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Cover: Girl Fighter, 1969, screen print, 19 x 17 inches. 
Back Cover: Advancing Banner, 1968, lithograph 5/7, 16 x 11 5/8 inches.

Weber is a Chicago public artist who began his career in the late sixties with images responsive to the civil rights struggles and the Vietnamese War. He continued his career as a leader in the Chicago street mural movement. Since the early eighties, Weber has turned to the sanctuaries of churches as public spaces in which to hang, banner-like, his art of social conscience. A mid-career retrospective of his work is on view at Valparaiso University, Jan. 17-Feb. 21, 1991.
Dulce et decorum est pro patria vivere

A column that typically ends with a wish for peace is hard to write today, less than a week before Christmas, and (depending on which of the deadlines you are endorsing) two weeks or a month before all hell may break loose in the Middle East. Never has the gap between the time of writing and the time of reading seemed so great.

I was born in 1940, and my earliest memories have to do with war. My oldest son, born in 1965, says the same thing is true for him; he remembers seeing, one day in kindergarten, a *Time* cover with a blindfolded GI carrying another on his back, and experiencing a sense of sadness and fear that overwhelmed him—at five years old. My youngest son, nineteen this Christmas, is planning his route out of the country, with my blessing.

Since August 2, most of the people I know have been trying to figure out what is right, as a course of action, or as a position, in this war crisis. We keep reading, and listening, and talking, and reading, and listening, and talking, and we find it hard to make conclusions. If I were to say to myself, "By January 1, you must make a decision about what is right in the Middle East, and be committed absolutely to it, no matter what," I would fail. I am puzzled and angry because there seems no way to avoid the situation in which war is one of the alternatives. It is as though for the people at the heads of state, armed offensive action—war—is always one of the choices. And thus one is forced to recognize that human beings have not moved one inch forward in the ability to control their lives through reason and the desire to do good since the earliest times we pay attention to. A miserable recognition.

Recently I watched a movie about the Australian Lighthorsemen during World War I, attacking Beersheba against terrible odds, with great gallantry. The battle scenes—exciting, gory, terrifying—reminded me of those in the recent and wonderful movie version of *Henry V* produced last year by Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company. There it was on St. Crispin's Day, 1415, and again in 1917. And in the much-admired television Civil War series. And in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, or Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's *Buffalo Afternoon*—in 1967, 1970. We have plenty of imagined experience of the spectacle of war in all these images of violent deaths. The sense of spectacle may blur for us the fact that each one in this vast collection of deaths was experienced separately, one person at a time.

Since we first began to make records about our lives, humans have made these deaths into works of art, in paintings or plays or movies, or books, or by carving the names into a large piece of black granite. The terror and horror of war is thus kept in front of us in a peculiar way, for we are fascinated by its presence, and by its possibility. But what if it were not a possibility?

A board game is playable with endless numbers of rules, which govern every contingency of disagreement except for the player who simply sweeps all the pieces and the board off the table. This might indeed happen, but it is not a strategy which all the players imagine as possible when they sit down to play. If it is an imaginable strategy, then everyone has agreed that the game will go on until someone sweeps all the pieces and the board itself away. And that conclusion becomes inevitable.

There have been some—very few—practices that humankind has moved away from, that people generally used to regard, but no longer regard as a viable practice. This is not to say that such practices (infant exposure, for example, or slavery) are never encountered, but that, where encountered, they are acknowledged to be outside the realm of acceptable alternatives of behavior. Is it so impossible to work at ways to make war that kind of practice? Must a Christian view of humans as flawed creatures doom us to accept this flaw as so inevitable a part of our nature? Or can we believe that God has a dream for us which includes other possibilities in this world?

Living once more—or still—at the edge of this ancient and perpetual evidence of failure, let us pray and work for a world where it is more than a hope and a wish to say,

Peace,

GME
In his *The Nature of Prejudice*, first published in 1954, sociologist Gordon W. Allport discusses the extent to which our personal values, loyalties, customs, and behavior are formed in response to our relationship to certain in-groups (groups to which we belong by virtue of such circumstances as birth, geography, language) and reference-groups (groups to which we do not belong naturally but to which we may wish to belong because of perceived benefits, aspirations for success, image, and so forth). For example, a member of a racial minority in a given society may experience a powerful desire for realignment with the racial majority, would like to "partake of the privileges of this majority, and be considered one of its members...", may feel so intensely about the matter that he repudiates his own in-group." Problematically, however, "... the customs of the community force him to live with, work with, and be classified with the [minority] group. In such a case his in-group membership is not the same as his reference group" (29).

Allport's terms are meant to explain, without suggesting too much about the insidious element involved in this process, the ways in which minorities may in subtle ways be culturally tyrannized by the majority—how, in fact, minorities may in some measure even contribute to this tyranny in the act of repudiating their own in-group identification. While Allport is not concerned with the aesthetic implications of in-group/reference-group identification, I want to suggest that his behavioral model can be naturally extended to encompass conceptions of artistic purpose and artistic identity as these are related to what we might call "ethnic circumstance." Ultimately, what I want to suggest is that James Baldwin, as natural heir to a particular aesthetic in-group, repudiates that inheritance, that identification. Instead, his identity as artist is powerfully tied in his own mind to a majority reference group—modernism and the modernist aesthetic—a group to which he aspires, but to which he does not innately belong. But first some history.

"Stranger in the Village," one of Baldwin's most widely-reprinted essays and one of his most powerful statements on the matter of cultural identification, was first published in *Harper's Magazine* in October of 1953. In 1955 it was reprinted as the final essay in *Notes of a Native Son*, a collection of essays all of which had been published earlier in a variety of intellectually prestigious magazines—*Commentary, Harper's, The Partisan Review, The Reporter, The New Leader*—during the years between 1948 and 1955. Just thirty-one years old in 1955, James Baldwin clearly was emerging as one of the major new voices of the black experience, an inheritor (in complex and not always comfortable ways, as we shall see) of the mantle of Richard Wright, from whose 1940 novel, *Native Son*, the title of his collection of essays was obviously derived. But the experience that Baldwin was emerging as the voice of was still the black experience, an out-group kind of experience, an experience of a disenfranchised "other," and Baldwin must have felt himself, when he wrote that essay in 1953, a stranger in more than one kind of village: a racial stranger, certainly, in that Swiss village where he was writing and living; a cultural stranger in the United States.
States and Western Europe with its dominant white traditions and culture; a stranger by temperament in the village of the modernist, anti-historical aesthetic. But this last village was one that Baldwin was determined to enter and make himself a home in, the only one, Baldwin felt, where he could achieve a measure of "public progress" ("Notes" 4).

In 1948, the year when the first of the essays in Notes of a Native Son was written ("The Harlem Ghetto"), T. S. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. In 1955 (the year, recall, when Notes of a Native Son was published), Melvin Tolson, black poet and author of "Harlem Gallery," was moved to write these retrospective comments on Eliot: "When T. S. Eliot published 'The Waste Land' in 1922, it sounded the death knell of Victorianism, Romanticism, and Didacticism. When Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the victory of the moderns was complete. The modern idiom is here to stay—like modern physics" ("Modern" 13-14). Even earlier, in fact in the very year of Eliot's de facto ascendance as the arch-priest of modernism, Tolson had been even more programmatically insistent that "the time has come for a New Negro Poetry for the New Negro." He was convinced, as Michael Bérubé has recently pointed out, that black writers in this Age of Eliot must either confront and assimilate modernism or forever be left outside the cultural mainstream. "The most difficult thing to do today," he told an audience of black students at a small college in Kentucky, "is to write modern poetry. Why? It is the acme of the intellectual. Longfellow, Whittier, Milton, Tennyson, and Poe are no longer the poets held in high repute. The standard of poetry has changed completely. Negroes must be aware of this. This is the age of T. S. Eliot" (qtd. in Bérubé 58). Tolson's response, his own attempt to enter the mainstream of the modernist idiom, to align himself with this newly-emergent "reference group" (to use Allport's term) was to compose two poems in the years just following this address ("E. & O. E." in 1951 and "Libretto for the Republic of Liberia" in 1953), both of which emulate the poetic manner of Eliot in their proximity, studied obscurity, esoteric imagery—even in their inclusion of a set of explanatory footnotes.

It would be too easy and too condescending even at this brief historical distance from the occasion to dismiss Melvin Tolson as a kind of modernist Uncle Tom. He was not the only black writer during this period attempting quite understandably to engage the modernists on their own ground and aspiring thereby to join in their enterprise. Ralph Ellison, whose classic Invisible Man was published in 1952 (in the heart of this brief period I am trying to isolate as significant) likewise attempted to disengage himself from the social-protest "in-group" associated with Richard Wright and align himself, instead, with the heavy-weights of modernism.

I respected Wright's work and I knew him," Ellison was to write in Shadow and Act, "but this is not to say that he 'influenced' me as significantly as [assumed]. Consult the text! I sought out Wright because I had read Eliot, Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Hemingway... But perhaps you will understand when I say he did not influence me if I point out that while one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives one can, as artist, choose one's 'ancestors.' Wright was, in this sense, a 'relative';... Eliot, whom I was to meet only many years later, and Malraux and Dostoievsky, and Faulkner, were 'ancestors. . .'" (Qtd. in Goede 483). This seems a compelling affirmation of Allport's model of human behavior, confirmed, moreover, on purely aesthetic grounds.

What I am attempting to establish through the examples of Tolson and Ellison is that black writers, during this crucial period of the late 40s and early 50s, were conscious of deeply conflicting allegiances between what the modernist aesthetic tends to posit as a set of mutually exclusive categories—the terms of life and the terms of art. On the one hand were the racial, social, cultural—the raw historical facts of the black experience in America. Real life, real content, real substance. Real history, if not always (or even ever) the history of the mainstream majority culture. But on the other hand, as Tolson and Ellison were aware, was the by-now-entrenched modernist aesthetic, what was being defined by the mid-50s not simply as an aesthetic but an ideology—even, on the darker side, a pathology, as Georg Lukács was to paint it in his classic 1956 essay, "The Ideology of Modernism." For the modernist, typically, the particularities of history are less important that the universally suggestive categories of myth and psychology. The objective, shared, commonplace—what might be called in general the components of a "social" consciousness—cede in favor of reification of the terms of the subjective consciousness. This involves, of course, much more than a simple shift of intellectual interest from objects to subjects or a neo-Romantic exaltation of the subjective; it signals a loss of faith in the terms of objectivity itself. "Technique" and "form" transcend the merely referential or representational and the search for "meaning" is considered nothing more than a naïve and fundamentally hopeless enterprise, since, as Lukács puts it, the "theoretical impossibility of understanding reality is [for modernism] the point of departure" (60). As an example of what Lukács considered modernist "decadence" he
quotes the German poet Gottfried Benn, whose observation might be considered an almost generic modernist sentiment: "There is no outer reality, there is only human consciousness, constantly building, modifying, rebuilding new worlds out of its own creativity" (60).

This is not exactly a guiding precept congenial to a literature of social protest, or to a literature that has much significant socio/historical dimension at all, as Tom Wolfe has recently lamented in a controversial polemic in Harper’s Magazine, "Stalking the Billion-footed Beast: A Manifesto for the Social Novel of the ‘90’s." The modernist (and, in a more self-consciously ironic way, the post-modernist) is a cool and detached technician of art, the Joycean definition from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man still remaining the credo most often cited: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, reified out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." For Eliot, similarly, the artist must learn to "extinguish his own personality," to drive an aesthetic wedge, so to speak, between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates." The literature of protest, by contrast, and the artist of protest, by implication, are not detached, cool, aloof, but, rather, are obsessively, heatedly involved. The burden of the writer (like Baldwin) who is driven by these competing, indeed irreconcilable impulses, these opposing ideologies, is forever to experience a deep sense of division, of divided duty, to sense that progress on one front is achieved only at the great cost of regress on the other.

Nowhere is Baldwin’s bedevilment by this artistic ambivalence more evident than in the record of his turbulent relationship with his friend and literary "relative," to use Ellison’s word for him, Richard Wright, a relationship that began with a deep sense of common social purpose only to deteriorate as Baldwin became ever more liberated, as he was to put it in one of his three literary obituaries for Wright, from "the sorrow, the rage, and the murderous bitterness which was eating up my life and the life of those around me" ("The Exile" 191). Baldwin and Wright first met in New York in 1944, just two years before Wright left for Paris where he was to spend most of the remaining years of his life in a self-imposed cultural exile. Baldwin was 20, Wright 36. Their meeting, as Baldwin recounts it, was fairly typical of what we might imagine the first encounter between a fledgling and an established writer to be like. Baldwin was all adulation. Wright was friendly, perhaps a little patronizing, certainly flattered. He generously offered to read what Baldwin had so far written of Go Tell it on the Mountain, and was impressed to the extent that he helped Baldwin to secure a much-needed supporting fellowship. Two years later Baldwin was to leave New York himself for Paris, as Fern Eckman speculates, "to escape not only the Negro condition but the condition of being Negro" (121). What Baldwin was also trying to escape, as he later expressed it in his “Autobiographical Notes” at the beginning of Notes of a Native Son, was "the very real danger of my social situation.” Baldwin was persuaded that a combination of hate, fear, and rage were giving the world “an altogether murderous power” over him. In such a condition, “in such a self-destroying Limbo,” Baldwin was convinced, “I could never hope to write”—could never hope to write, that is, in the meticulously detached way his modernist side was now compelling him to write. "The only real concern of the artist,” Baldwin goes on to say—in language that could have come from a Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, from any of the acknowledged giants of modernism is “to create out of the disorder of life that order which is art” (4, 5).

When Baldwin looked back, after Wright’s death in November of 1960, to their first meeting sixteen years earlier, to the meeting where he had considered Wright his idol and himself Wright’s protege, he was saddened to consider that "my only means of discharging my debt to Richard was to become a writer," but "this effort revealed, more and more clearly as the years went on, the deep and irreconcilable differences between our points of view" (“Exile” 190).

The essential differences between Wright and Baldwin were those between the documentary social realist and the modern subjective formalist, the same ideological/aesthetic conflict that three decades earlier had broken up the deep (though somewhat surprising) friendship between Henry James and H. G. Wells. In both cases the split was provoked by the publication of a literary manifesto of sorts by the younger man (Wells was James’s junior by thirteen years) in each of the two soon-to-be feuding pairs. In 1915 Wells published a collection of satirical essays under the title Boon, purporting to be a selection of commentaries on writers and literary issues of the day composed by a lately-deceased writer by the name of George Boon. "Of Art, Of Literature, Of Mr. Henry James," a late addition to the collection, portrays James altogether unsympathetically as a hopelessly fastidious and genteel writer of antiseptic novels comparable to "a church lit but without a congregation to distract you, with every light and line focussed on the high altar. And on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an egg-shell, a bit of string" (Qtd. in Edel and Ray 57). The point Wells is attempting to score against James here—that while his novels may be artistic masterpieces, from Wells’s more social viewpoint they are arid and devoid of life—is precisely opposite
the point Virginia Woolf, modernist, pressed against Arnold Bennett, social realist, in her famous 1924 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," namely, that Bennett's novels suffer from an excess of superficially drawn life and a notable absence of shaping, informing art.

This is more nearly the case that Baldwin was to attempt making against Richard Wright in the essay responsible for Wright's feelings of betrayal at the hands of his young friend. "Everybody's Protest Novel," an essay published in _Zora_ magazine in 1948 (and the following year in _The Partisan Review_ ) is mainly an excoriating critique of _Uncle Tom's Cabin_. But towards the end of the essay, _Native Son_, the very novel that the younger Baldwin had acclaimed as the masterpiece of the American black experience, is suddenly and bitterly indicted for perpetuating an image of black violence as damaging in its own way as the image of sentimental black acquiescence that permeates _Uncle Tom's Cabin_.

Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses. And, indeed, within this web of lust and fury, black and white can only thrust and counterthrust, long for each other's slow, exquisite death; death by torture, acid, knives and burning; the thrust, the counterthrust, the longing making heavier that cloud which blinds and suffocates them both, so that they go down into the pit together. ("Everybody's" 17)

The quarrel between Baldwin and Wright engendered by this piece, which Baldwin rather disingenuously claimed was not even a serious critique of _Native Son_, was never resolved, but did bring into the open those "irreconcilable differences" that Baldwin now sensed between his and Wright's conceptions of artistic purpose. "All literature is protest," Wright once shouted at Baldwin during one of their many subsequent arguments, "You can't name a single novel that isn't protest." To this Baldwin replied, "weakly countered," as he puts it, that "all literature might be protest, but all protest was not literature." "Here you come again," an angry Wright responded, "with all that art for art's sake crap" ("The Exile" 197).

"The root function of language is to control the universe by describing it," Baldwin writes in "Stranger in the Village." Baldwin's grief at the death of Wright in 1960 must have been tempered by just the slightest measure of relief. The field was at last cleared of his arguing presence, and Baldwin was finally able to control, in a sense to exorcise, the bothersome difference in their artistic visions by "describing" Wright's work in revisionistic terms that rescued it from those besetting particularities of specific historical circumstances. Here we see Baldwin turned critic, and critic of a particular sort, bringing to bear on Wright's work all of the universalizing, anti-realqist, anti-historical biases that characterize the mainstream of modernist, formalist criticism. "At the moment of his death," Baldwin asserts, Wright "was approaching his greatest achievements." Why? Because Wright was at last acquiring detachment, "a less uncertain aesthetic distance," becoming (presumably through some inevitable process of artistic evolution from a lower to a higher plane) the cool and disinterested modernist. "It is strange to begin to suspect, now," Baldwin writes in what is surely classic (and of course quite literal in this case) "death of the author" commentary, "that Richard Wright was never, really, the social and polemical writer he took himself to be... It had not occurred to me, and perhaps it had not occurred to him, that his major interests as well as his power lay elsewhere" ("Eight Men," 181, 184).

While he is alive, Baldwin laments, a writer's work is "fatally entangled with his personal fortunes and misfortunes, his personality, and the social facts and attitudes of his time." What a relief when he is gone, along with all that heat, passion, intensity, and rage.

All of this points for me to a central, consuming ambiguity in Baldwin. Here is a writer whose work openly acknowledges, even asserts, Otherness and disenfranchisement from the cultural traditions of the West, but one who simultaneously capitulates to the dominating attitudinal principles of that same cultural hegemony. But I am far from wanting to condemn Baldwin on the vague charge of aspiring to be a modernist. Aesthetic trends have about them, during the period of their birth and ascendancy, an aura of inevitability and truth, as though they are newly-discovered laws of nature. Modernism, during more than half our century, has seemed so natural and inevitable an extension of human progress in the understanding and expression of the inner life that anything in principle opposing its cult of subjectivism has been treated with a condescending intellectual contempt.

If there are doubts about this we need only to consider how unassailably correct and righteous James's critique of Wells has seemed to us, or to consider how, as James's reputation as "the master" of pre-modernism has soared, the social critiques of Wells have been regarded with tongue-clucking scorn while quietly going out of print, leaving Wells in our memory as...
nothing more than the author of *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*.

Or, we need only to consider how penetrating and insightful Woolf's indictment of Arnold Bennett has seemed to whole generations of students of the novel and how his "loose and baggy monsters" of social realism have fared at the hands of modernist critics, or rather have not fared since they have been generally ignored. Or, finally, should it surprise us that the social realist Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1930), is hardly read at all today and only rarely represented in anthologies of American literature used in our classrooms?

For Tolson, for Ellison, for Baldwin (and, as Baldwin would have it, even for Wright), the way of modernism was the way to cultural power and authority. Paradoxically, however, the modernist aesthetic is inherently an aesthetic of cultural complacency, of deliberate dis-engagement from the public arena in which power and authority retain any of their motive significance. Do these writers assimilate modernism, then, or are they merely assimilated by it? Institutions move in mysterious ways to absorb and thereby defuse whatever is strange or marginal or threatening. At the conclusion of "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin seems to me remarkably prescient in his observations on the impossibility of ever maintaining the kind of anti-historical, anti-realist cultural hegemony that lies at the heart of the modernist enterprise:

> It is only now beginning to be borne in on us—very faintly, it must be admitted, very slowly, and very much against our will—that this vision of the world is dangerously inaccurate, and perfectly useless. For it protects our moral (and, one might add, our intellectual) high-mindedness at the terrible expense of weakening our grasp of reality. People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster." (148)

Baldwin is correct here almost in spite of himself, in ways I suspect he did not intend and to an extent he could hardly have foreseen. I began by referring to the aesthetic apotheosis of T. S. Eliot and it is therefore fitting to conclude by citing a more recent commentary on him, this one by Cynthia Ozick in a recent issue of *The New Yorker.* "It may be embarrassing for us now to look back at the nearly universal obeisance to an autocratic, inhibited, depressed, rather narrow-minded, and considerably bigoted fake Englishman" (121). I would be tying too neat a package if I were to attribute this considerably revised view of Eliot to the counter-ascendancy of a literature of realism or of protest, Tom Wolfe's *Harper's* manifesto notwithstanding. It does suggest, however, that we are less likely now that at any time in our recent past to turn our backs (one of James's fondest images, by the way) on the complexities and contradictions of our own cultural history. Voices of protest, of all kinds, have helped us to move in this better direction by insisting that we not withdraw from but that we confront the terms of that history.

**Works Cited**


VIETNAM AND THE JOURNALISM OF CONFLICT

Eric Wignall

Antagonism between the two professions has grown with the rise of an independent press. During the First World War press coverage was little more than an arm of the government, and only after the war did tales of waste and carnage reach a wider audience. These debunking exposes may have sold papers, and may indeed have told the truth, but they caused outrage at the messenger, and the press was frequently criticized for being unpatriotic, a government's worst taunt. The Soviet press is now undergoing a revolution from government arm to government watchdog, and will undoubtedly incur the wrath of the Soviet military in the process.

As the United States enters a new decade, one that threatens at least one conventional war and increasing possibilities for costly, limited actions, the journalist/military conflict will also increase in tension and substance. If US military forces engage Iraqi troops in Kuwait it will be the first real-time war, for if war breaks out, satellite coverage is virtually assured; images of war will be sent to American homes in real-time, as they happen.

This is the next evolutionary step in media coverage from the "television war" of Vietnam. The technology of that day was limited, compared to today's standards, and the images sent back were delayed by film developing time and transit time to the states. That time lapse, which grew shorter as the war progressed, was enough of a stumbling block that editing and production had to take place before film was aired. Today television means unedited tape, direct from the satellite, direct from the uplink, direct from the camera itself. With little or no FCC involvement, TV news producers no longer have a time barrier between input and output. How the government, or public opinion, is going to react to this unprecedented access to military activities is uncertain. Short actions like Grenada, Panama, and the Falklands are easily censored by delayed media access. How media coverage affected past conflicts is an imprecise study, more so when the conflict is long-term, divisive and unpopular. The media's role in Vietnam's television war still provokes sharply divided debate by academics and media professionals.

The conservative thesis posits an unpatriotic press. Many conservatives believe that the absence of govern-
ment control over the media crippled the American war effort in Vietnam. This argument won't die, even though it fails to consider that Republicans in Washington were questioning the president's credibility on Vietnam long before reporters were. In its own way the conservative's 'unpatriotic press' argument is similar to the myth of deliverance in politics. That myth is conjured up each election year as we are told that the current generation is living in bad times, and "if only we could go back to the simpler, better days of the (fill in the decade) we would be much better off." Such political myths are never destroyed by evidence as long as they serve important functions. And in this case the myth of an unpatriotic, or at least militarily damaging, press is valuable to those who want to limit the media's access to information.

The liberal side of the argument glorifies the role played by the combat journalist. This view is a dramatic one for the journalist: war stopper, whistle-blower and public guardian. Unlike the World War II correspondent who dutifully submitted to censorship and accentuated the positive, the liberal vision shows hard-bitten, weary realists who reported TRUTH. These adversarial journalists knew the war was all wrong from the start and reported the news whether or not it was good for America. Used in this argument are the now legendary stories: Morley Safer in Cam Ne, Harrison Salisbury in Hanoi, The Tet Offensive, My Lai and the Pentagon Papers.

This antagonist view is not entirely wrong. As Vietnam continued, journalists did grow more independent of the government line, and were less than deferential, unlike those of an earlier era. The daily press briefings in Saigon, as they became more obviously unrealistic in their bodycounts and pacification stories, became known to journalists as the "Five O'clock Follies."

But history seems to conclusively point out that both arguments are false. As Daniel Hallin points out in his well-documented book, _The Uncensored War_, the shift in public policy about the war was not directly linked to coverage of the war. Press coverage of the Vietnam war, and contemporary American journalism, is a day to day affair. The press reported what came from official sources and from their dominant assumptions about the war. Critical coverage didn't become widespread until the wider society, including policy makers in Washington, began to turn away from the war.

The coverage paralleled a shift in the opinions of American policy makers. Systematic studies of network television coverage of Vietnam have rejected the idea that the living-room war meant graphic violence on a daily basis, or that television was consistently negative toward U.S. policy or led public opinion in turning against the war. Public opinion about Vietnam fluctuated throughout the conflict but turned negative as casualty figures rose over time. This general trend is noted in John Mueller's _War, Presidents and Public Opinion_, where a perceptible dividing line marks the point at which press coverage and public opinion turned the corner. That dividing line is the so-called Tet offensive.

Before the Communist offensive during the Tet holiday, the press relied heavily on official information in the form of briefings, Army statements, policy outlines and State Department information sessions. After the unexpected violence of Tet, in which the American Embassy — a symbol of U.S. commitment — had been overrun, press and public sentiment turned against the official line. Following Tet, the press generally opted for information outside government source material.

Mueller asserts that public opinion was driven not by the press, but by the reaction to a rising death toll; collapsing public support for intervention in Korea and Vietnam both parallel the rising American casualty figures. If Mueller's study is not complete in its explanation of swings in public opinion, he is certainly right to cast doubt on the argument that the war would have been different if the media had been more tightly controlled.

In a study of media-military relations, part of the Army's official history of the Vietnam War, Army historian William Hammond concluded that the voluntary guidelines set up to protect military security worked well. The image of a leaky press, endangering military operations through callous reporting is false. "We could not confirm even one breach," Hammond says, "never one where the enemy was able to take advantage, where they didn't have other ways of knowing." And on the issue of the collapse of political support for the war, Hammond concluded that

most of the public affairs problems that confronted the United States in South Vietnam stemmed from the contradictions implicit in Lyndon Johnson's strategy for the war. Given the restrictions and limited goals Johnson had adopted... the practical initiative rested with the enemy.... The South Vietnamese were unreceptive to the sorts of reforms that might have made their cause attractive to the American public. (Cited by Hallin xi)

Another myth is that the American public wanted a limited war, a quiet little conflict, in Vietnam. Some in the military believed that the war could have been won if the United States had fought an all-out war. Public opinion, or the administration's perception of public opinion, tended to limit the use of U.S. military
power. Strategic bombing was limited because extensive civilian casualties were seen as politically damaging, though Stanley Karnow suggests that had Johnson determined to do so, he could have “sold” the American public on this policy.

Unrestricted bombing, or aggressive military activity in general, probably would have played well in Peoria in the early days. Though establishment newspapers like the New York Times would not have liked it had Johnson unleashed the military, the Daily News and the Chicago Tribune would have been solidly behind him. Remember that in 1965 the News had called for an invasion of China, and the Tribune, like many midwestern papers, was hard on communism of any kind or location.

The media may well have been swept up into a war footing, but there was a certain amount of fear by administration officials that the public would respond too vigorously to an unrestrained call to arms, pushing the country into precisely the kind of confrontation favored by the Daily News, that motivated the decision to keep the war limited. The Johnson administration chose to fight a limited war not so much because it felt political opposition gave it no choice, but because it was unwilling to sacrifice other political priorities to an all-out war effort, because it feared the war could grow out of control, and because many officials—an increasing number as time went on—were not convinced the expanded measures advocated by the military would bring victory at reasonable cost. (Hallin 212)

Eventually public opinion did become a powerful constraint on U.S. policy, but it is not clear that Vietnam would have been much different if the news establishment had been more deferential to the administration line. Public support for war in Korea, a shorter, less costly, limited war also dropped as it grew more costly in men and material. The public relations battle for Korea was lost without adverse television coverage (there were few TVS) and censorship remained tight throughout the war. Military involvement in Korea was questioned by the public, who were debating the role of the US in the UN, and not by journalists who were still following what was essentially a World War II era set of professional standards.

Policymakers periodically receive bad press throughout history, even in so-called ‘good wars,’ and reports of incompetent military leaders have always been part of the military-media relationship. Negative reporting took place only after World War I but during World War II and Korea the press had a more critical eye from the outset. There is even a marked contrast between the anti-German cartoons of 1917-18 and Bill Mauldin’s occasionally pointed jabs at US officers and policies from 1943-45. But where does critical reporting turn negative, and when does that influence public opinion? More illuminating for our understanding of the media’s role than its effect on the public is the effect of that public on the attitudes and responses of presidents.

Presidents Johnson and Nixon controlled direct U.S. military involvement in Vietnam for the greatest amount of time. As similar as Johnson and Nixon were in their climb to power, they were very different in their approaches to the press and how they viewed public opinion. Johnson placed great emphasis on public relations while Nixon mistrusted the public. Both despised the Ivy League elite which controlled many aspects of their administrations, and neither man took even mild criticism well.

Johnson attempted, at several points in his administration, to control public opinion through publicity or evasion. His attempts nearly always missed the mark and his responses to media criticism of his policies were sometimes volcanic. An early war example is the story of media legend Walter Lippmann. Lippmann exerted enormous influence on administration insiders, and through them, the nation, but the Lippmann-Johnson relationship degenerated as Johnson escalated the troop commitment to Vietnam. According to Stanley Karnow, author of Vietnam: A History, Johnson resorted to snide remarks about Lippmann, even accusing him of aiding the enemy, while Lippmann referred to the president as “the most disagreeable person to inhabit the office.” Karnow describes at some length an episode in which Lippmann wrote a widely-read column in which he castigated Johnson as a president who had, in Lippmann’s words

“never defined our national purpose except in the vaguest, most ambiguous generalities about aggression and freedom. . . Gestures, propaganda, public relations, and bombing and more bombing will not work.” He predicted that Johnson would eventually find himself “in a dead-end street” unless he revised his Vietnam policy. And, with acute prescience, he foresaw domestic turmoil: “The division of the country will simply grow as the casualties and costs increase, and the attainment of our aims and the end of the fighting continue to elude us.” (Karnow 487)

The press underwent a more radical change when editors, along with the public, gradually perceived the futility of the war. During the early 1960s major magazines like Time and Life paid only occasional attention to Vietnam with its strange religious conflicts and unpronounceable names. Karnow and others writing about the early stages of the war have raised the question why media chiefs (like Henry Luce who was born

January, 1991
Johnson insisted that the bombing was "surgical" and an advisory board, primarily made up of publishers, overruled the jury of newspaper editors who had voted to award Salisbury’s articles the prize.

As the American intervention in Vietnam grew, however, editors could not ignore the war. Klarow illustrated the shift in coverage with a story about Luce’s successor, Hedley Donovan. Donovan went to Vietnam in 1965 and his reactions were predictable. After the usual round of official briefings and a look at the battlefield, he wrote in Life that "the war is worth winning"...Eighteen months later, following another trip, his views began to alter. He now observed the widening gap between the official U.S. claims of progress and the realities of the situation, and his doubts were further intensified by what his correspondents told him—most notably Frank McCulloch, Saigon bureau chief and a rugged former marine sergeant who had long before understood the hopelessness of the American cause. Back home, Donovan also listened to his Long Island neighbors, solid conservative citizens who were troubled by rising casualties and higher taxes for a war that seemed to be going nowhere. (Klarow 487)

In late 1967 Donovan wrote a new policy of war coverage for Life. As a result, Johnson declared that Donovan had betrayed him, as if the change in view was a personal attack. In 1969 Life printed an issue containing the portraits of some of the 250 young Americans who had died in Vietnam in one routine week. Like Matthew Brady's work of more than a century before the pictures brought these deaths to a different, more personal, level.

Johnson battled against this trend in the press coverage of Vietnam. He had taken on the New York Times in 1966 after Harrison Salisbury visited North Vietnam. Salisbury, the Times’s assistant managing editor, reported that the massive bombing of North Vietnam had killed civilians when some strikes hit urban areas—not an earth shattering observation in wartime. But Johnson insisted that the bombing was "surgical" and struck only military objectives. The newspaper's reports created what the administration referred to as a "credibility disaster." As one Johnson aide put it, the Salisbury dispatches made Johnson appear to be "a liar and deceiver."

It should be noted that the profession’s highest award, the Pulitzer Prize, was not awarded to Salisbury. An advisory board, primarily made up of publishers, overruled the jury of newspaper editors who had voted to award Salisbury’s articles the prize. Johnson was under pressure from non-media sources as well. The economic costs of the war, though comparatively light, proved to be a tremendous burden on decisionmakers in Washington during the Johnson administration. In July of 1965, when Johnson approved 44 combat battalions for General Westmoreland, he had calculated that the conflict would require roughly $2 billion for the year ahead. But the real figure ran to four times that amount—and worse yet, this type of planning error was to be repeated. As McNamara planned the military budget for the fiscal year ending in June of 1967, he estimated that annual expenditures on Vietnam would range from $11 billion to $17 billion. As it turned out, the war consumed $21 billion that year, and the cost continued upwards.

Compared to past conflicts, Vietnam was a cheap war. In 1967, a violent and expensive year in Southeast Asia, only about 3 percent of America’s gross national product was spent on Vietnam. At their height, some 48 percent of the nation’s GNP was spent on World War II and 12 percent for the Korean war. But even this light economic burden worried Johnson. According to Klarow he feared that even small accommodations to the war would force him to sacrifice domestic programs— "and, more critically, awaken the public to the costs of the commitment." Johnson wanted to wage war without paying for it, and without admitting that he was escalating the conflict by raising troop levels and bombing urban areas.

By the summer of 1968, at the urging of his economic advisers, Johnson had finally to propose a 10 percent income tax surcharge. The budget deficit had climbed to almost $10 billion in 1967 but Congress was no help to Johnson. They haggled over his tax package during the next year, and the budget deficit soared to $30 billion in fiscal 1968. The deficits sparked an inflation spiral that crippled the world economy into the 1970s.

It will be interesting to see if, in future conflicts or threats of conflict, the press can do a better job of defining and explaining budget matters to the public. Business, and specifically macroeconomic reporting, has seen impressive advances in recent years. This growth in economic newsgathering, and the dedication of an entire television channel to financial news, may make it more difficult for administrations to hedge about the economic impact of military action. Indeed, the word 'recession' has produced wincing responses from administration spokesmen responding to queries about the Persian Gulf.

During Vietnam the press tended to follow rather than lead public opinion in economic and political matters. Financial reporting, like war reporting early
On, followed administration lines and used administration sources with little or no analysis. Reporters did not often stray into the foreign turf of the stock analyst. Public opinion about the tax surcharge formed in living rooms before newspaper commentaries could make an impact.

With growing pressure from a radicalized press, increasing public dissatisfaction for the war, and mounting economic costs, the Nixon administration attempted to remove the U.S. military presence from Vietnam without "losing the war." But whereas Johnson placed too much emphasis on trying to manipulate public opinion, Nixon denied its existence. One horrific example of this stands out as another of the turning points in public opinion about the war, the bombing of Cambodia.

As late as 1970 a large proportion of the American people were loyal to the president in crucial moments. Public opinion polls told of majorities who indeed supported the president if not all of his policies. Many of these supported the invasion of Cambodia, since it was after all an attempt to win the war in one gallant rush, allowing us to get the troops out as fast as possible. But Nixon had lost the support of opinion leaders in the press, who lashed out at him. And he completely misjudged the effect he would have on events.

It was Nixon's reaction to the press that sparked an explosion. The New York Times called the Cambodian invasion a renunciation of Nixon's pledge to end the war. The invasion did spur a cross section of the public, aside from anti-war activists, including educators, clergy, businessmen, and others to protest. Faced with this kind of reaction Nixon drew a hard line around the invasion. When Walter Hickel, the Secretary of the Interior, publically objected to the invasion, Nixon ordered him almost instantly.

Nixon went into a public rage even before domestic opposition had really materialized, almost, as Kornow notes, as if he relished the coming onslaught. At the Pentagon on the morning after the invasion, he interrupted a briefing and embarrassed the officers present by cursing about his critics and telling the officers to "blow the hell out" of Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. Outside the meeting he went off on a rant about antiwar students—students who had not yet demonstrated against the invasion. Even though he knew his remarks were taped, he called the students "bums blowing up campuses."

Most universities and colleges across the country had seen unrest and demonstrations over one issue or another, but Cambodia acted as an explosive catalyst. At one university, antiwar students attacked the ROTC building, as they had at so many across the country. But in this demonstration armed national guardsmen were present. With Nixonian rhetoric, Governor James Rhodes had labeled the rioters as "worse than the brownshirts" and vowed to "eradicate" them. He ordered the guardsmen onto the campus to impose order but on May 4, 1970, they shot a volley of rifle fire into the crowd, killing four youths. The shootings at Kent State University in Ohio had a far greater impact on public opinion than the invasion that had sparked the demonstrations. Nixon had reacted to press criticism about his policies in an offensive, rather than defensive, tone and spurred others like Rhodes into a similar stance. The administration's public reaction to the shootings came from Nixon's press secretary, Ron Ziegler, who could only offer that "when dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy."

Dissatisfaction grew into open conflict with the government over the Vietnam War. The role of the press in this process was deeply rooted in the nature and tide of the war itself. Complex and unclear in its very nature, the Vietnam war was never clearly relevant to American interests; certainly our involvement was never comprehensible to the American public. The administration's troubles with the press were largely reactive in nature and only a reflection of the deepening political divisions at home, not in Saigon. The press neither lost the war or stopped it; they informed the public about different aspects of policies which could not work. As casualties and costs increased, so did the public's desire for withdrawal. To paraphrase a woman's response to a pollster at the time, we did not want to lose the war, we just wanted out.

Works Cited

On My Son's Decision to Register as a Conscientious Objector

Thumbing that picture of you in the paper
With Bach Mai Hospital bombing
Protesters when you were the *enfant terrible*
Of our little anti-war band, I say that
Was not, my only son, the germ
Of your conviction. It was the wail
Of 10,000 sand hill cranes
Over the Platte, the passion of Goya’s prints,
My crying over the boy that almost died
From whisky, and your wading knee-deep
In art since you faced an easel at three.

You do not know Penderecki’s hymn
Or Owen’s trench poems. No matter.
The tunes you hummed of Guthrie and Seeger
Your mother played after Telemann
Flute sonatas, your gleeful scramble
Up the rainy hill to chase the sheep
Glowing in the dusk above the fjord,
Your sister’s edging toward death at four
With meningitis, and meeting the lift
Of Indian mounds over the Mississippi
Set your head and hand and brush free.

When did you discover that catch and release
Of the Westslope cutthroat
Had to do with ending the Cold
War as you reached into Lost Johnny Creek?
For two years now you have worn
Around your neck your mother’s pendant
Rosette emblem, “War is not healthy
For children and other living things.”
It grew out of the lyric giant vee
Of your sailboat in the glint flakes
Of endless light miles on the Lake.

Free of the guilt that bends old men
To memorize the aged litanies of war,
You still know unquenchable mortality,
The tight fist at the throat that holds
Your back against the China wall.
You knew your bishop grandpa went
To court to witness for the defense
Of Dennis Banks after Wounded Knee,
But it was your kiss on Dad’s forehead
Amid our chorus of hymns when he died
That pulled you up to your eyeballs to decide.

Shouldering the sledge hammer
To crack the concrete slabs back on the patio
And planting the Snowdrift crab
At the foot of our window was only the last sign
Before you left home that it is
Mortal beauty, its shape and song,
That will not be broken by your hand
Drawing a bold line down
This side of deliberate death—
These designs on the table, your hands open wide,
You won’t set your elbows of truth aside.

Philip Gilbertson
Four Dreams of Epiphany

Arvid F. Sponberg

The title of Martin Luther King's last book is Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? I can't think of a question more appropriate for the world, or the campus, during Epiphany, 1991. As events continue to unfold in the Persian Gulf, we feel again the weight of Yeats' words in "The Second Coming."

... a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again ... And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Where do we go from here?
The phrase of Dr. King's which has become a byword is, of course, not "chaos or community?" but "I have a dream ..." Yet the Bible stories associated with Epiphany often bring together both the question and dreams.

The Dream of Heaven and the Promise
At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus referred to a dream often remembered during Epiphany. In John 1:47-51, Nathanael is impressed that, even before their first meeting, Jesus knew him to be a disciple. Nathanael calls Jesus the "Son of God" and "King of Israel." Jesus replies, "You shall see greater things than these ... you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Jesus refers to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:12. "And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants."

By referring to this dream, Jesus implies that his life and ministry fulfill that promise. In 1991, all the Children of Abraham—Jew, Christian, and Muslim—have embroiled themselves in a struggle about the lands promised to them by the God of Abraham. Where do we go from here?

The Dream of Sorrow
There is another dream in the Old Testament that we associate with Epiphany. The life of the prophet Samuel foreshadows the life of Jesus. I Samuel 3:1-14 tells about the Lord calling Samuel when he was trying to sleep within the temple. Verse 1 reads, "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." At first, Samuel mistakes the Lord's voice for that of his master, Eli, whose two sons have scandalized the nation with their immorality. Finally, he understands that the Lord is speaking and the news is bad:

"Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house from beginning to end. And I tell him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever."

Samuel's establishment as a prophet comes after a promise of endless punishment for iniquity in the house of Israel. Samuel might have asked, "Where do we go from here?"

The Dreams of Danger
The life of Jesus begins in the shadow of destruction. Within mere hours, the Magi experienced an enormous emotional wrenching: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, and frankin-
cense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."

T.S. Eliot dramatized the Magi’s state of mind:

... were we led all that way for Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly. We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death, But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, With and alien people clutching their gods.

Eliot’s Magus asks, in effect, "Where do we go from here?"

And Joseph and Mary may also have asked the question after an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, Out of Egypt I have called my son."

A flight to chaos or community?

The Dream of Unity and Peace

While Paul is a prisoner, he writes to the Ephesians, "assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

To which both Jew and Gentile replied, "Where do we go from here?"

"I Have a Dream..."

While Martin is a prisoner, he writes to his fellow apostles in Birmingham: "... I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

King liked the image of the single garment. He repeated it in his final Christmas Eve sermon which was broadcast to Canada from Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, in 1967. He illustrated the meaning of image with a homely example: "Did you ever stop to think that you can’t leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that’s handed to you by a Pacific Islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that’s given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning and that’s poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that’s poured into your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you’re desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that’s poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that’s given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you’ve depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured, this is its interrelated quality. We aren’t going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality."

King’s vision was not limited to our material interdependence. A few minutes later he reminds us, "And so when we say, Thou shalt not kill, we’re really saying that human life is too sacred to be taken on the battlefields of the world ... Man is a child of God, made in His image, and therefore must be respected as such. Until men see this everywhere, until nations see this everywhere, we will be fighting wars ... even though there may be political and ideological differences between us, the Vietnamese are our brothers, the Russians are our brothers, the Chinese are our brothers; and one day we’ve got sit down together at the table of brotherhood. But in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. In Christ there is neither male nor female. In Christ there is neither Communist nor capitalist. In Christ, somehow, there is neither bound nor free. We are all one in Christ Jesus. And when we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won’t exploit people, we won’t trample over people with the iron feet of oppression, we won’t kill anybody."

Dreamers

Jacob, Samuel, the Magi, Joseph, Paul, and Martin dreamed and asked, "Where are we going: Chaos or Community?" During Epiphany, 1991, we look at the world and we ask the same question. We know the promise. We bear the sorrow. We flee the danger. Now, Lord Jesus, help us make the peace.
The war shaped American culture; since it ended, American culture has shaped the war.

—William Broyles, Jr.

My film is not a movie; it's not about Vietnam, it is Vietnam.

—Francis Ford Coppola on Apocalypse Now

A slow, but steady transition is silently occurring in college classrooms across this country. Nearly two decades after the end of United States involvement in Vietnam, a generation of students born in post-Vietnam War years is beginning to arrive on university campuses. Even those students who are now seniors have no living memory of the Vietnam War era. Nevertheless, the clouded history of the American experience in Vietnam continues to spread lengthy shadows over current discussions of the nation's foreign diplomacy, and the immoral conduct often associated with American government practices during the Vietnam War still infiltrates conversations concerning the possible virtues of any war. Student interest in the events which shaped an era belonging to another generation, and their adoption of political beliefs which came about as by-products of those events, may seem odd at first; however, a number of explanations are available.

The most obvious reason for student curiosity about the Vietnam War era could be credited to influence of home environment. Many of today's college students are the sons and daughters of parents who were themselves students during the sixties and seventies. The political and social movements which shaped their parents' thinking certainly must have affected the ways in which children in the last two decades have been taught to regard war and peace. As this generation appears less rebellious than that of their parents, they probably have been more accepting of their parents' viewpoints.

High school teachers and college professors represent another powerful influence on the current student population. Throughout our public school systems and institutions of higher education, faculties are saturated with staff members educated during the Vietnam War era. As is often the case, particularly in the current politicized atmosphere of higher education, where many members of the ambitious anti-war movement of twenty years ago now are employed, a kind of self-absorption dictates what will be taught in the lecture hall and how it will be presented. As a result, issues which continue to concern the educators are strenuously stressed, perhaps one might correctly claim overemphasized, to their students.

Additionally, an 18-year-old today has witnessed thousands of hours of television, much of which has been aimed by networks and advertisers at the larger, more desirable demographic group of the Baby Boomer generation. Current programs such as L.A. Law, thirtysomething, Wonder Years, and China Beach, most obviously cater to the concerns of this aging generation; however, even perennial series, such as All in the Family, Family Ties, Growing Pains, and M*A*S*H, which appear in syndicated reruns numerous times daily on cable stations across the nation, reflect the attitudes and values, especially about war, of those who came of age during the Vietnam era.

Finally, the most significant impressions of the Vietnam War that many college students carry with them have been supplied by the various major motion pictures produced by Hollywood in the last two decades. For better or for worse, studies show that the average American youth, like the rest of the citizenry, is less likely to read for pleasure and more likely to view a film. No matter how fine the quality of books about Vietnam—whether...
historical texts, novels, or collections of poetry—most young Americans have had their images of Vietnam and their responses to the war shaped by commercial film, contemporary society's most influential art form. As the aforementioned comment by William Broyles, Jr. might suggest, the history of America, which once was preserved in texts on library shelves, is chronicled now on tapes enclosed in plastic containers lining the shelves of video stores.

Ironically, in order to understand the evolving views Americans have of the conflict and its surrounding controversies, one must acknowledge—whether or not one likes it—that the screen illusions of the Vietnam War now take precedence over the realities of the war. For many Americans, especially for most young Americans, the Vietnam experience is characterized by various memorable scenes in significant films like Coming Home, The Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now, Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July, Casualties of War, Full Metal Jacket, Taxi Driver, The Killing Fields, In Country, and Good Morning, Vietnam. More importantly, however, the emotions evoked by these scenes forever harbored in our memories also serve as personal stimuli that have conditioned the American public's current reluctance to accept war, even in response to extreme and evil provocations, as a moral option.

The impact of film on America's attitudes towards war is nothing new. As many have pointed out in the past, the influence of the multitude of John Wayne films, depicting noble actions by Americans in World War II and highlighting the moral imperative of that war, was instrumental in stirred the initial popular support for U.S. action in Vietnam. In fact, a compelling scene that was eventually cut from Born on the Fourth of July by director Oliver Stone dealt with this particular contribution to the early enthusiasm American youths exhibited at the beginning of the Vietnam War. In the edited footage, young Ron Kovic is shown sitting in a movie theatre, mesmerized by the heroic deeds of Wayne as he and his fellow marines fight the menacing enemies in World War II and triumphantly return home. The adolescent Kovic yearns for a corresponding opportunity to prove himself as courageous and patriotic. Consequently, an exasperated Ron Kovic, convinced his experience as a soldier in Vietnam would be similarly glorious and exhilarating, discovers too late that this war is different from the one his father's generation fought twenty years earlier. Disappointment, disillusion, and despair replace the anticipated experiences of excitement, exaltation, and honor that had been represented by John Wayne on the silver screen.

In the minds of America's young people, the image of the combat soldier has been transformed from John Wayne courageously and successfully charging onto a beach in the South Pacific to Tom Cruise coping with a lifetime imprisoned by a broken body and struggling with his battered conscience. In the decades preceding the Vietnam War, American teenage boys continually witnessed the admirable actions of John Wayne characters in film after film killing scores of enemy soldiers, apparently with total justification since the separation between forces of good and forces of evil were clear-cut. In the decades following the Vietnam War, the message evident in Hollywood films has been contrary: in just about every one of the films previously listed, American soldiers have been seen more often as weak, both physically and morally. The recurring images of combat in Vietnam movies include rape and slaughter of Vietnamese villagers and an assortment of other atrocities committed on innocent civilians, excessive drug use by soldiers, murders of fellow American soldiers, and lunatic behavior or other signals of insanity upon the veterans' return home.

Noting these differences does not disparage the quality of any of the films mentioned. In fact, all of the Vietnam-experience films listed in this article are superior films, filled with the kind of realistic and intelligent filmmaking one would hope all other Hollywood genres would imitate. Nevertheless, the time has come to recognize that Hollywood's treatment of the Vietnam War, as well-intentioned as the individual directors may have been, is just as guilty of skewing the message transmitted to American, as well as worldwide, moviegoers. The stereotype of the physically invincible and morally infallible warrior at Guadalcanal or Iwo Jima is no more exaggerated than the stereotype of physical or moral exhaustion represented by the crazed vets portrayed in Coming Home, Platoon, Taxi Driver, and a number of other films.

As a result, the influence these films exert over an entire generation may be just as harmful as the effect World War II films had on those who came of age in the fifties and sixties. The nation had been convinced by the time of American involvement in Vietnam that any war entered into by the United States must be moral, and few questioned commitment of troops to Southeast Asia, believing the conflict would be like a rerun of a John Wayne flick. In the 1990s, it appears that many Americans now consider commitment of troops to possible combat overseas under almost any circumstances could result in "another Vietnam." In the long run, hesitancy to commit to military action because of fearful public perceptions fostered by Hollywood's visions...
of war in Vietnam may someday cost the nation dearly; just as the quick acceptance of military solutions in the sixties cost the nation 58,000 young lives.

Hollywood has come full circle: it is time to re-evaluate the visions of war, even of Vietnam, in our cinema. Although it appears that everything which could possibly be presented in the war film genre has been seen, the time has come for American filmmakers to take a more balanced, a more comprehensive view of our nation in the midst of war. One example of just such a vision recently has appeared in an unusual form and in an unexpected location: *The Civil War*, a documentary series broadcast by PBS stations across the country. *The Civil War*, unlike other documentaries on America at war, such as *Vietnam: A Television History*, cleverly blends the techniques of exposition or examination found in historical records, the novel, and fictional film. In this eloquent presentation directed by Ken Burns, all aspects of the Civil War are investigated and exhibited through the use of narratives over still photography: the political opposition and pull of power evident in the highest levels of government; the conflict of opinions on issues concerning slavery and states' rights; the temptation to compromise in order to preserve peace, as well as the seductive trappings of war; the tactical plannings of officers on both sides of the battle lines; the personal sacrifices of soldiers and their family members; the moral dilemma involved in the act of killing and the horror of human slaughter; the despair of defeat and the triumph of victory; the regret over occurrences that inevitably led the states to a war which split their peoples from one another, but the necessity for the nation to engage in the war as the only way to preserve and protect unity, guaranteeing continuation of America's democratic experiment.

The conviction demonstrated during the Civil War and the outcome achieved, as much as any other events in our history, determined the kind of country and the kinds of concerns we have today. An argument could easily be made that the state of any nation at peace is defined by the wars it has fought, but such a statement may pertain even more to the United States, which has endured nearly a dozen wars, declared or undeclared, in its short history. *The Civil War*, perhaps more forcefully than any text on the subject, clearly illustrates how complex the nature of armed conflict really is, yet the documentary also shows how simply the entirety of war can be displayed for viewers.

As the craft of filmmaking marks the 100th anniversary of Thomas Edison's patenting of his film camera and projector in 1891, the time has arrived for Hollywood to offer a grand gift to all. Perhaps a proper present for the American public would be the sort of film which fulfills the serious artistic promise that initially presented itself when the first primitive pictures flickered on a screen, the kind of film that the century's best directors, from D.W. Griffith to Oliver Stone, have approached but not quite accomplished—a truly great epic work depicting accurately all aspects of an America at war. Until one of our finest filmmakers, with the substantial backing of studio support, finally achieves just such a sweeping, complete, and even-handed masterpiece, American audiences will be left only with those disparate views of war Hollywood thus far has produced.
Irony

James Combs

It is common among political historians to think of the twentieth century beginning in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I. One only has to read Bertrand Russell's memoirs about life in Cambridge in the years before the war to realize just how intrusive it was to the seemingly settled civilization of the European "proud tower." For a sensitive intellectual like Russell, it must have seemed truly insane, and he went to jail for saying so. By 1918, a good many more people, including the dazed and embittered survivors of trench warfare, had come to the same conclusion. In the retrospect of the 1920s, it all seemed an inglorious nightmare, an event so monstrous in its consequences that it was hard to believe the political decisionmakers of 1914 who had blindly stumbled into the alluring trap of war could have been so stupid, willful, and inhumane.

Many of the good things we associate with civilization—peace, diplomacy, democracy, freedom of thought and association, cultural tolerance, and so on—were sorely hurt by the war, and in countries such as Russia, Germany, and Italy destroyed. The twentieth century was born in the iron idiocy of warfare, and it has found it hard to break the habit.

World War I was the first modern war to become popular culture. For example, the fledgling American movie industry began to treat the "war raging in Europe," with bogus newsreels of combat shot in New Jersey, and one-reelers of soldierly exploits. Before American entry into the war, some major films (Griffith's *Intolerance* and Ince's *Civilization*) were avowedly pacifistic, while others (J. Stuart Blackton's *Battle Cry of Peace*, 1915, showed obviously Teutonic soldiers occupying Washington) fed pro-war sentiment. With our entry, Hollywood, Tin Pan Alley, and popular magazines committed themselves into the war with gusto. The Germans were demonized to the point of making life uncomfortable for German-Americans whose loyalties quickly became suspect. German names became anglicized, and things Germanic disappeared—frankfurters became hot dogs, sauerkraut became "liberty cabbage," beer gardens were closed. And war was romanticized, in story and song: images of heroism that not only won victories, but saved French peasant girls and English nurses from fates worse than death; of camaraderie amongst hearty fellows and even a gentlemanly code of honor which obtained with friend and foe; of feats of daring and derring-do, at sea, on the field of battle, and now even in the sky. By 1918, popular culture had made war seem downright fun.

But, as always, word began to filter back, the veterans—what was left of them—came home, and the full horror of it all began to sink in. The leaders of Europe had sacrificed a generation for reasons that were long since forgotten, and for exalted hopes that were very quickly dashed at Versailles. In the 1920s, veterans began to write about the war, and there was little about it in their writings that made it seem fun.

Indeed, the war movies of the 1920s—*The Big Parade*, *Lilac Time*, *Wings*—saluted the camaraderie, but certainly shared the general conviction that the war was a waste, combat a horror, and American commitment to such an adventure a mistake never to be repeated. With World War II, popular culture again began to celebrate the romance of war—beautiful girls began to appear again near the battlefield, the democratic camaraderie of the infantry squad, ship's crew, or B-17 crew was

James Combs, still on sabbatical in Virginia, sends us these thoughts about Vietnam while he writes his latest book on popular culture. He served in Vietnam between 1963 and 1965.
rekindled, the heroism that wins victories revived.

After World War II, the testimony of veterans provided plenty of reason to de-romanticize war again. But since we were involved in a new war before the ink was dry on the old one, World War II remained a positive symbol in popular culture as justification for the new one. (The TV series, *Victory at Sea*, first broadcast in 1952), was ostensibly about the war at sea during World War II but was actually an object lesson as to why worldwide aggression had to be resisted militarily, meaning the Cold War present.

Even Korea made it into the comics (remember "Combat Kelly"?), the movies, and so on as a case in point of enemy atrocities and culpability. The relationship between Hollywood and Washington in the postwar world was a cozy one indeed, with (for instance) the Pentagon exercising virtual script approval over almost every war film made, and with the FBI actually providing scripts and helpful "guidance" for radio, TV, and film.

As with so many other areas of American life it affected, Vietnam was different. I can recall getting my orders to go there in late 1963, and having difficulty locating it on a map.

When I returned in early 1965, one of the questions that kept haunting me was the one that would become the big political question of the late 1960s: why in hell are we fighting over that place? Unlike previous wars, there was no popular culture to support and explain it. Hollywood did not produce an immediate barrage of war movies set in Vietnam which gave it heroic and romantic status. Television wouldn't touch it—none of *My Three Sons* or *The Brady Bunch* faced the draft. And there were even fewer books. Robin Moore's *The Green Berets* depicted the exploits of Special Forces, but without including much notion of why the war. That awaited John Wayne's 1968 film, *The Green Berets*, but by that time it was too late. Popular culture was celebrating the revolt of the Sixties, including the antiwar theme that emerged in the youth culture. The "Ballad of the Green Berets" was superseded by the romance of peace and love, a sentiment undoubtedly considered both naive and subversive in the citadels of the military-industrial complex.

Indeed, some popular culture (think of films such as *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue*) entertained the notion not merely that we were in the wrong war, but that we were in the war wrong. In the "revisionist Westerns" of that period (even John Ford's apologetic *Cheyenne Autumn* has a large element of this) the US Cavalry, the mythic military agent of benevolent empire is transformed into the savages attacking the peaceful and nature-loving Indians (a depiction recently continued by Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves*). It was impossible to altercast Ho Chi Minh as in the same league as Hitler and Stalin, but it was easy to equate the Viet Cong—incorrectly, I think—as another Third World minority oppressed by Western society, just like native Americans and African-Americans.

It was correct to see Vietnam as a place in which the darkest and most extreme forms of American savagery were visited. I suspect that much of the trauma felt by both veterans and civilians of the Vietnam period was simply that it revealed just how much brutal and primitive ferocity we were capable of. The "other side" was quite willing to do terrible things, but for Americans the tales of carpet bombing and freefire zones and My Lai massacres and "fragging" our own officers and so on were just too much. After the fall of Saigon, as John Hellmann notes in his excellent *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, "the overwhelming desire was to deny (Vietnam) as a part of American history." There was a corresponding desire to deny Vietnam as a part of American character, that we wouldn't do the sorts of things the veterans and critics said we did.

Presidential politics since the fall of Saigon has traded heavily in the denial business, selling us the national bill of goods which denies the historical event of Vietnam as both part of our history and character. Carter reaffirmed our goodness as a people; Reagan offered the doublethink of "never again getting into a conflict we didn't intend to win," as if we could have won in any meaningful sense in Vietnam, but hinting that any future American military adventure would be even more savage in the application of ruthless firepower; and Bush declared that we shouldn't worry but be happy, since by implication now American warfare (with the precedents of Grenada and Panama) would be not only brutal and remorseless, but also so swift we shouldn't have time to doubt nor hesitate.

Since Vietnam, much political effort has gone into making warfare palatable again and beyond criticism or even control, claiming it as the sole province of the Presidency. The television recruitment ads for the armed services have chimed in with various lures to join, not the least of which is that warfare is fun, and certainly not fatal or consequential. The military build-up of the 1980s was not restricted to the refinement of hardware; it also involved the legitimation of what is now called "the military option." Both pacifists and cynics are now saying that it has been fifteen years since Vietnam, and it looks as if we are willing again to kill and be
American dramas, as Auster and Leonard Quart, in their war. Aside from the various movie has attempted to place Vietnam in store bookstalls. although they did seem to make it even series of paperback war novels awfully easy to meet beautiful Amer­
can girls in The Nam. There are Hellmann notes (and also Albert treatments, there were two television wood and Vietnam),

remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam), popular culture has attempted to present Vietnam in the context of our mythologies, even though that war did much to fragment and undermine our primal stories. The Vietnam of postwar popular culture became a stage for American dramas, as if in some odd sense we were the only victims of the war. Aside from the various movie treatments, there were two television series (Tour of Duty, and China Beach) that had their merits, although they did seem to make it awfully easy to meet beautiful American girls in The Nam. There are even series of paperback war novels which refight Vietnam from drugstore bookstalls.

We may now wonder if all this popular treatment of Vietnam has now played itself out, and ask whether we are now truly in a post-Vietnam era. Refighting Vietnam did serve many psychic and social needs, which if now behind us probably does set the stage for renewed military activism. The memory of Vietnam was for many people an inhibitory one, making even the Reagan Administration hesitant to commit large numbers of troops to a long-term involvement in some place of concern pointed to in chart-and-pointer briefings at the Pentagon. The pain of Vietnam is now fading from memory—the lives destroyed, the country rent asunder, the refusal of the Presidential gov­ernment to let go of it, the decline in public confidence and faith.

At this moment, many of us are wondering if the “lessons” of Viet­nam are now forgotten or were even ever learned at all. Perhaps now we are in a post-Cold War era of warfare, with the United States acting as a military mercenary for states that hire it as a client to conduct retaliatory wars against miscreant Third World countries that defy the canons (mostly economic) of the “new world order.” In that case, Vietnam as an object lesson offers decisionmakers only one recommenda­tion: make it quick, and keep the press out.

If we are faced with a President­ial government deluded into believing in quick, easy, and uncom­plicated victory, the real lesson of Vietnam is indeed unlearned at the top. For Vietnam did bring the war home as the harsh and savage reality it is. Previous wars had been censored by both the news and the popular culture—neither new­ssheets nor movies showed the true extent of the carnage. With Vietnam, we began to see war in livid color in the news, and in popular retrospec­t, that there were terrible human con­sequences to warfare. More than any previous war, Vietnam went far in deromanticizing war. (Not that there were no efforts at this before—John Huston’s World War II docu­mentary film The Battle of San Pietro was about as graphic a vision of combat as one can imagine, so much so that the Army brass that previewed it walked out on it, and banned it from public view—perhaps it offended their own romantic view of war.) Policymakers have acquired the habit of thinking of war as a game, as something reducible to the elements of gaming—strategies and tactics, moves and counter-moves, coalitions and resources, attacks and retreats. In so doing, they can easily repress thoughts of those troublesome human consequences, namely that real people bleed real blood on real battlefields, and that war is all about causing people to die.

But this habit has popular roots too. A visit to any toy store will remind you of just how much kids play war. The popular G.I. Joe doll alone involves a vast array of charac­ters, including suitably stereotypical foreign enemies (Mideast terrorists, for instance), and all the exquisite technology of the contemporary battlefield. Indeed, it is perhaps a measure of our frivolity as a people that soon after Desert Shield was assembled, it became an object of popular consumption.

The desert uniform quickly appeared in stores, as well as Sadd­dam Hussein targets for shooting practice. Both board and video games appeared which simulated the war before it was fought. One video game, called “F-15 Strike Eagle,” has been especially popular, since it includes a war scenario in which American jets blow up Iraqi oil and military sites while outmaneuvering tank and missile fire. Sales of this and like games—“Gunship,” “Airborne Ranger,” and so on—have increased thirty percent
since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. By the fall, these games had reached Saudi Arabia, so troops awaiting the word to attack real enemies could pass time by killing imaginary ones.

The difficulty—as Vietnam so amply demonstrated—is that the simulations of policymakers or popular video games do not recreate the actual process of military events. The study of warfare tells us that they are easier to get into than out of, and once the shooting starts, fighting and killing acquires its own logic and momentum. Perhaps our referent should not only be Vietnam in 1964 but also Europe in 1914. Then we can be reminded that peace comes to those who practice it, and that war is a fiery trap which in one way or another consumes all parties to the conflict. And if Vietnam is now forgotten, then too are the ultimate victims of the delusion of warfare. The nightmare of this veteran now is to look down the Washington Mall of the future and see still more black and shining walls full of names of soldiers someone once knew, but be unable to explain to children what they died for any more than Vietnam.

Cold

Early Wednesday morning before the sun like some insane fisherman can cut a hole in the congealed atmosphere, Alan and I stand like ancient gladiators silent at the door of the arena, hushed except for Mom who mumbles minders, only eyes exposed, all else is doubly wrapped in woolen armour. I don’t know which is worse, the suffocating breath or the air that cutting inside burns like hot steel. We fight for half an hour at a time, moles in icy tunnels taking papers to still sleeping patrons, back after a block or two to warm sensation, stiffness, out again with local news and sports. No dogs when it’s like this to battle, just the cold.

Lief E. Vaage

January, 1991
Triumphalism

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

We all learned a new word last fall, the word triumphalism, used by the poet Seamus Heaney. I’d never known this word, despite a long interest in religious behavior, even the waywardnesses of denominations. Triumphalism occurs in a passage about language in poetry, a passage I wanted the students to write about, knowing it a good one even before grasping the key word:

Language is the poet’s faith and the faith of his fathers, and in order to go his own way and do his proper work in an agnostic time, he has to bring that faith to the point of arrogance and triumphalism.

The word was not (I swear) in any of the six desk dictionaries at home or in the office. It was not even in the Random House Unabridged at home. I finally phoned the reference desk at the university library here in Dogwood; they found it in the RHU second edition. Triumphalism comes from Charles Vandersee, who does most of his teaching at the University of Virginia, has had poems lately in First Things.

zeal. It refers to a church that seeks power and even dominance. Zealotry still rages where Heaney was born and shaped, Northern Ireland.

Freely converted into demotic American English, Heaney must be saying that when he as a poet settles on a word, you can be sure he’s beaten away every competing word. He has the absolute right one. The chosen word is a sort of final rock, the Rock of Ages possibly, or the rock the Church is built on. In an agnostic and somewhat queasy era, this kind of faith in one’s own choices is quite spectacular.

In his poem “A Peacock’s Feather” I also did not know what topiary meant, and was hazy on tilth. But seeing tilth with loam, both “Darkened with Celts’ and Saxons’ blood,” I thought it must have something to do with farm land, which it does. Topiary turns out to be ornamental shrubs in unnatural shapes. The poem is a self-described billet-doux to his infant niece in Gloucestershire, who has just been christened. It interested me that a student of Vietnamese background had ingenious things to say about the christen stanza, not religious things, not having looked up the word, though the exam permitted a dictionary.

I then looked up christen myself, and it meant baptize. I looked up baptize in a couple of dictionaries and saw that it meant cleanse and purify, but didn’t say what was dirty, and dirty with what. So that even with a dictionary a person not culturally literate in Christianity would have trouble with a whole Heaney line: “And wipe your slate, we hope, for good.” On the exam I’d asked the students to write about the words we and hope and good, in regard to that slate. Evaluating answers in our time I decided to be lenient.

In the other course, in possibly our greatest novel of immigrant life, a young Austrian Jewish housewife queasily enduring ghetto New York speaks of her pale. Genya Schearl says, in Call It Sleep (1934), that she knows a church over on one street, a vegetable market in the other direction, the railroad tracks behind, and a few blocks away a store with whitewashed windows that children draw faces on. This is Manhattan’s Lower East Side, and “Within this pale is my America.” The whitewashed windows (presumably a store closed or abandoned) led students to interpret her environment as pallid, hazy, indistinct, and her life therefore a “pale” sort of thing.

This groping was not on a test.
At my request we were noticing the passage in class, since they needed to know her metaphor, needed to envision the Pale of Settlement in oppressive czarist Russia, and the pogroms—one main reason so teeming a mass of central and east European Jews had fallen onto Ellis Island by the time Henry Roth’s novel opens, in 1907. History’s Pale was new to my fin-de-siecle Americans.

Thinking about these two courses, I had something of an epiphany, a word which occurs in Heaney’s poem “North,” which we had studied. Although the anthology defines, from that poem, shod and althing and bled, brisk and evocative nouns from the North Atlantic, it does not bother with strand (shore) and epiphany, and nominated. In the line “exhaustions nominated peace,” Heaney is saying that the legendary old bloodthirsters sometimes got tired fighting, and named this regrettable condition “peace.”

My epiphany did not concern the depth of youthful illiteracy. We can scorn TV-constructed young people in America for not knowing much, and we would be partly right and partly wrong, as the rock of the Church is partly Peter and partly Word. One can also bewail the fact that splendid words exist, inscrutable but unacknowledged, in plenty of stories and poems, like the mysterious space behind the chalky window—waiting to repay attention, waiting to be put to use. Wouldn’t life be nicer if everybody looked up every new word appearing before their eyes? Especially if a test was going to follow.

Even if not tested, wouldn’t the lookers-up be richer? Knowing the Pale offers the chance (to use Heaney’s line from “North”) of “memory incubating the spilled blood,” and isn’t such incubation of old life—when in service of nurturing new lives—the sort of thing life ought to be about? Maybe even leading to a christening of sorts?

But scorn and bewailment tend to enervate. One is undisciplined reflex, the other is cheap grouse. My epiphany had nothing really to do with them, the students, but with good fortune. It’s actually a frequent epiphany: realization that some fortunate people in the world get paid for looking up words, lifting up words, as if precious and promising rocks, to judge both what’s inside and what weight they bear. Exalter and judge, perhaps connoisseur of le mot juste (yet ever in training), c’est moi.

Emily Dickinson talks about the experience of weight and weighing; she uses heft in two of her poems that we read. She famously felt the oppressive “heft of cathedral reasons,” and elsewhere she compares the weight of the human brain to “the weight of God”:

Heft them—Pound for Pound
And they will differ—if they do—
As syllable from Sound—

Students thought this was triumphalist precision in language, since syllable and sound are subtly different (syllable is possibly sense, while sound might be noise only). Furthermore, with them and they and another they between beginning and end of stanza, it is not clear which of the two, brain or God, is the sense-making entity. And students noticed the significant (triumphantalist?) if.

It is good fortune to be able to place this compact, well-built, triumphalist woman on a scale, also good fortune to do this with Robert Lowell. Despite his early fondness for locutions esoteric and recherche, as in his memorial poem “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” he offers with the simple word survive what is possibly the most evocative—even notorious—example of triumphalism in word choice in modern speculative poetry. This occurs in the last line of “Quaker Graveyard,” by which time we have been battered by a literal storm on the Atlantic and also a storm of language not quotidian: dreadnaught, spinnakers, lubbers, waterclock, contrivance, swingle, stouden, comeliness, cenotaph, combers. Clamavimus, even.

The poem has to do with cosmic (divine?) reciprocity at sea. In the 19th century, Nantucket sailors killed whales, and whaling in turn brought many whalemen to untimely deaths. Men over the centuries have used the sea as staging place for wars, and the sea in turn saw to it that many men died. Lowell asks what God thought about all this, and answers, with the famous last line of the poem: “The Lord survives the rainbow of his will.” No verb so pointed as outlasts or preserves or sustains or regards or rejects, because Lowell has not made up God’s mind. Has human atrocity still not sufficiently disgusted God; does Yahweh still keep the promise made to Noah? Or has God suffered long enough, now, needing angrily to repudiate that covenant? With the triumphalist word survive, Lowell seems to get at the divine agony that would underlie a just decision in either direction.

In the Call It Sleep course we studied a book which actually shows in process the struggle toward triumphalist language. In Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses, the famous section titled “The Bear,” a young white Mississippi man has decided to give up ancestral land in order to “escape” the curse laid on it, the curse of slavery in which his forebears participated. This is in 1888, as the land is about to be quite valuable. His notion of giving up the land involves sophistry; he will turn over the title to his cousin rather than sell the land, and of course his pas-
sive disposition of the land means that he has decided not to use it for good, in some way that might redeem its history of cruelty and humiliation.

Isaac McCaslin's cousin is naturally interested in hearing the language of decision and disposition, as are we the readers, and they argue over whether the act is relinquishment or repudiation. "I can't repudiate it," says Isaac (Ike). "It was never mine to repudiate." Meaning that human beings are not entitled to view the land as something to possess. White Europeans had introduced the idea of ownership to the Chickasaw natives, and from that point the land was cursed. The word Ike insists on is relinquish.

Still, 40 pages later, the discussion between cousins has grown morally more complex and historically more chastening. Ike sees that he is implicated in the acts of his ancestors, including not only slavery but rape of slave women and (before slavery) sin of ownership. Likewise the family slaves and their children, who are now free officially, will "not now nor ever" be psychically free from the wretched past. You can't abandon the past as you might abandon an old store and whitewash its front. "So I repudiate too," he says, meaning that by relinquishing the land he wishes to be understood as repudiating the ante-bellum deeds and mores that so scar his conscience.

It is good fortune to be present at such weighing of words, even if the scale emerges only at the end of a 40-page walk. It is also good fortune to be in the hands of a writer, Faulkner, careful enough with his characters to inform us, without bullying, that verbal triumphalism is not the same thing as moral triumphalism. Ike's decision, as readers have noted, settles nothing, redeems nothing, accomplishes nothing. It is finally (not, I think, "simply") something he says he "has to do."

Maybe, of course, what's going on here, with Heaney and Dickinson, Faulkner and Roth, does not exist. Triumphalism with language suggests an author, a striving one, but the influential French provocateur Roland Barthes has insisted that in texts "it is language which speaks, not the author." Himself constructed by the language and mores of his time, Barthes wrote in 1968:

The modern scriptor is born at the same time as his [sic] text, he [sic] is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his [sic] writing, he [sic] is not the subject of which his [sic] book is the predicate.

This is not only interesting but instructive, early warning of a possible scarcity. There must be today immigrant women who are like the Austrian Genya Schearl—likely Vietnamese women in Fairfax County, Mexican women in Los Angeles, Haitian women in Miami. Also timid women like Emily Dickinson, retreating to chambers to write bold poems to be discovered; also odd Ikes, thinking through without benefit of clergy a social theology to stand by for a lifetime.

Such people, scarce because they tend to change and depart, seem to have the advantage of being premodern. This is a condition we will likely be cherishing more and more, since these premodern people seem to be furnished with a "being." Possessing such a being, you would be larger than life—larger than life according to Barthes, anyway. Maybe the way to find such valuable premodern persons would be to read and listen in those ghetoes and chambers unfrequented by critics, theorists, scholars, journalists, preachers, and other wary and weightless scriptors too pure, almost, in ideology or parochial lexicons, to commit either a sin or a linguistic (in)discretion yielding triumphalist effect.

From Dogwood, yours faithfully,

C.V.
A Thousand Points of Ambiguity

Bruce Berner

From the very first, human life has been confronted by ambiguity. Eating an apple could mean either (a) disobeying God or (b) knowing as much as God. The very first multiple-choice test and we got it wrong. "But the question wasn't fair! It was badly structured. Why weren't we allowed to select '(c) both' or '(d) neither'? It was ... ambiguous!"

Modernity, ready for almost anything with its vast capacities for transportation, communication, and information dissemination, quickens the tempo of human interaction, providing both more matters of ambiguity and more occasions for having to deal with it. In our pluralistic, liberal culture, there are wide differences of opinion on almost every important question (and on a lot of trivial ones, too) and a credo that affirms everyone's right to hold any of those opinions. Yet, even with all of this, the problem seems of late to be getting worse. Perhaps this is just our age, but members of my generation are continually surprised and angry that matters once considered simple, settled, noncontroversial, even axiomatic, turn out to have ambiguous aspects beyond previous imagination.

Consider some American bedrock—the Constitution, the flag, holidays. Of course, the words of the Constitution have always been the subject of varying interpretation. When, however, has its laconic text been cited in support of (and, on the same question, in attack on) nearly every important social position?

In the fifties, for example, could we have guessed that a Father-Son Sports Banquet was material for fierce social and constitutional debate, that these innocent occasions were violating women's equal-protection rights?

As to the flag, we achieve consensus only on what it looks like; once we try to unpack its meaning, we discover confusion. Some practically worship the flag. Viewing the flag as a graven image, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to salute it. Political radicals want to burn it. Both the Constitution and the flag are important symbols to rally around—just don't ask us to identify exactly what they mean or the rally is over.

Holidays? When I was a kid, this seemed pretty simple. Everyone knew when they were and what they were. Now holidays are in turmoil. Congress moves them to Monday to create three-day weekends as if the primary function of observance is to squeeze out one more day for the camper or Holidome. Congress combines old ones into new amalgamations with vapid sounding names. (President's Day? I want it clear that during no part of that day will I celebrate Warren Harding.) New holidays? Worse turmoil. And not only turmoil on the issue of whether to observe it, but on the issue of who decides. We now have national holidays; state holidays; county holidays; city holidays; postal, but not bank, (and vice versa) holidays; University holidays (except for staff). The turmoil over Martin Luther King's birthday is, at least, finally being addressed by the one group in society which speaks most clearly for all Americans—The National Football League—which threatens to play no Super Bowl (apparently regular-season games are exempt) in states which do not observe Dr. King's birthday on a weekday.

None of this is to suggest that these debates are simple, that one side or the other is just wrong. Many of the arguments on all sides of these issues have integrity and force. They deserve our serious consideration. That is our problem! Life is simply too complex. Ah, that it were in some complex way more simple. We try to retreat to little corners of clarity only to find that they, too, have been rendered problematic. Consider the following three recent items.

A Rape in Oshkosh? Mark Peterson, a 29-year-old married gro-

Bruce Berner, teaches at the VU School of Law. He is passionate about many things, among them music and smoking, which shows us that passions are to be indulged with caution.
Jenny, a 27-year-old single woman. Presented. Now consider the question from her perspective. But which one? Seven of her personalities were issues, remember that the charge is rape, not adultery), the woman contends. Now the verdict, Mark is reported to have said: “I’ve been the victim here. It’s been turmoil. I’m still married, but my marriage has gone on the rocks because of all the publicity.” Hey, Mark, speaking of publicity, I’ve got news for you—more than the media troubled your marriage. Did Mark commit rape?

As to this particular case, there appears to have been much evidence that the defendant was well aware of the illness and exploited the situation, that he simply waited for the most compliant personality to assume control of this unfortunate woman. If such is true, it is difficult to generate any sympathy for him. (After the verdict, Mark is reported to have said: “I’ve been the victim here. It’s been turmoil. I’m still married, but my marriage has gone on the rocks because of all the publicity.” Hey, Mark, speaking of publicity, I’ve got news for you—more than the media troubled your marriage.)

But what if the jury had found that Mark did not know of the illness but simply assumed that “yes” meant yes? From his perspective (whatever you think of the moral issues, remember that the charge is rape, not adultery), the woman consented. Now consider the question from her perspective. But which one? Seven of her personalities were sworn in and testified! Their viewpoint were not uniform. So-called “date rape” cases typically have an element of ambiguity over the element of “consent.” The male testifies that he interpreted the woman’s words and actions to signify consent; the woman testifies that they meant the opposite. These cases are difficult enough when the woman is of “one mind” on the matter. The Oshkosh case adds a new layer of ambiguity.

Multiple personality is a useful window into much of our own mental process which is not at all pathological. We often, in a posture of quiet evening reflection, regret our words and actions from the maelstrom of the day. In short, we have moods. Often an issue strikes us one way today and just the opposite way tomorrow depending on our own changing orientation to the question. This phenomenon is different from ambivalence, from being at once “of two minds” on an issue. Many of us, however, don’t like it any more than we like our ambivalence. We believe that we should be “consistent,” but, ironically, we don’t always believe even that. Yet we all are, in some degree, a multiple personality. What prevents us from being a true pathological multiple personality is that we recognize our mood swings and remain (more or less) in executive control of them. This cannot, however, save us from ambiguity.

Cigarettes for Soldiers? Recently, I read a news story which struck me as a powerful example of ambiguity in an area I once considered pleasantly straightforward. When I grew up back east, I watched a lot of baseball games on TV. Whenever a Brooklyn Dodger hit a home run, Lucky Strike sent 10,000 cigarettes to the veterans in one of the VA Hospitals. If a New York Giant homered, Chesterfield did the same thing. This amounted to some additional advertising for those team sponsors and to some cigarettes for the veterans. Pretty simple. Mired in a particularly bad batting slump, Dodger Duke Snider once commented playfully that he was “pressing,” terrified that he was personally responsible for the nicotine withdrawal of thousands of vets in East Orange, New Jersey.

Several weeks ago, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company proposed to donate 10,000 cartons of cigarettes to the troops stationed in Saudi Arabia, partly, I suppose, for the publicity, but partly as a gesture of support and thanks. (10,000 cartons is the equivalent of about 5 cigarettes per soldier or of 200 home runs.) The company would pay the cost of shipping but obviously must rely on the government to handle distribution. The Government has now rejected the offer at the urging of the American Cancer Society, which asserts that the government must not place its imprimatur on this unhealthy habit.

Let me first come clean. I smoke cigarettes. I do this, however, not because I am stupid but because I am weak. I recognize the danger and I see clearly the point that the Cancer Society is making. I acknowledge it as both practically and symbolically important. Yet, I am at another level deeply (probably too deeply) outraged by the Government’s decision in this case. Has it, to be consistent, clearly stamped every weapon: “Invading Kuwait May Be Dangerous to Your Health?” Does the United States really want precision tactical aerial bombardment carried out by navigators in acute Marlboro withdrawal? One news account stated that the Government was not concerned about supplying current smokers but about encouraging nonsmokers to start. With all respect, requiring these young people to undergo the tedium and terror characteristic of battle readiness is encouragement enough. Besides, at five cigarettes per soldier, does Uncle Sam really think that the hardcore addicts are going to let some cigarettes get away for casual experimentation by nonsmokers? Give me a break. Give them a smoke.

Having said that (and I feel better now), I must concede that the other side of this question makes good sense. Whatever individual
choice might dictate, smoking does carry serious health risk and the Government should not have complicity in augmenting it, especially after it has shown its willingness to regulate tobacco advertising and after ex-Surgeon General Koop’s marvelous anti-smoking campaign. (The Government’s position becomes more suspect, however, when we consider its large subsidies to tobacco growers.) Moreover, the fact that war exposes soldiers to some risks does not prove they should be exposed to others. Maybe my position is not really in the soldiers’ best interests.

Speed Bumps on Campus? Last year, a University Committee, the University Senate, and the University administration engaged in a nearly year-long colloquium on the proposed installation of speed bumps on campus. At first blush, this may seem a straightforward problem: people are speeding; speeding creates risk; speed bumps will force people to reduce speed and, thus, lower risk. Yet, the number of person-hours consumed resolving (maybe) this issue was remarkable.

The question, at least when examined in a university community, has the following complications: the aesthetic aspect (“How will this look? What color will they be?”); the autonomy aspect (“Why not let me obey the speed limit by my own free choice? You can’t forward my accommodation by artificially forcing me to comply”); the technological aspect (“Did you know that some speed bumps may give you a jolt at 30 m.p.h. but have no effect at 60?”); the practical aspect (“Will they break university snowplows? Our cars?”); the symbolic aspect (“What do speed bumps ‘say’ about us to campus visitors?”). Or did you blithely assume they “say” “Slow Down!”?; the empirical aspect (“Do speed bumps really reduce speed or, instead, result in evasive behavior even more dangerous?” There is some evidence for this); the annoyance aspect (“I already go slowly but now I’ll spill my coffee”); the futility aspect (“People will just steal them.” And they have!!)

Again, it is not my point that this debate was silly (some of it was) but that even a seemingly simple problem often carries within it issues both multifaceted and perplexing. Intelligent, good people spent their most valuable commodity—time— not because of a need for self-entertainment, but because the speed-bump issue really does embrace all these aspects.

Well, what are we supposed to do about this ambiguous world we live in? I promise no searing insights, just a few reflections. First, it futile to hope ambiguity will go away. It will not in any event, and, if it did, how can we be assured it would not carry our deeply held interests with it? We cannot ordinarily gain clarity without sacrifice. Second, yearning to return to the simpler days of the golden past is unproductive.

We cannot. See Thomas Wolfe. They weren’t as golden as we remember them anyway. And why should we yearn to see through a glass more darkly still?

I’m afraid we just have to continue to cope. Compromise, accommodation, understanding, compassion, communication—all of these work. A little humor never hurts. A lot of love will always help. We need constantly to ask ourselves if ambiguity is the problem or if mere disagreement and dissent is what bothers us. Wishing that everyone saw it our way is a very dangerous wish. Moreover, we need to be mindful of the many benefits of ambiguity and controversy, of the richness and texture they bring to this life.

At the root of our discomfort about ambiguity, perhaps, is a felt need for coherence, for a system of meaning that admits of no loose ends, no rough edges. Yet even the scientific Weltanschauung, perhaps the most elaborate and elegant the human mind has constructed, is littered with “force at a distance” problems and with subatomic particles that just do not behave quite properly. We should notice that these ambiguities do not prevent science from functioning splendidly. Science goes forward in the face of this quandary principally because it has no other sensible choice. The problem is bracketed; someday we may solve it. We can learn a lesson from science. Nor has the Constitution’s ambiguous text prevented it from remaining an authentic American marvel.

For those of us whose system of meaning consists in living out a relationship with our God, we should not expect even there to break free of ambiguity. At the very center of faith and hope lie paradoxes so profound, mysteries so deep, that our very approach leaves us serene yet breathless, satisfied yet yearning, comforted yet terrified. Consider this portion of a Richard Crashaw poem:

Welcome all wonders
In one sight.
Eternity
Shut in a span.
Summer in winter.
Day in Night.
Heaven in earth.
And God in man.

Can ambiguity be just true?
Texas breathes through the poems of Walter McDonald's *Night Landings*—caliche, arroyo, mesquite, Pecos, Buchanan, the Brazos. And McDonald, like a good Texan, explores, meditates, and storytells his way through these and other more intangible landscapes—the hardscrabble of building new lives and a new family, the clarity of reaching back into childhood to remember and to teach the art of splitting wood, the oddness of one's relatives—Uncle Bubba and the owls, Aunt Myrtie and her faithful sewing machine, grandfather and "his continual/ tinkering with machines like broken toys/ wired back together." And all this strong sense of place is not merely decorative, but deeply functional: it serves to rebuild a life after war.

McDonald divides the book into five sections: "Hazards of Flight," which details the pilot's war experiences; "Building on Hardscrabble," and "Things About to Disappear," which bring us back to home and reestablish the sane sense of connection with one's home place; "The Songs We Fought For," which tries for connections between all the losses of war the the things which, now, may endure; and finally "All That Aches and Blesses," which reflects on and appreciates those true things which mean home. The forms are spare and contained—short to medium lines in two to eight line stanzas—and straightforward. The sounds are like good talk—flexible, relaxed, responsive to emotion. The voice is a good friend who's thought about what he wants to tell us and shapes it so that we can share. The images draw us in through familiar things to the strangeness at the heart: "I see his blood in veins here/ And here, like dry Texas streams/ That flow and disappear in limestone" or "All logs are anyway is smoke" or "Hands swishing the lake, we line/ Bone-white cypress stumps like sights." And the effect, although smaller and quieter than Whitman, is nonetheless true: "Who touches this book, touches a man."

Writers come to terms with war in different ways. McDonald's way is quiet, practical, unassuming. He is finding the thread of his life at home again and reweaving it in with the threads of other lives he has lived and shared. Thus far, the threads are holding, warm and sturdy.

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**Kathleen Mullen,** a member of VU's Department of English, is poetry editor for *The Cresset.*

**Walter E. Keller,** a Professor in the Department of Theology at VU, first met Norman Nagel in Cambridge in the mid-sixties.

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It is surely among the most gratifying experiences of a teacher's life to have his students publish a volume of fifteen commemorative essays in his honor. This volume, with contributions from an international circle of friends, is divided into three parts, a plan which reflects Norman Nagel's international career. Part I, containing seven essays, is dedicated to the ten years he served as preceptor of Westfield House, the Lutheran House of Studies in Cambridge, England; Part II, containing three essays, is dedicated to his sixteen years as the Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Theology here at Valparaiso University; and Part III, containing five essays, is dedicated to the last seven years as a professor on the faculty at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

All of the essays deal with themes concerning his life-long passion for confessing the Christian faith according to the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel.

As one who knew him well at both Cambridge and Valpo, I use this occasion not only to salute him, but also to say how fitting it is that his friends had opportunity to honor their esteemed colleague in this way.

**Walter E. Keller**

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*The Cresset*
Edging Toward Peace

I.

These winter sonnets I have cursed myself to write run jagged in my mind, like frost inching across a sunless pane, a shelf of merest ice before the crevice. I am lost beyond my strangest guess, outstripped, left bare in a wilderness I would not choose but which has chosen me—stubborn, a tight-lipped Isaiah refusing the coal. What earthly use? None. No word contains the wilderness of God, moving beyond all echoes in a cold so furious and pure it burns: bitter, untamed. No one will hear you there, and your sheer plod, jagged and wrong, baffles the story to be told. Still, your lightest track blazons God’s name.

II.

East, in this winter latitude, is far more south than east, true east, beyond the range of inland mountains. South instead, it warms my vagrant blood, disorients me, strange to this winter place and a shorter arc of the sun. So I must turn south-east to pray, slightly off balance, tilting up from the dark the steadiest words of love I can today: Lord of the compass-rose, rise as you will! Like a child in a blindfold childhood game, I shall spin round on the spinning world until you turn your face to me. Your lightest aim astounds me, and I yearn, quivering and still, toward that bright encompassing—your name.

Kathleen Mullen