

fall of the Iron Curtain and the death of long-time premier Marshal Tito, the decomposition commenced.

Today, Yugoslavia is a fraction of its former domain, comprising the republics of Serbia (which includes the Kosovo region) and Montenegro. Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia have seceded. Under the current truce, Bosnia-Herzegovina is a federation of the Republic of Srpska and the Muslim-Croat enclaves demanded by the United States. Yugoslavia, as constructed by the communists, was to be the consummate multicultural nation, cemented by the fraternal bonds of socialism. But Yugoslavia failed to forge these bonds, ending instead in a savage war between ethnic rivals, primarily because communism could never progress beyond socialist seizure of industry and commerce. Private ownership of homes and property continued, social regimentation never supplanted families, and citizens maintained their religious faith. The people of Yugoslavia refused allegiance to a nation formed with the objective of supplanting their values.

Today in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we find an uneasy truce being policed by the United Nations under U.S. hegemony. This truce was prescribed by the Dayton Accords after the United States armed the Croats and the Muslims and bombed the Serbs' key installations. One effect of the war was the displacement of refugees from ethnically mixed communities. While tragic, this does present the opportunity to resettle these refugees along the ethnic lines they prefer, removing the continuing irritant of intermingled peoples who are not likely to live peacefully together. Unfortunately, the United States is backing the return of refugees and the goal—once again—of a multicultural state.

The United States has demonized the Serbs for “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia, which is what all three parties—Serbs, Croats, and Muslims—were effectively practicing. With roughly equal casualties, all were equally victims. Yet the Serbs have accepted the most refugees, mainly because they are the only ones who do not persecute those of mixed ethnic marriage or descent. The crowning irony is that the United States is propping up Slobodan Milosevic, a former communist who has undertaken neither privatization nor free elections, and who was one of the original belligerents. In the American view, Milosevic now is

“cooperative.”

Perhaps the best lesson that Americans can learn from Yugoslavia is that there is no such thing as a multicultural nation. Certainly what has made the United States a great nation is its cultural heritage. The talents which immigrants brought to America from various cultures blossomed in the context of our culture.

We are a product of Western civilization and Christianity, both of which evolved in Europe. Our own derivation of this civilization emphasizes individual rights and responsibility, strong family bonds, limited representative government, religion separated from state, a strong sense of community, free enterprise, private property, the rule of law and reason, and a common language with which we communicate this cultural heritage. To be an American citizen (or, as an immigrant, to aspire to be one) is to join these cultural bonds, not import alternatives. The only real alternative is the eventual dissolution of America—which, if history is any guide, will likely occur under conditions of savage hostility.

Specifically instructive are the circumstances in Kosovo and Muslim Bosnia. Kosovo is the heartland of Orthodox Serbia. Today the region is predominantly peopled by Albanian Muslims, the result of immigration from Albania and victory in a war of reproduction. The Albanians have retained the language, customs, and religion of their mother country, and most observers agree that Kosovo will eventually be annexed by Albania. At the rate that the Muslims are reproducing, Bosnia will soon find that Muslims have replaced the Orthodox Serbs as the majority. Not surprisingly, the Muslims want a strong central government for the confederation they soon will dominate.

There is a lesson here that those of us who live close to our national border should heed. Texas was effectively annexed by Americans whose language and culture were alien to Mexicans. Today, Texas has a reverse demographic shift due to immigration and reproduction, and our politicians are pandering to the Hispanic constituency by *encouraging* the preservation of a foreign language and culture.

Although most Hispanics, both native-born and immigrants, want to be integrated into American society, “Anglo” politicians play on their gut feelings of

nationalism and downplay the importance of proficiency in the English language, both of which will limit their social and economic progress. Over the long term, this could lead to an increased desire for separatism and a reversal of allegiance to our country.

The government which governs culture least, governs best. But to the extent that government gets involved in culture through the schooling and assimilation of immigrants, the vast majority of American citizens want our government to defend not some multicultural alternative, but rather our cultural heritage and the borders which guarantee the peace and prosperity this heritage has created. That same vast majority, including the vast majority of Hispanics, strongly oppose the imposition of a multicultural America by a self-appointed cultural elite.

David Hartman is the chairman of the board of directors of The Rockford Institute.

FILM

The Face of Battle

by Wayne Allensworth

Saving Private Ryan

Produced by Steven Spielberg

Directed by Steven Spielberg

Screenplay by Robert Rodat

Released by Paramount
and DreamWorks SKG

If you visit the American cemeteries near the beaches at Normandy—there are two of them—you may pick up a booklet describing the landings of June 6, 1944, as I did over 15 years ago. Under the listing for “Omaha,” the anonymous historian wrote that

the 1st U.S. Infantry Division landed here from 6.30 . . . however, there was a rough sea at the foot of the cliffs. The first assault suffered heavy losses . . . the beach had not been cleared of anti-invasion devices, and the tide was rising. . . . A few assault groups reached the top of the beach. . . . The Pointe du

Hoc was climbed and captured by 225 Rangers. . . . This was the most difficult of the landings.

I study these words as I walk across the Colleville-St-Laurent cemetery on a surprisingly blustery summer day, overcast and damp. The cemetery is the final resting place of some 9,386 Americans killed in the battle for Normandy, and the debris of war—obstacles set up by Rommel to impede an invasion and the pill boxes on the summit of Pointe du Hoc—is still there, jutting from the sand and the stone like bizarre post-modern sculptures. Descending to the beach and walking in the direction of the Ranger assault at Pointe du Hoc, I discover that the water is numbingly cold and that the heights above the beach gave the Germans the deadly high ground. A “difficult” landing. “Heavy losses.”

The white crosses at Colleville-St-Laurent, punctuated by a Star of David here and there, are spread across a striking green sward, enclosed by trees and backing up to a monument and a simple stone wall. It is the wall I’ve come for. The 19-year-old sergeant I pay homage to is not interred here, or anywhere. I snap a picture of the inscription. All that is left is a shudder as I recall the grief of a Gold Star mother who never quite got over the loss of her eldest son. My namesake. I feel a mixture of sorrow and envy. The picture of the war most of us have is the bloodless epic of *The Longest Day* or the episodic drama of the old *Combat* TV series. *The Last Good War*. Dudley Doright Meets the Waffen SS. But a visit here taps us on our mental shoulders to let us know that it wasn’t like that. It wasn’t like anything we—the ones who weren’t there or someplace like it—have ever known.

Saving Private Ryan is the film for which Steven Spielberg will probably be most remembered. Watching *Ryan*, the audience has its consciousness jolted and its understanding of war deepened. The film’s first 25 minutes are an exhausting and exhilarating depiction of the Omaha landing. A storm of fire and death greets the GIs as the door of the landing craft drops. Men drown, weighed down by equipment in the chilling waters, and the audience is pulled from the comfort of the theater by a dreadful assault on the senses. Blood and body parts, screams and shouts, and unbelievable bravery make up the terrify-

ing mosaic of *Ryan*’s Omaha sequence.

There is in this film sorrow and callousness, heroism and cowardice, fear and the comradeship that only a closely knit group of men in dire circumstances feels. The cast—led by Tom Hanks as Captain John Miller, a Pennsylvania school teacher dropped into the unlikely role of leader of men in the deadly maneuvers of war; Tom Sizemore as Sergeant Horvath; Edward Burns as Private Reiben; and Matt Damon as the elusive Iowa farm boy, Private James Francis Ryan—pulls off a remarkably natural portrayal of young men bound by fate and uncommon love, spurred on by the heightened sensory experience of war, deprivation, and sudden death. Miller and his men are given an unlikely mission: find and save young Ryan, whose three brothers have been killed. General Marshall, portrayed by Harvey Presnell, has given the order: Mrs. Ryan will not lose her only remaining son.

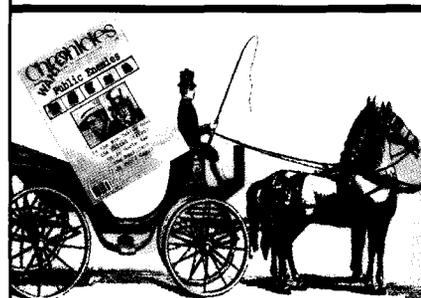
Spielberg, the proverbial Hollywood liberal (a breed not renowned for its love of Middle America), is paying tribute to the sons of Boise and Brooklyn and Birmingham for the awful sacrifice they made. To set the tone, Spielberg pays homage to John Ford’s *The Searchers*, while noting the landscape of a most American director’s *The Grapes of Wrath*: As Mrs. Ryan is notified of the loss of three sons, she is framed in a farmhouse door, looking out on stretches of amber waves of grain, while she is approached by the messenger from one side, a preacher from the other. Some conservatives have already attacked the film for not glorifying the war, for stressing the horrors of war over its sometime necessity, perhaps for being anti-American, but the audience’s empathy for the characters is excited precisely because these are *American* boys facing those horrors: *Ryan*’s GIs are not speechifying flag wavers, but common men who have set out to do a dirty job. Of course they love their country and feel a sense of duty, and Spielberg has chosen to portray that patriotism in their reminiscing about home, loved ones, and the simple beauty of their common lives. But war means fighting, and fighting means killing. *Ryan*’s GIs mow down the enemy with brutal abandon and take reprisals against a disarmed German who has killed a buddy. The squad’s Jewish member taunts German prisoners. These are the normal reflexes of war, and it is about time they were honestly portrayed. Per-

haps those who pass for conservatives in the late 1990’s, who seem to like war, any war, could learn a thing or two by reviewing the thinking of some of their forefathers, who saw things differently.

Others see *Ryan* as yet another Hollywood attack on Christianity. While it is obvious to any thinking person that the Hollywood of the 1990’s is hardly friendly to the Christian faith, it is also painful to observe how squeamish conservative Christians have become. No, *Ryan*’s Christians would not be model members of any organization dreamed up by Ralph Reed. Jackson, the unit’s sniper, is a dead-on impersonation of what any white Southerner would readily recognize as a type as old as the republic: Jackson is Sergeant York. As he sets the sights of his rifle, Jackson recites the 144th Psalm: “Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight . . . my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust.” It has been a long time since Christians had

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that kind of faith.

The question that *Ryan* gets at—why do men sacrifice themselves?—is something more important than jingoism, something more elemental than the often superficial patriotic *gore of filmdom*, and something today's conservatives are trying hard to forget, which just may be why we are losing our country. The film's final, bloody sequence is reminiscent of Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*. *Ryan*'s GIs are faced with a difficult moral situation—again, something today's conservatives often have trouble with—as they question the sense of the mission they are on. Why risk eight lives—six of which will be lost—to save one, and why this one? (“I have a mother too,” quips one of *Ryan*'s dogfaces.)

Ultimately, *Ryan* is about redemption and brotherhood. Like Peckinpah's outlaws, the men of *Ryan* have killed much, often instinctively, without thinking. Tom Hanks' Captain Miller reflects that he has necessarily rationalized killing as a means of saving lives: “Our objective is to win the war,” snaps Miller, and, by implication, to end it. But “every man I've

killed” takes “me further away” from home, from humanity. *Ryan* must be saved, says Tom Sizemore's Sergeant Horvath, because we are here and it may be “the one decent thing”—like the outlaws' decision to save the captured Angel even if they must all die trying—to come out of this war. In the end, *Ryan*'s GIs fight for redemption (an idea that Christians should see as positive; all of us, even heroes, who have taken on the deadly burden of duty, are in need of grace) and brotherhood. Once the decision is made—*Ryan* must be saved—they will fight to the end. Loyalty, friendship, kinship, the bonds of shared experience—these are the causes conservatives once rallied to, the only causes that are worth the hell fire of war. Unlike stock-market quotes, they cannot be rationalized or calculated. They have little to do with the “national interests” of the state. There is no cost-benefit analysis that can explain the Alamo or Omaha Beach.

If mainstream conservatives can benefit from reflections on *Ryan*'s moral conundrums, liberals, who seem to take joy in spitting on Middle America, should

pause a moment to reflect on the legacy of the Omaha Beach generation. The men who stormed the beaches were white, mostly Christians, from working or middle class backgrounds. They defeated Hitler as well as the “supermen” fanatics of the SS, and liberated the death camps. Their collective conscience reacted to blacks' pleas for decency at home. Their culture made this country prosperous, and the Constitution is written in their language. If the liberals and professional victims persist in calling us, the sons and daughters of that generation, “fascists” or “brown-shirts” (as one liberal senator called Pat Buchanan's backers during the 1996 campaign), then they should be forewarned: Some of us are not prepared to see the sacrifice of a generation squandered, nor the country they built given away without a fight. War is hell.

Wayne Allensworth, who writes from *Purecellville, Virginia*, is the author of *The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist Russia* (Rowman & Littlefield).

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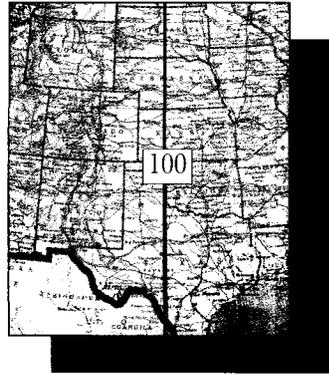
The Hundredth Meridian

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

Twenty Years and Counting

I have lived now in the West 20 years, two years past the age of liability for military service (if there were a Western States of America, and if they had a draft) and one year short of my political majority and the suffrage. Although you can have spent half a century living in a small town in the rural West and still be considered an outsider if you arrived there from someplace else at the age of 20, the truth is, if 20 years don't make a Westerner, nothing will. What, then, *is* a Westerner? According to my definition, he is simply a person who cannot imagine living anywhere *but* the West, even if he should be compelled, for economic or other reasons, to do so.

"Why go into the desert?" Ed Abbey asked. "The Great American Desert is an awful place. . . . Even if you survive, which is not certain, you will have a miserable time. The desert is for movies and God-intoxicated mystics, not for family recreation." Why, for that matter, go into the West at all? The leached and ruined towns, the sprawling, congested, modernistic, mechanized, militarized cities, hideous to look at; the arid lands, hundreds of thousands of square miles of cactus, creosote, and sagebrush, overlooked by the "shining" mountains, in reality bastions of naked rock and ice surrounded by gloomy, inhospitable subarctic forest inhabited by grizzly bears, mountain lions, and Sasquatches; the climate, roaring hot in the Southwest and cold enough to freeze molecular action in the North; the human population, divided between people (the native Westerners) who don't read books and others (environmentalists, mostly) who read the wrong ones; in the hinterland, the lack of employment and of nubile, unmarried women; the neglect and contempt of the East, where Significant People live, and the consequent near-impossibility of finding place and preferment (you can't share a power lunch via your computer); isolation, separation, and loneliness, much as on the frontier in pioneer days. . . . Every small Western town I know of has people like me and my friends in it, people who would be objectively happier—richer and more



powerful, better connected, professionally more advanced, married and with a family, even—had they chosen to settle somewhere else, or simply stayed put where they were raised, back East or on the West Coast. All of these people—including me—have no sensible or even plausible reason for sticking it in the West, and yet we *do* stick it. We just can't imagine living anywhere else.

There are times when it seems almost possible. The close green hills of New England, the open rolling parks of Virginia, the rich Mississippi Delta bordered by piney hills on the east and to the west the tangled, snakey bottoms of the great river, the blue-green, level horizon of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, watery and pale like a painting in oils overthinned by turpentine—a visit to any one of these places and others is capable of creating an illusion of choice in the heart of the dedicated Westerner, native or transplant. But it doesn't last. Returning home to pack his stuff, he looks at the country around him and decides he just can't do it. He knew it hundreds of miles ago, in fact, crossing the Missouri River at 33,000 feet or catching sight of Chimney Rock from Highway 92 southeast of Scottsbluff, Nebraska. For goners like us the West is a fever, a sickness we must suffer from in order to be fully alive. That is to say, it is a form of dependency, an addiction made freely accessible to the American people only as the result of an oversight attributable to scientific ignorance on the part of the same primeval FDA that missed its chance to criminalize coffee and beef. One whiff of pungent sagebrush or the astringent alkali dust, a glimpse of distant mountains, snow-covered, beyond the velvet plain or

a solitary, century-old cottonwood tree trailing green foliage about its fluted gray trunk, a rustbound windmill with its pinwheel jammed standing above a battered stock tank, or simply the endless border of yellow clover, dancing on a steady wind where the asphalt meets the gravel shoulder of the two-lane highway—and it's over, the breakout thwarted once again. The Westerner isn't going anywhere, and he knows it. Except to throw a saddle and pack on the Appaloosa and ride into the mountains for the night. Or take the rifle from the gun rack in the pickup and shoot a buck antelope at 300 yards after stalking him for two hours on the prairie. Or maybe just drive 70 or 80 miles round-trip to the nearest saloon where they have a sign tacked to the backbar saying HELEN WAITE IS OUR CREDIT MANAGER, IF YOU WANT CREDIT GO TO HELEN WAITE and all the women are married to friends or relatives of yours. Not that that ever stopped anyone, necessarily.

A postcard in my possession shows a pickup truck photographed head on and four individuals in the cab: the driver on the left side of the truck, another young man on the right, and, between them on the seat, two large dogs. On the back of the card is the printed caption "Double-dating in Montana" and two inscribed messages, in different hands. The first and briefer of these says, "Chilton—is it really this bad?" The author is a friend and colleague in Michigan. The other, obviously written by a woman, I may not print—no gentleman ever reads another's mail, much less publishes it—except for the signature, "Jane & Ted." Since my Michigan friend is an active environmentalist (in addition to being a well-known advocate of restricted immigration), I am able to make an informed guess at the identity of the undersigned couple, living part-time in Montana. To reply to his question, however, the answer is, "No—not quite." But almost. The American West is about isolation, and the contemplation of loneliness. That is its fascination, and has been for seven or eight generations of the American people—not those who experienced the West only through books and newspapers, of course, but the ones who lived it, breathed it, and had their being in it,