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## Book Reviews

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# Newt Gingrich: Can he tell fact from fiction?

by Nancy Spannaus

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### To Renew America

by Newt Gingrich  
HarperCollins, New York, 1995  
260 pages, hardbound, \$14.40

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### 1945

by Newt Gingrich and William R. Forstchen  
Baen Publishing Enterprises, Riverdale, N.Y.,  
1995  
382 pages, hardbound, \$24

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Newt Gingrich the sloganeering moralist, or Newt Gingrich the cynical futurologist, which would you prefer? Your answer will determine which of these two over-priced productions from Gingrich, Inc. you might want to subject yourself to.

There is no question but that both of Gingrich's books, if read with a clinical eye, give you an insight into aspects of the mind of the Squeaker of the House. Both clearly disqualify him from any serious consideration as a historian, although they advertise this as a qualification of the author. This guy doesn't know what the American Revolution was all about, and not much of anything else.

### American slogans

Gingrich's *To Renew America* is intended almost as a political platform. It outlines the areas of the "Contract on America," in combination with a certain amount of personal reflection. It substantiates over and over again that Gingrich doesn't have any understanding of the historical or philosophical significance of his own nation, much less any others.

"American civilization" is the principle which Gingrich puts forward as the ideal. But what is that? This alleged history professor (what a testament to incompetence!) describes it as comprised of five basic elements:

"1. The common understanding we share about who we are and how we came to be

"2. The ethic of individual responsibility

"3. The spirit of entrepreneurial free enterprise

"4. The spirit of invention and discovery

"5. Pragmatism and the concern for craft and excellence as expressed most recently in the teachings of Edwards Deming."

Now, you might think that American civilization should be defined with some reference to our revolutionary break with Great Britain, but that is not something which Gingrich puts any emphasis on.

In fact, the source he refers to as his favorite American historian is very instructive, since that source sees the American Revolution as being totally within the British radical empiricist tradition.

### Complete distortion

Gordon S. Wood, author of *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* and *The Creation of the American Republic*, is Gingrich's favorite historian. In *The Radicalism*, Wood states in the introduction: "There should no longer be any doubt about it: The white American colonists were not an oppressed people, they had no crushing imperial chains to throw off." That statement alone shows he doesn't understand the difference between imperialism and republicanism. He obviously considers the statements of our Founding Fathers against the British monarchy as purely rhetorical, or false.

Wood describes England of the 18th century as a "republicanized monarchy," and sees the American Revolution as in continuity with it. Specifically, he defines republicanism as the tradition of the Enlightenment, particularly the Enlightenment ideas of imperial lackey John Locke. Locke, in his view, is the quintessential representative of "freedom." And what is his view of freedom? The lack of inhibitions to do anything you want.

I'll be more specific. Wood describes the phenomenon of American republicanism as coming into its own in the Jacksonian era—the era of populist democracy, which, in fact, led to the destruction of the American System of political-economy for some decades. At that time, he says, Locke's ideas were more fully dominant. Locke's idea of the mind being a *tabula rasa*, a blank sheet, meant that, in Wood's words, "minds can be molded and manipulated by controlling people's sensations." Thus, people can be defined by their experiences, with no moral inhibitions whatsoever. A perfect description of British liberal radicalism of the Adam Smith type.

In fact, Gingrich positively refers to Adam Smith's view of liberty in his speeches, praising *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the work in which Smith says that people don't have to be concerned with the moral consequences of their actions, but should concentrate on fulfilling their desires, and leave the result to God. This is as anti-American as Adam Smith's theory of free trade, a policy which the American Revolution was specifically fought against.

Now, we can take a look at the "principles" which Gingrich says do define this nonexistent entity called American civilization, and see how nonsensical they are. Our "common understanding" of where we came from, is a vacuous concept—especially when divorced from our historical struggle against British imperialism. "Individual responsibility" is a value of all western civilization, in the positive sense of the individual's being made in the image of the Creator, and responsible for history. But Gingrich doesn't mean it that way, of course. He means to say that, if you don't make it in society, it's your fault—even if the laws, the economy, and other things are stacked against you.

"The spirit of entrepreneurial free enterprise" might be considered an American value by many, but it has the spin of the British free-trade ideology Gingrich loves. "Pragmatism and the concern for craft and excellence" is a sneaky apology for the same amorality of Adam Smith.

The only value which one could wholeheartedly endorse from Gingrich, is "the spirit of invention and discovery," a subject upon which our best President, Abraham Lincoln, wrote a wonderful stump speech, upon the difference between man and animals. But there again, the value is not simply American, except insofar as America attempted to represent the best of western Christian civilization.

In effect, Gingrich is defining "American civilization" in order to appeal to a British free trade chauvinism—not the American tradition.

## The novel

Gingrich's novel, *1945*, has been the subject of a great deal of ethical discussion, and, yes, the "sex kitten" scene is still there in the opener. In reality, the scenario—which has Hitler's Germany surviving World War II and embarked upon a nuclear race with the United States, and upon the openings of World War III—does have some fast-moving action in some parts. But by the book's conclusion, Gingrich's own personality as a cynical futurologist hits you over the head.

It is notable that the novel includes a fair number of historical characters, despite its disclaimer that "any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental." (Perhaps that statement goes better with the political book.) The evil hero is Otto Skorzeny, and the British prime minister is Winston Churchill. The most outrageous "real" fictional character, however, is the evil German nuclear bomb

specialist, who is given the name Friedrich von Schiller. Schiller, the German poet of freedom, who fought for the ideas of the American Revolution in Europe and for Classical beauty, is utterly defamed by this reference—and it could not have been by accident.

So, where does the cynical futurology come in? Well, after the Nazis have succeeded in destroying the U.S. nuclear facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the scene shifts to Washington, D.C., where the government leadership is trying to figure out what to do next. And what is the proposal? A new form of systems analysis geared to overcome bureaucracy! It reads like a printout of the gobbledygook from Alvin and Heidi Toffler.

From the mouth of one "General George Catlett Marshall," comes the following ideological spiel:

"I do have a new model—a new paradigm—on how a modern democratic state should organize itself to make a surge-effort in war. This is radical stuff . . . and I'm going to need a cadre of thinkers, thinkers who can take my ideas and run with them and build on them. . . .

"By that I mean, give them the greatest possible freedom to shape the very goals they pursue. . . . Or to put it yet another way, to *call* the shots, not just make them. Consider: We won the Great Pacific War as fast as we did by assembling first-rate teams without regard for the organizational provenance of the team members. Then we set them goals and arranged things that they could charge forward full-bore, with no bottlenecks, or bureaucratic jerks, or surprise budgetary constraints allowed to get in the way."

As another character identifies, this is a printout of "industrial-organizational ideas." They are of precisely the sort that Gingrich and his army of destroy-the-government revolutionaries are using today, when they claim that "bureaucracy" is the problem, instead of bad policies. It's organization-speak of an ideological kind.

## Recommendation

I recommend you buy neither of these books.

To hear Gingrich's moralistic sloganeering, you need only turn on your television. There's hardly any difference between *To Renew America*, and his rants and raves on camera.

To learn of Newt's sexual fantasies, war dreams, and organizational blueprints, you also need only hear his speeches, or read a brief profile, such as that in a recent issue of *Vanity Fair*.

Newt Gingrich doesn't know what it is to be an American. That tells you something about our educational system, and about those who have been sucked in by his rhetoric. It tells you that we had better do some serious reflection and study as a nation, if we are going to restore ourselves as a sovereign republic, committed to the welfare of our posterity, and all mankind.