials of museum curators' tradepapers.

Mike Wallace, a teacher in John Jay College of the City University of New York and an activist in the circle that produces the *Radical History Review*, has filled this gap with a wryly angry, Marxist-tinged polemic that chronicles the rise of the museum movement in America. Early on, his book, a title in Temple University Press's "Critical Perspectives on the Past," finds a persistently class-based factor that has colored the founding of American museums. But a hotter issue that drives his argument is the recent intrusion of the corporation into the production of popular history. "The interplay between power and memory," he calls it (x).

In olden times, the founding of museums by dominant classes (or downwardly mobile ones bent upon preserving a record of their former place in history) seemed to Wallace no more than ancestor-worship—a harmless conceit of the ruling classes of, say, New England or Charleston. Their sins were of omission—electing to celebrate their own contributions to American history rather than those of lower classes and later arrivals. But with the onset of the age of corporate sponsorship of museum making in the 20th century came the demands that whole categories of social conflicts be elided or neutralized. It is these demands that cause the author to raise his voice to its highest pitch.

The day of antiquarian museums passed soon after World War I. Thereafter, just as the great age of 19th century invention waned, some of the giants of the era, notably Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, entered the realm of museums. For them, America was to stand as the outcome of a seamless web of progress, unmarked by any scars of conflict. Ford's Greenfield Village, near Dearborn, Michigan and Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg in tidewater Virginia, like Hollywood period-movies set their histories in overwhelmingly dense layers of authentic detail that gave credibility to whatever story was to be told. The stories were clear: American greatness had evolved from quaint histories of the lives of yeomen and craftsmen to an industrialization that had been undisturbed by labor strife or slave insurrections. Wallace shrewdly points out the political effect of such omissions: the defining story of America is one of the triumph of technology and therefore of corporate consumerism.

Wallace's voice is at its sharpest when he takes up the conflict over who shall hold access to popular history in our own time. Indeed, when he takes up Walt Disney's forays into history in the form of Disney World, "EPCOT," and the firm's eventual blunder into the land surrounding Manassas Courthouse, the site of the two Civil War battles of "Bull Run" (in Yankee nomenclature), Wallace is driven by the sheer intellectual delight of tweaking the tail of the Disney lion. He all but guffaws at Disney's outrageously successful, glossily enameled versions of American history enacted in the firm's theme parks.

In the last essay—for the pieces *are* essays collected for this book—the author reaches a sort of epiphany of research and polemic when he analyzes the hidden corporate opposition to the now famously truncated Smithsonian exhibit on the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima that ended World War II. Among the "veterans" who protested the exhibition was the Air Force Association which, Wallace reported, enjoyed the support of 199 industrial "affiliates," or air-and-space firms that advertised in the AFA's organ, *Air Force Magazine*, which was itself more an advocate of Air Force procurement than a voice of aerial combat veterans. The AFA had been founded in 1946 at the end of the war by two genuine heroes, Generals Hap Arnold and Jimmy Doolittle, in order to urge that we "keep our country vigorously aroused to the urgent importance of air power" (286). Such a slogan was hardly served by the Smithsonian's attempt to provide a balanced historical exhibit of the decision to drop an atomic bomb on the civilians of an already prostrate enemy. Rather

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than teach Americans about an episode in the rise of air power, the exhibit divided the prospective audience into combatants who fought in a violent world of clearcut blacks and whites, and historians who studied in a gray world of shadings, qualifications, and nuances.

Throughout his book, Wallace approaches such conflicts between putative arbiters of "correct" history with the prescriptive voice of a polemicist who knows whereof he speaks. In two pages on industrial museums (88–89), his argument is hammered out in such phrases as: "Some years ago I decried," "I would like to suggest some pathways," "First I think we need," "I'd like to see," and so on. It is this nagging voice of advocacy that makes for a lively book that insists that Americans begin to see that their history *matters*.

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Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century. By Philip Gleason. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. xiii, 434 pp. $39.95.

It is easy to have fun at the expense of universities. The distance between lofty pretension and grubby practice often demands it. "A University should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning," said Disraeli in 1873. Adam Smith took a less roseate view: "The discipline of colleges and universities is in general contrived, not for the benefit of the students, but for the interest, or more properly speaking, for the ease of the masters." The paying public sides with Smith.

To complicate matters, some universities are quirky even by the eccentric standards of their peers. Take Catholic colleges. What are we to make of places where liberty and learning come face to face with doctrine and dogma? Who comes first, Pope or Professor? To be sure, that dichotomy is unsubtle. Even uninformed critics of Catholicism (a plentiful crew) should notice its weakness, as it misunderstands both the nature of authority and freedom and—adding historical to theological crudity—imagines the tension between them to be peculiar to confessional institutions.

Still, many people think (with George Bernard Shaw) that a Catholic University is a contradiction in terms. For all its liberal mouthings, the theory goes, Mother Church will always win. We should not be surprised by this. Not every Chancellor is a latter day Aquinas, able to defend intellectualism while upholding the claims of faith. Paying the bills and cheering the team take precedence. On the other hand, some Catholic academicians are themselves radically ambivalent about freedom and authority, and the claims of each in the institutions they serve. The result is disintegration: real common purpose gone, replaced by the factitious harmonies of the "mission statement." Alas for John Henry Newman's high ideal. Today he might notice the university as pantomime horse, head and hind tugging in opposite directions. Professors—a generally smug lot—think themselves the head of the horse, the administration as the risible rear. In truth, the difference in dignity is hard to gauge.

These thoughts are prompted by Philip Gleason's splendid study of the American Catholic experience of higher education in the 20th century. The story he tells is fascinating: at once that of a people, an era, and a country. Beginning with the foundation of the Catholic University of America in the 1880s and ending with John

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