Books

Books in Brief

Spring 2004

Pursuing Truth, Exercising Power: Social Science and Public Policy in the 21st Century

By Lisa Anderson (Columbia University Press)

From the early twentieth century, modern social scientists were largely content to pursue objective research, leaving governments and their agents the task of whether and how to act on the findings. But in recent years, trends of privatization and globalization have moved responsibility for many important policy decisions from governments to multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and other private actors. In this volume Lisa Anderson, dean of the School of International and Public Affairs, considers the effect of this displacement on the future of the social sciences, sizes up the modern academy's influence on foreign and domestic affairs, and asks whether the historic divide between research and implementation is still useful for social scientists and for the nation.

Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903–2003

By James Boylan '51JRN (Columbia University Press)

Taking advantage of unprecedented access to the school's records, Boylan tackles some of the issues that concern journalism education—such as whether the term itself is an oxymoron. A member of the school's faculty from 1957 to 1979 and a founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Boylan has produced the first comprehensive account of America's premier school of journalism. Boylan's book covers the school's turbulent and contentious history, recounting many of the controversies that have enveloped it, including the recent debate over the school's curriculum and direction for the school's future.

The Pursuit of Perfection: The Promise and Perils of Medical Enhancement

By Sheila M. Rothman and David J. Rothman (Pantheon Books)

Two professors at the Columbia University Medical Center look back on the “rich and intriguing historical record of enhancement” over the past few centuries in considering “what the pursuit of biological perfection means to us as individuals.” The Rothmans examine many procedures developed to combat the ravages of nature —botox, plastic surgery (particularly liposuction), human growth hormone therapy (“shortness had been turned into a medical condition, just like aging,” they write). By filling in historical details, the authors offer much to ponder at a time when genetic engineering tantalizes us with the prospect of longer and healthier lives.

Squash: A History of the Game

By James Zug ’99SOA (Scribner)

Any book with a forward by George Plimpton has something going for it right off the bat—or, as it is now called, the racquet. Zug, who has an MFA from Columbia’s Writing Division, makes what Plimpton terms “the delicious pleasure of cracking a ball against a wall” interesting through his reliance on colorful characters and anecdotes. “Squash breeds zealots,” Zug writes in detailing the history of a game, which he refers to as “boxing with sticks and a piece of rubber.” The book, which could reasonably have been titled “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Squash but Were Afraid to Ask,” contains enough squash esoterica to excite the most dedicated squash junkie, but is also accessible to those who wish to gain an increased appreciation for the game.

In Defense of Globalization

By Jagdish Bhagwati (Oxford University Press)

With factories continuing to shutter and white-collar jobs being “off-shored” to Asia, the seeming downside of globalization enjoys as high a profile as ever. So it is especially timely for Jagdish Bhagwati, an economics professor at Columbia and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, to release this volume that responds to the arguments of the antiglobalization movement. Suggesting that a focus on the perils of globalization obscures the greater good, the author reiterates the benefit of free trade for underdeveloped nations and makes the case anew for the free movement across borders of capital, workers, services, and technology. But Bhagwati is also candid about issues that remain to be addressed, like “brain drain” from poor countries and the need to restrain certain actions by international corporations.

The White City

By Alec Michod ’99SOA (St. Martin’s Press)

The White City—McKim, Mead & White’s plaster-of-Paris Xanadu—rose from the midcontinental muck at the Columbian Exposition, the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Some 25 million visitors drew inspiration from the site’s neoclassical grandeur, an expansive spirit the same architects set in stone a few years later on Columbia’s Morningside Heights campus. Here the pleasure domes provide backdrop to a macabre first novel by Alec Michod, who sets a team of sleuths, among them the highly intuitive Harvard-educated forensic psychologist Elizabeth Handley, on the trail of a gruesome serial killer and a lost little boy named Billy. This atmospheric, wind-whipped thriller probes the darkness behind America’s gleaming turn-of-the-last-century fantasies.

The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade

By Joseph E. Stiglitz (Norton)

University Professor Joseph Stiglitz, who teaches at Columbia Business School and the School of International and Public Affairs, looks back at an economic decade during which he enjoyed a ringside seat as a member (later chairman) of Bill Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers and then as chief economist for the World

Bank. The Nobel Prize–winning economist seeks to explain why the missteps in an otherwise sound ’90s economy—the investment bubble fueled in large part by misguided policy decisions, lax oversight, and misplaced corporate priorities—have led to today’s sluggishness, and offers an insider’s account—sometimes proud, sometimes critical—of Clinton-administration economic debates. Sizing up the future, he criticizes those who call for still fewer restrictions on markets, suggesting that an appropriate level of government intervention provides the best path to achieving sustained growth for all.



Guide to school abbreviations

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