

spread a feast of welcome for him. But don't unfold your napkin just yet.

Mr. Lasch neither calls nor thinks of himself as a conservative, and in that he is probably wise. Were he to do so, passages such as the one quoted above would be greeted with the most vituperative abuse from those who claim that title today. The self-appointed swamis of the right, from their yachts and Alpine retreats, would compare him to excrement, even as they perspired over the closing of the American mind and preached the virtues of pluralism. Cries of "anti-Semite," "xenophobe," "nativist," and even "agrarian" would pierce the walls of his study and silence his animadversions on the subjects of progress and universalism. His academic career would be threatened by unsolicited phone calls to his dean from spiteful colleagues. The Tories who prance through the parlors of Manhattan and Georgetown would make sedulous inquiry as to his thoughts during the civil rights movement while awarding bountiful grants to decrepit social democrats and second-rate defectors from SDS. Were Mr. Lasch to spread his sails to the winds from the American right today, he would soon find himself marooned in an archipelago of small towns, intact families, and agrarian communities far from the political sear lanes plied by the clipper ships of self-proclaimed "conservatives."

Alas, Mr. Lasch is not typical of the contemporary left, however, nor are the ruminations emitted by the estimable Cohen or the honorable Gephardt. Mr. Lasch is correct that the mainstream of left-liberalism in America today remains nearly comatose with dread of the mainstream of America itself. But the great fear on the left seems to be matched on the right by an almost equal aversion to the American heartland. The contemporary right by and large much prefers the pina colodas of the secularized, deracinated megalopolis of the Northeast and the California Fringe to the white lightning of the piney woods, the Rockies, and the Great Plains.

Today, the right talks and thinks like the left, and the left, sometimes, sounds like the right. That kind of confusion suggests that both labels have outlived their usefulness and ought to be put to sleep. They have become prisons that house so many different and conflicting

forces that the interests, values, and aspirations incarcerated in them are unable to find coherent political expression.

The political conflict of the future is likely to be not on the horizontal plane between left and right but along a vertical axis: the Middle-American stratum, which is wedded to the integrity of a distinct national and cultural identity, is sandwiched between an unassimilated underclass and an alienated and increasingly cosmopolitan elite that has subsumed left and right and shares more common ground with snappily dressed Soviet commissars and Japanese corporate executives than with farmers in Kansas, small businessmen in Ohio, union members in Detroit, or fundamentalists in Alabama.

That conflict, of course, is not new, and the American right has waxed fat and happy by claiming to represent one side of it. But today its enchantment with global democracy, a global economy, and a global culture that will displace national particularity render that claim transparently fraudulent.

If the remaining nucleus of American civilization is to survive, it will have to find a new label by which to identify itself and new guardians to lead its struggle.

Samuel Francis is deputy editorial page editor of The Washington Times.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Of Collard Greens and Kings



My godson was graduated from a Chicago high school last May. To my delight, he wanted to go to a Southern college. Unfortunately he picked Duke, which means that his idea of the South will probably come to include things like the rice diet, deconstructionism, Mercedes Marxism, and holistic therapy with crystals ("voodoo rocks," my buddy Fetzer calls them). Everything's up-to-date at Buck Duke's place, alas.

Nevertheless, the lad is moving in the right geographical direction, and since he will be physically present in Durham for the next four years he may also discover things like Levi Garrett and Shirley Caesar's gospel music and the Durham Bulls (not entirely destroyed by the success of the movie about them). So for a graduation present I gave him a copy of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, produced by a team at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi and just published by the University of North Carolina Press. "Here are a few things you ought to know," I told him.

About 1,300 things, as a matter of fact, that being the number of entries, written by nearly 800 authors, spread over 1,634 pages, and ranging alphabetically from Aaron (Hank) to Zydeco. The time has come, apparently, to talk of many things—of gays and grits and shotgun shacks, of collard greens and Kings (Martin Luther and Elvis I). At \$50 (\$60 after New Year's), this book doesn't cost a great deal more than a good country ham these days; weighing in at nine and a half pounds on my bathroom scale, it's cheaper by weight than rib-eye. Recently a review in *The New York Times* said that the new *Oxford English Dictionary* is a bargain at 11 cents a page: well, this sucker will cost you only three.

Of course, the book is so cheap (yes, yes—relatively speaking) because it has been heavily subsidized, especially by the National Endowment for the Humanities. In other words, it's your tax dollars at work again, and I know nobody asked you. But consider the alternatives. It beats a Congressional pay raise, doesn't it? As Confucius might have said: if extortion is inevitable, relax and enjoy it.

And there is a lot to enjoy here, by no means exclusively for Southerners. One of the pleasures of the book is browsing for odd juxtapositions. In the catchall "History and Manners" section, for instance, a charming sequence of entries goes:

Gardner, Dave
Gays
Goo Goo Clusters
Grits
Hammond, James Henry

Southerners my age will remember Brother Dave Gardner as the off-the-wall white Southern comedian who greeted the news of *Brown v. Board of Education* by saying: "Let 'em go to school, beloved. We went, and we didn't learn nothin'." Grand Ole Opry fans and candy lovers will know Goo Goo Clusters. Hammond was the politician, libertine, and proslavery theorist who announced that cotton was king and no one would dare make war on it—a slight miscalculation. Grits I presume you know about, and gays, too: Southerners tend to love one, but not the other.

This is mostly good reading, and good fun. There are the makings of a fine board game here. The encyclopedia has a problem, though, and it's one that, in its own little way, reflects a broader problem for the South, and the nation. The editors—I'm sure with the best of liberal intentions—have set aside separate sections on "Black Life" and "Women's Life." (There are, of course, no sections on "White Life" or "Men's Life.") The result is shabby treatment of some Southern blacks and women who deserve better (and maybe better treatment for others than they deserve). Whites who fought segregation, or defended it, for example, are treated under "Law" or "Politics" or "Violence"; most blacks who fought it are consigned to the ghetto of "Black Life."

Offensive this Jim Crow organization may be, but at least it isn't followed consistently. Jean Toomer is under "Black Life," but Ralph Ellison, thank goodness, is found under "Literature." Julia Peterkin is in "Women's Life," but Flannery O'Connor is in "Literature" with the *real* writers, where she belongs. The principle of organization eludes me. Could it be that the "Black Life" and "Women's Life" sections are just reservations for the second-rate? No, here is Loretta Lynn in "Women's Life": surely she belongs in "Music" every bit as much as Charlie Daniels. Does black trump female? No, writer *Margaret Walker* is in "Black Life," but *Maggie Lena Walker*, founder of the oldest black bank in the US, winds up in "Women's Life." (*Alice Walker* is inexplicably in "Literature.")

I give up. All I can suggest is that liberal piety now requires that books

have sections explicitly devoted to blacks and women. For my part, I don't think it's worth a klutzy organizational scheme that makes it impossible to predict where a particular entry will be found. (To be sure, the book has an index, but flipping back and forth through 1,600 pages is no fun.) A straightforward A-to-Z listing would have been preferred.

Whatever my misgivings about its flagrant tokenism, though, I think the book is a major achievement. Having said that (and with the examples of Southerners like Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich before me), I should probably declare an interest. I wrote a couple of the entries, and I was supposed to line up contributors for the "Recreation" section. However, one of the editors, Charles Wilson (known to some of us as "the Diderot of Dixie"), wound up doing much of that work—and not just for me. Eventually, Wilson had to write 70 of the entries himself and he is now an authority on some of the *strangest* things. Tying up those loose ends took a while: Wilson jokes that the encyclopedia paints a comprehensive portrait of Southern culture as of 1985.

Anyway, since I didn't do much, and I got my little share of your tax dollars up front, I see no real conflict of interest in my plugging this book. Besides, if I don't do it, who will? Almost everyone who has written about Southern culture at all contributed to it. From *Chronicles'* masthead alone, Thomas Fleming and Clyde Wilson wrote on the classical tradition and on John Taylor of Caroline, respectively.

One of the most interesting things about this book is that it shows signs of becoming a cultural event in its own right. Its publication was widely noted, but the most affecting notice I ran across was when I heard co-editor Bill Ferris on a Charlotte radio call-in talk show. Ferris would talk awhile about some entry from the encyclopedia; then the phone lines would light up like a Christmas tree as listeners from all over the South called in to say "Yes! That's the way we used to do it!" or "I remember when my daddy. . . ."

I couldn't help noticing the elegiac tone of many of these testimonials, a sense of old ways slipping away. One of my friends suggests that the encyclopedia itself is the equivalent for the South

of reviewing one's life in the course of drowning—drowning, he adds, in the mainstream. Another friend sees it as a product of what he calls the Post-Mortem South, a region that exists mostly in and on nostalgia. But both of these pessimists are professional historians, and so are most of the contributors to this encyclopedia; especially given that fact, I'm struck by how many of the regional icons and attributes it treats are of quite recent provenance.

If you'll forgive a homely simile, the South strikes me as like an old pair of blue jeans. It's shrunk a little bit, faded some; it has a few holes in it. There's always the possibility that it will split at the seams. But it's more comfortable than it used to be, and I think there's still a lot of wear in it. Consult this remarkable book and see if you don't agree.

John Shelton Reed writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he teaches at the University of North Carolina.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

"Zip to Zap"



The *first* "Zip to Zap," or "Zap-In," made headlines around the world, in places as different as Pakistan and Russia, to say nothing of Washington and Miami. It was 1969, with civil rights and anti-Vietnam marches, US forces in Southeast Asia at an all-time high, and, the year before, Bobby Kennedy's assassination and the Democratic Convention in Chicago.

But the "Zip to Zap" as conceived was about as political as beer. Many of the kids were simply tired from a week of sandbagging the floodwaters of the Red River of the North—surely not an anarchic pastime—and needed to blow off some steam.

The January before the first "Zap-In," the staff of the North Dakota State University newspaper, the *Spectrum*, had talked wistfully about going to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, over spring break. One of the staffers moaned that he