you've got to shut out all of the others." Two paths diverge in a wood, and Generation X strives to follow both—to the detriment of coherent belief, or belief altogether.

In *Virtual Faith*, Beaudoin portrays Gen X-ers as spiritual seekers on a quest for "theological clarity." He argues that through little fault of their own, they have become creatures of evanescence, in thrall to videos, music, and fashion. Through his chilling description of identities in flux, of selves engulfed by the kaleidoscopic flood of pop culture, the author reminds us of the perils faced by a generation for whom so much is so precarious.

Oddly, though, Beaudoin depicts popular culture not as a flawed substitute for faith, but rather as a fount of religious significance. His characterization of Madonna as "a saint of liberation" on a par with Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena will strike many readers as a bit over the top. By attempting to discern a spiritual dimension in music videos, the author expands the concept of the religious so broadly as to lose all meaning. In this regard, Beaudoin offers the spiritually hungry not bread, but stone.

—*Christopher Stump*

Contemporary Affairs

FORTRESS AMERICA:
The American Military and the Consequences of Peace.
By William Greider. Public Affairs Press. 208 pp. $22

Greider, national editor of *Rolling Stone*, has seized on an important yet largely unexamined fact: despite the absence of any significant overt threat, the United States has chosen to remain the world's dominant military power. A decade after winning the Cold War, in a departure from all previous American history, the nation has yet to demobilize. "What exactly is the purpose of Fortress America," Greider asks, "now that our only serious adversary has evaporated into history?"

Seeking an answer, he calls on those who build and defend the ramparts of the American fortress. He visits the crew of a spanking-new U.S. Navy destroyer undergoing sea trials in the Atlantic. At Nellis Air Force Base in the Nevada desert, he watches fighter squadrons go through their paces in a highly competitive "Red Flag" exercise. At Fort Hood, Texas, he assesses the army's efforts to adapt mechanized forces to the information age. Near Fort Worth, he walks the floor of Air Force Plant 4, birthplace of thousands of warplanes since World War II, now barely alive as it produces a dwindling number of F-16s.

Viewed from the inside, Fortress America has shrunk significantly over the past decade. The services have absorbed painful cuts. Through successive waves of consolidation, the defense industry has laid off 40 percent of its workers. Yet the author argues that this streamlining falls woefully short, leaving the nation with a defense establishment that "is too large to sustain, too backward-looking in design, too ambitious in its preparations for the future war," not to mention overburdened with duties in far-off places such as Bosnia and the Persian Gulf.

All sides of the "Iron Triangle"—the military officers, corporate executives, and politicians whose Cold War collaboration created Fortress America—are acutely aware of these contradictions. They know that present levels of defense spending will not suffice to train the existing force, support essential deployments, procure new equipment, and develop new weapons for the future. Greider takes it as a given that increasing the defense budget is out of the question. As he notes, though, money is not the only issue: "The larger and more troubling political questions are about purpose."

When Greider describes what he sees and hears—especially when he allows commanders, crew members, engineers, and corporate executives to do the talking—the results are impressive. But when he ventures into the realm of lofty analysis and policy prescription, he is awful. In "the post-Cold War vacuum," he reports with dismay, the United States has gradually assumed "the obligations of empire" through its role as "high-minded, vigilant enforcer of world order and global commerce." He calls on Americans to "say 'no' to empire," and instead ask themselves "what are we to do now that a general peace is upon us?" (Some readers may wonder how an era of ethnic cleansing, episodic genocide, nuclear proliferation, and terror qualifies as a "general peace.") Surrendering to the ethers of utopianism, Greider declares that "the end of the Cold War is a great opportunity to re-

imagine the world." The United States has the chance once and for all to put an end to injustice, inequality, and war, to "move to a higher ground and dreams of a common humanity."

Loath to confront the reality of empire and its military implications, Greider opts instead for a Great Crusade. Americans will recognize the summons as a familiar one. It was, after all, previous crusades that created our empire and our fortress in the first place.

—Andrew J. Bacevich

MAYHEM: Violence as Public Entertainment.
By Sissela Bok. Addison-Wesley. 195 pp. $22
CHANNELING VIOLENCE: The Economic Market for Violent Television Programming.
By James T. Hamilton. Princeton Univ. Press. 344 pp. $35

The vice squad on media issues has gone bipartisan. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has joined probusiness conservatives in the effort to ban gambling over the Internet. Bill Moyers and Bill Bennett alike decry ultraviolent movies and music. Republicans and Democrats in Congress unite behind such media cleanup laws as the Television Violence Act of 1990. But it isn't easy for liberals to put themselves on the side of wholesomeness. Some of the strains show through in these two books on media violence.

Bok, a professor of philosophy at Brandeis University and a fellow at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center, considers whether violent entertainment harms viewers and what steps might be taken to rescue the young from such stuff. Not fully a work of social science, though it has the proper trappings, *Mayhem* is not exactly a work of moral philosophy either, though observations by the Greeks and Romans, and by later poets and philosophers, are adduced to suggest what becomes of the human soul when we indulge our appetite for scenes of gore and cruelty. While there is a tepid quality to the exercise, one credits the author's instinct that summarizing the latest research on "the aggressor effect, the victim effect, the bystander effect, and the appetite effect" is somehow insufficient.

Not that the research is devoid of insight. Bok highlights some helpful points, such as how children are both desensitized and frightened by the violence to which they are exposed from a young age. The statistics on depression and suicide among adolescents and preadolescents are grave. She considers the ultimate question—whether dramatized mayhem makes people, especially the impressionable young, commit violent acts—and acknowledges that there is no solid causal evidence, only a correlation.

Bursting with charts, graphs, and regression analyses, *Channeling Violence* would never have made it to 390 pages if the author were as careful about the relationship between violent entertainment and actual violence as Bok is. Hamilton, a Duke University economist, admits that correlation does not prove causation, then proceeds to crunch loads of numbers on the assumption that it does.

Resting his argument on an analogy between media violence and pollution, the author considers suing networks whose violent programs provoke copycat crimes, imposing "violence taxes" on broadcasters, and giving the Federal Communications Commission additional authority to regulate program content. But he pulls back from these ideas, saying that the courts would probably disallow them on First Amendment grounds. Better, in Hamilton's view, are "family hour" rules, program rating systems, and the "V-Chip"—the government-mandated device that will be put in television sets so that parents can filter their children's TV diet.

More libertarian than Hamilton, Bok rules out of bounds any interference with content, even moderate interference (such as "family hour" rules) exerted through laws devised by democratically elected lawmakers. Instead, she enjoins parents to regulate children's viewing habits. And she too supports the V-Chip, which thus emerges as the liberals' technological magic bullet.

"Technology," Bok writes, "is increasingly coming to the help of those who want to avoid ambush by images and messages they find objectionable." But technology only helps if adults are willing to purchase and use it, a problem that both authors acknowledge. Hamilton calls this a matter of "norm creation"—social science jargon for moral suasion, not a feature of even the handiest of gadgets.

—Lauren Weiner