

# Beacon Press

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

September 22, 2008

To: UUA Board of Trustees  
From: Helene Atwan, Director  
Re: Beacon Press Board Report



One of the most exciting new directions for the press in this young century is to offer graphic books. These books, sometimes called Comic Books (but not to be confused with Batman), burst onto the publishing scene in 1992 with Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the Holocaust, *Maus*. Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, published in 2006, took the genre several steps forward, becoming a huge commercial as well as critical success as a graphic memoir of a lesbian daughter and her gay father. The genre promises to bring new readers to books and to offer an opportunity to deliver stories in an exciting new format perfectly suited both to the individual story and to the internet era reader. To that end, we have commissioned graphic adaptations of two of our classic backlist titles: Geoffrey Canada's searing memoir *Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America* and Octavia Butler's riveting novel about slavery, *Kindred*. These two new editions of important books about race will launch our graphic books program.

In keeping with our history of publishing progressive, queer-themed titles, we are excited to have a second direction in our graphic books initiative—books about the LGBT community. The first is a nonfiction project based on the lives of gay transsexual men interviewed by prominent cartoonist Dylan Edwards, creator of the long-running strips "The Outfield" and "Politically InQueerect." Edwards' previous work has received praise from Alison Bechdel, who we are very fortunate to have as an advisor to our graphics program, and who writes: "There's something extremely kinetic about Dylan Edwards' comics. The subtlety of both the drawing and the writing make his characters leap off the page."

Bechdel also lead us to acquire Nicole Georges' debut memoir *Calling Dr. Laura*. Georges has been producing her own zines and autobiographical comics for over a decade, many of which can be viewed on her website [nicolejgeorges.com](http://nicolejgeorges.com). Bechdel praises the "powerful chemistry going on between her delicate drawings and the probing honesty of her investigations. . . *Calling Dr. Laura* is disarming and haunting, hip and sweet, all at once." It is certain to be an innovative and unique addition to our lists.

Two recent publications, **Patricia Harman's** *The Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir* and **Fred Pearce's** *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner: Tracking Down the Sources of My Stuff*, are noted favorites of independent booksellers, both having achieved the coveted "Indie Next" selection, which guarantees prominent display in stores across the nation. Harman's debut memoir interweaves her personal and professional trials as a nurse-midwife striving to keep an independent practice solvent with the intimate and touching stories of her patients in what *Library Journal* calls "a vivid and detailed picture of the health-care system in the United States today." Described by *Kirkus* as "an able exposition of many of the ugly realities behind the global marketplace's attractive exterior," *Confessions of an Eco-Sinner* takes us on a global journey to track down the sources of all of the author's stuff—from coffee, to jeans, computers and cell phones—uncovering the economic and environmental exploitation that sustains a Western lifestyle. *Confessions* is a resolute call to curb rampant consumerism for a more humane future.



In a similar vein, David Bacon's book *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* documents, as Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, "how undocumented workers have become the world's most exploited workforce—subject to raids and arrests, forced to work at low pay and under miserable conditions, and prevented from organizing on their own behalf." Bacon, who has spent thirty years as a labor organizer and immigrant rights activist, has recently been interviewed on **Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now!***, and has received due praise from Mike Davis for being "the conscience of American journalism." **David Moore's *The Opinion Makers*** has also been garnering rave reviews. Dubbed a "scholarly crusader" by Herbert Mitgang in the *New York Times*, the former senior editor at the Gallup Poll here sets out to expose how pollsters don't simply report public opinion, but overwhelmingly manufacture it, posing a genuine threat to democracy in the process. He has been a guest interviewee on several NPR programs, including *Fresh Air*, *On the Media*, and the *Diane Rehm Show*.

Among our other newly acquired titles, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* by psychiatrist and cultural historian Jonathan M. Metzger explores how popular and medical beliefs about mental illness have historically shaped—and in turn been shaped by—cultural perceptions about race and gender. *The Protest Psychosis* not only scrutinizes how the diagnosis of schizophrenia became racialized in the 1960s, but shows how it is still racialized today.

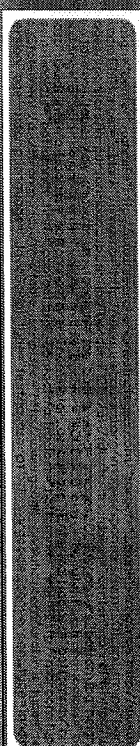
*Mean Little Deaf Queer* by award-winning performance artist Terry Galloway begins with her loss of hearing at the age of nine, an event that would set in motion the turbulent journey of self-discovery she recounts here. Self-described deaf girl by day, drag king patrolling the streets of an army base by night, Galloway unflinchingly explores the devalued life of deafness and unconventional sexuality from a firsthand perspective. As Sarah Bird, author of *How Perfect is That*, puts it: "You don't have to be mean, deaf or queer to take heart from this miraculously unsentimental, deliriously funny, refreshingly spite-free, joyously weirdo-embracing memoir. . . Like Augusten Burroughs, Frank McCourt, and Mary Karr, Terry Galloway has written a memoir that transcends its hilarious particularities to achieve the universality of true art."

Beacon has successfully sold Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* for over a decade, yet, until recently, no one has ever written a biographical account of Thurman—founder of one of the first explicitly interracial American congregations, whose work deeply influenced Martin Luther King Jr. In their newly acquired book, Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt—both senior volume editors for the Howard Thurman papers project—draw on archival and obscure contemporaneous material and a pivotal four month trip Howard Thurman took to India in 1935 to introduce readers to Thurman and the crucial role he played in the epochal shift in US race relations that occurred in the 20th century. We are looking forward to publishing this original and unique book in the fall of 2011.

# PW

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## Beacon Press to Launch Series on Free Speech

By Lynn Adriani -- *Publishers Weekly*, 4/25/2008 8:00:00 AM

Beacon Press is planning a new series of books focused on free speech. It is a natural progression for the independent Boston press, which has long been associated with First Amendment issues, having published the first full edition of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, as well as authors including Howard Zinn, James Baldwin, Ben Bagdikian, Cornell West and others.

The series will explore free speech over the first 150 years of American history; the emergence of an organized fight for free speech in the post-WWI years, and battles that have been fought over free speech in recent years. "Beacon Press publishes books that try to change the way that people think about fundamental issues. We believe that exploring the history of free speech is essential to ensuring that our understanding and respect for the First Amendment continue to grow," press director Helene Atwan said.

Each book in the series will be approximately 65,000 words and is intended mainly for a popular audience. Free speech activist and historian Christopher Finan, president of the American Booksellers Foundation of Free Expression, will be "the face of the series," said publicist Leah Riviere; he will edit books in the series, and solicit and review proposals. Brian Halley of Beacon Press will be the in-house editor. No books have been signed up yet.

Beacon has done themed series like this over the years; most recently is the *Queer Action/Queer Ideas* series, edited by Michael Bronski.

Authors interested in submitting proposals for the new free speech series should contact Finan at [finan@mitmspring.com](mailto:finan@mitmspring.com).

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# Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: September 1, 2008

★ **The Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir.**

Harman, Patricia (Author)

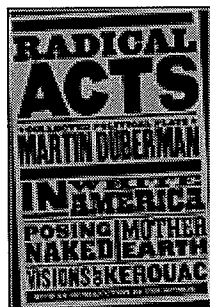
Oct 2008. 288 p. Beacon, hardcover, \$24.95. (9780807072899). 618.20092.

Imagine a health-care provider capable of reiterating the personal history of just one patient. With that fantasy in mind, imagine one who can recall the names of patients' children and spouses. By Harman's account, she not only knows the stories of nearly a dozen patients, she also relates to them on a very human yet professional way. Their stories, along with her memoir, make up a wonderful book, though by memoir/confession standards, nurse-midwife Harman's is relatively tame. Plagued with chronic insomnia, she self-medicates nightly with a couple fingers of Scotch. She and her ob-gyn husband argue, sometimes harboring anger for days, but they also make love on the deck of their secluded lakefront home. She sometimes lies to patients. She didn't want to have a potentially life-saving hysterectomy because she feared losing the capability for orgasm—and then she learned with relief and via self-examination that the procedure didn't cost her this basic pleasure. Her now-grown children haven't always been perfectly behaved. If such confessions seem tame, the whole book is touchingly revelatory of how valuable a medical practitioner who commits more than the current average of four minutes to each patient can be. It's deeply moving, not least because its stories are told against the backdrop of Harman's concerns about a practice that teeters on the brink of insolvency.

— *Donna Chavez*

Duberman, Martin. **Radical Acts: Collected Political Plays.** New Pr, dist. by Norton. Sept. 2008. c.320p. ISBN 978-1-59558-407-6. pap. \$18.95. DRAMA

**Verdict:** Biographer, novelist, and essayist Duberman (*The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein; Haymarket*) here presents four plays that dramatize historical events and vary in their ability to hold the reader's attention. Not an essential purchase for public libraries. It may be of moderate interest to college and university libraries for political science or sociology departments rather than theater collections.



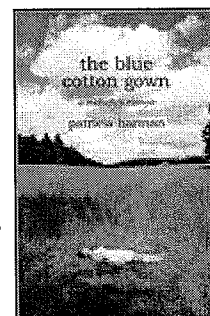
**Background:** "In White America," an ensemble readers' theater piece, Duberman arranges excerpts from primary sources to present black-white race relations from the 18th century to the mid-1960s. "Mother Earth" is the story of Emma Goldman's exile from America, her arrival in the Soviet Union, and her disenchantment with Lenin's particular brand of dictatorship. The history is engrossing, but its dramatic representation feels like chunks of court testimony. "Posing Naked," centering on Newton Arvin, a Smith College professor victimized for his homosexuality by the FBI in 1960, is dramatized in a sympathetic and engaging way and feels the most immediate of this collection. "Visions of Kerouac"

is the true story of the rampaging lusts and loves of your favorite wacky Beat poets.—Larry Schwartz, Minnesota State Univ. Lib., Moorhead

Harman, Patricia. **The Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir.** Beacon, dist. by Houghton. Oct. 2008. c.288p. ISBN 978-0-8070-7289-9. \$24.95. MED

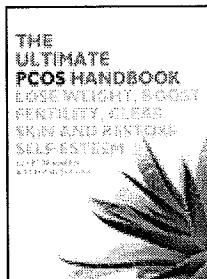
**Verdict:** Harman comes across as a wonderful, empathic friend and listener, and the stories she tells here, intertwined with her own life story, are personal and moving. A vivid and detailed picture of the health-care system in the United States today, from the perspective of one caring, intelligent, and hard-working professional. Highly recommended for public and medical libraries.

**Background:** Nurse-midwives don't just deliver babies—they can provide primary care to women of all ages, including gynecological exams, family-planning advice, and prenatal and neonatal care as well as assistance in labor and delivery. Harman, a certified nurse-midwife, works in a small medical practice with her physician husband in rural West Virginia, and after the practice had to stop delivering babies because of exorbitant insurance costs, she found herself counselling teenaged girls, abused women, poor women, and women with all kinds of health problems and personal concerns, referring them to other medical or social work specialists when needed. This memoir covers a year in her life as a nurse-midwife, wife, mother of three grown sons, and woman beset by her own health, emotional, marital, and financial problems.—Marcia Welsh, Dartmouth Coll. Libs., Hanover, NH



Harris, Colette & Theresa Cheung. **The Ultimate PCOS Handbook: Lose Weight, Boost Fertility, Clear Skin and Restore Self-Esteem.** Conari: Red Wheel/Weiser. Sept. 2008. 406p. index. ISBN 978-1-57324-371-1. pap. \$19.95. HEALTH

**Verdict:** Chapter notes, resources (web sites and organizations), resources for further reading (without dates), and an index give access to research, but a commercial web site is the major source recommended for information about the glycemic index. There is no glossary, and some of the web sites listed are inaccessible. Accompanying illustrations for the exercises suggested would have been helpful. Not recommended.



**Background:** One of several new books on polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), this guide to managing the disease is designed for women experiencing the common symptoms of weight gain, acne, and low fertility. The authors' personal experiences with PCOS informs their presentation, but a decidedly British slant (and terminology) may frustrate Americans looking for remedies available in the United States. In three parts, the book explains PCOS (assisted by the book's only illustration)

and gives strategies for coping with both the physical symptoms and the psychological aspects. —Lois K. Merry, Keene State Coll., NH

# Earth's Last Pastoral

## Red Bird

### Poems

By Mary Oliver

Beacon. 96p \$23

ISBN 9780807068922

Mary Oliver has done it again. She has assembled a collection of poems that is moving, intense and evocative in its engagement of the natural world. Yet this latest book by the Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award-winner is distinctive among her 17 volumes for the dark undercurrent that runs through the poems. The Red Bird of the title, who "comes all winter/ firing up the landscape/ as nothing else can do," sounds the keynote of the book in the opening lyric, makes brief appearances throughout the volume and has the last word as well. Clearly, Red Bird is the poet herself, who comes to us during this particular winter of our discontent to sound a Cassandra-like warning, to teach us the hard lesson that this earth is fallen and fragile, now more than ever, and unless we learn to cherish the world, we will destroy it.

Oliver's characteristic voice has long been one of hope. For the past 45 years, she has written poems that call attention to the minute and miraculous beauty evident in the ordinary. Readers familiar with her work will find this sacral vision in such poems as "Winter and the Nuthatch," "Crow Says" and "Night Herons." As these titles, along with the title of the book, suggest, the collection is dominated by images of birds. At least 22 varieties are specifically named, each creature cast in the role of teacher, whom the poet envies and admires for its ability to "declare so simply/ to the world/ everything I have tried but still/ haven't been able/ to put into words" ("The Teachers"). In taking on the persona of the chief teacher, Red Bird, Oliver emulates her predecessors in the practice of American pastoral poetry, most notably Whitman and Frost. Those poets have famously interpreted the voices of the mockingbird, the thrush and the ovenbird, to name but a few, in poems that unfold in a distinctively American landscape and tell us the truths we need to know. These are Oliver's avowed masters, whose lead she follows in tracing out the complex relationship between human beings and the magnificent world we inhabit. And though there is a darkness that lurks beneath the luminous surfaces of these poets' best work, Oliver has in the past typically chosen to accentuate the

light. Not so in this volume. Dead center in this book celebrating the lives of the birds we find this poem:

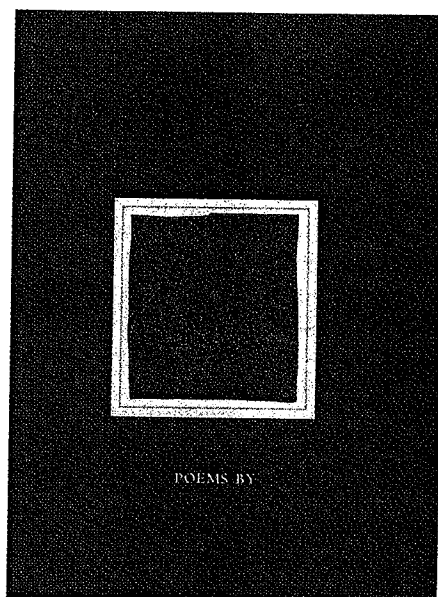
*Look, children, here is the shy,  
flightless dodo; the many-colored  
pigeon, named the passenger, the  
great auk, the Eskimo curlew, the  
woodpecker called the Lord God Bird,  
the...  
Come, children, hurry—there are  
so many  
more wonderful things to show  
you in  
the museum's dark drawers.*

In its relentless naming of extinct species (and the ellipsis indicating the disturbing fact that the list is not yet complete), its insistent call to the children and its concluding line, which locates these once-living creatures in a repository reserved for the dead things of the past, "Showing the Birds" is chilling. There is an urgency in this and Oliver's other poems about approaching environmental disaster that we do not find in Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much With Us" or Hopkins's "God's Grandeur," poems written in the 19th century warning readers, even so long ago, of

gered polar bear upon us. Though there is little expectation that we can recover the world as it once was, Oliver insists that we pay attention to this grim reality.

This urgency is evident in *Red Bird's* other lessons, as well, for all of these poems are saturated with the knowledge of mortality. Just as the earth and its splendid animals suffer death and loss, so, too, must human beings, the poet included. The speaker seems keenly aware of the fact that these may be her last days, her last poems and her last chance to communicate the truths she has discovered in her long apprenticeship to nature and to art. The collection serves as the poet's *apologia*, within which each poem speaks, in some measure, of her life's work: "I did not come into this world/ to be comforted./ I came, like red bird, to sing."

This elegiac strain is particularly poignant in "Self-Portrait," wherein the poet reveals her age (70), confesses her desire to be 20 again and expresses gratitude for the fact that despite the advance of years and the many losses she has suffered (including the unstated but understood loss of her long-time beloved part-



the insidious effects of progress. Oliver's poems intimate that the losses we suffer are irretrievable, needless and entirely our fault, thus placing the responsibility for the torn fields, the dying river and the endan-



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**September 12, 2008**

## Increased Raids and Checkpoint Arrests Endanger Undocumented Immigrants Threatened by Gulf Coast Storms



Undocumented immigrants along the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast have resisted mandatory evacuation orders out of fear they could be arrested and deported at checkpoints. The climate of fear around deportation has worsened as the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, or ICE, continues to step up its raids across the country, with two of the largest raids in US history taking place in the last five months. We speak to David Bacon, award-winning photojournalist, labor organizer and immigrant rights activist and author of *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Migrants*. [includes rush transcript]

Guest:

**David Bacon**, Veteran photojournalist, labor organizer and immigrant rights activist. His articles have appeared in *The Nation*, *American Prospect*, *Los Angeles Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*. He hosts a weekly radio show on KPFA in Berkeley, California. His latest book is *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Migrants*.

### RUSH TRANSCRIPT

This transcript is available free of charge. However, donations help us provide closed captioning for the deaf and hard of hearing on our TV broadcast. Thank you for your generous contribution.

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**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Nearly a million people have been ordered to evacuate their homes along the coast of Texas as Hurricane Ike prepares to strike the Gulf. The National Weather Service issued a stern warning for certain areas, saying that people who ignored the evacuation order could "face instant death."

But there's a portion of the population who might not evacuate out of fear. Undocumented immigrants in affected areas of Texas remain skeptical about the mandatory evacuation order, and they fear that they could be arrested and deported at checkpoints and evacuation centers. FEMA spokesman Dan Martinez said Thursday that there would be a "hurricane amnesty" for all undocumented migrants in Texas.

But earlier this summer, despite assurances to the contrary from Department of Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff, Border Patrol agents kept open checkpoints and apprehended a van of people trying to evacuate from Hurricane Dolly. Last month, many undocumented immigrants in New Orleans did not evacuate during Hurricane Gustav due to deportation concerns.

## WERE THE DAYS

man recalls the days  
books were books (not  
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### of Their Lives: en Age of Great n Publishers, Their and Authors

n. St. Martin's/Talley, \$35  
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-of-the-Month Club,  
ok a "love letter" to edi-  
tors, and though  
he's frank about  
people's foibles  
(like Alfred and  
Blanche Knopf's  
mercurial tem-  
pers), the tone is  
largely senti-  
sed on interviews with  
cipals, he recounts feats  
genius, like how Tom  
s made *All Things*  
mall a blockbuster,  
made St. Martin's a  
force. And there are  
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n Michael Bessie  
olita), the struggles of  
rove up the editorial  
he dissolution of great  
ms as money got tight  
were sold. It's difficult  
book's appeal to industry  
ut for insiders in a dif-  
fishing era, it's a delight  
se recollections of the  
Wall Street ruled  
Row. (Aug.)

foreign policy directed primarily toward  
securing peace in the world is surprising-  
ly pragmatic. (Sept.)

### Savage Mules:

**The Democrats and Endless War**  
Dennis Perrin. Verso, \$14.95 paper (120p)  
ISBN 978-1-84467-265-3

Proclaiming that "American political  
life has always been a feeding frenzy of  
delusion, uplift, and fantasy," blogger and  
satirist Perrin (*Mr. Mike*) focuses his at-  
tack more narrowly on the Democrats, ar-  
guing that from Andrew Jackson on, they  
have "robbed, cheated and lied to their  
constituents" in order to consolidate pow-  
er and maximize "mega-profits." The  
book moves from a historic overview to a  
contemporary critique of the Democratic  
support for the invasions of Afghanistan  
and Iraq, skewering such Democratic  
heavyweights as JFK, FDR, Bill Clinton  
and Jimmy Carter, "America's most un-  
derestimated imperialist." The final chapter  
offers a blow-by-blow account of the lib-  
eral blogger convention YearlyKos, an  
event that the author uses to illustrate his  
conviction that "the Dem [sic] elites will  
continue to gorge on corporate money  
and favors." Perrin undermines himself  
with his reliance on ad hominem attacks  
and joyless one-liners (JFK was "smoked,"  
genocide in Bosnia is an "Ian Fleming  
scenario," "the Iraq era had been satirical-  
ly deficient"). The result is a combination  
of self-righteousness and puerility. (Sept.  
18)

### The Opinion Makers: An Insider Exposes the Truth Behind the Polls

David W. Moore. Beacon, \$23.95 (208p) ISBN  
978-0-8070-4232-8

In this succinct and damning critique  
of the pitfalls of public opinion reporting,  
Moore (*How to Steal an Election*), former  
senior editor of the Gallup Poll, argues  
that today's polls report the whims rather  
than the will of the people due to an in-  
trinsic methodological problem: poll re-  
sults don't differentiate between "those  
who express deeply held views and those  
who have hardly, if at all, thought about  
an issue." Thus, respondents are com-  
pelled to provide an ill-considered, "top-  
of-mind response" because the method  
does not offer the option of expressing no

opinion. In Moore's view, forced-choice  
polls not only distort public opinion, they  
create a "legitimacy spin cycle," which  
damages U.S. democracy by "manufactur-  
ing a public consensus to serve those in  
power." Keen and witty throughout, his  
prose turns bitter as he condemns journal-  
ists, insisting they are fully aware of the  
polling flaws but turn a blind eye because  
"they like sharply divided groups and ex-  
treme reactions." However correct his  
claim and justified his outrage, his pro-  
posed antidote—that the media ought to  
enlighten its audience to its own igno-  
rance—feels more like a pipe dream than  
a practical prescription. (Sept.)

### ★ Illegal People:

#### How Globalization Creates Migra- tion and Criminalizes Immigrants

David Bacon. Beacon, \$25.95 (272p) ISBN  
978-0-8070-4226-7

In this incisive investigation of the  
global political and economic forces creat-  
ing migration, journalist and former labor  
organizer Bacon offers a detailed examina-  
tion of the trends transforming, for exam-  
ple, Mexican farmers into California farm  
workers. Bacon condemns efforts to crim-  
inalize illegal immigrants, noting that  
Congress's immigration proposals and de-  
bates take place outside any discussion of  
its own trade policies that displace work-  
ers and create migration in the first place.  
"The whole process that creates migrants  
is scarcely considered in the U.S. immi-  
gration debate," argues Bacon, who posits  
that displacement and migration are two  
perennially necessary ingredients of capi-  
talist growth. According to the author,  
the "same system... produces migration  
needs and uses that labor" while the vul-  
nerable undocumented or guest-worker  
status keeps that labor controllable and  
cheap. Readers disinclined to consider  
economic rights as human rights may  
balk at the general direction, but Bacon's  
timely analysis is as cool and competent  
as his labor advocacy is unapologetic. In  
mapping the political economy of migra-  
tion, with an unwavering eye on the  
rights and dignity of working people, Ba-  
con offers an invaluable corrective to  
America's hobbled discourse on immigra-  
tion and a spur to genuine, creative ac-  
tion. (Sept.)

### ★ Baghdad at Su- Commander's War

Peter Mansoor, foreword  
and Frederick Kagan. Yal  
ISBN 978-0-300-14069-9

This is a unique con-  
burgeoning literature c-  
lyzing the day-to-day j  
S. brigade in Baghdad  
Mansoor uses a broad s  
to address the military,  
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which tested officers ar  
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Vietnam neglect of cou  
makes a strong case for  
tary forces with civilian  
aid reconstruction in co  
operations. Above all, M  
the enduring impact of  
on war. There is never a  
says—or an easy exit. M

### Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Rule

Mark Mazower. Penguin P  
ISBN 978-1-59420-188-2

Columbia University  
er (*Inside Hitler's Greece*)  
able guide to the dynan  
nation of Europe. His f-  
bitions and foibles of th  
who believed that all of  
made to serve German i  
Mazower shows so well,  
about the occupation ha  
beforehand. The Nazis i  
their armies raced throu  
Soviet Union and the L-  
Nazi generals and old-li  
fought among themselv  
spoils. Mazower's most



## More reasons to take the polls with a huge grain of salt

by MikePhoenix

Tue Sep 09, 2008 at 09:44:46 PM PDT

I was listening to Portland, Oregon's progressive talk radio station this morning and got to hear Morning Show host Carl Wolfson interview David W. Moore a former vice-president of the Gallup organization. Mr Moore is also the author of a new book *The Opinion Makers*, which Wolfson praised highly, and has his own Website, *The Skeptical Pollster*. His name will may be familiar to those who have read Excelsior1's excellent diary *Busted!: Gallup, CBS, USA.Today, etc. Tinkers With Party ID Again*. During the interview, the former pollster gave us additional reasons not to panic about Obama's current polling numbers.

Moore below the fold.

MikePhoenix's diary :: ::

OK, hopefully that disgusting pun didn't lose too many of you. I am pretty much going to have to paraphrase the interview's main points from memory as it appears no transcript is available. If somebody out in kossackland can find one, I will update this diary. You can find more details concerning these topics by visiting his Website.

Mr. Moore points out in this interview that the question pollsters usually ask is something along the lines of "If the election was held today, who would you vote for?" The fact is the election is being held November 4th, not today. But if they asked "Who will you vote for on November 4th?", many more people would answer that they didn't know. This is just one way that pollsters push individuals who are basically undecided to make a choice. A substantial number of those who appeared to move to McCain this week and to Obama last week after each man's respective convention are basically undecideds who are paying little attention to the election. When such folks are pushed to make a choice, they give the pollster the name that they have heard the most positive things about recently.

The author gives another reason to be skeptical of polling results. Around 80% of those contacted by pollsters to give their opinion refuse to take part in the survey. This means that their polling data represents the segment of the population that chooses to take part in surveys. How do there views differ from those who choose not to do so? That's an open question.

Carl Wolfson asked his guest about a topic that has gotten a lot of buzz on this site. Do pollsters interview the growing group of mostly younger Americans who have no land-lines. The response was that, Gallup does interview cell phone users, but many firmas do not.

So there really is no reason to despair because the polls don't look as good as we would like, just as there is no reason to proclaim Obama a shoe-in when the polls look good.

**Tags:** Polls, David W. Moore, KPOJ, Chicken Little, Vote, Election, President (all tags) :: Previous Tag Versions

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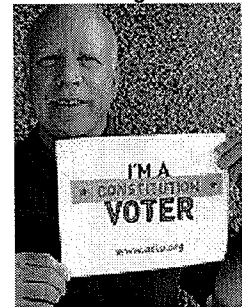
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THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

## A keen look at Boston's nature

### 'Paradise' covers landscape, flora, fauna, folklore

By Michael Kenney | September 21, 2008

#### **The Paradise of All These Parts: A Natural History of Boston**

By John Hanson Mitchell  
*Beacon*, 254 pp., \$24.95

When Walter Muir Whitehill wrote the preface to the first edition of his classic "Boston: A Topographical History" back in 1959, he described his daily ramble from North Station to the Boston Athenaeum with a discerning, if not always approving, eye, noting that "no right-minded Bostonian would dream of walking along a street if he could by any chance cut through an alley headed even approximately in the direction he is going."

Close to a half-century later, John Hanson Mitchell recounts an extended series of strolls through the city's natural spaces in "The Paradise of All These Parts" with an eye as admiring, and as occasionally disapproving, as Whitehill's.

And, with the possible exception of Whitehill's, this may well be the finest book about the town as a place, highly personal and at the same time keenly descriptive.

The competition should be steep, Mitchell notes, for Boston "was settled by a highly literate people and for this reason happens to be one of the best-documented places in the United States" in everything from politics to philosophy.

But not in terms of "the actual nature of the place." And that, he writes, is odd, for "the city would not exist were it not for its deep-water harbor and navigable rivers, its sharp hills underlain by water-bearing gravel beds, its abundance of fish and waterfowl and its nearby wooded hills."

It is an oversight Mitchell, who lives in Littleton and is one of the region's leading naturalists as editor of *Sanctuary*, the Massachusetts Audubon Society's magazine, sets out to redress and does so largely with great success.

Marring what is otherwise a close-to-perfect book is its lack of maps. It would have been good to be able to follow the paths of Mitchell's meanderings. (To remedy that omission, try Nancy S. Seasholes's "Walking Tours of Boston's Made Land," with maps both historical and contemporary, as a companion read.) Still, this book delivers a strong sense of the city and its residents.

One afternoon, Mitchell is "watching the action" from a sea wall near Columbus Park when he strikes up a conversation with a man in khakis, flannel shirt, and L. L. Bean hunting boots who he takes to be "an outlander eccentric" from an old proper Boston family.

"What the hell is that?" the man interrupts. "A little gull? They shouldn't be here now, should they?"

The conversation turns generally to birds, but for Mitchell it's getting tedious because he is more interested in identifying the gull.

Perhaps, Mitchell thinks, as the man "tilted away back toward the town," it is a rare California gull, or more likely a Bonaparte's, but it "flapped off, skimming over the gray waters to settle farther offshore, where I could get no field marks whatsoever."

The waterfront has a particular attraction for Mitchell, whose first view of the city was from offshore, in a long-ago summer when he was working as a deck hand on a schooner.

"Early one July morning," he recalls, "I came out on deck and saw a brownish fog on the shoreline. Rising through the mists were the towers of the coastal city." And as the fog lifted to reveal "the hilled skyline and the gray-brown granite of the buildings," the city was "looking for all the world like John Winthrop's divine city, save that the signature hills had been leveled."

Beyond all the discussions of the city's natural history and his warmhearted recounting of encounters with a range of characters, Mitchell is at his best in making the reader think anew about the city and its history.

He is walking one evening through the Charlesgate when he sees the Citgo sign, "that modernist landmark of the city [casting] an otherworldly glow above the town."

Noting the protests back in the early 1980s when Citgo said it was going to dismantle the sign - and earlier protests when the sign was erected - Mitchell sketches out a neatly reasoned discussion of Bostonians as "given to revolt, no matter what."

There were the original Puritan founders, then the Sons of Liberty, and then, "in what may have been [the city's] finest hour," the abolitionists' campaign against slavery.

But just as the reader might think Mitchell is heading off in praise of spectacular pop art, with maybe a riff on Sister Corita's Dorchester gas tanks, he asks why Bostonians, "generally an environmentally sensitive group," would champion "the emblem of a petroleum company."

Perhaps, he supposes, it was fitting to preserve the sign because this piece of "electronic blight" over the Back Bay skyline "is a perfect symbol of all that went wrong in Boston in the 1950s" - with the slicing of Storrow Drive through the Esplanade as a prime example.

Such language might suggest that in the end Mitchell has decided that the Boston of today exists in a kind of fallen state, a judgment he mutters at one point in the book. But it's more telling that he chose to take his title from Captain John Smith's marveling view from 1614 of a place that was "the paradise of all these parts."

*Michael Kenney is a freelance writer who lives in Cambridge. ■*

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