

---

## NEW TITLES

---

### *History*

#### **THE EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES:**

**An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age**

by Simon Schama  
Knopf, 1987  
698 pp. \$39.95



“To be Dutch,” writes Harvard historian Schama, “still means coming to terms with the moral ambiguities of materialism . . .” At no time, however, did the Dutch wrestle harder with their consciences than during their “Golden Century” (1570–1670). In a splendidly detailed history that ranges from Holland’s tulip mania to the grain trade, from marriage manuals and sermons to paintings by masters, Schama documents this spiritual struggle.

Thanks largely to their mercantile savvy, the Dutch of the 16th century grew fat and rich while most other Europeans scraped by. But as good Calvinists, Holland’s wealthy citizens feared that prosperity compromised their souls. Alongside scenes of comfortable burgher life, painters created allegories of gluttony, cupidity, drunkenness, disorder, and lust to condemn the effects of excess, or *overloed*.

And not even prosperity was certain. What God gave He could also take away—including the land. The invention of wind-driven pumps enabled the Dutch to reclaim 200,000 acres from the sea between 1590 and 1640, but devastating floods always threatened.

In a corrupting and insecure world, notes Schama, the home remained a bastion of order and decency. The spic-and-span stoops, which foreign visitors invariably noted, stood as literal barriers between the filth of the world and the immaculate purity of the family dwelling. Marriage, too, was a haven, but evil could wend its way even into wedlock. The moralist Johan de Brune warned that excessive carnal appetites might endanger spiritual health: “The marriage bed is no gutter for vile lusts, but those who use it well, may stay a maid.”

#### **THE KEY TO FAILURE:**

**Laos and the Vietnam War**

by Norman B. Hannah  
Madison, 1987  
335 pp. \$19.95

Why did the Communists win in South Vietnam? Hannah, a retired U.S. Foreign Service officer, points to early U.S. ambivalence and self-delusion. His prime example is the ill-fated, oft-forgotten 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos, negotiated by Averell Harriman under the Kennedy administration. The Soviet-American deal provided for a “neutral” Laos, free of all foreign troops. Instead, what U.S. diplomat Roger Hilsman called a “tacit