

I still mourn Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner, Liuzzo and Daniels and Moore for a dubious integration where-in Mayor Wilson Goode of Philadelphia can keep the Eagles from leaving town?

That is part of the pain, too. Blacks seem to have forgotten that love, be it King's offering, or Malcolm's rebuke, was both the means and the end, and electing blacks to office might be an interim step, but never more than that. Too many blacks have been seduced by the symbols of power and no longer know that we survived only because of the moral example.

**P**ERHAPS the Movement died at some unnoticed moment when people became more involved in changing America than in changing themselves. The Movement did not begin 25 years ago with a political agenda. It began with a vision that the values by which we as Americans lived were not only questionable in some instances, but woefully wrong in others, and the only way to change America was to present it with a new alternative of how to be.

Precisely because those alternatives of how to be are absent from public life today, there is even more of a need to observe this silver anniversary of the Movement's birth. And in observing it we might recall that idealism is a string in the soul that makes it soar, and in the soaring we learn that love is daring to believe that the soul matters, and scarcely anything else does. That is the enduring legacy of the Movement and without such belief, there would not have been the Movement. It is this legacy that cries out to be celebrated and reincarnated this year.

Whether or not there ever again will be a mass movement for social change is not so much a political question as it is an individual one. Mass movements do not happen until individuals make individual choices and individual decisions to risk their personal safety and security for that soaring of the soul that can save us all.

James Farmer's *Lay Bare the Heart* is the story of a life lived for that soaring. That February day in 1960 would not have been possible if not for Farmer and others like him. For him, there was no Movement to join, so he helped to create the one so many of us joined later, thinking, for a while, that we had made it ourselves.

As the founder of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, he participated

in the first organized civil rights sit-in in American history, in May 1942 in Chicago. He organized labor unions in the South, confronted FDR about colonialism in Africa during a time when most blacks denied having an African ancestry, took the civil rights movement into dreaded Mississippi with the Freedom Rides in 1961, and faced death in Plaquemine, Louisiana, in one of the great untold stories of the civil rights movement. He has written an appealing book, in which he talks about fear as a Freedom Rider, his warm relationship with Malcolm X, and his more complex ones with the Kennedys, LBJ, and Nixon. It is a deeply personal book, one in which he does lay bare his heart.

Yet one cannot help but hear in it, too, the silences between the heartbeats. While he tells entertaining and revealing anecdotes about King, about Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins, the deceased heads of the Urban League and NAACP respectively, he is silent about their ultimate historical significance. It is especially striking that Farmer recounts where he was when he learned of King's death, but an assess-

ment of King's contributions, strengths, and weaknesses is absent. Farmer is equally silent about the transformation of CORE into an ineffective black nationalist group. Perhaps it is unfair to criticize a book for what it doesn't say, but in this instance, the reader feels deprived of certain knowledge from a man who was uniquely situated in the events of the sixties, a knowledge that, if imparted, might help us to better know that time and ourselves.

Despite this reservation, *Lay Bare the Heart* is an important reminder that movements for social change do not simply happen. They are made by people who sacrifice their lives for ideals and visions, who are willing to subject themselves to the risks that come with such ideals and visions. James Farmer is such a man.

**JULIUS LESTER**

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## POP GOES AMERICA

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Culture as History:

The Transformation of American Society  
in the Twentieth Century  
by Warren I. Susman

(Pantheon, 321 pp., \$22.95)

Warren Susman has been a significant figure among American historians for more than 20 years. He has established a considerable reputation, both among his own students at Rutgers University and among members of the larger scholarly world, for his remarkable energy and imagination. His influence on those interested in the study of popular culture has been profound. And yet it is likely that most scholars, even many who are aware of his reputation and are familiar with some of his ideas, have never read anything he has written. Susman has published a number of important articles over the last two decades, but he has published most of them in inaccessible places—in little-

read journals, in the proceedings of professional meetings, in obscure anthologies only briefly in print. Except for a collection of documents he edited in 1973, he has, until now, never published a book of his own.

*Culture as History* brings together for the first time a group of his most important essays of the last 25 years. It is a spotty collection. Several articles that may have been important when first published now seem dated and uninteresting. Others apparently bear the marks of hurried preparation (a few were originally lectures delivered at scholarly meetings). The heart of the book, a group of essays on the culture of the 1920s and 1930s, suffers from

considerable redundancy. Susman himself claims to have found in these articles "a sense of order, progression, and even purpose" that turns this disparate collection into an intellectually coherent whole. Most readers will, I suspect, find that coherence elusive. Yet despite its limitations, this is an important and provocative book, both for its broad observations about 20th-century culture and for its imaginative and suggestive use of the commonplace, even banal artifacts of daily life to arrive at important observations about American society.

**T**HE study of "culture," Susman believes, is more than the interpretation of "the highest achievements of men of intellect and art." It is (in the words of sociologist Robert Lynd) the exploration of "all the things that a group of people inhabiting a common geographical area do, the way they do things and the way they think and feel about things, their material tools and their values and symbols." The most important signs of the way a society lives, Susman believes, are often the simplest, most ordinary artifacts of its culture. A popular novel can be more revealing than a major work of literature. An advertisement aimed at a mass market is often more significant than a serious work of art. The "structures of everyday life," to use Fernand Braudel's phrase, are as important as, perhaps more important than, the great public events and the major intellectual achievements that we commonly consider "history."

Susman concedes that 20th-century culture cannot yet be discussed in the context of what Braudel and other French social historians have called the *"longue durée"*; it cannot reveal the "deep structures" that have shaped the slow, epochal evolution of human society. Still, Susman's claims are far from modest. For he argues that the patterns of modern popular culture reveal a broad and profound transformation that has set 20th-century American life irrevocably apart from the world that preceded it. In the wake of industrialization and the social, economic, and cultural changes that accompanied it, a new world emerged—a world in which a traditional and seemingly timeless society gave way to a fundamentally different one. The story of 20th-century America, Susman suggests, is the story of the tension between an older, fading "Puritan-Republican, producer-capitalist" culture and a "new-

ly emerging culture of abundance" that has gradually established its dominance.

In the older culture, men and women were judged on the basis of "character," on the basis of their moral qualities, their principles, their rectitude. In the newer "culture of abundance" the standard of judgment has become "personality," the ability to interact effectively with others, to win their affection and admiration. In the older culture, consciousness was shaped largely by local circumstances—by family, neighborhood, community. In the newer culture, with its instruments of mass communication, its ease of travel, its shared experiences and enthusiasms, consciousness reflects the influence of a much larger world. In the older culture, aspirations to material comfort were sharply restricted by the limited capacity of the economy to produce. In the modern world, much greater material satisfactions lie within the range even of those of modest means. Americans by the turn of the century were, Susman argues, dreaming of "a new world based on fabulous plenty and newfound affluence." And, he claims, "a whole culture was built on that vision."

**I**N MANY RESPECTS, this is a far from original argument, as Susman readily admits. Sociologists from Max Weber to David Riesman, historians influenced by modernization theory, and many others have long stressed the importance of the new, bureaucratic structures of modern society in changing the nature of interpersonal relations. The idea of the 20th-century United States as a "consumer culture" or a "therapeutic culture" is one of the most familiar in modern scholarship. Susman offers several important variations, however, on this standard discussion of the modern era.

First, unlike most chroniclers of the consumer society, Susman is not an inveterate critic of the "culture of abundance." Maternal possessions and bureaucratic development, he insists, are not in themselves an "iron cage," as the Weberians would have it. Technological progress is not inherently dehumanizing. A consumer culture has repressive possibilities, to be sure, many of which afflict us, but it has a vast and joyous liberating potential as well.

But the larger difference between Susman's work and that of other historians who share some of his central assumptions is his focus. He is not much

concerned with institutions, or with economic relationships, or even—oddly enough, for an avowed socialist—with class in any conventional sense. He is concerned instead with the texture of ordinary experience, with "the forms in which people have experienced the world—the patterns of life, the symbols by which they cope with the world." It is not, he believes, a preposterous statement to claim, as he does occasionally in these essays, that "Mickey Mouse may in fact be more important to an understanding of the 1930s than Franklin Roosevelt."

**I**T IS THE 1920s and 1930s, in fact, that Susman considers the crucial period in the transformation of modern society, "the climactic stage" of the battle between the old and new cultures. And the best and most important essays in the collection deal with the popular culture of those years. The cultural heroes of the 1920s, he argues in a perceptive discussion of Henry Ford, Babe Ruth, and the advertising executive Bruce Barton, reflect the ambivalence of a society suspended between two worlds. All three men embodied the alluring qualities of the new culture of abundance—material success, technological progress (in the case of Ford), hedonism (Ruth), salesmanship and mass communication (Barton). Yet all three seemed to represent as well the older ideal of the triumphant individual rising to power and wealth by virtue of his own talents and abilities.

In the 1930s, Susman claims, there were widespread efforts to resolve the uncertainties and tensions afflicting the new culture by developing a new, self-conscious concept of "culture"—by creating, for the first time, a widely shared popular vision of the "American way of life." Only in a nation tied together by mass communications and transportation and by an integrated national economy could such a concept of a common culture emerge, and the form that it took reveals clearly the influence of the new ideology of abundance. These were the years in which the concept of "self-help" emerged—the Dale Carnegie message that "winning friends and influencing people" lay within the grasp of all. They were the years of Walt Disney cartoons, of the creation of a "world of fun and fantasy" and of "ultimate wish fulfillment," a comforting escape for middle-class victims of the Depression, "frightened and

humiliated, sensing a lack of order they understood in the world around them." From cartoons, such Americans could draw the comforting message that "no matter how disordered the world appears, Disney and his Mickey Mouse can find their way back to happy achievement by following the announced rules of the game."

AND THE 1930s were years in which the popular culture embraced, in a way unknown to previous generations, the idea of "commitment," the belief in the importance of the group, the roman-ticization of "the people" as a collective entity. The popularity of the Communist Party among American intellectuals was but one example of the allure of commitment. There was, as well, the revival of interest in "folk culture," the rise of the Agrarians with their celebration of the "communal" qualities of the Old South, the sentimental evocations of community and neighborhood in popular literature (in the works, for example, of Thornton Wilder and William Saroyan, which stood in striking contrast to the savage caricatures of the small town in the 1920s works of Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson). Out of the fear and shame that dominated the first years of the Depression, in other words, there emerged in popular culture "a final celebration of the American Way of Life and a strong sense of commitment to it."

No brief summary can do full justice to the rich and complex texture of this book, which includes essays ranging from the "uses of the Puritan past" to the World's Fair of 1939. But a brief summary may fail as well to convey some of the problems that accompany this kind of history. There have been frequent complaints in the last decade or so that historical scholarship has become excessively narrow in focus and arcane in its concerns. Scholars seem often to assemble mountains of detailed evidence, statistical and otherwise, and to support with it only the tiniest fragments of analysis. There is, however, another, opposite pole of historical methodology—the creation of broad generalizations on the basis of small fragments of evidence.

Clearly, Warren Susman has read widely in and thought deeply about 20th-century popular culture, yet far too often the evidence he marshals to support his broad generalizations about modern society seems insubstantial. A

chance passage from a novel, a scene from a film, an advertising slogan, a popular phrase or consumer fad seem frequently to be the basis of sweeping observations about the whole of American culture. Such ordinary artifacts may well be important. But Susman seldom offers any systematic evidence of their significance, any explanation of why one artifact is more important than another, any reason to believe that his generalizations rest on very much more than speculation. Perhaps informed speculation is the most that can reasonably be expected from the study of "cultural history"; perhaps scientific proofs are not available for the amorphous hypotheses that form the framework of the field. But Susman's essays seem particularly uninterested in the question of proof and make no effort to discuss the breadth, or the limits, of their sources.

This is, then, a less than fully satisfying book. In addition to the disconnectedness of its essays and the abstract quality of some of its arguments, it suffers from the author's idiosyncratic and at times mangled syntax, from an occa-

sionally discursive prose style; from an excessive (and implausible) use of the word "brilliant" to describe books, essays, films, and other works Susman admires. It is not what anyone would call a disciplined book, or a consistent one. But *Culture as History* has other, less conventional, but no less important rewards—its imaginative and at times, yes, "brilliant" use of unusual sources; its sweeping (if occasionally strained) generalizations about popular culture; and the compelling glimpse it provides us of a remarkably creative and questioning historical intelligence at work exploring some of the central realms of American experience. It would be nice to think that this book will, if nothing else, bring to Warren Susman some of the attention and acclaim to which his long and influential scholarly career should entitle him.

ALAN BRINKLEY

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## APPOINTMENT IN FLORIDA

### Continental Drift by Russell Banks

(Harper & Row, 366 pp., \$17.95)

In recent years, the American novel, or at least the subset of it that critics take seriously, has been acting like a kind of surly post-adolescent, sleeping until noon, sulking in its room, and muttering "What's the use?" when anyone mentions subjects like work or ambition. So it's always a pleasure to see a gifted and serious novelist biting off more than he can chew. In *Continental Drift*, Russell Banks takes on, in miniature, the entire condition of the world in our time. The book that results has many of the strengths and weaknesses of the very best American fiction.

*Continental Drift* is harrowing, bleak, often clumsy, and always compulsively readable. It reminded me of Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* and John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* Like Stone, Banks has constructed a kind of super-caper nov-

el, in which a crime and its aftermath become a metaphor for an entire moment in our national life, like *Dos Passos*, Banks deliberately draws on a broad canvas, attempting to dramatize social and political change in the lives of ordinary people.

The novel's title refers to the theory that all the continents were once part of a single land mass, which slowly broke up and has been drifting apart ever since. But Banks's vision is of demographic, not geological, motion—of the vast, almost unprecedented human migrations of our time in which people across the globe flee from starvation, war, poverty, and oppression and seek a new life somewhere—anywhere—else.

Although his story concerns the Caribbean boat people who are arriving in

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