The object of her study is policy that pursues unattainable goals in obstinate disregard of self-interest, contemporary criticism, or the availability of feasible alternatives. Her thesis is that corrosion of intellect and diminution of human sensibilities repeatedly accompany political power. As she politely and succinctly puts it: "Mankind, it seems, makes a poorer performer of government than of almost any other human activity." Given her erudition, and the plethora of examples to choose from, this book could have been a sprawl of human blockheadedness. Perhaps the greatest triumph, then, is that Tuchman has conducted a tightly disciplined examination, through a few well-chosen case studies, of one specific human folly: disregard of the other human activity."

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To qualify for inclusion in this volume a political folly had to fulfill rigorous criteria. It had to have been indulged in by a succession of rulers or administrations; it had to be increasingly and obviously self-defeating and seen as such at the time—no historical second-guessing; there had to have been ways out of the impasse that were recognized but ignored; policymakers had to have become victims of paradigmatic assumptions that left them both incapable and unwilling to take off their blinders. What Tuchman brands as folly, psychologists have labeled "cognitive dissonance": calling "light at the end of the tunnel" what is really the reflected glow of a fevered ego. The dust-jacket illustration features a harlequinade; I would have chosen an image compounded of Werner Herzog's Aguirre, the Wrath of God and Pete Seeger's "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy." The March of Folly proceeds in an orderly and inexorable manner, much as do its bemused protagonists. Again, this is not a saga of madmen but of those "subject to misjudgment, error and impulse—like you and me." After stating her thesis and offering a soupçon of foolish individualists (Herboom, Montezuma, Louis XIV), Tuchman presents three extended studies: the Renaissance popes, George III and his ministers, and our Vietnam-era political leaders. In all three cases Tuchman adheres carefully to her parameters of perverse folly and then establishes them convincingly and in some detail. In all three cases policymakers ignored the benefits of experience, the lessons of repeated error, and the warning disillusion or alienation of their own adherents. In all three cases the obstinate power-wielders created the conditions of their own failure and wreaked havoc on the very institutions they were pledged to protect. The reader may wish she had surveyed other, favorite episodes of persistent folly (the French Bourbons and the last Romans come immediately to mind) but will be both convinced and impressed by how well Tuchman's choices illuminate the concept of well-intentioned self-delusion.

Tuchman rightfully and forcefully exposes the resolute ideologues, the incompetents who hid behind dogma, and the transparently power-hungry who pursued self-aggrandizement or sycophancy despite the cost to others. But what most impressed and riveted me were the examples of those within the "Establishment" who warned their superiors of their folly, were patronized, and who then half-heartedly trudged along, holding their heads high and ignoring the slippery footing or—like Melvin Laird—blushing every time they had to defend their government's policies.

The Renaissance popes ignored clerical critics like Egidio of Vietbo, Bishop Domenico de Domenichi, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, and the Brethren of the Common Life, all of whom tried to divert Borgia's, della Roveres, and de Medicis from their venality, power politics, and dynastic nepotism. King George suffered the "loyal opposition" of Cabinet ministers like General Conway, the Earl of Shelburne, Thomas Pownall, the Duke of Richmond (Tuchman neglects the Earl of Dartmouth), all of whom were convinced that the king's hard-liners would drive Americans from the Empire. Even Lord North was profoundly ambivalent but went along, unnecessarily forcing issues bound to create disaffection.

Lyndon Johnson too had a cote-full of administration doves: Senator Richard Russell, Clark Clifford, George Ball, George Kennan, U. Alexis Johnson, General James Gavin, CIA General Edward Lansdale (in Vietnam from the mid-50s). All of them told him unpalatable truths about Vietnam but long delayed any public dissent. Tuchman also reminds us of the very gradual awakening of men like Mike Mansfield, Robert McNamara, and other New Frontiersmen: pages 340 to 356 provide an impressive list.

In sum, while the refusal to confess an error to one's enemies was understandable, the inability to respond to the second thoughts of one's friends was deep folly. And those who continued to support folly, knowing it to be folly, compounded the folly. A final strength of Tuchman's account is that she fulfills the deeper purpose of a mo-

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Some recent books we have failed to review:

- Mennonite Tourguide to Western Europe. Herald Press.
- Before, Beyond and Between the Hedges: A Pictorial History of Georgia Football. Leisure Press.
- Sexy Arms: How to Get Them and How to Keep Them. Leisure Press.
rality play: Not only does she narrate others' frailties, she reminds us of how much they and we have in common. To some extent power corrupts, but obstinacy, overreaction, the prideful refusal to admit that compounds error, self-delusion—a failure of reason—are no one's monopoly. Foily may be a child of power, but so are we all prone to folly. On the other hand, the true morality play also holds out hope. Humans have not only created prodigies of technology, art, medicine, and theoretical physics but have also produced models of the modest and intelligent statesman who creates effective government: Solon, the Antonine emperors, Charlemagne, Maria Theresa, the Jeffersonian generation. When power is wedded to humility, responsibility is its child. 

THE UNRAVELING OF AMERICA: A HISTORY OF LIBERALISM IN THE 1960s by Allen J. Matusow (Harper & Row; 542 pp.; $22.95)

Larry Tool

Today the turbulent '60s beg for historical focus. The passions of the period are spent, its issues are muddled, its partisans hoarse. Firebrands have become fathers, communalists have become landlords, ex-students scramble for university tenure. Even the bright mirror of nostalgia has grown dim from constant use. For those of us who shaped or were shaped by the '60s the time has come to entrust our memories to the historians, who will edit and interpret them for posterity. "Where have all the flowers gone?" Gone to textbooks every one.

One does not envy these historians. Who among that cautious fraternity will prove bold enough to pass judgment on a whole generation of quarrelsome critics—at least while that generation is still on the scene? Memoirs and diaries have appeared; institutional histories have been assembled from bulging files; surprisingly good biographies (Lyndon Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr.) have begun to accumulate. But the Class of '88 wants to know what the '60s were really about, and no provocative general interpretation has yet been offered. The Unraveling of America does not quite take this bull by the horns, but Allen Matusow has at least stepped into the arena. Two cheers.

For Matusow the essence of the '60s is the ordeal of liberalism. His account is woven from three kinds of narrative: The ambiguous. Did Andrade, the first director of São Paulo's Department of Culture, wish merely to preserve the past within Brazil's social revolution, or was he parodying the capitalist conception of progress in the Third World? We may find a partial answer in yet another of the book's transformations. Just before his transfiguration, Macunaima modifies the second line of his slogan to "Brazil will be a place of wealth." The change implies both a prophecy and a redefinition. Wealth is now no longer judged by the standard of international economics, but, perhaps, by the rich resources of the people and by the cultural heritage that Andrade has brought to light. 

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING by Milan Kundera translated by Michael Henry Heim (Harper & Row; 314 pp.; $15.95)

Gerald Freund

If Kundera had set out to write a love story, he might have had better success, but he would have written a far less interesting book. This new novel by the celebrated Czech author, who now makes his home in Paris, is an incisive, compelling, and mostly despairing political work. The political pattern is delicate, but pervasive. It requires considerable ingenuity for a writer to engross a reader in his own deep concerns without their becoming crude interruptions in an interesting and often psychologically fascinating work of fiction. Kundera has that talent. Nevertheless, because he is a totally involved political intellectual, Kundera tends to force rather than lead his reader, who participates in none of the critical choices and decisions. Little is entrusted to the reader's independent thought or imagination. There are no silences, none of the pregnant pauses so important to the works of Kundera's favorite composer, Beethoven, whose imperative "Es muss sein!" he quotes again and again to glittering literary effect. But then Kundera is not an organist listening for cathedral reverberations. The only echo he wants is that of his own voice. Perhaps he wants to drown out the cacaphony of political sloganeering and torture-chamber screams.

Whatever the reasons, we are not, finally, unsympathetic with his impatience. It is an understandable flaw when one considers that Kundera reveals himself through his protagonist, Tomas, as an exile with no possibility of finding a cultural "home." He is in an enforced state of painful loneliness and taken up by his guilt for having escaped the bitter fate—in many cases death—of his Central European intellectual friends who chose not to flee Russian domination. Kundera's cry of pain and ambivalence is understood through the experience of the fictional Tomas. A surgeon, he initially escapes Czechoslovakia to a good hospital position in Switzerland after the Russian invasion of 1968. But then he follows his lover, Tereza, back to Czechoslovakia and to ignominious humiliations. Among his many conquests, Tereza is the only woman Tomas loves. For Kundera, she represents the singular muse he tries to follow. Unlike Tomas, he did not follow her "home," for he would no more have found his "home" in Czechoslovakia than he had anywhere else. Still, Kundera cannot help wondering what might have been his fate; and Tomas, his invention, wanders purgatorily until he finally finds a level of existence with Tereza in which he can live a truly loving and self-reconciled life. Through Tomas, Kundera finds an imagined state of grace. But there is still no way "home" for Kundera, for while his present life allows freedom of expression, he speaks in a cultural wasteland—different, but in the end the same as life under the heel of the Russian conqueror.

Tomas's odyssey is fictionalized as a succession of erotic encounters, described with a strange lack of eroticism. In each encounter Tomas seeks to find "the millionth part dissimilarity," the unpredictable individuality he desperately needs for his creative as well as political life. He exults in the differences he discovers en route to and in intercourse—different nuances of