

evident interest in the paleo-conservative journal *Chronicles*. Of the “emerging global marketplace” he writes: “Animality and filth, like everything else, have become commodities, which people are called upon to tolerate as expressions of freedom and feel free to buy as much as they wish.” I hope Genovese will forgive me for saying so, but he is precisely the kind of “aristocratic socialist” Marx and Engels dismissed with the back of their hand as long ago as 1848!

Genovese has lately come to the attention of American conservatives of all tendencies because of his stout-hearted defense of academic freedom, civility, and ordinary decency in American universities. Evidently he and his wife, the historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, have had quite a time of it at the various places they have taught, at one of which they were even (falsely) accused of forcing graduate students to do their laundry! Of course, one can hardly expect less when one writes passages like these:

Anything that comes with a *cri de coeur* for the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden passes muster and may be expected to be greeted with hosannas, no matter how absurd the arguments and blundering the scholarship.

Academia normally defines as political that which lies beyond its ideological consensus, which is generally though not always accurately perceived as “liberal.” And academia defines as objective and scientific that which expresses its own prejudices and viewpoint.

The countless opportunists and careerists who dominate the historical associations call themselves liberals as a matter of political convenience. They went with the McCarthyite flow in the 1950s and go with its leftwing variant today. In the unlikely prospect of a fascist or communist ascendancy tomorrow, they may be counted on to apply for party cards as soon as it looks like a smart move.

Perhaps the most interesting selection in the book is an essay entitled “The Question.” It first appeared in the “democratic socialist” journal *Dissent*, and asks very pointedly, “What did you know [about Soviet Communism], and when did you know it?” Unfortunately, the dozen or so answers

that *Dissent* commissioned are not reproduced here, but after reading Genovese’s challenge many readers will go off to the library in search of them. What an unpleasant read it must have been for all those unctuous, self-congratulatory fools in *Dissent*’s stage army. Here was Genovese insisting that the moral responsibility for Stalinism falls not just on bona fide members of the Communist Party (like himself) but on liberals, “democratic socialists,” “radical democrats,” and others—those who “could usually be counted upon to support, ‘critically,’ of course, the essentials of our political line on world and national affairs.”

Throughout this essay Genovese offers

some tempting autobiographical *aperçus*, some of them consigned to the footnotes. They begin the story of a young Sicilian-American from Brooklyn who joined the Communist movement at age 15, but was expelled from the party at age 20. By his own admission he remained a supporter of the Soviet Union and its international policies “until there was nothing left to support.” Nonetheless, Genovese is a towering figure among American historians and intellectuals—an iconoclast whose full autobiography one hopes one day to read. Perhaps sometime soon the professor will turn aside from the history of the American South to produce it. ❧

It Seems We’ve Been Here Before

Fighting for Liberty and Virtue: Political and Cultural Wars in Eighteenth-Century America

by Marvin Olasky
Crossway Books
316 pages / \$25

REVIEWED BY
John R. Dunlap

Among the leading English social clubs of the mid-eighteenth century was Medmenham, formerly a Cistercian abbey located in Buckinghamshire on the outskirts of London. In 1753, Sir Francis Dashwood—a well-connected noble destined for such offices as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Postmaster General—acquired the property at Medmenham and rehabbed the ruins of the abbey into a plush cathouse. Praised by his American friend Benjamin Franklin as “a humane, liberal reformer,” Sir Francis was in any event a reliable caterer to the libertine tastes of the worthies who flocked from London to join his “Hell-Fire Club,” among whom were various cabinet ministers and members of Parliament. Dubbed “monks” or “Franciscans,” club members enjoyed their revels in the rebuilt abbey under

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stained glass windows depicting the Twelve Apostles in obscene postures.

Not that Dashwood perfectly epitomized the London of that era. Even among the dissipated English upper classes, Sir Francis was thought by some to have taken his worship of Voltaire a bit far. Besides, the eighteenth century in England is also the age of Johnson and Fielding, of clear-sighted moralists like John Brown and James Burgh, of William Pitt and the lofty Edmund Burke. Yet Burke himself complained that the shabby character of key British leaders was a drag on their public performance, and when the “prodigal son” Ben Franklin finally left London for Philadelphia on the eve of the Revolution, after sixteen years of more or less sycophantic residency among the Americans’ overlords, he expressed his disappointment with the Crown in moral terms: “When I consider the extream Corruption prevalent among all Orders of Men in this old rotten State . . . I cannot but apprehend more Mischief than Benefit from a closer Union.”

Marvin Olasky, an atheist-turned-Calvinist who now teaches journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, has in recent years applied his Ph.D. training to a kind of public service with a string of historical surveys useful to an understanding of American political culture. Best known for *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992), an acclaimed cri-

tique of the moral assumptions underlying welfare policy, he has also written a social history of abortion and a sweeping review of press attitudes through American history. In *Fighting for Liberty and Virtue*, Olasky dips into several dozen source documents and specialized histories to present a survey of the eighteenth century that "spotlights the intersection of politics and morality."

The American Revolution was preceded not just by clashes of political and economic interests between London and the colonies, but as well by a culture war. The movement for independence was fueled by the sentiments of two distinct colonial groups: "Enlightenment-influenced politicians who demanded small government, and Awakening-energized Christians who pushed for holy government."

Stirred by the Great Awakening of the 1740's, the colonial descendants of pious religious dissenters took a particularly dim view of London's intermittent efforts to establish throughout the colonies the Church of England. Anglican leaders on display "were often distinguished more by the size of their stomachs than the breadth of their learning," and the latitudinarian Anglican hierarchy in London was perceived (by and large accurately) as hand-in-glove with a quasi-pagan regime.

Olasky does not dispute the standard economic and political causes adduced for the Revolution; with the colonial historian Carl Bridenbaugh and others, however, he contends that the various tax decrees and legislative enactments of Parliament, together with their obnoxious enforcement by locally garrisoned British troops and the admiralty courts, did not of themselves constitute sufficient impetus for the colonial uprising.

Blurred under the wide brush-strokes of today's general histories is the moral and religious dimension of the conflict, which the secularized twentieth-century imagination has trouble noticing. When London appointed the Earl of Loudoun military commander over the colonies in 1756 at the start of the French and Indian War, the colonial assemblies, according to one standard college text, "regarded Loudoun's authority with suspicion." Omitted in such histories is the impres-

sion of the colonists that Loudoun was a swaggering peacock, with a retinue of seventeen servants, a mistress in tow, a disposition to whine, a fondness for terrorizing his own troops, and no personal military distinction whatever.

By the time of Loudoun's appointment, the practice of dumping the Crown's mediocrities on the colonies was more than half a century old—and continued right through the Revolutionary War. The two key cabinet ministers during the war both owed their appointments more to connection than to talent or sense. First Lord of the Admiralty was John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, a former Medmenham "monk" more agile at dodging charges of bribery than at securing frigates for the naval effort. Secretary of State for the American colonies, and thus in charge of the land war, was George Sackville, a promiscuous bisexual whose reputation for cowardice and venality created a seething reservoir of distrust among subordinates. The same conditions that sparked the American rebellion helped ensure its success.

But there would not have been an American Revolution without the coalition painstakingly forged by American leaders who understood both camps of the aggrieved. Patrick Henry of Virginia and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts were animated alike by love of God and disdain for bureaucrats. Both saw the connection between moral turpitude and rapacious taxation. At the doorway of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1765, a young secular-minded law student named Thomas Jefferson was awestruck by Patrick Henry's "torrents of sublime eloquence" delivered against the Stamp Act in an oratory studded with Old Testament imagery.

Even the smug deist Benjamin Franklin, who despised the Pennsylvanian Presbyterians, muted his hatred for religious enthusiasm as a coalition was cemented between anti-tax freethinkers and morally alarmed Christians. "We have fled the political Sodom," Samuel Adams thundered in Philadelphia a month after signing the Declaration of Independence; "let us not look back, lest

we perish and become a monument of infamy and derision to the world."

Less bracing was the "agitated peace" that followed the successful Revolution. In the wake of bitter debates between Federalists and anti-Federalists, the Great Compromise embodied in the U.S. Constitution "papered over differences among members of the revolutionary coalition." The adoption of the Constitution by narrow margins at the state conventions was made possible by reluctant Federalist pledges to add the Bill of Rights—and by the prospect of having the widely trusted George Washington as the nation's first President.

Born in rancor and mutual suspicion, the new Republic was sustained in its shaky early years by the distinctly non-political activities of ordinary pioneers and by the character of leaders who, for all their personal foibles and religious differences, understood the link between virtue and liberty. That link, Olasky argues, is one we should not lose sight of.

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How German Is Kurt Weill?

Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life

by Jurgen Schebera
Yale University Press
381 pages / \$35

REVIEWED BY
Mark Steyn

Frank Sinatra, who gives fulsome credit to his composers and lyricists, likes to introduce “Mack the Knife” thus: “Here’s a song by Weill and Blitzstein.” He gives a stage shrug. “Sheesh. Sounds like a law firm.”

You get the picture. Even with an American lyric by Marc Blitzstein, Kurt Weill isn’t *quite* one of the boys, like Sammy Cahn or Johnny Mercer. For most of the great American songbook—Berlin, the Gershwins—we have to thank the overzealous Cossacks of Czar Nicholas II who a century ago made emigration seem such an attractive proposition. Born in Dessau in 1900, Kurt Weill belonged to that more recent tide of refugees, those who arrived mid-century from Mitteleuropa. Like Billy Wilder, he spoke with a German accent. But, whereas the American-ness of Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* and *Some Like It Hot* has never been in doubt, Weill’s cultural identity is still up for grabs.

It’s a pity Weill isn’t a law firm. If he were, I’ll bet he’d be suing his recent biographers, most of whom have come at him from the German end, and for whom ignorance of all things Broadway—the Broadway in which Weill believed and in which he immersed himself for half his working life—is a badge to be worn with pride. In his preface to this new biography Jurgen Schebera claims a more even-handed approach: “The musical world has thought in terms of ‘two Weills’ and has been busy weighing the European and American works against each other—not a terribly productive pursuit,” he sniffs, maintaining that we have to view

MARK STEYN’s column on American culture begins next month in TAS.

his work as a whole. But then you notice the cover, by which I know you shouldn’t judge a book, but all the same—granted that his bald pate and rimless specs invariably give him the austere air of a ledger clerk from Kafka, you still couldn’t ask for a photograph that looks more, well, *German*. And then you read Schebera’s discography of “important interpretations” by “the most important, internationally known interpreters”: no mention of that killer arrangement for Sinatra by Quincy Jones, or Louis Armstrong’s “Mack,” or even Bobby Darin’s, one of the biggest-selling pop singles ever; no Lena Horne singing “My Ship,” or Tony Bennett’s “Lost in the Stars.” Instead it’s all gloomy, neo-Brechtian recitals by self-consciously cerebral Teuton chantoosies. By a man’s record collection shall ye know him: “important” is a peculiarly joyless term to apply to music, especially to a composer who wrote musical comedies for Mary Martin and Danny Kaye.

What does a guy have to do? When *Life* described him, in 1947, as a German composer, Weill wrote to protest: “I do not consider myself a ‘German composer.’ The Nazis obviously did not consider me as such either, and I left their country (an arrangement which suited both me and my rulers admirably) in 1933. I am an American citizen.” And no equivocating, hyphenating, multicultural mumbo-jumbo either: From 1936 on, he spoke and wrote only in English—even to his wife, Lotte Lenya. He Americanized his name, too. Whenever I’ve discussed Weill on the BBC in London, their dread Pronunciation Unit has insisted that he be called Koort Vile. In vain, I point out that the man himself, who’s surely entitled to a say in the matter, pronounced it, from the moment he arrived in New York, Curt While; that his lyricists and fellow Broadway composers all refer to him as Curt While; and that Maxwell Anderson begins his lyric to Weill’s first U.S. pop hit, “September Song” (1938), with a sly play on his composer’s name:

*Oh, it’s a long, long while
From May to December. . .*

The long while is in contrast to his partner: a curt while.

A man’s name is as central to his identity as you can get, but, since his premature death in 1950, even that’s been taken away from Weill. In a stunning act of cultural appropriation, he has effectively been posthumously extradited to Germany and allotted a very specific place in history—as the in-house composer who provided the seductive, decadent soundtrack to the Weimar Republic. The Broadway stuff is regarded as, at best, an aberration or, worse, a commercial sell-out. “He was very interested in money,” sneered Otto Klemperer. “He got too involved in American show business and all the terrible people in it.”

What a twit. Even after all that’s happened to their wretched country, guys like Klemperer never learn. To listen to some of his critics, you’d think that Weill, torn between the devil and the deep blue rinse of the Broadway matinee ladies, should have stuck with Hitler as the lesser evil. Better a death camp in the Fatherland than a camp death on Broadway, surrounded by Gertrude Lawrence and a thousand prancing show queens. Weill’s librettist from the *Threepenny Opera* days, Bertolt Brecht, got it right: he loathed America, and after the war returned not just to Germany but to East Germany, the Stalinist GDR, where he founded the relentlessly political Berliner Ensemble. Weill stayed in New York, and thereby declared: *Ich bin ein Irving Berliner*.

As to money and the terrible people in American show business, it’s all relative. Schebera has unearthed an interesting review from *Der Volkische Beobachter* of Weill’s 1932 opera *Die Burgschaft*: “This Jew has seen how his last opera led to trouble in Leipzig,” roars the critic. “It is utterly incomprehensible, then, that an author who presents thoroughly un-German works is to be heard again at a theater supported by German taxpayers!” I’m not saying I’m a Nazi, but, as boneheads go, this one has a point. Any artistic enterprise dependent on state funding is always going to be vulnerable, simply because the right to free expression is inevitably compromised when it gets jumbled up with the right to public subsidy. Subsidized art is *always* “acceptable” art: In a democratic society, it’s what’s acceptable to the louche tastes of the funding bodies—Andres Serrano’s urine samples and Robert Map-