

sumer who buys to catch up and the Vance Packard view of the consumer as dupe. Critics now contend that people choose what they buy as a way of defining and understanding themselves and their society. Goods are a kind of language, and contemporary arguments turn on whether the language fosters or limits human expression.

Strikingly, the book says little about branding per se. Essays allude to how corporations manage and modify their brands, but not to how brands are most accurately valued, or how some brands have been successfully extended and others have not. If branding is a kind of language, we don't hear much from the native speakers. The title, with its dot-com period, makes a pretty good book about theories of consumption, a well-trod field, seem like something unique and exciting: an up-to-the-minute study of branding. In other words, it does the job of a brand.

—THOMAS HINE

*AMERICAN DREAMSCAPE:
The Pursuit of Happiness in
Postwar America.*

By Tom Martinson. Carroll & Graf.
288 pp. \$26

Another book about suburbia? They've been pouring off the presses lately, in a torrent of vituperation about the evils of sprawl, the depravity of automobile culture, and the sterility of suburban life. But this book is different. Martinson, a city-planning consultant and longtime suburbanite, has the novel idea that the 140 million Americans who live in the nation's suburbs are not all fools.

All good planners are first of all good social observers, and Martinson offers the rare planner's portrait in which suburbanites will recognize themselves. He points out that most of the vituperation comes from drive-by critics who glimpse suburbia only fleetingly and through an urbanist windshield. Accustomed to the more formal, structured form and life of the city, they see a wasteland of "visual chaos" and social isolation in the hinterlands, while overlooking the diversity of suburban experience and the social and community life that suburbanites weave by picking from geograph-

ically far-flung choices. At bottom, Martinson believes, the sprawl critics' critique represents one more battle in the venerable war between cosmopolitan "gentry" and the workaday yeoman class.

He mainly has in mind the New Urbanists, the suburbia critics whose photogenic new communities (such as Seaside and Celebration in Florida) and canny arguments for an updated form of 19th-century town planning have made them darlings of the national media. (See "The Second Coming of the American Small Town," by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, *WQ*, Winter '92.) The New Urbanists rightly note the absurdity of zoning laws that make it virtually impossible to build anything like an old-fashioned town. But they have not been content to offer their ideas as just another choice for how to live; they insist that only a New Urban America will do.

The critics' various plans for remaking suburbia can be summed up in one word: centralization. This means denser, more urbanized communities, more mass transit, and no new roads. Martinson thinks the critics are blind to the powerful momentum favoring decentralization and to the preferences of suburbanites themselves. The suburban backlash against sprawl is a response, not to decentralization, but to "the congestion and disorder that seem to accompany rapid growth," he writes. "Becoming more like a dense big city—which is many suburbanites' very definition of congestion and disorder—is the last thing" they want.

What they do want is a more natural environment, which to Martinson suggests paying more attention to the larger landscape of suburbia, not just by preserving open space but by working to create a distinctive sense of place in each community. The germ of such an approach lies in the work of the great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed some of the nation's early suburbs. But Martinson notes that, with only a few exceptions such as Ian McHarg, most designers disdainfully turned away from suburbia after World War II. What will entice profit-conscious developers to seek out people like McHarg? Won't regional plan-

ning schemes be needed to shape the larger landscape? Martinson doesn't say enough about these and other questions. But he has seen into the heart of his subject and pointed the debate over sprawl in the right direction.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD

THE CHINESE.

By Jasper Becker. Free Press. 464 pp. \$27.50

Becker has been a resident correspondent in China for 10 years, far longer than the typical reporter's tour, and is now Beijing bureau chief for Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. In *Hungry Ghosts* (1997), he provided the first book-length account of the 1959–61 famine that killed at least 30 million Chinese. In his equally admirable new book, he turns his attention to the China of the past two decades and considers the urban and rural economies, the army, the intellectuals, and the Communist Party and its officials.

Becker has traveled extensively through China, and his anecdotes make the book particularly valuable. In the back of beyond, for instance, he was speaking to people whom time had passed by when a policeman approached and warned that he should not

be there. The policeman "is too poor even to afford shoelaces but everyone cringes and falls silent." Elsewhere, Becker interviews a writer who spent 22 years in labor camps. The man describes the behavior of his fellow prisoners, all of them intellectuals: "They lied, sneaked, and betrayed each other all the time. They stopped at nothing to try and prove their loyalty to the Party. . . . For all their high-flown ideals, they behaved with grovelling servility."

I have never met an ex-prisoner, even one safely abroad, who has voiced such sentiments; anecdotes can be misleading. In addition, some of Becker's judgments are overstated or simply wrong. He writes, for example, that "China is now a society in which everyone seems to be engaged in deceiving and cheating one another." In fact, one of the more striking features of Chinese life during the past 50 years is how many dissidents tell the truth even when they know the consequences could be fatal. The sourcing is often insufficient, too. When Becker provides statistics on business failures and unemployment, for example, the footnote directs us to his own article in the *South China Morning Post*. I have no reason to doubt the author's facts, but I want to know how he discovered them.

—JONATHAN MIRSKY

HISTORY

HENRY M. JACKSON: *A Life in Politics.*

By Robert G. Kaufman. Univ. of Washington Press. 548 pp. \$30

A man for whom the term *Cold War liberal* might have been coined, Henry "Scoop" Jackson (1912–83) is remembered today largely for his hawkish views on the Soviet Union and his determination that America would not just wage but win the arms race. Those positions gave rise to a nickname he detested, "the Senator from Boeing," though his devotion to the interests of the biggest employer in



Jackson won the 1976 Massachusetts Democratic primary.