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Books That Matter

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Book Reviews

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and external interventions with conciseness and clarity.

Chapter three also casts light on a poignant irony underlying the vote counting dispute. Journalists from *The Miami Herald* counted the 64,248 ballots that would have been subject to recounting had the Gore legal challenge been successful. They counted the ballots using the various criteria endorsed by the competing campaigns, and their analysis found that the most lenient criteria, which Gore's team was advocating, would have resulted in victory for Bush. Moreover, a recount by the most restrictive rules, which Bush wanted applied to any recount, would have added up to a Gore victory.

The court cases are subjected to somewhat greater analysis in chapter four. Dover focuses on what he views as the themes in the legal struggles: equal protection, due process, and abuse of discretion. He shows how these concepts were used by both sides in the suits and counter suits concerning Palm Beach County's decision to use the confusing butterfly ballot design; allowing Republican Party members to fill in missing information on absentee ballots in Seminole and Martins counties; allowing three extra days for overseas absentee ballots to arrive and be counted; and in the battle over recounts and the counting standards to be applied therein. The contestants used the different levels of court jurisdiction and the varying interpretation of these legal concepts to try and compel election officials to recount votes by the standards each felt to be most beneficial to their causes. The Bush side got the ultimate victory in the highest court. Dover writes that the Supreme Court reduced equal protection rights by shrinking the pool of eligible voters when it decided in favor of the strictest of recount criteria.

In the fifth chapter the author discusses federalism as a system of government and how it affects electioneering in the United States. **Dover** feels federalism as practiced in this country creates an electoral process that is problematic in a number of ways. Elections are the responsibility of state and county governments and are managed by elected government officials, the majority of which came to power through partisan contests. This arrangement puts officials with party loyalties in charge of conducting what of necessity need to be unbiased balloting processes. Moreover, and more significant from the author's point-of-view, is the poor funding of elections. Whereas the federal and state governments draw revenue from income and sales taxes over wide geographies and large populations, counties collect taxes from smaller bases and on less valuable resources. From these resources (in addition to some state and federal funding) county governments must fund the elections for all levels of government and finance all other official business. Disparities in revenue generation create disparities in the quality of elections from county to county, and **Dover** sees this inequality as a basic and widespread breach of the equal protection clause of the federal Constitution. Specific to the 2000 presidential contest, he sites, among other

things, understaffed election offices for incomplete voter lists and cheaper, less accurate punch-card ballots in less affluent counties for relatively high numbers of unreadable ballots. Although most serious observers of elections agree that reforms that boost and equalize the quality of elections across the country are desirable, **Dover** states that the very fact that elections in the country occur no more frequently than every two years make the problems seem less important to county officials who must cope with other challenges that demand their attention much more of the time.

The final chapter concerns the lasting impact of the controversial presidential election of 2000. The author thinks that the dispute in Florida will increase pressure on governments at all levels to upgrade voting technology to better ensure tally accuracy. He also feels that the public perception of the Supreme Court as a politically neutral institution has suffered as a result of its involvement in Florida's troubled electoral process. For all its peculiar aspects, the election also demonstrated characteristics that **Dover** has observed in other national elections. He points to the high place of primaries in the candidate selection process, the ever-growing use of mass media for distributing campaign information, and the discrepancy between the popular and the electoral vote counts. Included is a discussion of the various divisions that split the national electorate and offered in support of the author's view that the United States is a divided nation with two highly competitive minority parties.

Each chapter ends with a list of references, and there is an annotated bibliography of resources about the 2000 presidential election. Other useful back matter includes primary source materials such as the court decisions from the various cases, relevant election law, and election results from all 50 states and all the counties of Florida; more in-depth biographies of the 20 major actors in the election and post-election events; and a focused and effective index. The several photographs depict a butterfly ballot and the physical process of recounting questionably marked ballots as well as some of the people involved in the controversy.

Evidence of **Dover's** liberal persuasion appears here and there in the text, but he clearly situates his opinions in commentary after the facts have been laid down. He doesn't experience parallax due to his leftist vantage point; instead of distorting facts, **Dover's** comments express an honest frustration with certain facts, particularly choices made by the Gore team at different points in the campaign. Even if created to some degree from frustration, *The Disputed Presidential Election of 2000* nonetheless offers a clear, concise source of facts, informed analysis, statistics, primary source material, historical background, and insightful discussion to satisfy the needs of students and researchers in political science and the curiosities of anyone who'd like a better understanding of what happened during those 37 odd days of American history. 🐼

Books That Matter

Column Editor: **Ellen Finnie Duranceau**
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Shortly after my new irregular column of mini-reviews first appeared (in the February 2003 issue), I tore through **Matthew Scully's** book *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. (New York: St. Martin's, 2002. 0312261470. 464 pages. \$27.95.) In the months that followed, I was like the victim of one of **J.K. Rowling's** horrific dementors, whose cold kiss sucks out your soul, leaving you howling in despair for eternity. I've been unable to write a second column, feeling both that I must write about this book, and at the same time that I can't write about this book. I feel I must—because the book does matter, so very very much; yet I feel I can't, because I am not sure how to write successfully about a book that is painful, overwhelming, scary, deeply disturbing, and depressing.

Taking my "books that matter" theme as my guide, I will try to explain why I wish every person in the United States would read *Dominion*. It is a book on animal rights by a Republican presidential speech writer and confirmed political conservative, **Matthew Scully**. He offers a heavily researched, angry, often bitter and darkly ironic account of

how nonhuman animals are being treated in the United States and around the world today. He makes the case that animals do have feelings, experience pain, and suffer—and that mankind has a sacred responsibility to care for other creatures. He carefully dissects every argument against nonhuman animals' lack of emotions, consciousness, or ability to communicate. He conscientiously raises and rejects argument after argument that tries to hold human beings apart and above all other animals; he successfully takes the philosophers and the professors on.

He places his argument in a Christian context, arguing that while man was given "dominion" over the animals, man is abusing this power. While this may bring animal rights issues into a frame of reference important for some people, I can assure you it is not necessary to need or be convinced by his religious argument in order to believe that the appalling mistreatment of animals he describes must be stopped. He admits that his topic is not easy, that animal rights advocates are dismissed as part of the fringe, or as ridiculous

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in their political correctness. **Scully**, to his credit, does not allow these concerns to deter him from rendering his findings and his feelings in all their disease. His passion, his fury, is apparent on every page. The searing force of his revelations is often overwhelming. In fact, I do not quote him here, except very briefly, because much of the book is so disturbing, it is difficult to pluck his words out of context and offer them up in a review without seeming over-the-top, almost obscene.

It would be difficult to say which section of the book is most devastating—the overview of the vapid, morally bankrupt trophy hunters sacrificing the planet's few remaining large mammals to build up their bloated egos; the rigid greed of nations who refuse to control commercial whaling, even as we watch what is likely the final passing of these great and intelligent, gentle giants; or, the section that for me was the final suck of the dementor's kiss: the unimaginably horrific conditions in which farm animals are raised and slaughtered in the United States, left helpless with virtually no laws to protect them. I have read extensively on this subject and yet never had I read an account of pain and suffering so visceral, so unblinking, so compelling.

Scully does not leave us wallowing in despair, however. His final call is for specific, needed, and realistic changes in our laws—reforms (particularly to the **Animal Welfare Act** and for a **Humane Farming Act**) to protect those over whom we have dominion. As he notes: "As our powers are unique, it would follow too that our ethical obligations are unique." I would add that each of us has an ethical obligation to educate ourselves about what atrocities are occurring right among us in our nation today, and that reading this book is an excellent place to start.

If you think I should be on to happier topics after that one, I'm afraid that instead, I have another powerful but disturbing book to recommend. It is *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*, (New York: Touchstone, 1994. 0671888250. 304 pages. \$14.00.) by **James Howard Kunstler**, a writer and novelist (Simon & Schuster 1993). This is a book thematically similar to another I wrote about previously in the pages of *ATG*, *Suburban Nation*, and it covers some of the same terrain, explaining how our zoning laws have come to encourage and even enforce the development of ugly sprawl across our land, a landscape that works against human needs and destroys our environment. (He notes while we may yearn for the traditional New England small town, our laws which require separation of residential and commercial districts, deep setbacks, wide streets, and large lots actually prohibit such a town from being built today—in effect: "all you could build in present day New England [is] Los Angeles.")

Kunstler takes a sociologist's perspective on how America came to look the way it does, what is wrong with it, and how we can fix it. His writing is vibrant, colorful, heartfelt, and full of

energy and passion. He is no stranger to strong opinions. He starts out by saying that:

"Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading - the jive-plastic commuter tract home wastelands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Lego-block hotel complexes, the 'gourmet mansardic' junk-food joints, the Orwellian office 'parks' featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass as the sunglasses worn by chain-gang guards, the particle-board garden apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts, the whole destructive, wasteful, toxic, agoraphobia-inducing spectacle that politicians proudly call 'growth.'"

I think it is safe to say that if you are turned off by this passage, you won't like **Kunstler's** book or his style, for the passage is characteristic of the driving wordplay **Kunstler** uses to convince us of his key thesis: that "the living arrangements most Americans think of as 'normal' [are] bankrupting us both personally and at every level of government," that our American landscape has become a "landscape of scary places, the geography of nowhere, that has simply ceased to be a credible human habitat." **Kunstler** uses his books to explain in searing, broad swaths of history and analysis "how and why it happened, and what we might do about it." He provides a historical perspective, making a case for how decisions made in distributing land in colonial time and in the country's early development have contributed to and led us toward our current problems.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this book—and there are many—is **Kunstler's** overview of how three American cities grew up and took on the various qualities that now define them—for better and for worse. These are Detroit's "old industrial metropolis gone to hell;" Los Angeles' current car-obsessed form, which "may not allow it to function in the century to come," and Portland Oregon, because it "embodies the most hopeful and progressive trends in American city life and especially urban planning and offers an alternative to the sprawling crudscape of most of recent American development." (This book is ten years old now, and I hope his encouraging vision of where Portland was going has turned out to be accurate.)

While the overview of these great cities and their perspective plights is indeed fascinating, **Kunstler** is also deeply compelling when his darkly ironic tone reaches its apex in his review of places he calls "capitals of unreality." These are three places "dedicated to the temporary escape from the crisis [of place] in America:" Disney World, Atlantic City, and (surprisingly, perhaps) Woodstock, Vermont. He makes the case that these are places to one extent or another offering "extravagant unreality," a term he uses primarily for Atlantic City. Any parent who has so far managed to paddle upstream against

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United States Counties

Mark Dunn and Mary Dunn. 2003, \$95 hardcover, appendices, index, ISBN 0-7864-1515-0.

The FBI Encyclopedia

Michael Newton. 2003, \$95 hardcover, appendices, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-1718-8.

World Epidemics

A Cultural Chronology of Disease from Prehistory to the Era of SARS

Mary Ellen Snodgrass. 2003, \$75 hardcover, charts, glossary, appendices, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-1662-9.

Encyclopedia of DNA and the United States Criminal Justice System

Louis J. Palmer, Jr. 2004, \$95 hardcover, 69 photos and illustrations, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-1735-8.

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American culture and avoid taking the kids to Disney World will relish **Kunstler's** dissection of that place, its venal values and its troubling symbolism, replete with (another surprise here, perhaps) death and destruction.

His final section is on people who have envisioned solutions in one way or another, including the developer of Seaside, Florida, the new small town that functions like an old, small town; practioners of sound zoning regulations and planning principles called "Traditional Neighborhood Development;" and open space conservation groups and creators of land trusts. He leaves us with the somewhat reassuring belief that there are more and more people out there recognizing what has gone wrong, finding a vocabulary to explain how and why it's wrong, and then applying solutions.

I'd like to close by mentioning two other—much happier—books I highly recommend. One is *Seedfolks*, (New York: Harper Trophy, 1999. 0064472078. 80 pages. \$4.99.), by **Paul Fleischman**, a book selected for a town-wide read in my hometown of Arlington, Massachusetts, which is how I happened to come across it. It is a fictional account of how a community garden is created in Cleveland, told through the eyes of a series of characters from different ages and ethnic backgrounds, all of whom find themselves engaged in and reawakened by the transformation of a vacant lot into a garden, starting with the efforts of one nine-year-old child who plants seeds in honor of her dead father, a farmer in his native Vietnam. It is a very moving, inspiring sliver of a book—one that you can read

in one sitting, but which will leave you wanting to get out there in the dirt and grow things, to reconnect to nature, yes, but also to get to know your neighbors, to build community, and to spread a bit more goodness and hope in your own neighborhood.

The other book is **Alexander McCall Smith's** *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, (New York: Anchor, 2003. 1400034779. 240 pages. \$11.95.), as well as the others in the same series. These books probably need no introduction from me, as they are bestsellers and widely read. But if you haven't tried these touching, entertaining, and somehow ennobling books, you are missing a treat. The stories center on the confident, kind, and insightful Precious Ramotswe, a Batswana woman who does an extraordinary thing for her time and place—she opens a detective agency. The agency operates more through **Mma Ramotswe's** uncanny intuition about people, through her ability to cleanse souls and lead them to their own truths, rather than as a traditional crime-solving unit. The way **Mma Ramotswe** reveals the hearts and minds of her clients and their situations, the way she teases apart the psychology behind their problems, yields a set of novels that have appeal that transcends the traditional mystery/detective genre. Beyond the engaging characters and plotlines and the working through of very human problems, **McCall's** appeals on another level, too. They capture the nuances

charleston conference dates

future

	Preconferences and Vendor Showcase	Main Conference
2003	5 November	6-8 November
2004	3 November	4-6 November
2005	2 November	3-5 November
2006	8 November	9-11 November
2007	7 November	8-10 November
2008	5 November	6-8 November
2009	4 November	5-7 November
2010	3 November	4-6 November

of life in a simple and traditional—but changing—society, such that one yearns for his Botswana nostalgically, even if one has never known it or a place like it.

Please write <efinnie@mit.edu> and tell me what you think of these books if you read them.

I will close with an offer: I've been reading mountains of what has been termed "doggie lit"—books on human/canine relationships. I have been quite uncertain about whether **ATG** readers would want to hear about these books, but if any of you do, let me know, and I'll write my next column on that topic. There are many, many great books out right now about how and why humans relate with their dogs as they do, and I'd love to tell you about them if you are interested!

Happy Reading,

Your book lover

ATG Profiles Encouraged

by **Michelle Flinchbaugh** (Acquisitions Librarian, Albin O. Kuhn Library, UMBC, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250; Phone: 410-455-6754; Fax: 410-455-1598) <flinchba@umbc.edu>

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BORN & LIVED: Germany, Georgia, South Carolina.

FIRST JOB: Exporter/translator with an import/export company.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Head of Monographs and AV Acquisitions at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, SC. My favorite part includes curriculum analysis and working with colleagues who truly care about quality collection development. Research areas include the role of information and technology in society, education, economic development, human rights, globalization, and national security.

IN MY SPARE TIME I ENJOY: Painting, drawing, photography, digital media, music, scenic road trips, philosophical discussions with friends, technical assistance to non-profits.

PHILOSOPHY: Mutual respect and fairness cover a multitude of shortcomings.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Work more closely with linking information and education with human and economic development in the South and in tropical America.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Libraries will continue to thrive, become more savvy in marketing their value to constituencies, and continue to mix print resources with high-tech information tools. Specialized libraries and research offices will move more toward specialized databases to save space and maximize access to more information. The tension between print and electronic resources

will continue, and the reality of libraries' finite budget will bring more ideas about new electronic-access pricing models to the table. Print and electronic will be increasingly polarized: print will continue to be the preferred medium for traditional full-length books, "e-books" will find a niche primarily for quick-look-up reference tools and course-pack-driven texts for computer-based distance education, the sciences will prefer the latest research online while the humanities retain more of their print roots. Multimedia teaching tools will break into the college-level market and thus gain more respectability for academic contexts and be viewed as less of a children's medium. E-journals, aggregated databases, pricing issues, subscription-packaging models, and the tension between print and electronic media will continue to evolve.