

minimize casualties in the North African landings.

If FDR was wrong in his judgment of individuals (seeing anti-German Vichyites where for all practical purposes none existed), and particularly wrong in his belief that de Gaulle was a fascist, he was helped to reach those conclusions by Alexis Leger, former permanent undersecretary of the Quai d'Orsay, who had taken refuge in Washington and was regarded as little less than an oracle on French affairs. As Aglion points out in his book, 85 percent of the French community in the United States was anti-Gaullist, when not Vichyite through-and-through: this included not merely the business community in New York but the French Embassy and such cultural luminaries as André Maurois and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Moreover, in France itself—this is the dirty secret of the war and the Resistance—most people were Vichyite until almost the last year of the war. As late as April 1944 the perfidious Pétain was welcomed by friendly crowds in occupied Paris. And if, as Lacouture says here, the *maquis* grew tenfold between January and August 1944, might one be permitted to connect this less to growing opportunities for action than to a correct reading of the signs of the times? If Americans failed to swallow the Myth of the Resistance whole, on this at least they were not misinformed, even if they sometimes arrived at their conclusions by twisted, even bizarre routes.

The real problem facing American (and to some extent, British) policy was when to recognize that de Gaulle's forces had attained sufficient critical mass to be taken seriously in the high politics of the war. It seems this point was never really reached—certainly not by Roosevelt at any time—and a subsequent generation of Americans were left to pay the bill, as they paid for so many of his other wretched policies. This is the sad tale that Lacouture could have told so much more compellingly had he been willing to cut his Gaullism with a bit of soda and ice.

What is particularly irritating is not so much Lacouture's views as his tone. Writing in the late 1980s, he finds everything so much simpler than it appeared more than four decades before; armed with the foreknowledge of de Gaulle's later greatness, he artificially (and wrongly) reduces the dimensions of all his wartime contemporaries. This and the breathless, liturgical prose leave one feeling that there is more to the story than we are being told. We close *The Rebel* hoping against hope that the subsequent volume will not merely match this one in detail, but also surpass it in balance and fairness. De Gaulle deserves no less. □

BENJAMIN O. DAVIS, JR., AMERICAN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr./Smithsonian Institution Press
442 pp. \$19.95

Dave Shiflett

It was reported recently that a gentleman, on hearing that the jetliner he had just boarded was being piloted by a female, promptly deplaned. That he was the only chicken speaks highly of our society, which believes that all God's children should have the opportunity to smash 747s into the sides of mountains. How times have changed. It wasn't too long ago we were particular not only about who flew our passenger planes, but who was allowed to drop bombs on our enemies. Black Americans were denied this opportunity (as are women, for the moment). Why was this?

As Gen. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. reports in this autobiography, a 1925 War College report put blacks lower on the human totem pole because of "their smaller cranium, lighter brain, [and] cowardly and immoral character." The result of this study was that blacks were not encouraged to fly, and absolutely forbidden to command white pilots. Gen. Davis is the man who broke the color barrier, doing so with quiet dignity, and surely leaving many observers with a bad case of the shakes.

Consider the times in which the general was raised. During the 1920s, to

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mention but one incident, young Davis and his family were confronted by the Ku Klux Klan during one of that organization's intimidation exercises. The Klan was riled over plans to award many of the jobs at a new black VA hospital to, of all people, blacks, and in an attempt to reverse the decision the Klansmen donned sheets, lit torches, and went marching past the Tuskegee Institute and environs. Local black residents were advised to lie low, preferably under their beds, lest their presence inspire the marchers to set the neighborhood afire.

The Davis family declined to hug the floorboards, and instead took to their front porch, with Davis's father, a regular Army officer, reviewing the sad parade in his dress uniform. This might not seem like much these days, but back in the 1920s it could take authorities quite a while to answer a black man's call to 911. Gen. Davis inherited his father's guts.

The general's book has attracted the greatest attention for its section on West Point, which he entered in 1932, having been nominated by a black Republican representative who was not a member of the Congressional Club. These were lonely times for the young man: he had no roommate, nor did any-

one talk with him except in the line of duty. The silent treatment went on for four years, the social monotony broken only when Davis met his future wife, Agatha. He graduated thirty-fifth in a class of 276, then set out to get himself into a command cockpit. Heavy flak awaited him.

Even though Davis had graduated in the top fifth of his West Point class, that War College study, with its lighter brains, smaller craniums, and other goblins, put a command position out of his reach. Davis feared he would spend his life teaching, but was saved from that fate when FDR ordered the creation of the nation's first black air squadron. Davis was chosen commander.

The 99th Pursuit Squadron, headquartered at Tuskegee, Alabama, was a great step forward, but hardly the answer to the local white community's prayers. It was bad enough that black MPs carried sidearms when they drove their Jeeps into town, and indeed the locals demanded that these men be disarmed. Worse yet was the fact that these black men had wings—P-40 fighters, to be exact. One can imagine Jim Bob and friends looking up from their fishing holes to see these fellows zoom past, machine guns and bombs glistening in the sun. Visions of the Apocalypse, no doubt. The 99th failed to live up to these expectations, readying themselves for battle rather than dive-bombing the local country clubs. Davis's men had other plans for members of the master race.

The idea that blacks were unfit for air combat was destroyed once and for all over Anzio, when on two days in 1944, twelve Teutonic gentlemen were blasted from the sky by black pilots, which no doubt did not go over well with the welcoming committee at Valhalla. The press's first reaction to those victories was to downplay them, as did *Time* magazine in a piece that drew a response from Agatha Davis, whose letter was full of blood, guts, and razor blades.

Davis is at his best when describing the war years, but the book could have benefited from some tighter editing; even great Americans can get a little heavy on detail. "On Christmas Day," General Davis writes early in the book, "besides celebrating with decorated trees, fruitcakes and assorted nuts, we flew an escort mission to provide cover for a bomber formation attacking Brux, Germany." By the time we get to his remembrances of life as a bureaucrat, we find this: "Transportation is a public service, and therefore its benefits had to be assessed in terms of broader societal goals. If a proposed facility had environmental effects that were too severe, then it was open to ques-



tion whether the community would really be served by it."

Well, a man's got to earn a living somehow. If there isn't a lot of style in this book, there is a wry sense of humor

at work. Readers should also turn the other cheek when the general admits to having been a Mondale supporter and a fan of affirmative action. No record is spotless. □

WATCH ON THE RIGHT:
CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS
IN THE REAGAN ERA

J. David Hoeveler, Jr./University of Wisconsin Press/333 pp. \$24.95

D. G. Myers

Lionel Trilling's remark in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) that there were no conservative ideas in circulation has become an article of faith on the left, even if the passing decades have made Trilling himself look almost conservative. Today, among those university professors who are in a hurry to abandon the human heritage, the only opposition acknowledged is that of "the Killer Bs": Allan Bloom and William J. Bennett, Jr. Equally alliterative conservative thinkers—Irving Babbitt, Jacques Barzun, Julien Benda, Peter L. Berger, M. E. Bradford, William F. Buckley, Jr., Jakob Burckhardt, Edmund Burke—are ignored, if not unknown. Just recently, an esteemed professor of English at Duke University said that, while both the left and the right have offered critiques of American education, the difference between them "is one of sophistication and complexity." The right presents its case in a vulgar "flag-waving mode," while the left urges its reforms "in the context of a full-fledged epistemological argument, complete with a theory of the self, an analysis of the emergence and ontology of institutions," and buzz buzz buzz.

J. David Hoeveler's latest book makes any such self-congratulatory dismissal of conservative thought impossible to sustain. In the eighties, Hoeveler points out, conservative ideas "achieved an ascendancy marked by conservative triumphs in the presidential elections of 1980, 1984, and 1988." The sniggering on the left at the mental capacities of Ronald Reagan and Dan Quayle cannot distract attention from the fact that behind the success of conservative politicians there stands a movement of conservative ideas that has gained wider approval from the American people than any recent movement on the left. Hoeveler even calls this movement a "renaissance," and in

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Watch on the Right he examines it in detail, while placing it in the larger context of conservative thinking since Burke.

Hoeveler's thesis is that so-called neo-conservatives, who believe themselves merely to be flinching at the radicalization of liberalism and who are looked upon with suspicion by the Old Right, have more in common than either side may realize with the "principles and prejudices that have marked conservative thought over two centuries." He selects for close study eight contemporary figures: four neoconservatives (Irving Kristol, Hilton Kramer, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak) and four intellectuals affiliated with an older, more "European," strain of conservatism (William F. Buckley, Jr., George Will, Robert Nisbet, and R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.).

In criticizing an essay on Will by the late Henry Fairlie, Hoeveler complains that Fairlie "threw together a potpourri of scattered reflections by Will but disdained to see any thematic core in them." *Watch on the Right* is no such disdainful potpourri. Hoeveler believes that each writer's body of work amounts to a philosophy—at least to a characteristic way of squinting at the world. He isn't especially interested in biographies of his eight thinkers, and his book is a little thin on such basic information as which books were written in what order.

Conservatives may be almost anything else in addition to conservatives. They may be historians or economists or literary critics or political theorists, though at least six of the eight intellectuals in Hoeveler's book can be described as some variety of journalist—as F. Scott Fitzgerald puts it, "that most limited of all specialists, the 'well-rounded man.'" Since none of his subjects wrote philosophy per se, Hoeveler's method is not capable of showing how each one's thinking was given shape by the particular mode in which he did write, because modern conservatism, unlike Marxism for instance, is not in itself a mode of thought. What,

then, makes someone a conservative?

Hoeveler tries to explain American conservatism in the idiom of general ideas. In his view, its rebirth was attended by four main principles. These were: (1) anti-utopianism, an animosity toward any abstract scheme for the perfection of society; (2) democratism, a trust in the habit and memory, the fundamental wisdom, of the people at large; (3) liberalism (in its classical sense), putting freedom before liberation, and therefore responsibility before grievance; and (4) the bourgeois ethic, "the source of the self-discipline that makes intelligence and its application possible."

These principles exhibit both the continuity and the newness of contemporary conservatism. Although recent anti-utopianism is inspired by disdain for the vague mysticism of sixties counterculture and the bold plans of the New Left, this feature of conservatism is as old as anti-Jacobinism. "Conservatives from Burke to Robert Nisbet have identified [the French Revolution] as a revolution by intellectuals," Hoeveler says, "one in which abstract theory envisioned a new order for human society." But more recent misgivings about intellectuals have assumed the form of philippics against a "new class" of professionals in law, government, the press, and the university—an "elite corps of impudent snobs," in Spiro T. Agnew's less sparing phrase. This anti-elitism is nicely balanced by a confidence in the sentiments and opinions of the common folk on such matters as crime, obscenity, racial justice, the rewarding of merit, and the threat of Communism. It is this confidence in the common man, for instance, that distinguishes a writer like Tyrrell from his master, H. L. Mencken.

Hoeveler is superb at drawing connections and parallels, at tacking recent writers onto the map of historical conservatism. This is as it should be, since the 49-year-old Hoeveler teaches intellectual history at the Milwaukee campus of the University of Wisconsin. He skillfully braids Kristol's supply-side economics, Kramer's modernist aesthetics, and even Novak's passion for sports into a coherent humanism. If he seems to place Irving Babbitt at the center of American conservatism, it's no surprise, for Hoeveler is best known for his definitive and tightly written account of Babbitt's *New Humanism*, published in 1977. Each chapter of *Watch on the Right* makes for interesting reading, particularly the one on Novak, perhaps because his intellectual progress has been the most tortuous.

As a whole, though, the book is curiously unfocused (to use Hoeveler's own phrase), partly because the writers it covers do not really constitute a cohesive movement. Considered as a set of general ideas and principles, conservatism flashes with brilliance, but as a distinctive genus of thought, it seems occasional, unpremeditated, ad hoc. Hoeveler observes that recent conservative writers have "failed to define a conservative philosophy of knowledge." This may explain much about the intellectual history of recent conservatism, from the left's intolerance of it to Buckley's failure to deliver his long-promised book on the movement. It may also suggest that what conservatism requires at present is not intellectual history, no matter how informative and interesting, but a searching philosophy of itself, an account of what (if anything) it means to think conservatively. As intellectual history, though, *Watch on the Right* is about as good as can be. □

