



BOOKS

Not-So-Tall Tales?

A Diplomat's Progress: Ten Tales of Diplomatic Adventure in and around the Middle East

Henry Precht, Williams & Company, 2005, \$14.95, paperback, 233 pages.

REVIEWED BY DAVE DUNFORD

As its title suggests, *A Diplomat's Progress* functions on some levels as an homage to John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*: a series of allegorical tales told by a dreamer. There are obvious parallels between John Bunyan's mythical places, like the Slough of Despond, and the exotic settings, such as Assiut and Mauritius, of Henry Precht's tales. And like Bunyan's hero, Harry Prentice of Savannah, Ga., the first-person narrator of all 10 tales, tries to find meaning and fulfillment in his journey through a world where larger forces control his fate. Instead of the evil Giant Despair, he meets wily Sunnis, Shia, Iranians, Maronites, Israelis, Palestinians and Kurds.

The author unapologetically plays fast and loose with the line between truth and fiction. He advises us in the introduction not to "worry about what might be real; swallow it all." This is good advice, because Harry is often far from heroic. We learn he is ethically challenged as he conspires with an Egyptian police officer to pocket some of the cash found on a dead American. After an embarrassingly brief bout of soul-searching, Harry elects to do nothing about the obvious rape of a

Precht's protagonist resembles no one as much as Inspector Clouseau. Yet he also seems very real.



young Japanese woman by a senior Mauritian official. Later he unwittingly allows the Iranian government to use him as bait to lure a Kurdish dissident out into the open and hang him.

While on vacation in Israel Harry seizes an opportunity to talk with a Palestinian, and gets duped into helping him carry out a bombing there. In such situations, Harry resembles no one as much as Inspector Clouseau, wandering innocently through a world of mayhem, evil and betrayal without ever being harmed or losing his faith in the goodness of humanity. Yet he strikes us as very real, in a way that no former diplomat authoring his own memoirs could ever duplicate.

Two chapters nestled in the middle of the volume about the days preceding the Iranian revolution are so compelling as to be alone worth the price of the book. They give us a classic example of tragedies brought about by political leaders who stubbornly cling to familiar policies even though there is abundant evidence for all to see that the policies are bankrupt. Harry, the consummate political officer, sees the train wreck coming. He carefully marshals his evidence and presents it to his

superiors, but to no avail.

He shows real courage by soldiering on even after his superiors signal clearly that they don't want to hear evidence pointing to the impending collapse of the shah's reign. We know that Harry will fall victim to that iron law of bureaucracy (applicable well beyond the Foreign Service) that tells us it does nothing for your career to be right if the people who are wrong are above your pay grade.

Eight of the stories transport us to exotic places like Afghanistan and Damascus (the other two are set in Washington, D.C., and England, respectively), where we see Harry matching wits with Middle Easterners who come to life as believable characters with good lines rather than the stereotypical Arab terrorists that inhabit our best sellers. The exotic sights, sounds and smells of the Middle East permeate these pages.

My favorite tale is "Mission to Assiut," whose plot — Washington sends Harry from Embassy Cairo to Upper Egypt to ask a radical Sunni cleric to intervene with Shia terrorists holding Americans hostage in Lebanon — is so absurd that I conclude it must have been inspired by a true incident.

You will find *A Diplomat's Progress* to be a fun and easy read, even if you no longer care who lost Iran.

Dave Dunford is a retired Foreign Service officer who served in Quito, Helsinki, Cairo, Riyadh, Muscat and Washington, D.C. He currently teaches, writes and consults in Tucson, Ariz.



Pondering the Path to Pluralistic Prosperity

World on Fire: How Exporting Free-Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability

Amy Chua, Anchor Books, 2004, \$14.00, paperback, 368 pages.

REVIEWED BY
STEPHEN P. NEWHOUSE

World on Fire: How Exporting Free-Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability is a fair book that puts forth a credible thesis about a vitally important subject: the interaction of free markets and democracy. Amy Chua, a Yale Law School professor, basically argues that huge disparities in wealth and opportunity that break along ethnic lines generate conflict — and that democracy and market liberalization actually exacerbate these tensions.

The results of such conflicts vary, but none of the outcomes give cause for optimism. In some cases, the disenfranchised react against the market through ethnically-targeted expropriation. In others, the “market-dominant minority” undercuts democracy and suppresses the ability of the majority to strike them. In the worst cases, the privileged ethnic group becomes the target of more violent actions.

Setting her argument off from determinism with a number of caveats, Chua contends that while this is not a universal phenomenon, it is more common than one might think. She identifies market-dominant minorities ranging from the Chinese merchants of Southeast Asia and the Ibo of Cameroon to the Jewish billionaires of post-Soviet Russia and the Lebanese throughout Africa. She sees ethnic violence from Rwanda to

Yugoslavia through the same lens, and argues that the same basic pattern of inequality, resentment and reaction also makes global anti-Americanism comprehensible.

Such observations are at odds with the advice developed nations (Chua blames the U.S., especially) push on developing ones. But in Chua’s view, democratic and market-oriented reform should be taken slowly, mirroring the way economic and political institutions evolved in the West, rather than rapidly and concurrently.

Chua’s basic thesis may be intuitive, but the evidence she summons is less than compelling. She frequently cites her own experiences to illustrate her points, reinforcing the sense that her data-gathering was haphazard, rather than systematic. At the same time, she construes many events quite differently than is conventional (I have seen no other account of the Rwandan genocide portraying it as the result of too much democracy, too soon). The combination is unsatisfying. One should recognize, however, that this is a direct result of the grand scope of the argument and serious data limitations: who has counted ethnic groups worldwide over time systematically? How does one measure “tension”? Who has kept a count of liberalization, and how would one compare minor policy changes to more substantive ones?

Another limitation of the book, surprising from a law professor, is an un-lawyerlike lack of definitional precision. She repeatedly confounds “democracy” with any situation in which the majority can impose its will. In addition, “free market” is not how I would describe crony capitalism — the operative word there is “crony” — of friend and family counting for more than price.

Deeper theoretical questions also sit not far in the background. Chua

Chua posits a plausible, if not totally convincing, challenge to the accepted wisdom in Washington.

implies in several places that capitalism and competition inevitably yield severe income inequality. But there is no basis for that presumption. In fact, economic theory predicts that under competition, relative productivities and resource scarcities would be the primary determinants of income. This shortcoming is related to intriguing questions the book leaves uninvestigated and unanswered: How do these groups establish and perpetuate themselves as market-dominant minorities? Why doesn’t competition erode their positions?

But despite such shortcomings, Chua has produced a readable, if somewhat repetitive, book that posits a fairly plausible challenge to the accepted wisdom of the Washington consensus. Free markets and democracy don’t necessarily combine to make the world rich, peaceful and just. The path to pluralistic prosperity may depend much more on sequencing and on other important real-world differences that are sometimes lost in the call for quick reform.

Stephen P. Newhouse has been a Foreign Service officer with the Department of State since 1997. He is currently on the staff of the Under Secretary for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs. The views expressed here are his own and not necessarily those of the State Department or the U.S. government.



The Art of War

Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon

Gijs van Hensbergen, Bloomsbury USA, 2004, \$35, hardcover, 352 pages.

REVIEWED BY
LARRY WINTER ROEDER JR.

Hanging just to the left of the entrance to the U.N. Security Council is a huge copy of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" — one of the most powerful graphic depictions of the horrors of war ever created. In *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, Gijs van Hensbergen gives us the historical background of the painting and the atrocity it portrays, and discusses how its images have continued to shape modern thinking about war and politics.

As he recounts, soon after the Spanish Civil War began, a delegation representing the beleaguered democratic government traveled to Picasso's home in Paris seeking a bold visual protest against Generalissimo Francisco Franco. Specifically, they asked him to paint the centerpiece for the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 World's Fair. Though Picasso disdained overtly political art, he agreed.

Not long thereafter, on April 27, 1937, Franco's forces, backed by the Nazis, firebombed a Basque village in northern Spain. Fascist forces pounded Guernica with high explosives and incendiary bombs for over three hours, cutting down people as they fled from the crumbling buildings. Some 1,600 civilians were killed or wounded, and the town burned for three days.

By May 1, news of the massacre reached Paris, where more than a million protesters flooded the streets to voice their outrage in the largest May Day demonstration the city had ever

seen. Eyewitness reports and black-and-white photographs filled the front pages of Paris papers. Appalled and enraged, Picasso quickly sketched the first images for the mural he would call simply "Guernica."

Hensbergen points out that Picasso deliberately chose not to employ images from the destroyed city. Instead, he broke away from normality. The paint is nearly monochromatic, not full of gory reds. As a result, the initial reception to the work was "strangely muted." The Spanish had wanted something partisan and the Basques felt it was too abstract. Yet the truth is that the abstraction provided a long-term tool, an illustration of existential terror that "depicts the effects of a brutality that strikes from nowhere." The victims are looking above them, but not at a specific enemy, adding to the terror inflicted by all who engage in mass murder from the skies — exactly the sort of evil the U.N. Security Council is now meant to resist and punish.

The mural became a fund-raising tool, moving through Scandinavia and then arriving in London on Sept. 30, 1938, the day of the infamous Munich Pact. It was the centerpiece of the Museum of Modern Art's Picasso retrospective in New York six weeks before the invasion of Poland a year later.

Picasso's grim painting (now housed in the Reina Sofia, Spain's national museum of modern art) ranks as the most effective anti-fascist work of art in the world and one of the most forceful statements of its kind in human history. Because of its abstract nature, people could apply it to any crisis, such as the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust. The artist Willem De Kooning saw the mural as a description of the Luftwaffe's destruction of Rotterdam.

Creating "Guernica" also transformed Picasso, who became a communist in 1944 and painted many anti-

Picasso's decision not to employ images from the destroyed city in the painting helped make it universal.

war works, including the dove for the communist-organized Paris Peace Congress in April 1949, which was later adopted as the international symbol of peace. The irony is that Picasso hated the excesses of the Soviets, while Soviet critic Vladimir Kamenov denounced Picasso as pathological. Said Kamenov: "His pathology has created repugnant monstrosities. ... In his 'Guernica' he portrayed not the Spanish Republic but monsters. He treads the path of cosmopolitanism, of empty geometric forms. His every canvas deforms man — his body and his face." But it should come as no shock that the Soviets reacted this way, for the painting was clearly an attack on the kind of atrocities perpetrated by Stalin and others of his ilk through the ages.

Too often, we prefer pretty pictures, simple images. But "Guernica" is not one of those. It is a deep philosophical statement against violence and war, a work of art that all who are interested in peace need to ingrain in their minds.

Similarly, this book is a must-read for every foreign affairs agency employee, and everyone working for peace and justice. ■

Larry Roeder is the policy adviser on disaster management in the International Organization Affairs Bureau's Office of Social and Humanitarian Affairs.