

**ROADSIDE EMPIRES:
How the Chains
Franchised America**
by Stan Luxenberg
Viking, 1985
313 pp. \$17.95

It is the rare American town that does not have its own McDonald's restaurant. This most successful of franchise businesses has become a model for others—corporations that sell the right to sell everything from automobile mufflers to suntans. The men who pioneered the first chains were often hands-on entrepreneurs: Colonel Sanders, decked out in white suit and string tie, took to the road in 1956 to market the chicken fried in supersecret 11-herbs-and-spices batter he originally sold in his Corbin, Ky., restaurant. For years, he personally supervised the restaurants that bore his name. Luxenberg, a free-lance business writer, finds the remarkable success of the chains somewhat puzzling: Why, he wonders, does a people that claims to prize diversity embrace so avidly the big franchise chains, where all aspects of business are, at least in principle, standardized? In part, the answer lies in brisk advertising campaigns. More important to consumers, perhaps, are convenience, predictability, and low cost. To Luxenberg, however, such virtues come at a very high price. Over the past 30 years, franchises have obliterated much of American regional culture, commerce, and cuisine. The various chains are likely to grow, but franchise corporations face some challenges. Many franchise holders chafe under strict and often arbitrary company guidelines. And there has even been talk of unionizing among the poorly paid armies of fast-food workers.

**ADULT ILLITERACY IN
THE UNITED STATES:
Report to the Ford
Foundation**
by Carman St. John Hunter
and David Harman
McGraw-Hill, 1985
224 pp. \$8.95

The U.S. Bureau of the Census concluded in 1980 that over 99.5 percent of all adults in this country read or write. That statistic would be encouraging were it not for the fact that most illiterate people do not fill out census forms. And, in most cases, those so incapacitated are too embarrassed to ask for help. These two books give a more accurate assessment. Hunter, an educational consultant, and Harman, an Israeli professor of education, figure that 23 million American adults cannot read at all; some 37 million more cannot understand an apartment lease, a utility bill, a

ILLITERATE AMERICA
by Jonathan Kozol
Doubleday, 1985
270 pp. \$15.95

paycheck stub listing deductions. The cost to society is high. Kozol, author of *Death at an Early Age* (1967), estimates that U.S. taxpayers spend at least \$20 billion a year on welfare and unemployment benefits, prison maintenance, and court costs directly attributable to adult illiteracy. "Will anything be done?" asks Kozol. The 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education exhorted parents to read aloud to their children. Illiterate parents, helpless to obey, perpetuate a cycle of illiteracy. Last year, the U.S. government spent \$100 million on programs to teach adults to read—an average of \$1.65 per illiterate adult. In 1982, the director of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education estimated that it would take a minimum of \$5 billion to make serious progress in reducing illiteracy. Together, the various existing remedial programs—supported by government, nonprofit groups, business—reach only four percent of illiterate Americans. The authors' feelings are strong; Kozol, in particular, is not given to understatement. For all that, he sounds something like a voice in the wilderness.

Arts & Letters

THE INTELLECTUAL FOLLIES:
A Memoir of the Literary Venture in New York and Paris
 by Lionel Abel
 Norton, 1984
 304 pp. \$17.95

An anecdotal account of the intellectual life of New York and Paris from the 1930s to the present, this memoir is an informative addition to a rapidly growing genre. Abel, a playwright and critic, writes with irony-tinged nostalgia of the artists and intellectuals who enlivened Greenwich Village and the Left Bank with revolutionary ideas that they thought would help usher in a new age. For most of Abel's peers, the key decision of the '30s was the choice of a political hero—most often either Trotsky or Stalin. During that time, Abel writes, "New York City went to Russia," and it stayed there until Stalin signed a pact with Hitler in 1939. Abel also explores the artistic and philosophic controversies of the time. Sympathetic to the moral confusion that gave rise to such movements