

It seems that Professor Guinier's fundamental point of contention is that the present system of governance is unfair: unfair not because we do not elect enough blacks to elective office, but because blacks do not get what they want when it comes time to consider what does and does not get passed as legislation. This is the point she emphasizes, time and again, through the turgid legal prose in which so much of this book is written.

One gets the strong impression that, in her dismissal of what is generally perceived to have been the Reagan agenda on civil rights matters, Professor Guinier is less concerned with the individual virtues and decentralized power that support self-government than she is with making sure that the people on whose behalf she thinks she speaks get their piece of the action. She thereby indicates that much of the classical concerns of government, namely the preservation of a framework of liberty and federalism within which virtue may be pursued and the highest aspirations of human existence accomplished, are not fundamentally of any great interest to her. Such can be inferred from her cavalier dismissal of the case made by the Reagan administration against one of her most cherished goals, which is to hold the line against federal retrenchment in the sphere of civil rights, a sphere in which so many "gains" have been made in recent decades.

Thus, in the course of this book, one is finally forced to ask whether Lani Guinier and those who share her concerns have been reading the same newspapers and experiencing the same history as the rest of us these past 30 years. For, far from having seen the officially designated oppressed classes among us receive the short end of the stick, we have witnessed an era in which being "oppressed" has become a lucrative business. In the name of civil rights, our property rights have been invaded, our right to speak freely and truthfully infringed, merit has been discarded for appearance, and law itself has been made the servant of power-maximizing politicians who would prosecute policemen for doing their job while letting the barbarians who infest our streets run free. Headlines to the contrary, Guinier is no "quota queen"; her work seeks to go beyond the present order of things. It seems clear, however, that she thinks the present system is an improvement on

the way things were. That she could arrive at a conclusion so different from that of most of the readers of this journal, and indeed most of America, is not reason to celebrate our diversity. It is, on the contrary, yet another "firebell in the night" heralding the balkanization of America, a development that, if unchecked, will yet vindicate Stephen Douglas's prophecies as to where Mr. Lincoln's theorizing would lead us.

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A Child of the Revolution

by Mark G. Malvasi

John C. Calhoun: A Biography

by Irving H. Bartlett

New York: W.W. Norton;

320 pp., \$25.00



In his engaging biography of John C. Calhoun, Irving H. Bartlett reminds us that American political culture and the men who made it were not always as decadent and corrupt as they are today. Yet Bartlett's book is not a partisan manifesto. He is respectful of Calhoun but not always sympathetic to his views, aspirations, and achievements.

One of Bartlett's most important and original contributions is to show that Calhoun was not *sui generis* but was, instead, the product of his culture. Calhoun was born into the conservative but volatile society of the South Carolina backcountry in 1782. His father, Patrick Calhoun, although he died when John was a boy of 13, exercised a remarkable influence on his son's temperament and worldview. A stern Scots-Irish Presbyterian, Patrick Calhoun taught his children that life is a perpetual struggle against evil. He also instilled in them an abiding love of liberty and an unqualified hatred of tyranny. For Patrick Calhoun, the obligations to God, family, neighborhood, and country defined the parameters of private and public life. John C. Calhoun fully absorbed his father's convictions, preferring through-

out his life study, toil, and duty to frivolity, idleness, and self-indulgence.

Bartlett traces Calhoun's public life as a backcountry lawyer, state legislator, congressman, Vice President, senator, and Cabinet official. In examining Calhoun's private life, Bartlett shows that the image of the "cast-iron man," which has enjoyed remarkable durability among historians, utterly misrepresents his personality. Calhoun was a devoted son; an indulgent, even permissive, father; a dutiful, if somewhat remote, husband; and a conscientious planter and master of slaves.

Bartlett ably reviews Calhoun's enduring contributions to political philosophy, his effort to "place political science on the same solid foundations as physical science." But Bartlett's most subtle and important insights emerge from his exploration of the dichotomies that structured Calhoun's thought and career. Three themes, or more accurately three tensions, dominate the narrative: first, Calhoun's effort to reconcile nationalism and sectionalism; second, his struggle to balance ambition against principle; third, his defense of slavery and republicanism.

Like most other scholars of Jacksonian politics, Bartlett acknowledges the enthusiastic nationalism that characterized Calhoun's tenure in the House of Representatives. Upon entering Congress, Calhoun immediately identified himself with the "war hawks" who supported the conflict with Great Britain. After the War of 1812, Calhoun advocated internal improvements, favored a protective tariff, championed a national bank, and generally sought "to counteract every tendency to disunion."

During the 1820's, according to the familiar argument, Calhoun in response to the outcry raised in South Carolina against the tariff abandoned his early nationalism and embraced an ardent sectionalism. Bartlett does not posit such a sharp divergence between Calhoun's commitment to nation and to section. In Bartlett's view, Calhoun was first and last "a child of the Revolution." He revered the Union and his affection for it never wavered.

But Calhoun could not support a Union that had become oppressive. When the government of the United States passed to the control of men more interested in using power for their own benefit than in attending to the good of the commonwealth, Calhoun sought to

implement various mechanisms, nullification and the concurrent majority among them, to protect the rights and liberties of the minority section. Although he never abandoned his attachment to the Union, he maintained that his rivals had perverted it by transforming the government into an instrument of patronage.

Calhoun suffered to behold the nation abandoned to party hacks and spoilsmen. Only honorable, autonomous, and dispassionate gentlemen who were not prey to the intrigues or obsessions of the moment had the authority to rule. Never at ease with the mass politics that emerged during the first half of the 19th century, Calhoun himself found it impossible "to speak to the democratic spirit of the new age."

Steadfast in his fidelity to the Old Republic, Calhoun always proclaimed to act from the most noble motives, without consideration of political advantage. Bartlett maintains that Calhoun may have rationalized to his own satisfaction "the fiction that he remained above the political scramble." But he concludes that "it would be a mistake to take Calhoun at face value," since "he was no selfless knight in shining armor." Bartlett is doubtless correct that Calhoun at times acted to gratify his political ambition. But what politician does not? The real question is whether Calhoun was a political opportunist who sought to advance his career at the expense of the country. It seems to me that Calhoun sacrificed political ambition in defense of all that he cherished.

It would have been a simple matter for Calhoun to win the presidency, as his colleague Dixon Lewis of Alabama recognized, had he supported the popular war against Mexico. He refused to do so, arguing that the declaration of war had been unconstitutional. Even in victory, he was convinced that the war would bring disaster to the United States by requiring the imposition of a crushing debt, encouraging the centralization of power, necessitating the creation of a large standing army, and transforming a republic of free institutions into an empire bent on conquest. "Mexico is to us the forbidden fruit," he told his fellow senators. "The penalty of eating it would be to subject our institutions to political death."

Calhoun's defense of slavery, however essential for his political survival in the South, was also in the final analysis more

a matter of conviction than of expediency. Calhoun never questioned the natural inferiority of blacks and asserted, in unison with other pro-slavery theorists, that "there never yet has existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not . . . live on the labor of the other." For Calhoun and his Southern contemporaries, however, domestic slavery humanized the exploitation of labor, imposing reciprocal obligations on masters and slaves. Southerners deplored the political, social, and moral, if not the material, consequences of industrialism and capitalism that exposed men, women, and children alike to brutality, degradation, and hopelessness. They believed that a society in which some men took personal responsibility for the welfare of others was the sole preserve of republican freedom and Christian morality. From Calhoun's point of view, whether the South stood or fell would determine the fate of the American Republic itself.

Calhoun did not live to witness the devastation of the South in the Civil War that he had warned against and had desperately sought to prevent. But he had seen enough by 1850 to know that the Old Republic in which he had come of age, and to which he owed whatever distinction he had earned, was swiftly pass-

ing into memory. He had, as Bartlett discerns, fought under the same banner as his father before him:

Calhoun knew that he was the son of a legend and had become a legend himself. Blessed with advantages of wealth and education far beyond anything his father possessed, he had tried to carry on his father's struggles in a new and rapidly changing world. Patrick's enemies were not his father's enemies . . . but in many ways the stakes were the same for father and son. With one foot always in the wilderness, the father had put his life on the line to carve civilization out of a brutal frontier. The son . . . put his character on the line to preserve the political principles that civilization had created.

So much more imperative is it now to reflect on the life, thought, and character of John C. Calhoun, when the Old Republic is virtually beyond remembering in this grim and unheroic age.

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LIBERAL ARTS



MAIL AND MULTICULTURALISM

The vice chairman of the United States Postal Service recently stated that blacks are over-represented among postal workers in major cities, often at the expense of Latinos. Tirso del Junco, who is himself Hispanic, said that postal service management in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami "is driven by blacks—they must open the doors of opportunity to everyone," reported the *Los Angeles Times* last summer.

Postal Service officials denied del Junco's accusations and argued that hiring is based on the results of a test open to anyone. "The managers do not control the hiring of employees—the register controls it," said Charly Amos, the "Postal Service Manager for Affirmative Action."

Reimagining a River

by Stephen Bodio

Gila: *The Life and Death of an American River*
by Gregory McNamee
New York: Crown; 215 pp., \$24.00



In 1944, a party of German prisoners-of-war escaped from a camp in Phoenix, armed with old maps and with the intention of stealing a boat and sailing to Mexico. When they saw the “pitiful trickle” that is the modern Gila, they began to hike downstream in despair and were soon rounded up. Their leader later complained, “I only wish the Gila really had been a river. If it has no water, why do the Americans show it on their maps?” In the spirit of Edward Abbey (and with a few of his prejudices against such things as cows), Gregory McNamee goes a long way toward answering this question in his readable, but never shallow, history.

He begins in the first person, in the high 10,000-foot-plus headwaters of the river, the forests of southern New Mexico, during a vivid September thunderstorm, then casts back into geological history to when the Gila was a sea bottom, 150 million years ago. He passes rapidly, though not superficially,

through paleontology and slows down as humans arrive. His treatment of early Indian history seems comprehensive and taught me much I did not know. Entering upon the history of existing tribes, he takes for a chapter epigraph a haunting quote from an Apache elder that might stand for the whole book: “The land is always stalking people.”

His coverage of the conquest is fair. If it seems at times to be critical and perhaps a little politically correct, his documented account of the watershed is hard to dispute, and depressing. He does give occasional glimpses of another side; I found it fascinating that the Church in the 1600’s had declared, “He sins against Divine Providence who tries to improve what God, for inscrutable motives, has wished to leave imperfect,” and that it therefore disagreed with Father Kino’s public works projects. There is wit here, too; McNamee, writing of the peripatetic Kino, wryly observes, “*Qui multum peregrinatur, raro sanctificatur*”—“Who travels much is rarely made a saint.”

But the darkness deepens, as the history of the Gila drainage comes to resemble a novel by Cormac McCarthy. McNamee rightly observes a fact still overlooked today: the Spanish invented the taking of scalps that became an industry, one indulged in by all sides in the 19th century: “By 1800 . . . a mat of scalps numbering in the thousands bedecked the great doors of the cathedral in Chihuahua City.” Blood flows plentifully through that century and into ours, but the river, strangled by dams and irrigation and the cutting of riparian vegetation, beset by overgrazing of its watershed, diminishes until the hapless German prisoners find themselves walking on sand. Phoenix is founded, grows, metastasizes, sucks up water, eventually changes the climate. (A “Phoenician . . . will use three hundred gallons of water daily, the highest rate of consumption in the nation.”)

McNamee then examines the natural history of the Gila basin. As much as I like this book, I think he is at his weakest here, using perhaps too many secondary sources. The Dust Bowl affected eastern rather than southern New Mexico. Bitterns do not live in the mountain headwaters of the Gila; the state has one of the healthiest populations of cougars on the continent (which is not to say that they should be killed indiscriminately); squirrels are not hunted for their coats; and the Puerco on the other side of the

divide, not the Gila, is the muddiest river in the world. (The Gila undoubtedly comes close.) “Speciation” means something very different from “diversity.” Each of these errors is minor in itself, but the cumulative effect weakens McNamee’s authority.

On the subject of cattle, McNamee is right about the ill effects of overgrazing in the 1890’s but probably far too pessimistic about the possibility of a *rap-prochement* between modest cattle grazing and environmental health. However, he does not stand alone in this respect; the polarization of this issue is one of the tragedies of the modern West.

I do not want to leave the impression that *Gila* is a seriously flawed book. Though it is possible to quibble with details, McNamee’s central thesis—that greed and shortsightedness have trashed and continue to abuse a once magnificent and still haunting landscape—is inarguable. His documentation of the unintended effects of dams and reckless water policies is (forgive me) particularly damning. “When the great rains of October 1983 came, the rusty floodgates at Coolidge Dam failed to open. Glen Canyon Dam, on the Colorado, shivered loose from its bedding in soft sandstone, and its operators sounded a warning that it might collapse at any minute—taking with it, in turn, Hoover Dam, Davis Dam, Parker Dam, and Imperial Dam.” The story of the Central Arizona Project, its expense, destructiveness, and worthlessness, should be a lesson to conservationists and conservatives alike.

Finally, McNamee refuses to give in to facile pessimism. His models are Aldo Leopold and Ed Abbey, people who transcended contemporary culture’s short attention span and simplistic political divisions. In a statement reminiscent of Abbey, McNamee remarks, “To dam a river is only to pretend that risk can be minimized, and ours has been a risk-fearing age, to the great delight of insurance companies and cowards.” And in the spirit of Leopold, he concludes: “The nature of human beings is to dream. The nature of writers is to spin tales. It is time that we turn to better stories and dreams than we have now.

“A flowing Gila would be a start.”

Stephen Bodio’s most recently published book is Querencia (Clark City Press). He has a book about fine guns forthcoming.

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