

The Nation

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EDITORIAL

'CAP' PULLS HIS KNIFE

"The facts are stark." So says Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in his preface to the slick Pentagon propaganda brochure called "Soviet Military Power."

Stark, staring mad is more like it. And not MAD in the sense of Mutual Assured Destruction, the deterrent theory that has kept the world from the ultimate blowup for three decades. Reagan & Co. are abandoning MADness for plain madness as they edge toward the doctrine of a fightable, winnable nuclear war.

Weinberger's sales pitch is aimed at two principal targets. Congress is the first ground zero, and it is growing stickier about raising the money for a new generation of superweapons. The other bull's-eye is Europe, where the NATO countries are dubious about playing host to cruises, neutrons and Pershing 2s.

So the idea is to prove once more that The Russians Are Coming; they have an "unending flow" of new hardware; their capability for "projection of power" beyond their borders is mushrooming; and they persist in "the quest for military-technological superiority" (a plank, by the way, in Reagan's platform for America).

Therefore we must outdo, outflank and overkill them, cost what it might and come what may. That means B-1s and MXs, and devil take the hindmost European ally. To placate those nervous Nellies, Al Haig is playing the nice cop, chatting with Andrei Gromyko desultorily, while Cap Weinberger acts the tough role. An empty gesture toward multilateral arms control aims to counter Europe's growing interest in unilateral disarmament.

The allies won't buy tickets to this old charade. Neither will the Russians be there. But the acting President, directing this melodrama, goes on buying hideously expensive props for a show turning to tragedy.

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STORM LAKE, IOWA 50588
THE NEW A-BOMB DEBATE

HIROSHIMA AND MODERN MEMORY

MARTIN J. SHERWIN

[My] article [*"The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,"* Harper's, February 1947] has also been intended to satisfy the doubts of that rather difficult class of the community which will have charge of the education of the next generation, namely educators and historians.

—Former Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to President Harry S. Truman, January 7, 1947

Thirty-six years after atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, every RAD (Reagan Administration Day) we survive enhances the relevance of those events and the debates they ignited. Two recent publications, "Hiroshima: A Soldier's View," an article by Paul Fussell featured on the cover of the August 22-29 issue of *The New Republic*, and a book, *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings* (Basic Books, 706 pp., \$37.50), remind us of the political motives that inspire those debates and of the personal commitments that intrude on them.

No one who looks closely at the arguments related to the atomic bombings will fail to recognize that there is more than a matter of military history at stake. Hiroshima not only introduced the nuclear age to the world but it also served as the symbolic coronation of American global power. The atomic bomb, as contemporary cartoonists depicted it, was our scepter, and its use contributed to the image of our international authority.

But power was not the only foundation for
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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Hiroshima

Continued From Front Cover

that authority. "The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation" was also important. Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard wrote to the Secretary of War on June 27, 1945. Urging that the Japanese be warned several days prior to the attack, Bard sought to modify the decision made a month earlier by the Interim Committee:

After much discussion concerning various types of targets and the effects to be produced [the minutes of the May 31 meeting read], the Secretary [of War] expressed the conclusion, on which there was general agreement, that we could not give the Japanese any warning; that we could not concentrate on a civilian area; but that we should seek to make a profound psychological impression on as many of the inhabitants as possible. At the suggestion of Dr. [James] Conant the Secretary agreed that the most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers' houses.*

Bard's advice went unheeded, however, and the initial irony of Hiroshima was that the very act symbolizing our wartime victory was quickly turned against our peacetime purposes. At the 1946-48 Tokyo War Crimes Trials, which, like the Nuremberg trials, were a symbolic expression of our moral authority, Justice Rabhabinod Pal of India cited Hiroshima and Nagasaki as evidence against our claim to rule in Asia by right of superior virtue. The atomic bombings, he wrote in a dissenting opinion, were "the only near approach [in the Pacific War] to the directive . . . of the Nazi leaders during the Second World War."

Addressing the issues of just cause and morality that Pal raised, the earliest explanations for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki aimed at convincing "a candid world" that our actions had been morally justified. "We

have used [the atomic bomb]," President Truman stated publicly, "in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans." His private explanation, written on August 11, 1945, in response to criticism of the atomic bombings from none other than John Foster Dulles, was more revealing: "Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them.

"When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true."

Hiroshima and Nagasaki was researched by the Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and translated by Eisei Ishikawa and David L. Swain. It was published simultaneously in the United States, Britain and Japan on August 6, the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. The book is an encyclopedic summary of the devastation experienced by the "beasts" who inhabited those cities. Its findings are presented in four parts. Part One describes "The Physical Aspects of Destruction," such as damage to buildings, and its chapters assess the blast effects and the physical behavior and properties of the radiation released. Part Two, "Injury to the Human Body," is the most gruesome but also the most important section, for the studies summarized there deal with the impact of radiation on human beings over time. The third section, "The Impact on Society and Daily Life," carries the study into the areas of psychology, sociology and even politics. And Part Four, "Toward the Abolition of Nuclear Arms," contains chapters on medical care afforded the victims, on government policies toward them, on efforts of researchers to document the damage and on the cities' peace education programs.

In the appendix there is a useful chronology of events, "Atomic Bomb Damages, 1945-1978"; a list of the thirty-four Japanese scientists, medical personnel and social scientists responsible for the study; and, I assume, the

most complete bibliography available in English of the medical and scientific literature in English and Japanese related to the atomic bombings. All told, it is a most important reference work, which is also to say that it is a book whose message will be discussed by many, but whose pages will be read by few.

The concerns behind the publication of *Hiroshima and Nagasaki* are self-consciously historical in the sense that the authors want to insure that the experience of having suffered the first two atomic holocausts shall not have been in vain. "The A-bomb catastrophe has become more remote with each passing year," the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki write in the foreword.

Thus, it is clear that we must make a renewed effort to keep alive the A-bomb experience. . . . Hiroshima and Nagasaki have joined in the publication of this comprehensive compilation of the findings that are so far scientifically confirmed; and we have done so out of the conviction that, in the present state of international policy in regard to nuclear arms, there is not a moment to lose.

But it may be that "the moment" is lost, and was lost, even before August 6, 1945, when Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill rejected steps that might have led to the international control of atomic energy. And it may be that at some level we recognize that such a moment, if indeed it ever existed, is now beyond our grasp.

The American public's sense of powerlessness before a monster its own government created and used may be the single most important reason behind the easy acceptance of the idea—so vigorously promoted by the Reagan Administration—that only nuclear superiority can guarantee our national security. Even here, the debate over the

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* The leaflets dropped on Hiroshima and numerous other cities prior to August 6 did not provide the residents of those cities with a relevant warning, as Fussell erroneously claims. They only informed them of the terms of the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, which called for Japan to surrender unconditionally or face "the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland."

atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is relevant, for it is of paramount importance to those who wish to rely increasingly upon nuclear weapons that these weapons not be tarnished with a sense of guilt that could inhibit their use as an instrument of diplomacy.

However, the least obvious impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki may be the most important: the subtle conversion of tens of millions of people over the course of thirty-six years of nuclear arms racing to the idea that nuclear war is inevitable. The button exists and someday someone will push it; nothing can prevent that. Technology has altered our confidence in free will. Kurt Vonnegut suggests this intellectual metamorphosis in *Slaughterhouse Five*, a book which attempts to come to grips with his Hiroshima-like experience as a prisoner of war in Dresden when that city was pulverized by a massive British-American bombing raid that killed 35,000 people on February 13-15, 1945.

"How does the universe end?" Billy Pilgrim asks his omniscient Trafaladorian captors, who have shuttled him to their planet through a time warp.

"We blow it up, experimenting with new fuels for our flying saucers. A Trafaladorian test pilot presses a starter button, and the whole Universe disappears."

"If you know this," said Billy, "isn't there some way you can prevent it? Can't you keep the pilot from pressing the button?"

"He has *always* pressed it, and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him. The moment is *structured* that way." So it goes.

And so it went at Hiroshima, and quite properly so, according to Fussell, who argues that the President made his decision in Washington for the same reasons he (Fussell) celebrated that decision in Europe. A professor of English at Rutgers University and author of *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Fussell, like Vonnegut, was profoundly affected by the conflict. Their experiences were somewhat different, however. Vonnegut was a captured enlisted man who lived through a veritable holocaust initiated by the Allies; Fussell was a second lieutenant who had been wounded by one enemy, but not seriously enough to be denied orders to the Pacific to participate in an invasion planned for March 1946 into the homeland of another.

"Experience whispers that the pity is

not that we used the bomb to end the Japanese war," he says from his precarious vantage point, "but that it wasn't ready earlier to end the German one." To be dropped on Dresden, perhaps. As Vonnegut notes, "World War Two certainly made everybody very tough."

Well, not exactly everybody, in Fussell's view. "In life," he argues, "experience is the great teacher." And it was only combat experience that taught soldiers what Hiroshima and Nagasaki were all about. If you were holding a rifle and a set of orders designating you an American kamikaze, you thanked God—as William Manchester did in *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War*—for the atomic bomb. Fair enough. It is well to be reminded that in any war, soldiers in trenches may justifiably view events very differently from those who fly desks.

Former soldier Tim O'Brien makes this point clearly in his perceptive novel about the war in Vietnam, *Going after Cacciato*. But O'Brien is also clear about how limiting the soldier's view can be: "The common grunt doesn't give a damn about purposes and justice," he has Doc Peret say.

"He doesn't even think about that shit. Not when he's out humping, getting his tail shot off. Purposes—bullshit! He's thinking about how to keep breathing. Or . . . of what it'll feel like when he hits that mine. Will he go nuts? Will he throw up all over himself, or will he cry, or pass out, or scream? What'll it look like—all bone and meat and pus? That's the stuff he thinks about, not purposes."

According to Fussell, too many commentators on Hiroshima derive their sense of purpose from the war roles assigned to their social class: "The problem is one that touches on the matter of social class in America. Most of those with firsthand experience of the war at its worst were relatively inarticulate and have remained silent." In other words, those who did not *fight* do not have an appreciation for the events that concluded the war: "The degree to which Americans register shock and extraordinary shame about the Hiroshima bomb correlates closely with lack of information about the war," he argues. What follows this comment is a veritable explosion of resentment in which logic is abandoned and research is derided as the war records of selected American critics of the bomb-

ings are hauled out for derision.

"What did [John Kenneth Galbraith] do in the war?" Fussell asks. "He was in the Office of Price Administration in Washington, and then he was director of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey [which concluded that Japan would have surrendered without the atomic bombings and without being invaded]. He was 37 in 1945, and I don't demand that he experience having his ass shot off. I just note that he didn't."

The war record of David Joravsky, a distinguished historian of science at Northwestern University, is the next to be judged inadequate. "In an interesting exchange last year in *The New York Review of Books* [October 23, 1980]," Fussell writes, "Joseph Alsop and David Joravsky set forth the by now familiar arguments on both sides of the debate. You'll be able to guess which sides they chose once you know that Alsop experienced capture by the Japanese at Hong Kong in 1942 and that Joravsky made no mortal contact with the Japanese: a young soldier, he was on his way to the Pacific when the war ended."

And finally, there is the late professor of philosophy J. Glenn Gray, whose book *The Warriors* describes soldiers as "shocked and ashamed" when they heard about the atomic bombings, a reaction that Fussell explains by revealing that Gray spent the war at division headquarters, which "is miles behind the places where the soldiers experience terror and madness and relieve these pressures by sadism."

That sentence and an additional paragraph or two discussing the Pacific War massacres from which, as Fussell says, "Hiroshima seems to follow in natural sequence," sound uncomfortably reminiscent of Vietnam War descriptions, and, indeed, it is the juxtaposition of the *bad war* with the *good war* that is bringing old soldiers like Fussell and Alsop out of the closet to defend Hiroshima. For in its current phase, the debate over Hiroshima and Nagasaki has little to do with how others see us; it has become strictly a matter of how we see ourselves.

A generation of warriors who considered their experience so virtuous that they can speak of massacres apparently without thinking of My Lai (Fussell says, "No Marine was fully persuaded of his manly adequacy who didn't have a well-washed Japanese skull to caress and who didn't have a go at treating sur-

rendering Japs as rifle targets"), and who can speak of the savagery that existed on both sides as an adequate explanation for Hiroshima, do not want their history Vietnamized. If the war was just, then anything that contributed to victory was justified; and the atomic bombings, which appeared to bring the war to a conclusion, were, from a soldier's point of view, a gift from God.

But it was Truman, without Divine guidance to the best of our knowledge, who decided how that gift should be used. Aware of that, Fussell offers this extraordinary comment near the close of his essay: "Harry Truman was not a fascist, but a democrat. He was as close to a real egalitarian as we've seen in high office for a very long time. He is the only president in my lifetime who ever had the experience of commanding a small unit of ground troops obliged to kill people. He knew better than his subsequent critics [of Hiroshima and Nagasaki] what he was doing."

Putting aside the suggestion that the experience of killing people in war is excellent preparation for Presidential decision making in the nuclear age, let us move from combat experiences to historical research and inquire what Truman was experiencing and what he was thinking about as he sat behind his desk in the Oval Office in the spring and early summer of 1945.

Research in the President's Official File, and in the diaries, correspondence and records of his closest wartime advisers, reveals that while the war was an ever-present consideration, its conduct was not among Truman's primary tasks. The record of military successes, Roosevelt's deteriorating health, a growing concern with postwar problems and Truman's inexperience had shifted much of the daily management of the conflict away from the White House during 1945. The new President would officiate over victory, but he would not be credited with having led the nation to it. The problems of the postwar world loomed larger before Truman than they ever had before Roosevelt, and they occupied more of his time. His performance would be judged on what he accomplished after the war.

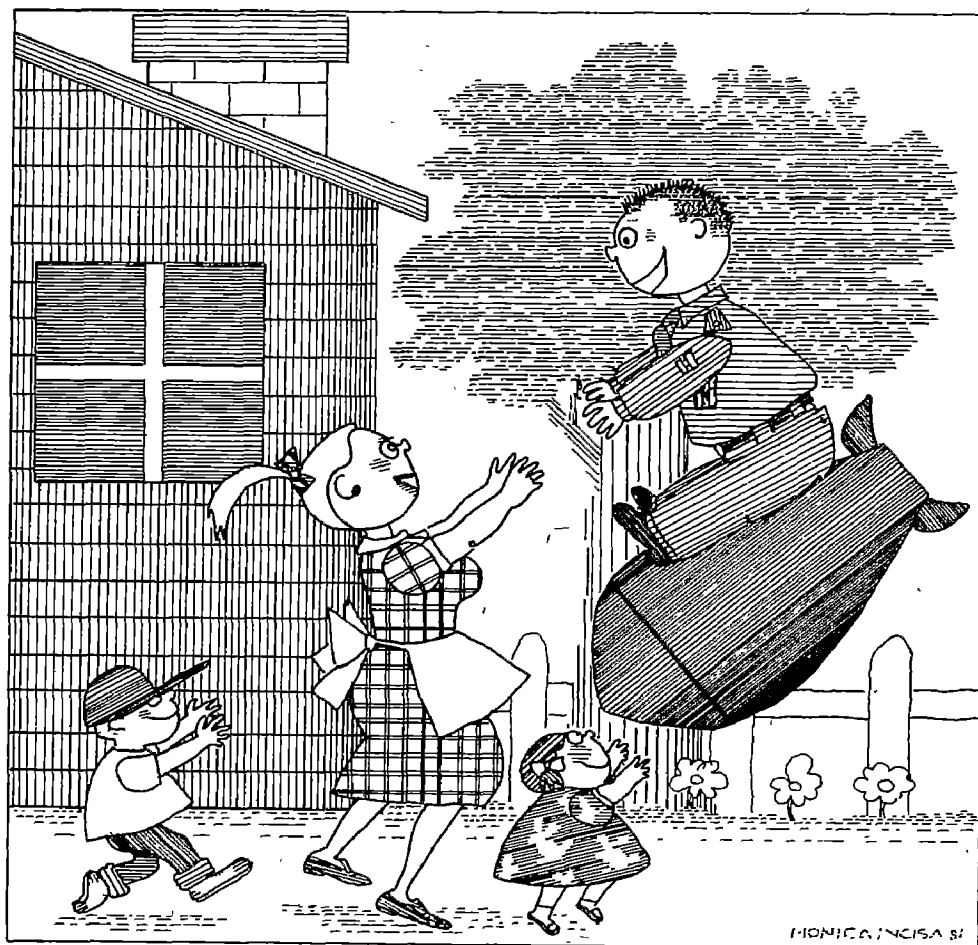
The Soviet Union was the primary postwar problem. Joseph Stalin was breaking the Yalta Agreement, the Secretary of State reported to the President at their first meeting on April 13, and soon after, Averell Harriman, Am-

bassador to Moscow, characterized Soviet behavior as nothing less than a "barbarian invasion of Europe."

Operating on the principle that toughness was next to godlessness in Stalin's eyes, Truman launched several initiatives during his early weeks in office. His first—subjecting Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov to a tongue-lashing—had disastrous results. His second—the precipitous termination of lend-lease aid to the Russians the day after Germany surrendered—produced an even worse reaction. Casting about for a more effective diplomatic strategy, Truman turned to the counsel of his Secretary of War, Stimson, whose experience as the overseer of the atomic bomb project inspired the policy of caution and reasonable accommodation he recommended. It seemed to Stimson "a terrible thing to gamble with such big stakes in diplomacy without having your master card [atomic bomb] in your hand." He viewed the bomb as the key to the postwar world. It would be "the most terrible weapon ever known in human history," he told Truman, noting that "if the problem of the proper use of this weapon can be solved, we would have the opportunity to bring the

world into a pattern in which the peace of the world and our civilization can be saved."

By the late spring of 1945, the implications of this weapon which had been created to win the war had become more problematic than the war itself. As the bomb moved toward completion, a dangerous (though now familiar) illusion was nurtured in the White House: the idea that the bomb was a panacea for America's diplomatic as well as its military problems. As preparations for the Potsdam Conference got underway, assurances that the weapon would work became increasingly important to the President. On June 6, he told Stimson that he had even "postponed" the summit conference "until the 15th of July on purpose to give us more time." And then, Stimson and Truman agreed, in an early linkage of arms control and diplomacy, that after the first bomb had been successfully used against Japan, a fitting exchange for an American offer to the Russians for the international control of atomic energy would be "the settlement of the Polish, Rumanian, Yugoslavian, and Manchurian problems." And even before this discussion, Secretary of



State-designate James F. Byrnes had told Truman that the bomb "might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war."

Truman inherited the basic policy that governed the atomic bomb, just as he inherited every other policy related to the war, a point that commentators on both sides of the debate often ignore. It was therefore possible to use the bomb only because Roosevelt had made preparations to do so. Truman was inclined to use the bomb because of those preparations. But he decided to use it because there seemed no good reason not to. On the contrary, the bombs were available and the Japanese fought on; the bombs were available and precedents of burned cities were numerous; the bombs were available and \$2 billion had been spent to create them; the bombs were available and revenge had its claim; the bombs were available and the Soviet Union was claiming too much. "The bomb," to quote Stimson,

was "a badly needed equalizer." Its use held out not only the hope of shocking Tokyo into submission but also the possible dividend of jolting Moscow into cooperation. "No man, in our position and subject to our responsibilities, holding in his hands a weapon of such possibilities," Stimson wrote in "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," "could have failed to use it and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face."

But a critical question remains: Were the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as Fussell and Alsop claim, the quickest way to end the war? A considerable body of evidence suggests that the decision to use the bomb, which involved a decision to reject another recommended initiative, delayed the end of the war.

American cryptographers had broken the Japanese diplomatic code before the war, and senior members of the Administration were aware of a struggle between peace and war factions within the Japanese government. Based on this privileged information, and on his knowledge of Japanese politics gained from long experience as Ambassador to Japan, Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew urged Truman during the final days of May to modify the unconditional-surrender policy. It was an insurmountable barrier for the peace faction, he explained, for no Japanese government would surrender without assurances that the Emperor would not be deposed or the dynasty eliminated. But Truman decided to reject Grew's advice, and an important question is why?

One answer is that he would not accept the political consequences that were likely to result from a public retreat from a policy that had become a political shibboleth since Roosevelt introduced the idea in 1943.

Another answer is that he preferred to use the atomic bomb. This is the view offered by the authors of *Hiroshima and Nagasaki*: "The A-bomb attacks were needed not so much against Japan—already on the brink of surrender and no longer capable of mounting an effective counteroffensive—as to establish clearly America's postwar international position and strategic supremacy in the anticipated cold war setting." Although this interpretation is difficult to "prove," any serious effort to interpret Truman's motives must confront the significant evidence in

Stimson's diaries, in the Manhattan Project files and in the President's papers that supports it. "The bomb as a merely probable weapon had seemed a weak reed on which to rely," Stimson wrote in his memoir, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, "but the bomb as a colossal reality was very different." This expected difference, it must be recognized, may have made the difference when Truman chose between unconditional surrender and the atomic bomb.

But whatever the reasons that led to the President's decision, the point that is relevant here is that many more American soldiers and Japanese of all types might have had the opportunity to grow old if Truman had accepted Grew's advice, the perspicacity of which became even clearer on July 13 when an intercepted message from Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo to Ambassador Naotake Sato in Moscow noted that "unconditional surrender is the only obstacle to peace."

And unconditional surrender remained an obstacle to peace even after atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese did not surrender until the government of the United States offered assurances that neither the Emperor nor the imperial dynasty would be endangered. In his *New York Review of Books* article, published under the title "Was the Hiroshima Bomb Necessary?", Alsop camouflages this point by referring to "President Truman's wise decision to agree to preserve the imperial house as part of a surrender otherwise unconditional." But the details that Alsop recounts of the military's resistance to surrender are relevant only against the background of the demand for unconditional surrender. That policy, initiated in America, bound together a fracturing war party in Japan. To focus solely on the position taken by the military hard-liners, as Alsop does, misses the point. As Eugene Dooman, a senior Japan specialist in the State Department during the war, long ago pointed out to Herbert Feis (author of *Japan Subdued* and *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*), "the Army, and I mean the diehards like [Generals] Umetzu and Anami, never did countenance surrender, but a fission had already developed among the generals, as witness the intervention of General Tanaka, commanding the Eastern Army, against the troops sent to seize the emperor."

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In the early morning hours of August 10, in the Emperor's bomb shelter adjoining the imperial library, Premier Kantaro Suzuki startled his divided colleagues on the Supreme Council with the announcement, "Your Imperial Majesty's decision is requested." That decision, "to accept the Allied proclamation on the basis outlined by the Foreign Minister," brought the war to its conclusion—on the condition that the United States not compromise the prerogatives of the Emperor as supreme ruler or the survival of the dynasty.

When he came to consider those final, dramatic months of the war and the momentous decisions he influenced so heavily, Stimson (whose introspection and honesty seem out of place next to the modern political memoir) wrote "that history might find that the United States, by its delay in stating its position [on the conditions of surrender], had prolonged the war." □

THEATER.

JOHN LAHR

American Buffalo

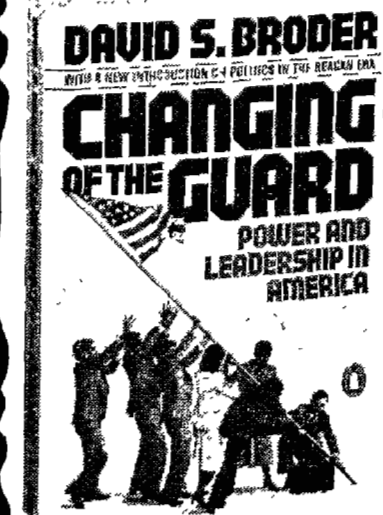
"You know what is free enterprise," says Teach in David Mamet's brilliant *American Buffalo* as he readies himself for his night's work of breaking and entering. "The freedom . . . of the Individual . . . to Embark on any Fucking Course that he sees fit . . . In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit . . . The country's founded on this, Don. You know this." Crime, Mamet shrewdly shows, is only the American ethic of pluck 'n' luck turned upside down. Teach and his cohorts are out to steal the coin collection of a man who recently paid \$90 for a nickel from Don's Resale Shop. They are losers who talk the language of business success. Driven, ignorant and terrified, they are motivated not so much by a dream of winning as a fear of losing. Their impoverishment is reinforced by the vicious ethic whose axioms they spout. "Without this," says Teach, speaking of the American's "inalienable" right to do his own thing, "we're just savage shitheads in the wilderness." And they are.

In a society that promotes the myth of equal opportunity, mobility is

crucial. The American must always feel himself in motion, pursuing his destiny and his fortune. The result is a restless, rootless, insecure society which has no faith in the peace it seeks or the pleasure it finds. *American Buffalo* superbly evokes this anxious and impoverished world. The characters are stalled, yet they talk only of movement. In the play's first minute, Don is giving his gopher, Bob, a business lesson. "Action counts," he says. "Action talks and bullshit walks." And in the same breath, speaking of another street hustler, a low-life called Fletcher, who never appears, Don waxes lyrical: "You take him and you put him down in some strange town with just a nickel in his pocket and by nightfall he'll have the town by the balls. This is not talk, Bob, this is action." Don sees himself as an entrepreneur ("That's all business is . . . common sense, experience and talent," he says, preaching virtues that are hilariously absent from his character). Don collects junk; and in the swagger of his clumsy syntax, he conveys Mamet's clear perception of him as another scrap of the detritus of capitalism. His world and his language are composed of waste. The arid, tatty deprivation that comes through in this world of small-fry hustlers is created out of the ethic of self-aggrandizement, which punishes them even as it seduces them. "That's what business is," Don tells his pupil. "People taking care of themselves."

When Teach makes his entrance, he enters in a fury. He has been put down at the local diner for mooching a piece of toast from a girl's plate. In this mean and brutal world, friendship augurs betrayal, and generosity is parceled out in chump change. "She goes 'Help Yourself,'" Teach says. "I should help myself to a half of piece of toast its four slices for a quarter. I should have a nickel every time we're over at the game I pop for coffee . . . cigarettes . . . a *sweet roll*, never saw word." The pitch and roll of Teach's speech is terrific writing. Mamet's use of the sludge in American language is completely original. He hears panic and poetry in the convoluted syntax of his beleaguered characters trying at once to fathom and to hide from the realities of the sad life around them. Their speech, like their lives, is a jumble of conflicting connections. Teach continues: "Only (and I tell you this, Don) Only, and I'm not casting anything on anyone: from the

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