

be. He jumps altogether too swiftly from the observation that the majority of black Americans have left poverty in the past twenty-five years (in 1959, 55 percent of blacks were poor; only about one-quarter are poor today) to the more doubtful assertion that they have therefore culturally identified themselves with the mores of white America. A closer look at the black middle class would have revealed that, to a disquieting extent, it derives its income not from commerce and entrepreneurship, but from government employment. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted on June 16, while one of every fifteen white Americans (and one of every ten Korean-Americans) owns his own business, only one of every sixty-seven black Americans does, or about as many as work for the post office.

Harrison ends his book with a quick survey of the ills of American culture. Much of what he says—from the need for more respect for business to an attack on the evils of littering—is completely true. But much more of what he has to say reveals a striking faith in the power of social engineering (a legacy, perhaps, of his career as a foreign-aid dispenser) and an even more striking unwillingness to think hard about what culture is and where it comes from.

So, he complains, “religion has shifted its emphasis from personal morality, character and the living of a good life to the correction of social and political ills.” The solution? “More sermons that stress the personal life well and creatively lived as an effective way for the individual to contribute to the well-being of the society and the world.”

So, he complains again, parents maltreat their children. The solution? “Research on effective child rearing should have a high priority, but so should ways of communicating to prospective parents the lessons the experts have learned, for example, through courses in child rearing for high school students.” If culture were indeed so easily alterable as that, America could have moralized itself into paradise on earth long ago. Unfortunately, the fundamental apparatus of the human mind is rather more intractable than Harrison cares to recognize. And that makes this a very unserious book on a deadly serious subject. □

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF STEPHEN CRANE

Christopher Benfey

Alfred A. Knopf / 294 pages / \$25

reviewed by MATTHEW SCULLY

The life of Stephen Crane, like the lives of Hemingway and other literary realists who came to a sad end, draws its power from the cliché of the suffering artist consumed alike by creativity and dissipation. In his 1951 biography, John Berryman described Crane admiringly as the thoroughly “illusionless” man, meaning the young author of *The Red Badge of Courage* had come to see life in all its false trappings, stared into the Void, refused to join in the “dance of death,” and so on. Hence the tragic, bitter, seen-it-all air we find throughout Crane’s life and writings—touching, but a little melodramatic in a man who never reached 30 years of age.

Of course being a tragic, illusionless figure can be a pretty vain illusion itself. Consider the fool’s proverb from Emerson that Crane jotted down in a notebook, evidently as some sort of defiant personal credo: “Congratulate your-

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selves if you have done something strange and extravagant and have broken the monotony of a decorous age.” Modern literature has a romance with the idea of artful self-destruction—breaking our monotony through reckless living, boozing, carnal abandon, fidelity only to one’s craft. And the quieter types who write literary biographies lap the stuff up like kittens at the saucer. Roughly half the biographies reviewed in the *New York Times* on any given Sunday fit this description—purring praise of strange, extravagant, and often thoroughly depraved lives.

One detects a bit of this antihero-worship in Christopher Benfey’s *The Double Life of Stephen Crane*, an inquiry that is otherwise sober and perceptive—particularly in its literary analysis. And to be fair to Crane, his mournful, fatalistic air was understandable: a long series of sicknesses prefigured the tuberculosis that eventually got him at 29. He died in 1900, having sensed his doom for at least a few years before.



Throughout his twenties, Crane rushed from continent to continent, garret to garret, and woman to woman; sketching slum life in Manhattan while writing *The Red Badge of Courage* on the side, dispatching profiles of Indians in New Mexico, surfacing next in Greece, from there dashing off to the Cuban War, then on to London—and sometimes vanishing so completely that biographers haven't a clue where he might have been.

Even stranger, he seemed to "live his life backwards," writing about things he would then uncannily experience—war, shipwrecks, prostitutes. Hence his "double life." "Spare" describes not only Crane's prose but his physical appearance and material possessions. An odd union of austerity and carelessness mark his character: he seemed to practice both life and writing as the art of elimination.

So when Crane wrote, in a letter quoted by Benfey, "The lives of some people are one long apology . . . I go through life unexplained," it wasn't an Emersonian evasion. It was the avowal of a gifted man with little time to spare for self-exploration. Given another thirty or forty years, the author of one of our greatest novels might have degenerated into a stylish celebrity like "Papa" Hemingway, relieving the "monotony of a decorous age" with boorish behavior, public brawls, ferocious literary quarrels, and serial marriages. But in the time allotted him Crane seems to have guarded his literary integrity.

Like most journalists, he was a glory hound (afraid a war might end before the famous Stephen Crane could get there to cover it), and not the best manager of his personal affairs (mounting debts, untreated sicknesses, lavish living with pampered prostitutes). But his triumph was to resist the lure of lazy cynicism and remain faithful to his calling, scribbling furiously even in his final weeks.

His well-warranted fatalism may also explain those oddities in his life over which Benfey and other scholars have labored. Why, for instance, that attraction to prostitutes and prostitution, not only in his compelling first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, but also in several real-life affairs? Was there some strange compulsion to "rescue fallen women," maybe arising from a Methodist minister father and a rigid, ungenerous mother who left him an emotional orphan?

"Crane's grief is disguised and displaced in [*Maggie*]," writes Benfey. "Its setting in the slums of lower Manhattan is typical of this displacement; for Crane, economic deprivation is a metaphor for its emotional counterpart. His mother's death left him feeling bereft and in need of appropriate language to explain his loss." Benfey observes, too, that *The Red Badge* and so much of Crane's writing centers on the theme of exposure—"the lost child looking for a safe haven." Even his lesser-known stories—about shipwrecks and stolen toys and lost dogs—have to do with separation, the forced detachment from "not-me" objects.

Well, maybe so. It's as good a psychological reading as any, and Benfey offers extensive and thoughtful arguments to back it up. And unlike the usual psychobiographer, he's prepared now and then to acknowledge the mystery of personality and say, "We can never know." Though by the end we have had our fill of Freud and the various other psychologists Benfey (like Berryman) invokes, the book is a skillful case study in those archetypal yearnings one carries through life, emotional dissonance of one kind or another in search of resolution. Perhaps, then, *Maggie* was a metaphor for his own absent mother; and yes, perhaps his works are full of "oral-maternal associations" and—Berryman's thesis—"Oedipal guilt-sense toward the father."

But knowing this, as in his better moments Benfey seems to, does not really deepen the experience of reading Crane's work—which after all reaches to themes beyond whatever sorrows, fantasies, or frustrations the author may have known. And surely when Benfey finds the names "Cora" and "Dora"—two of the prostitutes Crane fell in love with—encoded in Crane's first-hand account of the wreck of a real ship called the *Commodore* off the coast of Cuba ("Cora is like Dora. *Cora como Dora*. *Commodore*."), he's making a hard sell. Indeed, to explain Cora and Dora, one could offer the more practical point that Crane's calling and sense of impending death simplified the choice between life's symbolic sexual poles, betrothal and brothel. He was a wanderer and not a settler, and if one has grimly resolved to

embrace the impermanent, what companion could better embody that decision?

In the end, his is the story of a gift mysteriously given and brilliantly used. How did a 22-year-old, a no-account student, and not even much of a reader, sit down in a shabby New York apartment one day to write *The Red Badge of Courage*? Never mind that he had not seen a battlefield—it wouldn't be any less a mystery if he had.

The standard view, shared by Benfey, holds that Crane's grim realism was a reaction to the pietism of his parents, his unconventional ways a rebellion against their Christian moralism. Crane's own despairing view of God and man is cited in the simple lines: "A man said to the universe, 'Sir, I exist!' 'However,' the universe replied, 'that fact has not created in me a sense of obligation.'" As with most of Crane's writings, one hears not the intellectual's usual sigh of spiritual dissatisfaction but the authentic realism of a soul who, having stared out into the universe, has grasped that he is owed nothing, and that all the obligations run the other way. □

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INVISIBLE VICTIMS: WHITE MALES AND THE CRISIS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Frederick R. Lynch

Praeger / 238 pages / \$14.95

reviewed by PETER BRIMELOW

The collapse of socialism, in both its Communist and social-democratic variants, appears to be the central event of our times. Conservatives are hurt and puzzled that they haven't received more credit for being so right about it. One reason can be found in Frederick Lynch's pathbreaking *Invisible Victims*: Socialism has actually just mutated. The lust to "put politics in command," in Chairman Mao's phrase, has adroitly redefined itself in terms of equity rather than economic efficiency. While conservatives have been congratulating themselves about events overseas, the U.S. has been silently and steadily transformed by a race- and gender-based socialism.

Quotas were explicitly banned in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but have nonetheless been spreading ever since. They have received extraordinarily little attention in the media and even less in academe. Of some 1,300 papers given at a recent American Sociological Association conference on "Race & Ethnic Relations," only one addressed the topic. Lynch, a sociologist at Claremont McKenna College, has written the first major study of what affirmative action actually does to its main victims, white men.

The scale of the quota revolution has been far greater than conservatives—with the notable exception of Norman Podhoretz's *Commentary*—have yet realized, and merit-based hiring has been widely subverted. Take, for example, "race-norming"—fiddling test scores to produce racially proportionate results. Many state and local governments race-norm their General Aptitude Test Battery, taken by job-seekers and sup-

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plied to potential employers. Private testing agencies race-norm results to "EEOC-proof" their clients. (The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regularly sues to force private business into quotas.)

"Affirmative action has been an administrative revolution imposed by judges and bureaucrats," Lynch writes. Thus it was not easily opposed, particularly because much of it is implemented informally and orally. The secretiveness



has only increased with the Reagan-Bush judicial appointments, whose growing influence has threatened the stability of the liberal judicial establishment. But affirmative action personnel openly say they intend to get around any law.

A few of Lynch's male victims were political liberals who felt obliged to rationalize their fate. But most acquiesced with varying degrees of anger. Some changed jobs. Usually totally isolated, these men felt that no one would help them.

They were right. The older generation of white male managers has in effect compromised with quotas, Lynch argues, because they think the impact will fall only on the younger, baby-boom generation. And the EEOC flatly refuses to accept white male discrimination complaints about corporations with approved—i.e., anti-white male—affirmative action plans. Litigation, for those who have tried it, proved expensive, exhausting, chancy, and immensely time-consuming—one case remains unsettled after more than six years. A further factor in the paralysis: the particular male personality itself. These victims seem really to have believed that grown men don't cry. A considerable number did not even mention their disappointment to friends, relatives, or fellow-workers.

Their wives almost never felt such inhibitions. "My wife is mad as hell; she's angrier than I am," said one man. Some wives absolutely insisted on being interviewed for Lynch's study. One woman pointed out that discrimination against white males injures not only the men themselves, but their wives and families. "This 'hidden' or latent conflict generated by affirmative action between career women and homemaker wives has gone virtually unnoticed in the affirmative action literature," Lynch notes.

He adds, "Karl Marx insisted that for any sort of class consciousness to arise, there must be communication of a common sense of oppression. With the mass media and the social sciences rarely recognizing the phenomenon, much less portraying it sympathetically, white males have been easily and silently victimized one by one."

The media have been able to ignore anti-white discrimination partly because neither conservatives nor liberals raised the issue. For example, the likelihood that Robert Bork would find quotas unconstitutional spurred the civil rights establishment's fanatical resistance to his Supreme Court nomination. But White House lobbyists said nothing. The media elite's motives are also partly ideological. From J. Anthony Lukas's best-seller *Common Ground*—which dealt with an earlier symptom of race-based socialism, busing—Lynch quotes a *Boston Globe* reporter: "If they [the Boston Irish] don't like integration, we'll shove it down their throats." And Lynch