

but now he lives in upstate New York. He clearly wants us to recognize that he's come a long way from his Mississippi roots, and, for better or for worse, he obviously has. But origins will tell—he writes like an angel. I just wish I agreed with more of what he has to say.

Harkness went back to his hometown for a visit and was apparently ticked off to discover that Mississippi is not an equitable, color-blind society. Like (one might ask) where? He does not vouchsafe to us what part of the U.S. he would have Greenwood emulate, and I doubt very much that he could be pleased by the white attitudes to be found in any American town with a significant black presence (much less any, like Greenwood, with a substantial black majority).

Now I've never been to Greenwood. I've never done more than briefly visit the Deep South. Maybe Harkness is right and things in the Mississippi Delta are pretty much what they always have been. Maybe race relations and conditions for blacks are better in upstate New York or in Chicago or Detroit or the other cities to which black Mississippians have historically migrated. Maybe so.

But you wouldn't know to read his articles that for the past decade and a half more blacks have been moving to the South (in most cases, probably,

returning there) than have been leaving it. You wouldn't know from his article that the South is the only part of the country where the percentage of black families living in poverty has decreased in the past few years, or that that percentage is lower now than in the Midwest. You wouldn't know that Mississippi now has more black elected officials than any other state in the country, or that a higher proportion of blacks hold public office in the South than in any other region. You wouldn't know that an increasing number of Southern politicians, black and white, have been elected by biracial coalitions. You wouldn't know that a majority of Southern whites now tell the Gallup Poll that they'd vote for a black for President. (OK, so some of them are lying, but what they think they *ought* to say is important, too.)

No, the South isn't a color-blind society. What some of us hope it is becoming is a working and relatively decent biracial society—a rather different thing. (If it can be done, it will be no small accomplishment: I remember a college political science course that held up as examples of successful multiethnic societies Switzerland and . . . Lebanon.) Not all whites share that goal. Not all are happy about the prospect. But a good many of us are. Harkness has little use for what he calls the “old, humorous,

relentlessly superficial affability” of my region, but I suggest that it's close kin to the quality known elsewhere as civility, and that it will get us through this if anything can.

I'm not one of those who feels that Southern whites are uniquely fitted to instruct the world on race relations. Harkness makes fun of those who see something of value in the South's unhappy history on this score, and he may be right to do so. But for whatever reason—luck has something to do with it, and so do the goodwill and political skills of black Southerners—things are looking up in those parts of the South that I know best. And they may even be looking up in Greenwood.

There's no evidence in his article that Harkness talked to any blacks at all during his short visit, much less to any who had come back from the cities of the upper Midwest. On his next visit, he might try that. He could ask them whether *they* think anything of importance has changed.

It's OK to talk to black folks now, James. They'll even tell you what they think. And maybe that's the most important change of all.

John Shelton Reed's latest book, Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy, will be published this fall by the University of Georgia Press.

POLEMICS & EXCHANGES



On 'Conspiracies Against the Nation'

Thomas Fleming's broad-brushed editorial "Conspiracies Against the Nation" (*Chronicles*, April '86) has led me to conclude that Mr. Fleming's

own political philosophy lies precariously close to the extremism of libertarianism (one of many "extremisms" he cautions against), insofar as he seems unwilling to grant any legitimate government intervention into the private lives of individuals.

Mr. Fleming's fear of conservative

statism is misplaced as he warns against the dangers of "Baby Doe Squads," whose only purpose is to protect newborns from being denied life-saving medical treatment. Parental privacy, and all claims to a "right of privacy," do not legitimize the willful taking of an innocent life for whatever

reason.

While there is much to be said concerning the dangers of employing statist measures to achieve ideological ends, either from the right or from the left, it is a grave distortion to equate the protection of newborns with efforts to institutionalize school prayers and anti-gun control legislation.

In his quest of "the government that governs least," Mr. Fleming denies the government of possibly its one legitimate role—the recognition and protection of the inalienable rights of its citizenry. Conversely, the government's continued complacency in its protection of these God-given rights, as furthered by judicial activism and the acceptance of a thinly veiled quality of life ethic (see "Therefore Choose Death," *Commentary*, April '86), has pushed the government closer to illegitimacy as originally defined by its founders.

I agree with Mr. Fleming that "the government that governs best governs least." However, I would also add that the government that fails to recognize the inherent rights of the least of those it governs is the government that most quickly enslaves.

—Sean Robert Gerety
New Fairfield, Connecticut

The Editor Replies:

I have been called many things before, but never a libertarian. Mr. Gerety's letter is representative of several we received in response to the April "Perspective." None of them addressed my argument. I regard abortion as murder—that is an ethical statement. I fully support draconian abortion laws at the appropriate level, but I am suspicious of any Federal law on locally committed crimes—that is a political statement. While ethics and politics are intimately linked, they are not the same. The state exists to encourage virtue but not to coerce it—or so St. Thomas argued.

Mr. Gerety, in defending the government's role, employs the typically libertarian language of rights. What these rights are or where they come from, I haven't a clue. Conservative moralists used to write of natural law and the duties that derive from it. But

natural rights is something else: It is the sour wine our fathers drank as a medicine against royal absolutism. By now our teeth have been set on edge by tyrannical courts that claim to act *always* in defense of those rights, including the right of women to control their own bodies.

Conservatives used to believe that big government was the source of many of our woes. Nothing better illustrates the perils of statism so well as the Supreme Court's illegitimate decision to legitimize abortion. The most sensible first step is to undo that great wrong before entrusting still more power to a government that gives little evidence of prudence or restraint. If we fail in reconstructing the authority of local communities, we may well find ourselves turning to Caesar in a desperate attempt to restore order. It is not a cheering prospect after only 200 years of republican government.

On 'Naming the Bard'

In light of your criticisms of education, higher and lower, the question arises, why should *Chronicles* writer Jane Greer (February issue) and Joseph Sobran of the *National Review* be taken in by the anti-Shakespearean nonsense? Are they untaught? Badly taught? Or are their views a relatively harmless manifestation of the paranoia of the times?

Once someone allows the thought to take root that Shakespeare was someone else, he has stepped into an abyss of unreason, and there can be no argument because there is nothing to argue about. Shakespeare's identity is axiomatic. To dispute it is as weird as to dispute the heliocentricity of the solar system *after* observation proved it in (I think) 1838. And that would be very weird. If one rules out the evidential equivalent of instrumentation—life-records, title-pages, contemporary references, and so on—then one is in no position to say anything about anyone at all, including the Earl of Oxford.

But we must never forget that we live in a country where the majority of people have no grasp of the maneuver called proof and believe all kinds of

nonsense—which brings us back to the educational system.

Two observations. As far as I know, the combined Baconians, Oxfordians, Derbyites, &c. have not contributed anything to the corpus of Shakespearean scholarship except rubbish. What they have done is mislead uninstructed people who believe what they read in books. This puts them in quite a different category from the astrologers, alchemists, neo-Platonists, &c. whose work has fallen into disrepute but whose contribution to our ways of thinking and knowing is immense. The anti-Shakespeareans are merely destructive, and belong in the freak department of the library. Second, what is your magazine doing joining ranks with freaks? It's no use advocating ancient tradition on one page and knocking it down on the next. Ill-disposed as children are to read poetry these days, I do not suppose they will be much encouraged by the knowledge that the great Shakespeare himself was a fraud on both sides of the mask. As you say elsewhere in the magazine, children have good sense in matters like that.

—F.W. Brownlow
Mount Holyoke College

Ms. Greer Replies:

Mr. Brownlow is not looking for a response or dialogue; he is, in fact, doing what he can to discourage it. He obviously hasn't read Charlton Ogburn's book and doesn't intend to, but even at such a remove from the *really* terrifying material therein, he is frightened enough to throw scholarship out the window and wage a purely *ad hominem* attack on those of us who are fascinated by the very large body of facts pointing to Edward de Vere as Shakespeare.

When a staunch Stratfordian takes it upon himself to refute Ogburn's book point by point (and there are hundreds of points), I will be delighted and very much interested, and feel safe in saying that Charlton Ogburn will be, too. This is, after all, supposed to be *fun*, a quest of love; there is no "loser," and every literature-lover will be a winner no matter what the truth is found to be.