

ings that happen to kids during the crucial years between birth and 3-4 years old. Nor are they going to exert a lot of control over the swelling percentage of students living in single-parent households; the growing number of physically abused youngsters or those emotionally ruined by divorce and related strife; or the steadily increasing amount of time students spend wired into television and videogames instead of print.

It's entirely possible that American schools and teachers aren't what they used to be, but then what is? Kids and families are certainly different. A generation ago, there were considerably fewer families where both parents worked outside the home. If Junior nodded out during first period for three weeks running, somebody eventually found out at home. Mom, Dad, or at least Grandpa was usually around to see that homework was finished regularly, or to go to Parents' Night for a chat with Miss Kopechne about whether Ellie Beth really ought to anger quite so pliantly with the boys from the mechanical arts class.

A few months ago, the U.S. secretary of education declared with effusive gratitude that actions taken in response to *A Nation at Risk* have already had a measurable effect on the average scores of high school seniors on standardized tests. Since the typical public high school system needs all year to gear up for Arbor Day, you don't have to be a confirmed cynic to harbor a few doubts about so remarkably speedy and comprehensive a recovery. But with much vacuous officialese draws to a close public education's latest season of discontent—a menopausal doldrum followed by the predictable self-congratulation that terminates the natural life cycle of any bureaucratic roushaha.

Whether there's something wrong with American schooling isn't at issue, and you need neither national commissions nor private panels to prove it. All you need is to see the agonized bafflement on the face of the kid who's trying to make change for you at the local McDonald's, or the panicked eyes of the checker at Shop-Rite when her computerized cash register beeps its shrill protest at an improper command.

Probably it's sheer blasphemy to ask whether reading St. Augustine's *Confessions* or *Oedipus Rex* is the solution to their problems. Or whether "fostering analytical/life skills" is really what art, literature, history, and philosophy are all about. Or whether the most basic goals of mass education are identical to or even compatible with those of classical learning or technocratic scholarship. These, in any event, are questions to which *The Paideia Pro-*

gram and companion volumes never get around. Assuming curricular content to lie at the heart of declining performance by schools and students alike, Adler and company substitute reflexive elitist curmudgeonry for any serious look at the impact on public schools of at least a century of social, cultural, and technological upheaval. In the meantime, curiously enough, a substantial number of American kids

somehow learn enough to run businesses, design computer chips, write novels, make movies, and invent all manner of new or better mousetraps. That doesn't necessarily prove today's schools are thriving centers of academic excellence. It may only mean that they play a smaller part in nurturing ambition and native ability than the educationists would like us to think. □

DOUBLE VISION: HOW THE PRESS DISTORTS AMERICA'S VIEW OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Ze'ev Chafets/William Morrow/\$16.95

Daniel Pipes

It is a matter of record that Israel is the subject of far more political and media scrutiny than its Arab neighbors. Indeed, of all countries, Israel is second only to the Soviet Union in the amount of air time and newsprint it receives in the United States. That in itself is not a matter of concern. But, Ze'ev Chafets charges in *Double Vision*, much of this attention is distorted or biased.

Chafets, an American native who emigrated to Israel in 1967, became director of Israel's Government Press Office, a position that afforded him an opportunity to witness first-hand the way American journalists cover Middle Eastern politics. His conclusions are disturbing. Since 1973, he writes, each of the three key American groups—press owners, journalists, and politicians—has, for reasons of its own, chosen to distort the Arab-Israeli conflict.

To begin with, the companies that own the television networks, the newsmagazines, and the great newspapers have become huge corporations with wide-ranging international interests. Long ago they shed their sensitivities about advertising revenues from local department stores. Today they are vitally concerned with "forces at play in the national and international economy. And since 1973, none of these forces has been more dramatic, and more influential, than the economic and financial power of the Arab world." Chafets isn't claiming the existence of a conspiracy, but simply the evident self-interest of media com-

Daniel Pipes, associate professor of strategy at the U.S. Naval War College, is the author of In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power (Basic Books) and editor of the Harvard Middle East Papers.

panies adopting an "even-handed" approach to the region.

As for journalists, they too turned against Israel, though not for economic reasons. It is no secret that as a group they are to the left of the general population, voting, for example, for George McGovern in 1972 at twice the rate of the population at large. When the American role in Vietnam came to an end in 1973 and the left needed a new cause, it settled on the Palestinians. Through what Chafets calls a "left-wing trickle-down effect," many journalists picked up on this new crusade. Israel came to be seen not only as an oppressor of Palestinian rights, but also as an outpost of imperialism.

Finally, the United States government added its weight to the anti-Israel orientation when Jimmy Carter came to office in 1977. Believing that stability in the Middle East depended on resolution of the West Bank problem, the President took "a hitherto relatively obscure issue—Jewish settlement in the West Bank—and turn[ed] the searchlight of American national interest on it."

West Bank control, necessarily a difficult issue for Israel, became the pivotal Middle East question for the United States—and not Arab recognition of Israel, bilateral U.S.-Arab ties, or any of the many other alternative emphases.

Political bias aside, American coverage in the Middle East is affected by a staggering array of other problems. One of them is that American journalists are underprepared and overburdened, as Chafets describes in a delightful anecdote. In September 1980 he visited Jonathan Broder, the *Chicago Tribune's* Middle East cor-

respondent, just after Broder's editor had requested he leave immediately for Turkey to cover the imposition of martial law. Broder, "who had never been to Turkey, didn't speak Turkish, and didn't know a soul there," had been traveling for several months and had fallen behind with his clippings:

Half a year's worth of unmarked and uncut newspapers were stacked precariously against one wall. We divided up the pile into four smaller stacks and the four of us—he and his wife, I and mine—started frantically leafing through the papers in search of stories about the country. Time was running out, and in desperation he turned to my daughter—seven years old at the time and just learning to read—wrote the word *Turkey* on a piece of paper, and handed her a stack of newspapers to peruse. Six hours later he was on a plane.

Such difficulties are hardly surprising, given that the Middle East, a region roughly the size of Europe, is (outside of Israel) covered only by about thirty American journalists. This, Chafets wryly notes, is fewer than the number of sportswriters at the *New York Daily News*.

To make matters worse, every Arab country except Lebanon and Egypt is a closed society with no independent press of its own; there is no way, then, for foreign journalists to depend on their local counterparts for independent reportage. News collection is further impeded by the fact that some of the countries in what Chafets calls the "arc of silence"—including Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq—prohibit foreign correspondents from even living in their territories, which makes the cultivation of unofficial sources next to impossible.

The Syrian government goes further yet, engaging in violent intimidation of journalists. In the most thoroughly documented portion of his book, Chafets tells of the Assad government murder of several Lebanese, American, and German journalists—surely one of the most shameful acts in recent press history—how these killings were subsequently covered up in the Western press, and finally how they inhibited subsequent news coverage from Lebanon.

The paucity of Arab coverage, in contrast to the presence of a "small army of foreign correspondents" in Israel, is giving reporting from the Middle East an imbalance: Thus, "an Arab hunger strike in an Israeli prison in the summer of 1980 got more attention than the mass murder of political prisoners in Syria about the same time [and] riots in the West Bank came in for more coverage than the Iraq-Iran war."

Double Vision provides an extraordinary catalogue of Middle East news howlers: →

•The *Detroit News* no less than three times—on November 23, 25 and 26, 1979—carried news stories that declared the mosque in Mecca rescued from the rebels who had taken it over and never explained the discrepancies in these accounts.

•Ned Temko of the *Christian Science Monitor*, in his eagerness to find an American hook for a news story about the PLO, asked the PLO spokesman about his organization's reaction to the death of Elvis Presley.

•Yasir Arafat, so carried away by his own dovish rhetoric, replied to Barbara Walters when she read a clause from the Palestinian National Covenant about the need to destroy Israel, "I did not remember that."

•David Ottoway of the *Washington Post* compared Saddam ("The Butcher

of Baghdad") Husayn to an "American politician on the election hustings."

•Ottoway's colleague Jonathan Randal found advantages resulting from a large-scale massacre in Syria in February 1982: "What emerged from the Hama rubble, according to local residents, was a respect for the government in large part born of fear but also of a feeling of avoiding even greater catastrophe. Some analysts have argued that the destruction of Hama . . . marked the birth of modern Syria."

Double Vision combines wit, style, and intelligence to produce a devastating indictment. If it is true that informed citizens cannot, alas, avoid the press, this book provides a vivid reminder of just how vigilant we must be. □

there "on that dusty Montana slope." Why should he, of all people, cause us to take so much as a second look? After all, he is a known entity and, aside from his physical appearance, not a very pleasing one at that. Though possessed of great vitality and courage, he seemed incapable of introspection and, indeed, carried little luggage upstairs, between his ears and beneath the long flowing blond hair which he carefully tended—and yet, oddly, had cut short before meeting his Maker on that final day. No matter how one explains Custer's renown, he seems to have been the pet and plaything of the ironic gods who chose to lodge him among us at a time and place so perfectly suited to his meager talent as to make him appear much larger than he was.

During the Civil War, which began just as he was graduating from West Point—thirty-fourth in a class of thirty-four—Custer became the youngest American ever to win a star, being promoted to brigadier at 23. But throughout the War his smashing victories were plotted by other men; in fact, he possessed little if any skill as a tactician. "In a tight situation," Connell notes, "his response was instantaneous and predictable: he charged. This response to challenge was not something he learned; he reacted as instinctively as a Miura fighting bull." Moreover, he never learned from his mistakes, which were frequent. The wonder is that he survived as long as he did. With few exceptions—Little Phil Sheridan was one—those who knew him best disliked him personally and doubted his ability as an officer. In an interview published in the *New York Herald* two weeks after Little Big Horn, an officer who knew him well explained his rise in plausible terms: "The truth about Custer is, that he was a pet soldier, who had risen not above

his merit, but higher than men of equal merit. He fought with Phil Sheridan, and through the patronage of Sheridan he rose; but while Sheridan liked his valor and dash he never trusted his judgment. He was to Sheridan what Murat was to Napoleon. While Sheridan is always cool, Custer was always aflame. Rising to high command early in life, he lost the repose necessary to success in high command." The two officers who were nearest him in his final years, Major Marcus Reno and Captain Frederick Benteen, were much harsher in their assessments, but they detested the man and hence may have been less than objective in decrying the officer.

But, as I say, it is less the character of Custer than it is the whole complex of Indian-Anglo relations that gives this book its special flavor. After all, Custer was only one of many actors in the play. At times he disappears altogether from the stage while members of the supporting cast stand in the spotlight and speak their lines. To be sure, the play (to maintain my image or figure a moment longer) has no moral whatsoever. Certainly Mr. Connell does not make the romantic (or sentimental) mistake of depicting the Indians as *noble savages*. No one so fond as they were of torturing and mutilating their adversaries can be considered noble. Nor, on the other hand, does he gainsay the cupidity and deceit of the Anglos who sought to corral the Indians on reservations and thus deprive them of their way of life, and when efforts to that end failed endeavored simply to exterminate them. The simple fact is that the Indians occupied land that the westward-moving Anglos wished to farm or mine for its minerals. In the inevitable clash that followed, the two opposing peoples responded in a perfectly human manner: They went at each other's throats with all the moral fervor that we mistakenly believe only fanatics display.

Reading this spellbinder of a book I was often reminded of Mark Twain's remark about "this damned human race"—to wit, his comment that the more he saw of men, the more they amused him and the more he pitied them. Twain would have delighted in *Son of the Morning Star*, as would Joseph Conrad, who late in life wrote his friend Bertrand Russell that he had "never been able to find in any man's book or any man's talk anything convincing enough to stand up for a moment against my deep-seated sense of fatality governing this man-inhabited world." More than anything else it is that sense of fatality that Connell conveys in this exemplary volume. □

SON OF THE MORNING STAR
Evan S. Connell/North Point Press/\$20.00

William H. Nolte

In *Son of the Morning Star* Evan Connell has given us an utterly fascinating account of what led up to, occurred at, and then followed the fiasco that took place at Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876. That is to say, he has accounted for that landmark event insofar as an accounting can be made without stepping outside the bounds of evidence and entering the domain of conjecture. Had some of the 220 or so officers and enlisted men who accompanied Custer on his wild mission lived to tell tales about just what happened on that blazing hot Sunday afternoon, our interest would doubtless be less than it is and has been. Given the many hints and clues, the shards of palpable evidence strewn about the site, and the human obsession for solving such riddles, it is little wonder that such an immense literature has grown up around the leading actors in the little drama.

Still, I am puzzled by the interest we take in George Armstrong Custer, a man who was certainly unfitted by nature to play the role of tragic hero. In fact, it is not so much Custer who fascinates as it is the mainly sordid enterprise in which he played a part. That Connell is also puzzled by our interest in the man seems apparent

throughout this long study—as, for example, on page 106 when he pauses, as it were, in his chronicle to place the actor in cameo relief:

Even now, after a hundred years, his name alone will start an argument. More significant men of his time can be discussed without passion because they are inextricably woven into a tapestry of the past, but this hotspur refuses to die. He stands forever on that dusty Montana slope.

Just so. But I am still bemused by the very factuality of the figure standing



William H. Nolte is C. Wallace Martin Professor of English at the University of South Carolina.