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Introduction

First as student and then as scholar, I found myself drawn to Orestes Brownson, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Will Rogers, and Hollywood's motion pictures. Does such a diverse list suggest a fickle heart? Before you draw that conclusion, let me tell what I have found them to have in common. All show an acute consciousness of American values, reflecting them in creative ways that can deepen our awareness of their times. Will Rogers did this in syndicated weekly and daily newspaper articles as well as in

more than seventy motion pictures. Benjamin Whorf, whose “linguistic relativity hypothesis” stemmed from his studies of Native American languages, stepped outside his time, hoping to share an Emersonian vision of human harmony with self, society, and Nature. Audubon, Stowe, and Brownson all wrestled in unique ways with the political and spiritual aspirations of their day while Brookline’s Frederick Henry Hedge and Amy Lowell evinced mind-sets cultivated by a privileged Boston suburb. And, of course, the movie culture has constantly influenced and reflected American values and visions—as much now as ever. Wars are constantly with us and so are war films, often shaping and reflecting national mood swings. These journalists, artists, philosophers, and genre influences are the focal points for *America Reflected: Language, Satire, Film, and the National Mind*, a selection of my scholarly efforts over the last forty years.

America Reflected: Beginning with Brownson

My initiation to cultural studies began with an undergraduate honors thesis devoted to Orestes Augustus Brownson (1803-1876). Brownson seemed like a productive choice because he had been committed to so many different movements and publications from the 1820s through the 1870s: he was more than just a social activist and prominent democratic spokesman; he was also a philosopher for whom epistemology and faith were paramount. *Orestes A. Brownson: Epistemology of a Crucified Redeemer* explored the relationships among the following elements: political activism for a just society, epistemological investigation of *how* we know, and a search for faith in an era of “isms.” Brownson sought salvation through service as a public intellectual. Like John Bunyan’s allegorical Pilgrim, he trudged from movement to movement, ultimately losing faith in the *demos* after the “hard cider” presidential campaign of 1840—it was won by the Whig, William Henry Harrison, rather than the incumbent democrat, Martin Van Buren. After a few years of wandering in a spiritual wasteland, Brownson embraced Catholicism—which he valued as a hierarchical faith privileging the intellectual elite, while *also* caring for the laboring classes. The lesson derived from a close study of the evolving perspective recorded in Brownson’s *Boston Quarterly Review* (1838-1842) was that cultural historians must be simultaneously attentive to politics, and myth, as well as philosophical issues often overlooked by historians who can be myopic in their search for “cold, hard facts.”

During my undergraduate years (1959-1963), students and teachers were excited by such books as *The Virgin Land* (1950) and *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (1962)—both pioneering studies of America’s popular myths and symbols. Henry Nash Smith, in his classic *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950) traced America’s proud

celebration of its self image as “nature’s nation.” In his short, colorful book, John William Ward sketched the portrait of a hero who promised to bring the frontier’s natural virtue and egalitarian spirit to Washington—it is a cliché, today, but was an innovative marketing concept in 1828. Ward documented Andrew Jackson’s charismatic influence with news stories, cartoons, and popular songs like “The Hunters of Kentucky.” Both books used the concept of “myth” to indicate a cluster of values combining intellectual content and emotional power. While not uncritical of potential excesses, both scholars presumed that human beings are myth-making creatures.

In the last years of graduate study, I attended meetings of the American Studies Association and the Popular Culture Association where senior scholars Daniel Boorstin, Russel Nye, and Ray Browne invited acolytes to march with them to the newest scholarly frontier, the study of popular culture. As I moved forward in trace of these pioneers, I retained the lesson from the Brownson project: studies of culture should bundle elements of politics, history, and epistemology. *America Reflected* maps the weigh stations along the trail of my own intellectual pilgrimage. Stopping points included Will Rogers, satirist; Benjamin Lee Whorf, anthropological linguist; America’s wars and war eras; as well Harriet Beecher Stowe, novelist; Frederick Henry Hedge, Unitarian minister; Amy Lowell, poet; John James Audubon, naturalist; and a host of films and filmmakers—a diverse group of people and movements, but all touchstones of our national culture. Two—Lowell and Hedge—were from Brookline, Massachusetts and of special interest in my search for what we now call “roots.”

Will Rogers in the 1920s and 1930s

America Reflected begins by tracing the evolution of Will Rogers as a symbolic man, journalist, and film image (Chapter 1). He wrote “daily telegrams” from 1926 until his death; these insightful capsules were carried on the first page of newspapers across the land. Longer was his experience with weekly articles—which allowed him to study public persons and major issues of the day from 1922 to 1935. Beginning in 1920, the Newspaper Enterprise Association engaged Rogers to report on the Republican and Democratic presidential nominating conventions. *The Saturday Evening Post* (hereafter *SEP*) dispatched Rogers on world tours to check out how ordinary people were faring in a troubled world. As part of a 1926 European jaunt, Rogers sent home humorous “open letters” to President Calvin Coolidge (Chapter 3). Showing a better sense of humor than what one might expect from a taciturn Vermonter, Coolidge returned the compliment by inviting Rogers to brief him at the White House upon the Oklahoman’s return. Will Rogers was a favorite writer for the *SEP* because the editor, George Horace Lorimer,

although a wealthy Philadelphian, shared many values with his Midwestern correspondent (Chapters 2 and 5). However, there were significant differences in their world views, differences which reveal Rogers' greater generosity of spirit. In silent and sound motion pictures based on regional novels—some which had been serialized in the *SEP* previous to book publication and then later screen adaptation—Will Rogers represented middle west values in action. The novels and scripts prepared for the films sometimes included Nativist animadversions against Irish and Italian immigrants, Jews, and African Americans, but, when the cameras started rolling, Rogers exercised his privilege as a star to deviate from these unworthy portrayals; indeed, he usually found a way to collaborate with the minority and underdog characters in the films to overcome the Establishment figures. This cooperation was especially noteworthy in the rural communities brought to life by such films as *Dr. Bull* (1933) and *In Old Kentucky* (1935)—two Twentieth Century-Fox productions which also reflected the world view of director John Ford.

As my interest in making motion pictures blossomed, opportunities emerged from regular research visits to the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma—where thousands of photographs, sound recordings, and paper documents boisterously invited visual treatment. With the help of Patrick Griffin and R.C. Raack, I produced an “historian-made film” for which all film archive research, interviews, and the editing were directed by trained scholars. Entitled *Will Rogers' 1920s: A Cowboy's Guide to the Times* (1976), the resulting historical compilation explored the ways in which the Oklahoman interpreted the major issues and personalities of the silent era (Chapter 6). One major goal was to replace overbearing and didactic narration with music and montage—in other words, to communicate cinematically rather than by an illustrated lecture. The film which resulted from this project won a host of awards and was shown on public television in Oklahoma as well as nationally on The Discovery Channel. Rather than dwell on the tragic 1935 demise of the cowboy philosopher, the film evoked his special place in the 1920s as both a spokesman and cultural symbol. The Council for International Exhibition (CINE) presented this study with a Golden Eagle, the highest award in the United States for a non-theatrical film. (It is currently shown daily at the Will Rogers Memorial and Museum.)

Benjamin Lee Whorf: Brownson Redux?

Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) is a prominent figure in the history of linguistics and communications; as English as a Second Language (ESL) becomes an established component of the university curriculum, Whorf has found a new academic niche. In

2009, two philosophers, writing in the journal *Philosophy Compass*, announced that recent empirical studies had brought Whorf back into focus in a virtual revival of linguistic relativity studies (Reines and Prinz). Like the Orestes Brownson of my senior thesis at Harvard, Whorf was fascinated with studies in perception. At the same time, he shared with Will Rogers concerns about industrial development; indeed, he admired the Native Americans of the Southwest for their cultural resistance to the technological thinking of the American mainstream. (Much has been written, by the way, about the Cherokee perspective which informed the satire of Will Rogers.)

A graduate of MIT (1918) in chemical engineering, Whorf was fascinated by the “new physics” of the day which he saw as releasing humanity from the positivism of the 19th century. He lamented the polemical conflict between soi-disant proponents of science and fundamentalist defenders of religion during the Scopes trial, interpreting the debate to be symptomatic of the broader unrest of the 1920s and 1930s and clear evidence of popular misunderstanding of the implications of the work of Max Planck and Albert Einstein (Chapter 7). (In this regard, he joined such British writers as Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) and Sir James Jeans (1877-1946) whose names appear on Whorf’s reading lists for this period.) It is my contention that the consistent goal of his work in Native American studies was to prove the appropriateness of different ways of “knowing”—both the scientific method (dominant for Western languages) and the way of spiritual intuition (dominant for Native American tongues). During his mature years as a thinker, Whorf argued that a proper study of the linkages among language, mind, and reality would resolve apparent antinomies. In this approach, he was in the New England tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, and other Transcendentalists—including Orestes A. Brownson, at least in one phase of the mercurial reformer’s epistemological pilgrimage toward Catholicism and conservatism.

Whorf’s name is often associated with that of his teacher, linguist Edward Sapir—with whom he studied at Yale University and for whom he taught a class or two during his apprentice years. The basic differences behind their language studies are explored; while Whorf hungered for belief, Sapir was a modern humanist (Chapter 8). Previously unpublished papers by Whorf provided me with a new perspective on the religious concerns of Sapir’s prize pupil. As a believer, Whorf saw the empirical validity of the doctrine of original sin in the world around him; he deplored the arms race of his day, and he predicted a future war from the air which would target civilian population centers. At the same time, he lamented the vulgarization of science by pundits such as H.L. Mencken—whom the New Englander hoped to challenge in public debate after publication of a potentially controversial novel entitled *The Ruler of the Universe* (1925).

Alas, Whorf never enjoyed the public exposure he sought because no publisher would take up the manuscript.

But Whorf never lost interest in finding a place for faith in an age of science. This motivation suffused his language studies and is the major difference between the New Englander and his teacher. Sapir was a gifted anthropologist and linguist, but also a sophisticated modern who took joy in the arts—he was both a poet and a pianist—without the need to introduce the topic of religious faith. Drawing on the insights of Franz Boas, pioneer of American Indian studies at the Smithsonian, Sapir explored the unique formal characteristics and poetic qualities of the American Indian languages. The Yale professor was impressed by the spiritual richness of American Indian culture, but he did not detect a special gift in the Navaho and Hopi tongues to praise, nor a dangerous limitation in English to cause alarm. In contrast, a close reading of Whorf reveals that he discerned metaphysical promises in the pioneering work of both Boas and Sapir. The “linguistic relativity hypothesis” would be Whorf’s special “spin” on this heritage with the goal of relieving the spiritual drought of a lost generation (Chapter 8).

Whorf offered the Native American world view as an alternative. In the late 1930s, his ideas burgeoned about the spiritual resources of Hopi and Navaho language and culture—in part because of his anthropological studies and in part as a result of exposure to the writings of French and German linguists. Both Antoine Fabre d’Olivet (1767-1825) and F. Max Müller (1823-1900) were visionaries who laced their linguistic studies with a soupçon of mysticism. Their books encouraged Whorf to postulate an antinomy between Indo-European languages (which he designated “Standard Average European” and abbreviated as SAE) and Amer-Indian tongues. The latter group—especially the Navaho and Hopi—communicated in languages more facile with the spiritual dimension of life while offering a more agile way of describing the world of energy and matter revealed by the “new physics.” By doing so, they proved the insularity of SAE (Chapter 9). These findings clearly went beyond mere linguistic studies and provided the basis for a broad perspective on the putative “progress” of what we now call the “first world.”

For Whorf, the continued use of military force was a sign that Western cultures were in much need of complementary perspectives.

America’s Wars: Reflections in Film and Television

One of the career-changing decisions I made in the 1970s was to tap my experience as a Marine Corps officer (1963-1966). Academic studies of novels, films, and television documentaries revealed to me such basic ignorance of the tactics and equipment that the

generalizations reached by such works lost credibility. With basic facts in error, how could the conclusions built upon them *not* be in error? For example, if you do not know the difference between an M-79 grenade launcher and a 3.5 rocket launcher, what else do you miss in studying America's infantry at war? What are the three basic types of ambush and what are the advantages of each? Why are the two most dangerous elements on the battlefield a Marine lieutenant and his map? For lack of understanding of similar details—or appreciation that the last query is a sardonic joke—it seemed obvious that academics were unable to differentiate the realities and images of war in personal narratives, novels, poems, and films. Having spent three years of my life on active duty (plus grueling boot camps during college summers), I decided that it would not be off target as a scholar to apply the cultural perspective to America's wars (see Preface and Chapter 24 for details about my military experiences).

Part 2 of *America Reflected* devotes attention to military images and realities for World War I, World War II, the Cold War, and Vietnam. Sixteen chapters interweave historical themes with readings of literature and motion pictures devoted to the conflicts; throughout, there is a pervasive concern about how perception and memory affect interpretation of these tragic historical crises. For the complete "Introduction," go to www.petercollins.com.)

Vietnam

As a returning Vietnam veteran, it was my distinct displeasure to observe how both print and television media egregiously misreported the conflict—both in regard to policy, and also when depicting our servicemen. From 1980-1983, in collaboration with David H. Culbert (Louisiana State U) and Townsend Ludington (U of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), I researched and directed a 2.5-hour documentary entitled *Television's Vietnam: Impact of Visual Images*. This longish historical compilation made maximum use of Marine Corps combat footage, reconstructed newsreels, television commercials of the day, popular tunes, and the testimonials of those involved—from the battlefield to the diplomatic and White House echelons of the struggle (Chapter 18). This "epic" production was edited down to an hour-length program and "bootlegged" without my knowledge; one of the recipients of the truncated version was Reed Irvine (d. 2001), Director of Accuracy in Media (Washington, DC), who telephoned me at my office in Morrill Hall, Oklahoma State U, to suggest a reworking of the program using additional archival footage and interviews. Together, we designed a major conference on the subject in Washington, DC and, with the help of additional interviews with media analysts, journalists, and diplomats, produced two hour-length programs: the first, *Television's Vietnam: The Real Story* (1985), was in rebuttal to the PBS series *Vietnam: A*

Television History (1983) with Charlton Heston as the narrator/host. Heston also hosted the second program, *Television's Vietnam: The Impact of Media* (1986), a documentary focusing on specific stories from the Tet offensive 1968. The reporting of Tet served as a microcosm of the errors committed by the press throughout the years of direct U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict (1965-1973). These programs were distilled from a considerable research base—about the existing fiction and nonfiction on Vietnam—established long before production (Chapter 17). In addition, as a veteran, I was highly motivated to balance the public record, albeit in my second language, Spanish, which allowed me to be more forthright on the personal motivations animating the film projects (Chapter 24). Over the years, I have been asked by teachers to recommend Vietnam documentaries for the classroom (Chapters 23 and 25), but the prolific—though delayed—production of Hollywood versions of Vietnam demanded analysis (Chapter 17). Despite these animadversions, to my surprise, I was asked to step in for Oliver Stone on a college campus after he reneged on his contract with the student speakers' forum. (He had been offered \$30,000 to give an hour's presentation; my PowerPoint lecture with clips turned out to be yet another of my charitable contributions to the principle of "free speech.")

During production phase of these programs, some academic panels on which I appeared were picketed by protestors—most memorably by the Young Socialist League at a 1981 national Popular Culture Association meeting in Cincinnati. In the run up to broadcast of the programs on public television (PBS), the producer of the 23 episode WGBH series, Richard Ellison, warned the press about the—to his mind—egregious errors of our documentaries and predicted a "chilling effect" in the wake of their broadcasts by PBS. In the afterglow of an annual Phoenix, Arizona junket for television critics, most urban dailies in the US echoed Ellison's dire predictions, although the *New York Times* distinguished itself as a defender of the programs and their right to be aired (Chapter 19). Ellison ceased his harangues only after the President of WGBH told him, in a public forum, that he was out of line.

General Westmoreland and his Trials

During the Vietnam conflict, General William C. Westmoreland went from the elevated status of *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" to its "Man on the Spot." Westmoreland was a well-intentioned and honorable man who became a scapegoat for America's Vietnam debacle. It was my pleasure to organize a conference in 1980 at which Westmoreland volunteered to share his views; the event was timely because his

autobiography, *A Soldier Reports*, had just been published. He won over a full auditorium of initially unsympathetic students and faculty by his unpretentiousness sincerity and his passion to defend the legacy of Vietnam veterans. Throughout his retirement, he and wife “Kitsy” gave of their time and prestige for veterans events, seminars, television programs, hoping to lift the stigma borne by troops who came home to an indifferent—or, in some cases, hostile—nation.

In the same time frame as our Chapel Hill conference, Mike Wallace approached the General aboard a commercial airline—Wallace was seated in first class and came back to coach class to talk with the retired leader. The CBS television celebrity gave every impression that he was interested in pursuing the truth about the intelligence estimates of Vietcong and regular enemy units prior to the Tet offensive—and the contribution of those reports to the confusion and dismay resulting from the sudden Tet attacks at the end of January, 1968. Westmoreland agreed to fly to New York City for a filmed interview with Wallace and thus began work on a controversial documentary entitled *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception* (1982). The “Westmoreland trial” (*Westmoreland v. CBS*) which followed the broadcast of the exposé received banner headlines week after week especially after sources inside CBS headquarters leaked details about unfair questioning by Wallace and fraudulent editing by director George Crile (Chapter 20). Sometime after the trial, a cherry wood box of research materials from the trial was prepared for scholarly use by the Clearwater Publishing Company; it contained microfiche copies of the pre-trial depositions and other documents from the courtroom drama. This treasure trove of information was borrowed via interlibrary loan and I remember two chilly months during the winter of 1996 vetting the lengthy testimony of the CIA’s George Carver deposed in preparation for the trial. Although a major player in the numbers debate, Carver was never interviewed by Director George Crile until the post-production phase of the project, most likely as a self-protective ploy. Carver’s deposed testimony revealed that a legitimate debate among intelligence agencies had been transmuted by CBS into a nefarious plot—an error of conspiratorial interpretation of the kind frequently embraced by journalists and other amateur historians (Chapter 21).

But Westmoreland was not the only Vietnam-era scapegoat. The subtitle of journalist Neil Sheehan’s *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* indicated an exposé of a leading optimist about the war in Southeast Asia, a government official whom Peter Arnett, David Halberstam, and Neil Sheehan—at least in the early days of the conflict—relied upon for colorful inside stories (Chapter 22). Sheehan’s epic “history” portrays a brilliant man fighting a bungled war; at a critical turn of his

research, the investigative reporter even discovered a back story of perverted sex for his protagonist, a story introduced as a devastating *ad hominem* argument to discredit the war's most convincing proponent. The *New York Times* correspondent describes himself as "a newsman who got diverted into history"—and it shows. *A Bright Shining Lie* is fascinating reading, but is guided by the same crusading journalistic perspective which led to much of the errant reporting of the era itself—rather than being a detached analysis written with the benefit of hindsight. In the Neil Sheehan version, the US military was blind to changing realities, especially in the Third World. General W.C. Westmoreland epitomized this myopia in his choice of a "big unit" strategy—rather than listening to the wisdom of Marine General Victor Krulak who advocated placing combined US and ARVN units in each threatened village. The book's message is that national leadership should be wrested from the hands of aging governmental and military elites. A new generation—for some unexplained reason, 100% of whom are Harvard graduates—has the public interest at heart with David Halberstam representing the reportorial side and Daniel Ellsberg standing out as the model policy analyst. Within the book, Ellsberg is lauded for being both a Harvard Fellow *and* a company commander in the Marine Reserves, the perfect balance of thought and action. Sheehan concludes that the press and geniuses like Ellsberg turned against America because they were forced to do so—not because they espoused a competing ideology.

During the summer of 1998, HBO broadcast its film adaptation of *A Bright Shining Lie*, with Bill Paxton playing John Paul Vann. If it is true that the WGBH series on Vietnam would have been a better work of history had it followed more faithfully the narrative of Stanley Karnow's companion history, it is equally true that the film version of Sheehan's epic would have been more worthwhile if the screenwriter and director, Terry George, had *read* the book. Instead, the film recycles familiar clichés of the war era—many of them either disproven or seriously revised since the 1975 American debacle. The film's treatment of the 1963 Buddhist immolations shows no historical perspective or interest in the many scholarly studies—to include Sheehan's nuanced version. The famous photograph of Kim Phuc burned by napalm and running toward the camera is presented as an atrocity by careless Americans in 1967 when it was an accident of war committed by South Vietnamese in 1972. Tet, in 1968, is presented using the standard misleading microcosms of the day. In all, HBO spent \$13 million to revive the anti-Establishment "spin" of the 1960s reporting. Even putative friends of the project were revulsed. After reading the script, Daniel Ellsberg, who is vital to the narrative of both book and film, threatened a law suit, demanding that his character's name be changed. He concluded a stinging memo to director/writer Terry George with a coup de

grace: “That [changing his name] would not solve all my troubling concerns about this script. What would go a long way in that direction would be to change two other real names in it, as well, to frankly fictional ones: ‘John Paul Vann’ and ‘Vietnam’” (quoted in Chapter 22).

Other Figures and National Myths and the Film Record

Part 3 of *America Reflected* focuses on selected figures and films—in two cases, fascinating people from my home town of Brookline, Massachusetts. Founded in 1705, Brookline is an independent suburb just west of Boston and contiguous with it. The town has nurtured writers, scholars, and filmmakers—from Amy Lowell (poet) to Mike Wallace (adversarial journalist) to Richard Goodwin (presidential speech writer) to Ellen Goodman (pundit) to the Albert and David Maysles (pioneers of direct documentary). Two chapters of local history are here devoted to leading hometown figures. Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890) was the only New England Transcendentalist fluent in German. (Many of Immanuel Kant’s ideas were imported into New England by way of English translations or in French through the writings of Victor Cousin, a pen pal of Brownson.) Hedge, unlike other members of the “Hedge Club”—later called “the Transcendentalist Club”—remained within the Unitarian fold; his flirting with ideas about liberating the ego were counterpoised by a steadfast respect for tradition, a characteristic ambivalence for many nurtured in a protected and stable Boston suburb (Chapter 27). Also studied in detail is another denizen of Brookline, Amy Lowell (1874-1925), an iconoclastic member of a proud family whose childhood diaries disclose a youthful search for identity which flourished like the garden of “Patterns” in the poems of her maturity (Chapter 28). Her rootedness was such that her headstone (alas, in Cambridge) is satisfied to identify her simply as “Amy Lowell of Brookline.” Although of the product of Calvinism and Connecticut, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s (1811-1896) spiritual search connects with Lowell’s theme of identity. Chapter 26 explores this theme as it surfaced in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the regional novels in which she nostalgically evoked the *weltanschauung* of early New England. With passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, the shame of slavery overwhelmed Stowe; her compulsion to write the anti-slavery tract stemmed from her conflicted sense of being a scion of Calvinism in an age of romantic optimism. She found self expression for her anguish by writing about the dilemma of slaves in the American South.

America’s attitudes toward nature are central to our national identity, an historical principle recognized long before it was formally codified by Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous 1893 address, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” It is a

revealing reflection on our culture that John James Audubon (1785-1851) fervently shared the expansionist enthusiasms of his day; the “bird man” admired pioneer settlement, extractive industry, and the growth of cities—indeed, the full menu of Manifest Destiny— at the same time he recorded the disappearing aviary beauties of the wilderness (Chapter 29). The same kind of ambivalence about industrial development is reflected in the post-WWII motion picture, *Tulsa* (1949). Like Audubon, the makers of this crusading film were often more on the side of exploitation than their stated conservationist philosophy would seem to have justified (Chapter 31). Will Rogers understood these contrary feelings and, as a national spokesman for the 1920s and 1930s, repeatedly played to them in his daily and weekly articles. As part of his fascination with the Native American language and culture, Benjamin Whorf also shared in the dilemma; an offspring of his research as an anthropological linguist, he hoped, would be the lesson of cultural humility. His late articles call for an admission by Western civilization that technological advances need to be tempered by spiritual growth. Indeed, he saw himself as living proof that an MIT graduate could be a man of faith. In the film *Tulsa*, this search for balance is symbolized by the romantic choices for the protagonist, Cherokee Lansing (Susan Hayward). Initially, she is attracted to Bruce Tanner (Lloyd Gough), whose goal is to extract as much oil as possible in the most wasteful way; later in the film, she recognizes that the oil industry must respect the environment, leading her to turn to Brad Brady (Robert Preston), spokesman for New Deal-style planning.

The New Deal films of the Roosevelt Administration are recognized for their innovative work in social documentary, but they are rich texts for understanding the vision of FDR as he sought to heal the economy *and* the land. David Lilienthal’s book, *TVA: Democracy in Action* (1944) is a classic book describing the environmental problems of the day and the presenting government planning as an ideal—on a regional basis subsuming many states. Two films by Pare Lorentz, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and *The River*, synthesize government views about the careless treatment of the land which led to drought and floods, but are also successful works of art that stir the emotions as they weave together editing, music, and evocative narration. Made for theatrical distribution, these short films are worthy of perennial study by those seeking America reflected (Chapter 30).

Conclusion

The quest for *America Reflected* began with Brownson. His spiritual journey paralleled many of the twists and turns found in the lives of Amy Lowell, Harriet Beecher Stowe,

and Frederick Henry Hedge. Along with some great living teachers, he instructed me that cultural studies should be guided by concerns which transcend the trendy and dodge the dogmatic—even when the results are unpopular. Will Rogers added a sense of humor and an understanding that each era needs its spokesmen—whose messages mean much to their times, even as their limitations become obvious to later generations. Benjamin Whorf carried the interest in epistemology to the margins of culture and understanding, questioning the entire Western tradition and calling for alternative spiritual resources to complement our limited *weltanschauung*. War experiences and activist work for veterans after the Vietnam conflict reminded me of the goodness of ordinary people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for a worthy cause—as they did in the previous national conflicts studied in this collection—WWI, WWII, and the Cold War. My own immersion in war as a small unit leader in a time of conflict and domestic debate endowed me with a perspective unusual for an academic. In particular, it gave me an aperçu into the ideological blinders of the press—which is populated by an elite with as much pack subjectivity as any other elite in our culture. The Brookline background and the experience of leadership gave me tolerance for the errors of decision makers caught on the treadmill of history while constrained by the political forces and limited real-time information. But it all began with Brownson’s insight that the cultural historian needs to consider modes of perception—even his own—as much as history and politics. If we do not strive for such a perspective, we will merely reflect the predilections of our class and place, thereby adding to the ambient noise of our time rather than contributing insight and wisdom.

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