

community are fully confronted and recognized. The community is happy in that it has survived its remembered tragedies, reshaped itself coherently around its known losses, and embraced its eccentrics, invalids, sinners, and fools.

*Sabbaths, 1987-1990* continues a pattern of poetry begun in an earlier volume titled *Sabbaths* that included poems from 1979 to 1986. It is nature poetry of the kind Berry himself describes in his essay "A Secular Pilgrimage." Such poetry is secular in its detachment from institutionalized religion but a pilgrimage in its worshipful valuing of what is not entirely understood and in its religious aspiring beyond what is known. It is intensely responsive to the physical presence of the natural world and at the same time stimulated by the immanence of mystery or divinity in that physical presence. Berry suggests two important generative influences for such poetry. One is Oriental poetry, with "its directness and brevity, its involvement with the life of things, its sense that the poem does not create the poetry but is the revelation of a poetry that is in the world." The other is the prose writings of Thoreau, characterized by "a painstaking accuracy of observation, a most unsolemn and refreshing reverence, a sense of being involved in nature, and a rare exuberance and wit."

These influences are clearly discernible in Berry's own poetry. Following Thoreau, who said "the true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible

and indescribable as the tints of morning and evening," Berry writes, "I keep an inventory / Of wonders and of uncommercial goods." This inventory is kept primarily on Sabbath walks in nature, and he imbues "Sabbath" with rich metaphorical significance. He alludes to the first Sabbath, in which God rested while the Creation sang a hymn. It is echoes of that hymn that he seeks in his Sunday ramblings. The poems imply that when "field and woods" (farm and wilderness, cultivated and uncultivated land) are in harmony they awake reverberations of that first Sabbath anthem. And he mentions a final Sabbath with its song of the death of time and pain. These poems are variations on the theme of Sabbaths—from first to last, from literal to figurative.

The principal thread of analogy is that Sabbath is to workday as the solace of nature is to the sweat and labor of human society. The poems hint at a possible harmony in which the two elements complement each other:

Then workday  
And Sabbath live together in  
one place.  
Though mortal, incomplete, that  
harmony  
Is our one possibility of peace.

Berry, as a farmer-environmentalist, is concerned with redeeming the land, being a partner with nature in healing the effects of harmful practices. He uses the notion of Sabbaths in these poems to express a rhythm of work and rest that informs the agrarian ideal.

Some nature writing is little more than pandering to our modern alienation from the natural world, verbal nature walks to quiet the conscience of an indoor society implicated in environmental depredation. Wendell Berry's engagement with the natural world transcends mere description, or even the kind of appreciation that finds pleasant correspondences between nature and the human mind or soul. His is a daily tactile involvement that shapes his moral, aesthetic, and social values. The quiet gentleness and apparent simplicity of his writing is as hard won as his reclaimed land. He once alerted his readers to this:

I am  
a man crude as any,  
gross of speech, intolerant,  
stubborn, angry, full

of fits and furies. That I  
may have spoken well  
at times, is not natural.  
A wonder is what it is.

We have more than enough displaced writers providing us with fits and furies. We can benefit from a placed writer like Berry providing us with a practical voice concerning how to be responsibly at home in our world.

*Stephen L. Tanner is a professor of English at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.*

## Straight Talk by David Gordon

**Paved With Good Intentions: The Failure of Race Relations in Contemporary America**  
by Jared Taylor  
New York: Carroll & Graf;  
416 pp., \$22.95



A reviewer of Jared Taylor's impressive new book faces a dilemma. If a book's principal thesis is valid, a critic must of course say so. But a difficulty arises in the present instance. According to Taylor, public orthodoxy inhibits discussion of race relations in our country. Dissenters from this orthodoxy face retribution. With remarkable courage, Taylor has defied the conventions whose existence he decries. It is exactly at this point that the problem I have referred to takes shape. The sanctions that Taylor has risked threaten not just him, but those who tender him their support. Reviewers who praise him must, it seems, partake of his temerity. Now the difficulty strikes home, in a way I cannot ignore. I entirely lack Taylor's boldness: what, then, am I to do? I can only hope that this review does not fall into the wrong hands, since any honest reader must recognize the genuine worth of *Paved With Good Intentions*.

Taylor identifies a fundamental error at the heart of most discussions of American blacks and their difficulties: the assumption that "whites are responsible for the problems blacks face." Whites bear this responsibility because they en-

### LIBERAL ARTS



#### POLITICAL ORATORY, 1993

"This is a little tiny chunk of a huge plateful of stuff we'll have to deal with."

—Senator Alan K. Simpson,  
Republican from Wyoming, on the  
defeat of President Clinton's  
economic stimulus bill.

slaved blacks in the past and because the abolition of slavery only resulted in new forms of oppression that left blacks hardly better off than before. Though prospects for blacks have in recent years improved, the damage that racism continues to cause remains of vast dimensions. Yet Taylor maintains that this doctrine really demeans blacks: "It implies that blacks are helpless and cannot make progress unless whites transform themselves." "Implies," I think, goes too far, since one might hold whites responsible for the low position of blacks but maintain that blacks can still act to better their situation. But no doubt most proponents of the doctrine see it in just the way Taylor describes.

The position to which Taylor takes vigorous exception relies on one part of St. Paul's definition of faith: "the evidence of things not seen." To lay bare the lack of substance in the "white-racism" account, our author deploys three main arguments. First, he posits that empirical evidence lends little support to the view that blacks must constantly battle discrimination. A study he cites investigated bias in employment through the dispatch for interviews of whites and blacks with identical job qualifications and concluded that blacks and whites did not significantly differ in the offers of employment they received. Another study failed to substantiate the oft-repeated claim that the police treat blacks worse than whites. Here, it seems to me, Taylor is on exactly the right track: the prevalence of white racism is a hypothesis to be tested, not a social fact to be taken for granted.

Having thrown into question the key assumption of contemporary *bien pensants*, Taylor next poses a challenge. If white racism injures blacks, what about other groups that have in the past suffered from severe discrimination? Surely, "other nonwhite races should face obstacles similar to those faced by blacks." Once more, Taylor contends, the facts falsify the hypothesis under test. Chinese- and Japanese-Americans have attained high levels of employment and income, fully comparable to those of whites, despite the invidious prejudices they faced in the not-far-distant past. If they have surmounted the obstacles thrown in their way, why cannot blacks confront with equal tenacity *their* disadvantages?

Finally, whatever one thinks of the civil rights movement, no one can deny

its impact: "America has made historically unprecedented efforts to correct the evils of the past." As racism has diminished, one would expect the situation of blacks to have improved concomitantly—if indeed the white-racism hypothesis is true. In fact, rates of illegitimacy, crime, and drug use among blacks have increased, not lessened, since the onset of the civil rights revolution. Once more, the racism hypothesis falls to the ground.

I suspect that Taylor's opponents will remain unconvinced, but, if intellectually honest, they must at least confront his arguments. How to do so? They might weaken the racism hypothesis so that it asserts a tendency rather than an inevitable connection: racism, one could argue, confronts its victims with problems they *may* be unable to overcome. If a group can meet discrimination successfully, as the Asians have done, well and good, but if blacks cannot, racism remains part of the explanation for their troubles. But to this rejoinder, Taylor could respond once more with his first argument: positing the malign social effects of racism is itself a hypothesis that demands investigation.

Taylor makes it abundantly clear that wide acceptance of the white-racism explanation has had drastic consequences. Because of the evils imputed to racism, massive programs of affirmative action have become an entrenched feature of our national life. "The original impetus for affirmative action was understandable. If racist barriers had kept large numbers of talented blacks from getting good jobs or going to good schools, such people would surely be found with little effort. Once found and given equal opportunity, they would succeed at the same rates as whites." Unfortunately, the expectations that initially motivated affirmative action have not been borne out; blacks have not responded to the boost offered them with a rush toward the higher-paying professions. But advocates of reverse discrimination cling to their cherished dogmas. If the programs have not succeeded as intended, the solution is obvious: we must have many more of the same programs.

As Taylor documents substantially, racial quotas have become virtually unavoidable. No important university lacks an "affirmative-action officer," while tests used by police and fire departments have again and again been revised to ensure "correct" results. Does not justice

demand the abolition of such blatant measures of discrimination? Proponents of affirmative action, such as the legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin, would, I think, reply to Taylor with a demurrer. White racism, in their view, has so blighted the prospects of blacks that no quick remedy will work: affirmative action must remain in place for the indefinite future. And what of whites deprived of jobs? This, so far as I can make out, is held to involve no injustice; as Dworkin explains in convoluted fashion, "equal respect" does not require "equal treatment." Orwell's "some are more equal than others" at once springs to mind.

Whatever the sins of affirmative action, the contemporary system of welfare incorporates an even more harmful feature. Affirmative action can do nothing for those blacks who have no jobs at all. Since—obviously—white racism stands indicted for the situation of the underclass, it is the duty of the white majority to ameliorate their plight. A vast system of welfare, constantly extended, endeavors to assist members of the underclass until they can stand on their own feet to take sufficient advantage of the "equal" opportunity affirmative action offers them. But once more, Taylor insists that the contentions of liberal orthodoxy be subject to empirical inquiry. Far from helping blacks, the welfare system, he argues, has worsened their situation, principally by its effects on the family. High rates of illegitimacy have severely weakened the black family: many black children who live in large cities have little if any contact with their fathers. The collapse of the black family, Taylor contends, has led to precisely the increases in poverty, unemployment, and crime ascribed by conventional wisdom to white racism. And the welfare system has greatly contributed to the demise of the black family, since young women have no financial incentive to avoid pregnancy until marriage. They know that others will subsidize any children they have.

Taylor's analysis poses an urgent task for contemporary social science. If he is right, the entire welfare system needs to be reexamined: the benefits the system is supposed to bring must be weighed against the damaging consequences Taylor has adduced. Further, even those who continue to blame white racism for the problems of blacks need to confront Taylor's critique of welfare. If the welfare system worsens the position of blacks,

appeals to the white-racism hypothesis cannot justify its continuance. Perhaps of even more vital significance than the details of the book's argument, however, is the tone of its discussion. In an area too often dominated by catch-phrases and emotion, this calm appeal to reason and fact stands out as a model of informed social analysis.

*David Gordon is a senior fellow of the Ludwig von Mises Institute. He is the author of Resurrecting Marx (Transaction Books, 1990).*

## Speech for Speech's Sake

by Brian Robertson

**Free Speech for Me—But Not for  
Thee: How the American Left and  
Right Relentlessly Censor  
Each Other**  
by Nat Hentoff  
New York: Harper Collins;  
392 pp., \$25.00



One of the unfortunate after-effects of the so-called “Red Scare” of the early 50’s was the triumph of the “no limits” interpretation of the First Amendment, which has poisoned American political thought ever since. It goes something like this: the McCarthyite “reign of terror” permanently discredited the idea that you can suppress speech in a free society, whatever the reason (in this case political treason). Once you start to draw limits on free expression, whether it be political, artistic, or literary, you are setting up a situation in which the opinions and standards of the few are imposed on the many. Only if every member of society has the freedom to say, write, read, or buy whatever he pleases can we be assured of the access to ideas that is the guardian and embodiment of freedom. Words or images can never harm people; only the attempt to suppress them can.

In this view, “expression” is construed so broadly that almost no behavior falls outside its purview; it encompasses everything from pornography to flag-burning. This absolutism with regard to expression (which now holds sway at the majority of law schools and with a ma-

majority of the Supreme Court) has its roots in relativism: in a world in which truth is impossible to determine, no idea may be safely forbidden. It follows that the vitality of a culture can be measured by the diversity of “expression” therein—one of the sillier liberal conceits.

For Nat Hentoff, the “no limits” theory of speech is something of a creed. In his new book, Hentoff explores the current threats to this ideal of a tolerant, free society. He finds—despite the book’s subtitle, which implies a rough equality of offenses from right and left—that the vast majority of attempts to suppress speech today come from a new generation of leftists committed to enforcing sensitivity, tolerance, and politically correct thinking by any means necessary. The tendencies of the Religious Right don’t even come close (indeed, Mr. Hentoff has to resurrect the story of the obscenity convictions of comedian Lenny Bruce—who died over a quarter century ago—to find a good example of right-wing persecution). The fact that the existence of this new thought police does not raise the ire of the very same crowd that goes ballistic when someone suggests taking hard-core porn off the stands at the local 7-Eleven might lead one to think that many of them never really believed that stuff about freedom of expression in the first place—they were just using it for the purposes of secularizing the culture. With Hentoff we have a genuine believer: an old-style First Amendment liberal who is consistent in his application of the “no limits” theory of speech, even when that means tolerating politically incorrect viewpoints.

Those who deny that we are in the midst of a war over culture in this country need only read Hentoff’s book to be disabused of that delusion. It is a collection of tales from the front lines of that war, focusing on battles over free speech in academia and the public education establishment, where the stakes are highest. The picture that emerges is frightening. Never has the intellectual atmosphere at our institutions of higher learning been so stifling, and, as Mr. Hentoff documents, it is perhaps most stifling in the most elite of these institutions. Today, it is no longer Main Street but the Ivy League where one finds the most narrow-mindedness, conformity, and simple ignorance. It seems, from Mr. Hentoff’s account, that the young people who populate these supposed bastions of free discussion and thought

are so lacking in historical perspective that they firmly believe the solution to the world’s problems is to eliminate all “discriminatory” and “offensive” language from our cultural discourse, both public and private. Even tenured professors try to steer clear of “controversial” subjects for fear of being denounced as “insensitive” by zealous thought police (a fear much more evident today than during the largely fictional McCarthyite “reign of terror”).

Because radical feminism and multiculturalism are the reigning orthodoxies at these institutions, what this sensitivity means in practice is an all-out assault on the Western tradition in philosophy and morality. The extent to which these insidious ideologies serve as covers for a shallow materialism just beneath the ideological surface is truly extraordinary. Anyone who dares, for instance, to point out that the feminist agenda of sex-without-consequences has been a disaster for both women and children, leading to soaring rates of illegitimacy, divorce, and abortion, can be dismissed as one who wants to keep women from positions of power and influence. By successfully putting such talk outside the realm of civilized discourse, feminists are able to ignore the question of how much their politics are driven by a desire to avoid the consequences of irresponsible behavior rather than by some altruistic concern for women’s rights.

Likewise, the battle over cultural diversity in the curriculum at elite universities often obscures the fact that the roots of the controversy are the quota policies of the schools themselves. Unfortunately, the effect of admitting woefully unprepared minority students in order to meet quotas is not diversity but bitterness and resentment. When faced with “core curriculum” courses that require a high degree of intellectual discipline, many of these students are confirmed in their suspicion that the entire university system is stacked against their success and hence demand that other cultural perspectives be represented. The real scandal is that so many universities cave in to such bogus claims instead of reexamining their own admission policies. The fiction that those policies are motivated by a genuine concern for the welfare of minority students is belied by the fact that so large a percentage of blacks admitted to college in this country drop out before graduating. As Thomas Sowell has suggested, these