

Irish Republican Army (IRA), and of the gap between them and the fanatics of Al Qaeda, there is no better guide.

Laqueur, one of the leading and most experienced academic experts on terrorism, keeps his sense of perspective and proportion. In a brisk review of the last 150 years of terrorism, he stresses that “its political effects in contrast to the publicity it received were small.” In some circumstances, terrorists succeeded in highlighting authentic injustices, as with America’s own John Brown in the pre-Civil War years, but usually they provoked police or political reactions that defeated them. “The more successful terrorism was in destabilizing society, the more effective the mobilization of the antiterrorist forces which led to the downfall of the militants.”

Turning to the new jihad-based terrorism of Al Qaeda, Laqueur provides an excellent study of the roots of contemporary Islamic terrorism, although some with knowledge of the religious currents within the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale might question his stress on its Egyptian origins. But he makes the useful point that, unlike the old Communist International, the new Islamic terror network can make use of spaces like mosques that in democratic societies are outside the supervision of the security services.

It is refreshing, amid so much overheated prose about the menace of Islam and clashes of civilizations, to see the phenomenon analyzed by a penetrating and informed intelligence. Yet there is no squeamishness about his controversial conclusion, which is that the civilized world has to recognize that not all terrorists are rational actors who can be bought off by negotiation or appeasement. Some are stark, staring mad.

Since 1945, the world has grown grimly accustomed to terrorists with a clearly defined and negotiable aim—an independent Vietnam or Algeria, a united Ireland, a Palestinian state. But there is a new cleavage between those terrorists, such as Yasir Arafat and the IRA’s Gerry Adams, who have sought to bomb their way to the peace table, or at least to a negotiated political solution, and the new implacables, such as the suicide bombers of 9/11, who want to blow up the

peace table along with everything else.

Moreover, the new terrorism has the apocalyptic prospect of obtaining weapons of mass destruction. Laqueur assumes that at some point their use is almost inevitable, however good our security. Costly public-health precautions are going to become increasingly familiar, along with regular training and exercise drills, public awareness programs, and surveillance measures that will test our civil liberties.

A system of global security cooperation will be required to monitor and block the movements, finances, and communications of the terrorists. There is simply no alternative to such a strategy, which will require the United States to seek allies and partners and international legitimacy. Recent talk to the contrary is so much hollow bluster.

—MARTIN WALKER

DEMOCRACY AND THE NEWS.

By Herbert J. Gans. Oxford Univ. Press. 168 pp. \$26

American newspapers, much as we love to complain about them, are thicker, richer, and more conscientiously factual than their counterparts elsewhere. Most of the largest European dailies would kill for a newsroom the size of, say, *The San Francisco Chronicle’s*, and few could even imagine a world of 21 percent profit margins—the U.S. industry average, even during the recessionary doldrums of 2002.

Despite these achievements, Columbia University sociologist Herbert Gans worries that American newspapers have degenerated to the point that they may require taxpayer subsidies. The author of *Deciding What’s News* (1979) and other works, Gans believes that the American dream has foundered, and that journalism is at or near the root of the problem. His critique of democracy is essentially Naderite: Corporations and other nonhuman entities exercise disproportionate power, alienating half of the voting-age population and separating rich from poor.

Gans pins his extended essay on what he calls “Journalism’s Theory of Democracy,” a four-part doctrine: “(1) The journalist’s role

is to inform citizens; (2) citizens are assumed to be informed if they regularly attend to the local, national, and international news journalists supply them; (3) the more informed citizens are, the more likely they are to participate politically, especially in the democratic debate that journalists consider central to participation in democracy; (4) the more that informed citizens participate, the more democratic America is likely to be.”

Most reporters I know would balk at the notion that *any* unifying theory underpins our work, but Gans maintains that this one is “widely accepted”—as well as fundamentally flawed. It’s “unrealistic,” “wishful thinking,” even “a substitute for thinking about democracy.” In his view, this self-mythology obfuscates the news media’s fundamental shortcoming: their failure to ignite a democratic fire under the citizenry.

Gans wants journalists to promote “citizens’ democracy,” which, in newsroom practice, turns out to entail one grim top-down directive after another. There’s little

room here for the underrated job of telling interesting stories in a compelling manner. Instead, reporters should borrow tactics from schoolteachers. The “first priority” of every news organization should be “to eliminate the continuing racial and class biases in the news.” Satirists should be given “protection against censorship and job loss.” And everyone, heaven knows, should spend more money: “If the news is as central to democracy as journalists argue, then more needs to be spent so that its impact is maximized.”

Gans yearns for media that connect with citizens, but, like a shocking number of media critics, he seems vaguely hostile toward weblogs and other online publications that do just that. A. J. Liebling famously observed that “freedom of the press belongs to those who own one.” In an era when just about anybody can own one, perhaps things aren’t nearly as dire as Gans thinks.

—MATT WELCH

HISTORY

**PEEKING THROUGH
THE KEYHOLE:
*The Evolution of North
American Homes.***

By Avi Friedman and David Krawitz.
McGill-Queens Univ. Press. 212 pp.
\$24.95

Fifty years after a new kind of house and community began to dominate the landscape, a private home in suburbia—albeit a third larger than the average tract house of the Eisenhower era—remains the American dream. According to this short, smart book, however, what our mobile, mutable society needs are fewer McMansions and more homes that are various in form and flexible in function.

The midcentury modern home represented a triumph of newfangled technology over old-fashioned aesthetics. Tired of Colonials and Victorians and of both urban and rural life, postwar Americans flocked to brand-new houses and suburbs created not by architects and planners but by develop-

ers. The mass-produced homes—less crafted than their predecessors but more efficient to construct and run—were mostly occupied by wage-earning fathers, stay-at-home mothers, and their children.

This typical household no longer prevails, yet we’re stuck with its typical home, according to Avi Friedman and David Krawitz, respectively a professor and an administrator at McGill University’s architecture school. Our households are older, less traditional in makeup—many more occupants are unmarried—and smaller, averaging 2.5 members. Moreover, activities that once belonged to “the world,” from work to entertainment, increasingly go on at home. Nevertheless, what the Canadian authors call our “North American home” adheres to the midcentury template, inflated by the notion that “big is good, bigger is better, huge is best.”

One reason our homes and suburbs sprawl as our households contract is capitulation to the car. As James Kunstler observed in *The Geography of Nowhere* (1993), our