

Briefly Noted

DISTANT NEIGHBORS: A PORTRAIT OF THE MEXICANS by Alan Riding

(Alfred A. Knopf; 385 pp.; \$18.95)

Mexico is coming apart at the seams. This is the clear message of this important, insightful, and uneven book by a former *New York Times* correspondent in Mexico.

After forty years of steady but poorly distributed economic growth, the Mexican economy has come unstuck. Local industry is highly protected, grossly inefficient, and incapable of generating new jobs. Much of the rural population is trapped in rain-fed subsistence agriculture on poor soil in a land-tenure system that provides neither viable plots nor living farm wages. A massive external debt absorbs much of the oil revenue left over from the predations of a corrupt state monopoly and equally predatory oil workers union.

Economic decline and stagnation are calling into question a hierarchical, centralized political system of powerful special interests and their brokers. The restive urban middle classes, shocked by inflation and successive devaluations, are withdrawing their loyalty from the political system and increasingly, in northern Mexico, voting for candidates of the conservative opposition PAN party. Politicians are torn between opening up the system to allow for more democracy and relying on increased coercion to ensure control.

Adding fuel to the economic and political tensions is a persistent social crisis that denies minimally adequate housing, nutrition, education, and other social services to a majority of the population. Government and public sector jobs are used as sinecures at all levels, and social services are often a subsidy of the rich at the expense of the poor. Similarly, while Mexico City suffers from man-made environmental disasters, the wealthy try to buy their way out of the smog, traffic jams, and water shortages.

Riding finds the ruling classes materialistic, ambivalent, and rudderless. But he finds resilience in something called the "Mexican soul"—the fatalism, stoicism, and "spiritual aspirations" of the people. He foresees no massive disorder or violence but a continuing steady erosion of national confidence, governability, and popular support or acceptance.

—Aaron Segal

Correspondence

PIPES ON SURVIVAL

To the Editors: ...Walter C. Clemens, Jr.'s review of, *inter alia*, Richard Pipes's *Survival Is Not Enough* ("Cold Light on Cold War," *Worldview*, March) calls for a response.

One may agree or disagree with Pipes on policy questions (I agree most of the time), but it would be difficult to find a more thoughtful treatment of the subject than *Survival Is Not Enough*. Clemens accuses Pipes of "pandering" to "right-wing" stereotypes, engaging in "egregious distortions," being "anti-Russian," possessing "a nearly Neanderthal mentality," and even purveying "*dezinformatsiia*."

Fortunately, the reviewer himself provides a revealing context for his zealous criticism when he compares the marketing of the books by Pipes and others to Times Square pornography and suggests that publishers should block publication of such manuscripts on the above-cited grounds. The conclusion is inescapable that a free marketplace of ideas is incompatible with the reviewer's values.

Nils H. Wessell

Director, Foreign Policy
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Walter Clemens responds:

Dr. Wessell does not rebut my evaluation of the scholarship in Professor Pipes's recent writing. Instead, he questions my esteem for the marketplace of ideas. The last sentence in my review makes clear that I cherish a free press and oppose censorship. Freedom, however, brings on dilemmas and responsibilities. We may find putative experts putting forward views that push public policy in certain directions, even though the factual basis for their accuracy is not well established. Recognizing that there is a wide area where expert disputes expert, we must all be concerned about standards of accuracy. Expressions of this concern may be found in my "Intellectual Foundations of Reagan's Soviet Policies: The Threadbare Emperor" and in other essays edited by Bernard Rubin, *When Information Counts: Grading the Media* (Lexington Books, 1985). I telephoned a trade house, a university press, and a high school text publisher and was told by editors in each that there has been a deterioration in the scholarly standards of manuscripts received—

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and that an economic crunch inhibits them from carrying out extensive in-house checks for accuracy. Perhaps well-heeled commercial publishers and subsidized university presses should invest a few thousand dollars more per book to cut down on the kinds of bloopers noted in my review.

(The editors regret the gremlin that crept into Dr. Clemens's own piece and made its way into print. The Holy Alliance should, of course, be dated from 1815.)

Just Published

Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace is the classic statement of the thought of Hans J. Morgenthau, who died in 1980. It has recently appeared in a sixth edition over the name of Professor Morgenthau and of his student Kenneth W. Thompson, director of the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. Dr. Thompson has updated the book using, where possible, fragments of Morgenthau's own writing to make substantial revisions in the treatment of such areas as human rights, détente, and the nuclear problem. (Alfred A. Knopf; xiv + 688 pp.; \$26.95)