

when he spoke of Mr. Punch's ideal of perfection as "the British Hunting Squire, the British Colonel and the British Sailor."

The great problem with this study (originally prepared for a 1991 London symposium to mark the 150th anniversary of *Punch's* launch) is, as Altick frankly admits, that topical humor so often remains rooted in time and place, inaccessible to subsequent generations. A two-line squib that

prompted hearty laughter over a glass of port in 1841 may require pages of sober exegesis for modern readers. Altick's unremittingly conscientious approach to the task at hand will probably deter the Anglophile general reader, but the wealth of social data, incident, and drawing-room gossip creates a formidably detailed mosaic of Britain's age of empire.

—Clive Davis

Contemporary Affairs

DISUNITED STATES.

By John D. Donahue. Basic Books.
256 pp. \$25

In 1939, only one in eight Americans said he or she trusted the state governments more than the federal government. Today, three-fifths of Americans subscribe to that sentiment. In *Disunited States*, Donahue, a political scientist at Harvard University, assesses one of the more broadly accepted tenets of current conventional wisdom: that "devolving" federal power to the 50 states will improve American governance. Donahue is skeptical.

To be sure, devolution has benefits. States tend to be smaller and closer to those they govern (though not as small or close, Donahue suggests, as is widely assumed). Moreover, the states can serve as laboratories for policy reform, at least if they are willing to learn from their neighbors (which is not always the case, as Donahue shows). States can also promote diversity and choice. In the battle to attract families and businesses, New Hampshire keeps its taxes low while neighboring Vermont offers socially liberal policies.

But that battle sometimes goes too far. Donahue recapitulates the stunning string of concessions that states have offered automakers seeking new factory sites. In 1980, concessions cost Ohio \$4,000 per newly created Honda job; by the early 1990s, Alabama was spending \$168,000 for each new Mercedes-Benz job. Even Alabama may come out ahead ultimately, as economic benefits ripple throughout the state economy—but the inducements, the author notes, exemplify the rent-seeking, "industrial policy" behavior that repulses most economists (as well as the conservatives who are

especially partial to devolution). Donahue points out that education spending, which one would expect to be a high priority for competitive states, may actually suffer in a business environment that emphasizes immediate results. Governors and legislators may worry that they will bear the costs and tribulations of education reform, while their successors will reap the benefits.

Devolution has other shortcomings as well. State lines often lead to jurisdictional conflicts, which can impede efforts to track incompetent doctors, regulate air and water pollution, and control interstate crime. Donahue points out that lobbying, a key factor behind citizens' distrust of the federal government, is no less prevalent in state capitals. Indeed, state-level lobbying is often more opaque, less scrutinized, and potentially more insidious. The various interests lobbying the federal government frequently cancel out one another's strength, whereas a locally powerful interest group can hold a state hostage.

Donahue's most intriguing argument is that even if devolution did improve the quality of government, the financial gains would likely be small. "Suppose," he writes, "every last thing that the federal government does, aside from running defense and foreign affairs and writing checks (to entitlement claimants, debt holders, and state and local governments) were transferred to the states—national parks and museums, air-traffic control, the FBI, the border patrol, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Weather Service, student loans, the space program, and all the rest. Suppose, then, that the states proved able to do *everything* that the federal government used to do a full 10 percent more efficiently. The cost of govern-

ment would fall by a little under one-half of one percent.” Rather than squeezing blood from this administrative turnip, Donahue argues that the real way to cut the federal government is to reduce entitlements, an idea that is far less popular among politicians than devolution. Donahue also suggests privatizing and “voucherizing” certain federal undertakings, such as job-training programs, rather than devolving them to already-groaning state bureaucracies.

What is most notable about *Disunited States* is its painstaking fairness. When Donahue summarizes his arguments at the end of the book, the depth of his skepticism toward devolution comes as a surprise, given the scrupulous balance of his earlier chapters. This reasoned, constructive assessment of unpopular economic realities is a rare achievement: a book that boasts both a stunningly original concept *and* a near-flawless execution.

—Louis Jacobson

MAKING THE CORPS.

By Thomas E. Ricks. Scribner.
324 pp. \$24

For a great democracy that is also a global superpower—and whose continued dominance demands a superior military force—the relationship between soldiers and society is a matter of singular importance. Although recent developments have suggested that the American civil-military relationship is far from healthy, most Americans continue to take it for granted. This readable and provocative book should change that.

Despite his job title—Pentagon correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal*—Ricks understands that the real story of today’s military is not the generals in Washington but the sergeants and captains in the field. Parris Island, the Marine Corps base in South Carolina that provides the principal setting for Ricks’s tale, is about as remote from the corridors of power as you can get. *Making the Corps* tells the story of Platoon 3086: a group of 63 young men delivered by bus to Parris Island in early-morning darkness, each to discover if he has what it takes to become a United States Marine. Step by painful step, Ricks follows the progress of these recruits through boot camp, an arduous, disorienting, sometimes brutal 11-week rite of passage that some will fail to navigate. He tracks those who make it into

the Fleet, where they struggle to adapt the standards of boot camp to those prevailing in the “real” Marine Corps. Finally, Ricks evaluates the efforts of these rookie marines to come to terms with the world outside the Corps, a world that Parris Island taught them to disdain.

In telling his story, Ricks introduces the reader to a fascinating cast of characters: the hierarchy of senior leaders who design boot camp with the explicit intention of stripping each new recruit of his civilian identity; the drill instructors who, as gods, tyrants, mentors, role models, and father figures, preside over the daily process of transforming recruits into marines; and, above all, the recruits themselves, whom Ricks portrays with empathy and respect. Today’s marine volunteers come, for the most part, from among the have-nots of society. They enlist not for love of country but out of something like desperation, reacting to boredom, failure, minor scrapes with the law, and love affairs gone awry. Yet each yearns to be somebody. To enter the exclusive brotherhood of the marines is to be somebody very special indeed.

Boot camp is the price of admission. Recruits pay the price less by attaining the technical skills of the professional soldier than by embracing without reservation the ethos of the Corps. Central to that ethos are values such as honor, courage, and selfless-



ness that, according to senior marines, have all but vanished from American society. The essence of boot camp, in other words, is cultural indoctrination.

Here lies the author’s true achievement. *Making the Corps* exposes the gaping cultural divide that separates soldiers, marines in particular, from the rest of today’s soci-