"immediate use of the American navy and air force."

At the same time, Niebuhr maintained a running criticism of the mainline Protestant churches for their perfectionism and neutralism: "If modern churches were to symbolize their real faith they would take the crucifix from their altars and substitute the three little monkeys who counsel men to 'speak no evil, hear no evil, and see no evil.' " Anticipating the current debate over moral symmetry, Niebuhr charged the Christian perfectionists with blurring the moral distinction between tyranny and democracy, and with espousing "perfection without pity, goodness without discrimination and responsibility, and loveless love." He condemned the churches for giving advice that, if followed, would ensure "an easy Nazi victory" and for escaping the war issue by spinning "utopian plans" for the postwar world.

Lingering socialist postulates clouded Niebuhr's view of the Soviet Union through the 1930s. Though he had been critical of certain Soviet practices since the early 1920s, as late as 1936 in *Radical Religion* he called the Soviet Union "the most thrilling social venture in modern history." By 1938, however, he was comparing Stalin's "dictatorship" to Hitler's, and in 1940 he predicted the possibility of postwar Russian expansion into Europe. He was especially critical of the "subservience" of Communist parties to "Russian diplomacy, in all its tortuous turnings," adding that the "trouble with all the comrades and semi-comrades" was that they had "made Communism their Christ and Russia the Kingdom of God." (Before Pearl Harbor, Niebuhr was a member of both Norman Thomas's Socialist party and William Allen White's Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. A Socialist ideologue informed Niebuhr of his inconsistency and said that "this war is a clash of rival imperialisms." Niebuhr agreed: "So is a clash between myself and a gangster." He promptly quit the Socialist party.)

In a 1953 essay often overlooked by liberal revisionists, "Why Is Communism So Evil?" Niebuhr castigated Marxist arrogance, Soviet brutality, and the "timid spirits" who will not acknowledge "this universal evil of Communism." "Communist dogmatism creates an ideological inflexibility" that reinforces "the monolithic political structure" of the Soviet Union, he said. A decade later he declared that Soviet Communism was far more dangerous than any authoritarian regime—it was "a pretentious scheme of world salvation, a secularized religious apocalypse."

Niebuhr was impatient with the idealistic planners of the postwar world. In 1943 he said that any viable postwar settlement would require the continuing commitment of U.S. power and that an Anglo-American alliance "must be the cornerstone of any durable world order." The United Nations, like the failed League before it, was at best a frail reed and at worst an illusion. In 1945 he said that if the divisions between the Soviet Union and the Western allies continued to widen, the United Nations might become "irrelevant." He repeatedly attacked "the illusion of world government" and in 1949 wrote an article by that name in *Foreign Affairs* which remains a testament to his profound understanding of world politics. A war against Russia, he said, was possible; the Western allies should be prepared for it. Convinced that Soviet expansionist policies were the major threat to freedom and world peace, he became an unabashed Cold Warrior, agreeing with Churchill that U.S. superiority in nuclear arms was the "chief deterrent of a Russian venture to conquer Europe."

This remarkably consistent affirmation of political realism and responsibility persisted until the mid-1960s, marred only slightly by the not fully examined assumptions of his Marxist past. He acknowledged this flaw in a 1952 essay, "The Triumph of Experience Over Dogma," in which he said that he clung to shreds of Marxist dogma long after he supposed himself free of such illusions. He embodied Churchill's provocative assertion that "facts are better than dreams."

This record adds up to a profile of a thoughtful neoconservative, a liberal mugged by reality. One must allow for foibles, contradictions, and ambiguities in any seminal thinker, especially one as turbulent and torn as this preacher turned political philosopher in the crucible of a world menaced by the totalitarians. Niebuhr drew his wisdom from the Judeo-Christian moral tradition—from the Hebrew prophets, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and Martin Luther—and, less consciously, from American statesmen like James Madison and Abraham Lincoln. Will Herberg, a former leading intellectual in the American Communist party who was converted by Niebuhr into a Judeo-Christian realist, asserted that one could establish a kinship between Niebuhr's conservatism and that of Edmund Burke.

Vintage Niebuhr, then, is indeed a man for all seasons. He directed his anger against the evils of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and against the idealists, utopians, and rationalists who could not comprehend tragedy and evil in the world, and the cynics who didn't care about the fate of freedom. □

## JESSE JACKSON AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

Thomas Landess and Richard Quinn/Jameson Books/$17.95

Philip Terzian

Jesse Jackson, who takes himself nearly as seriously as the authors of this otherwise admirable book, likes to believe he is the inheritor of the mantle of Martin Luther King: America's preeminent, perhaps America's only, black leader, whatever that may mean—a moral authority in the gown of a visionary reformer. In fact, I am inclined to think that if he has picked up any fallen standard it is George Jessel's, the late toastmaster general of the United States, and a ubiquitous presence if not a moral authority. There was a time when civic banquets and organizational get-togethers were incomplete without his bogus uniform, sonorous voice, and familiar one-liners. Jesse Jackson is his modern equivalent: He seems to be everywhere, but especially on television, reciting his motivational doggerel, rhyming "hope" with "dope," turning up in such unlikely places as Damascus or Geneva or Havana, where he cannot always tell the good guys from the bad, lending his celebrity presence where it may or may not be welcome.

Just last February he surfaced in South Carolina eulogizing Ronald McNair, the black astronaut who died in the shuttle explosion, and conferred upon the poor deceased a signal compliment: a connection with himself. He and McNair, he said (and so *Time* and the *New York Times* reported), had been classmates at North Carolina A & T University, when in fact they had been nothing of the sort. Jackson is ten years older than McNair, and they probably never met. For that matter, McNair's academic credentials were genuine, whereas Jackson's are problematic at best. His theological education—the foundation of the "Rev." that punctiliously precedes his name—was fitful, incomplete, and unrewarded by any sort of diploma. His ordination was honorary. He was in South Carolina for the same reason George Jessel used to show up at the Friar's Club: No one knew quite why or how, but he had to be there, and it was too much trouble to keep him away.

*Philip Terzian, a* TAS *contributor since 1975, is writing a book on the American Century.*

In short, as Thomas Landess and Richard Quinn make painfully clear, Jesse Jackson is a liar and a fraud, even a usurper, a demagogue minus a message, a hypnotic performer whose spell is lifted without the snap of a finger. This is not to say that Jackson is insignificant, or that time and energy are wasted on figuring what he is about. On the contrary; like most confidence men, it is his victims who measure his progress. His success tells us more about ourselves than about his guile, which is self-evident, even flagrant. He says one thing, means another, and both are untrue. But no one bothers to read the label.

His appearance is especially eloquent: A decade ago he was resplendent in afro and dashiki, chained and bemedaled, loud and insistent. Nowadays he has traded the garment of the agitator for the wardrobe of a pimp. He speaks in measured tones, occasionally raising his voice for emphasis or biblical citation. He is at his best when least eligible, most brazen: Mikhail Gorbachev nodded gravely at the plight of Soviet hymies. When Jackson spoke to the Democratic National Convention in 1984, he came as a forgiving conqueror, having lost every contest he entered, and by some distance. Of course, the delegates listened, and some even wept, but they are

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Democrats, and self-mortification is a religious ritual in that particular sect. The rest of us may have wondered: If Jesse Jackson did not exist, would it be necessary to invent him? No law bears his imprint, no doctrine boasts his name. No institution endures because he laid the foundation. No cause but Jesse Jackson has his unqualified allegiance. The Democrats may have held him in unaccustomed esteem, but their electors avoided him in droves. Why read about him? Alas, the answer is found on every doorstep: the press.

From the moment Martin Luther King lay murdered, Jackson's career has been a whirlwind of airport connections, jerry-built alliances, proclamations, and press conferences—leadership by news release. If he is not *the* black leader, he is *a* black leader; and leadership, he seems to think, is something seized rather than earned. The authors are especially skillful in their examination of the Jackson mythology, his irresistible rise and unquestioned mastery—one might say intimidation—of the media.

The details are fascinating: He grew up in comparative comfort, not the Third World squalor he characteristically invokes. He was neither King's chosen deputy nor anointed successor; indeed, he was close to dismissal from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when James Earl Ray intervened on his behalf. Self-promoting, double-crossing, scene-stealing, he seems to have learned the value of publicity from his putative mentor, but little else. And that is the heart of the matter.

It is often forgotten that Martin Luther King was nearly redundant at the time of his death, misconstrued by reactionaries but scorned by radicals. Success came quickly, perhaps unexpectedly, in social as well as legislative form. In the eighteen years since King died, the movement he personified has missed its crowned head. The problem, of course, is that now there is no movement; King's progress was not a cult of personality but a crusade of ideas. In this instance, the media—and, to be fair, academia, Congress, the social statisticians, and others who should know better—have never fully grasped what is otherwise so obvious: When ideas take root, they form the common mind. Civil rights is conventional wisdom, not an exclusive preserve, or the strategy of a private army.

It is convenient to divide ideas into personalities (liberalism: FDR, Hubert Humphrey; conservatism: Robert Taft, Ronald Reagan), but it is also misleading. The success of the civil rights movement has no more eloquent testimony than the elusiveness of "black leadership." It has transcended politics. The difference is between a tribune and a spokesman, between fighting for right and lobbying for advantage. Blacks don't need Jesse Jackson—no more, at least, than the Democrats—and the futility of concern about personal leadership is summed up in the incoherence of his journey since 1968. He has careened from one gimmick to another, the author of a series of false starts and broken pledges. What was once People United to Save Humanity is now People United to Serve Humanity. Save, serve—what's the difference? A rainbow coalition that is painfully monochrome—who would notice?

It is scarcely an accident that his language is so wild and imprecise, that exaggeration is his form of emphasis. Words mean for Jesse Jackson what he wants them to mean, no more and no less. Let's talk black talk, he said to a black reporter on one memorable occasion, and lapsed into the vocabulary of anti-Semitism. When he spoke some contrite syllables to an audience of Jews, he switched glossaries, and the expedient worked. He may not have satisfied his listeners in the room, but he spoke to a wider audience. The language of electronic celebrity is noise, and the currency of blab is emotion not meaning.

Which leads us to the real question, why? The authors are concerned that Jesse Jackson represents a disturbing phenomenon. They are distressed by his insincerity, startled by his company. They detect a pattern of deception and suspect unworthy motives. All of this is true, but little of it is important. Take away the marketing techniques, and what is left? Jackson is a kind of minor irritant, a boil in the social hind quarters. I would even argue that he is a symptom of national health. He must journey to Cuba to be treated as a head of state; only the Syrians would find him worthy to be manipulated. The press was mystified by his devotion to Louis Farrakhan, but only the press would entertain such expectations. The Democrats were alternately bullied and seduced, but Jesse Jackson is just another Balkan prince dividing their unhappy kingdom. The Democrats who make any difference—that is to say, those who vote—resolutely declined to take him seriously. For that, at least, we can be thankful. Contempt for democracy is often an article of faith among the sages and brokers of politics, but Jackson is important where it doesn't count.

The moral, then, is in the subtitle: the politics of race. It is true that the differences that divide Americans provide a kind of grist for social upheaval and evolution. But time passes, and the mills tend to turn out bread rather than more grist. Black nationalism is no more likely to endure than white nationalism, and while Jesse Jackson is alive and Martin Luther King is dead, it is Jackson who is the anachronism. The fact that he fascinates, or an appetite persists for his image and message, is the perverse side of human nature. Spectacle can be interesting, and curiosity is easily piqued. The demolished automobile will slow down traffic, but novelty wears off easily. Where will Jesse Jackson be tomorrow? What rhetoric can maintain interest? What provocation will capture the six o'clock news?

Not long before his death, I made a pilgrimage to a strip joint in Washington to watch George Jessel perform. The uniform was unchanged, the voice was the same, and so were the jokes. It was an extraordinary, but not altogether unfitting, home port into which he had sailed. I like to think that Jesse Jackson will continue to entertain, rather than disturb. Where he will go and how he will subsist, I cannot say. But I think I know. □

## STATE OF THE ART
Pauline Kael/E.P. Dutton/$22.50

Bruce Bawer

For most of us, it's difficult at times to look at film critically. After all, we grew up on movies in a way we didn't grow up on serious art or music or literature: the genre is full of sentimental associations for us. There are old movies by the score that we remember fondly not because they are great examples of cinematic art but because we first saw them with people we loved, because we once had pubescent crushes on the stars, because our mothers loved them; there are recent films that move us to uncritical raptures with their beautiful scenery, beautiful faces, or all-Mozart scores. Indeed, if a bad book is only a bad book, a bad movie—if you're sitting in a theater that has a huge screen, an excellent sound system, and a first-rate, unscratched, color-perfect, 70-millimeter print—can nonetheless be a terrifically powerful visceral experience. It's all this that makes the job of movie reviewing—the job, that is, of getting beneath the subjective associations and the visceral experience and judging the film as a work of art—particularly challenging.

But not for Pauline Kael, who's been reviewing movies in the *New Yorker* since 1968. Kael's critical method is implicitly founded upon the hypothesis that the sort of distinction I've just made is a spurious one. To her mind, manifestly, her role as a film critic is not to attempt to transcend subjectivity but to exult in it, to exalt it; not to analyze films but (to draw a fine but fundamental distinction) to give us a play-by-play account of her sensual engagement with them. It's less true, in other words, to say that Kael writes about movies than to say that she writes about *going* to the movies. And, as the whole world indubitably knows, Pauline Kael *loves* going to the movies. She lives them, she breathes them, she worships them, she is at once their high priestess, devoted spouse, and insatiably aroused mistress: such, at least, is her public image. Was there ever in all of history, one wonders, a critic as famous for his *love* of the genre under his scrutiny as is Pauline Kael? Is there any, for that matter, who has celebrated his hyper-impressionistic tendency to approach that genre as a well-nigh erotic object as blatantly as has Kael, with such titles as ***I Lost It at the Movies, Reeling, Taking It All In, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Deeper into Movies,*** and ***When the Lights Go Down***?

This is not to deny, of course, that Kael is an unusually engaging writer—a *fun* writer—and, in many ways, a highly gifted critic. She's perceptive, she's sensitive, she knows a great deal about film technique, she's intelligent (though, it must be said, she invariably applies her critical intelligence more generously to the articulation than to the formulation of her critical opinions). In her tenth book, *State of the Art,* in which she has gathered her reviews of 117 movies released in 1983, 1984, and 1985, both her considerable strengths and her lamentable weaknesses are in full flower.

So, too, are her characteristic prejudices. To name one: being a critic who

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*Bruce Bawer writes on writers and fiction for the* New Criterion.



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