

**THE CIVILIZING
PROCESS: The History
of Manners (Vol. I)**
by Norbert Elias
Urizen, 1978
328 pp. \$15
L of C 78-104651
ISBN 0-916354-32-6

If a man accidentally intrudes upon a woman in the bathroom, his *polite* apology might be "Excuse me, ma'am," his *tactful* one, "Excuse me, sir." To Norbert Elias, the difference speaks volumes (a second is due in December). In this 1936 classic, newly translated from the German original, Elias traces the growth of the ideal of manners from *courtoisie* (court behavior) through *civilité* (bourgeois urbanity) to *civilization* (democratized *civilité*, ready for export), each more socially inclusive—and self-conscious—than the one before. Elias sees manners as the prism of the polity: Medieval nobles who thought it good form to eat meat with their hands from a common vessel "stood in a different relationship to one another than we do." The book is a trifle scholarly but deft and lucid as it shows changing mores. "If you cannot swallow a piece of food," counseled the Dutch humanist Erasmus in 1530, "turn round discreetly and throw it someplace."

**IMPERIALISM AT BAY:
The United States and the
Decolonization of the British
Empire 1941-1945**
by William Roger Louis
Oxford, 1978
594 pp. \$19.95
L of C 78-1068
ISBN 0-19-821125-2

How did it happen that the world gained 75 new sovereign states in 1940-70? Diplomatic historian Louis conveys the mix of imperial, strategic, and idealistic motives that guided Allied policymakers in shaping the future of extraordinarily diverse colonial societies in Africa and Asia during and immediately after World War II. The Americans were alternately liberal and annexationist. Determined to retain former Japanese islands in the South Pacific for strategic purposes, they endorsed some form of international trusteeship for everyone else's colonies, whether ex-German or British. (One key U.S. adviser called the American commitment to decolonization "like setting a bird free, but only in the garden.") Churchill, insisting that he would not "preside over the disintegration of the Empire," echoed British Tory and Labor views, while Lord Cranborne, Colonial Secretary, maintained that "our Colonies . . . at present are children and must be treated as such." The staunchest anticolonialists were the Australians and New Zealanders, especially cantankerous Australian Foreign Min-