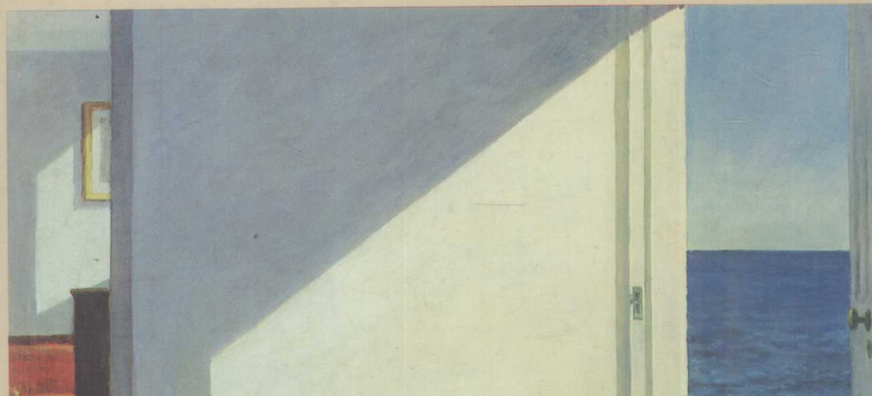
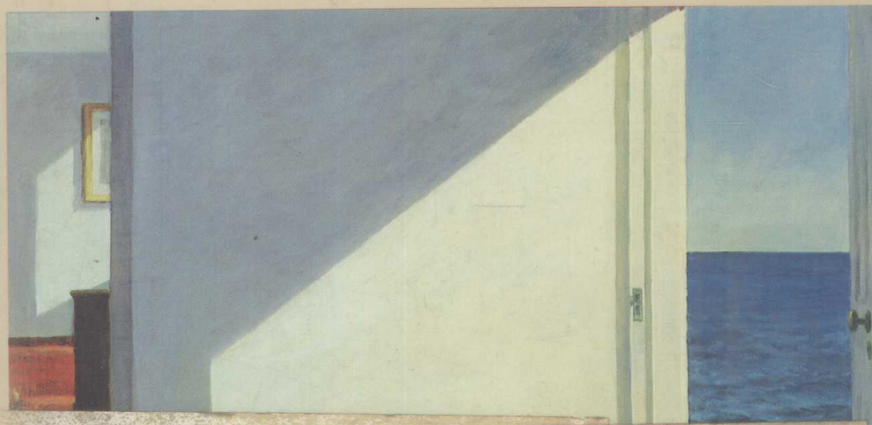


WILLIAM
VESTERMAN

E S S A Y S
FOR THE '80'S





ESSAYS FOR THE '80's



William Vesterman

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY



RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Essays for the '80's.

1. College readers. 2. English language—
Rhetoric. 3. Interdisciplinary approach in education.

I. Vesterman, William, 1942—

PE1417.E85 1986 808'.0427 86-20441

ISBN 0-394-34313-1

Manufactured in the United States of America

Cover painting

Edward Hopper, *Rooms by the Sea*, 1951.

Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B. A. 1903.

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PREFACE

Essays for the '80's is a thematic, issue-oriented reader for Freshman Composition containing forty-three lively essays in a variety of lengths, styles, and levels. The book is arranged in six categories of the contemporary issues from public and private life found most stimulating by today's students. Each category is introduced by a section called "The Past as Prologue" that contains a classic piece from an earlier period to create a context and provide comparisons. The five central categories are framed historically by another section of essays—early predictions for the course the decade was to follow ("A Different Decade"). The book's writing component includes an alternate table of contents to make clear the variety of vivid writing available for a rhetorically arranged course. Each section contains an introduction that sets the general theme and links the individual selections. Biographical headnotes, discussion questions, and writing assignments for each essay complete the book's apparatus.

The title of this collection is meant to express simultaneously two principles of selection. First, with the exception of the classic pieces for historical comparison, the essays included have been written and published within the present decade. But perhaps more importantly for their success in stimulating class discussion and out-of-class writing assignments, they are "essays" in the original sense of that term—attempts to understand some of the central but far-from-settled issues of the decade, issues that manifestly concern student writers and their teachers as well. The categories in which the essays are arranged contain many topics that make up our sense of the immediate past and future and affect the student both as a public and a private individual. In responding to these essays, therefore, students will be addressing topics that are of personal concern and yet that are also within the scope of their experience, judgment, and self-interest.

As the table of contents shows, the book offers complete essays that clearly demonstrate the methods by which accomplished contemporary writers achieve clarity, organization, and forcefulness of expression in expository prose. It is from such contemporary models that students can directly gain stimulus for class discussion and help in forming their own

styles. In addition, many of the topics for term papers in courses that depend on that form of writing assignment are commonly selected from areas covered by the sections of *Essays for the '80's*.

To ensure that these virtues of content and style translate into success as measured by the practical goals of Freshman Composition, the essays have also been selected to represent a variety of rhetorical modes ranging from personal narrative to exposition and argumentation. Additionally, the issues included naturally extend from some that require only personal opinion and judgment for student response to others that can stimulate further research on open-ended topics of the sort favored by courses that work toward the completion of a term paper at the end of the semester.

All features of the book's apparatus are designed to support the assumption that topical and personally relevant essays may be seriously used in a serious composition course without reliance on faddishness or fluff:

- For each section of the book a brief sectional introduction puts the general category into contemporary focus, explains any necessary matters of context, and suggests how the particular selections crystallize various aspects of the general topic.
- A headnote for each piece provides a brief biography of the writer and an encapsulated description of the writer's thesis and manner of pursuing it. Highlighted points of rhetorical and stylistic interest will orient students to some of the ways in which they might most efficiently learn from the writer's technique as well as from the writer's theme.
- Discussion questions for each essay address:
 - a) the topical issues;
 - b) the interrelation of the topical issues with those of other essays in the book;
 - c) rhetorical and stylistic features of the essay;
 - d) suggestions for using similar topics and techniques in the student's own writing;
 - e) suggestions for using the piece as a point of departure through comparison or contrast to the most recent developments on the issue or on related issues.
- An alternate table of contents is provided.
- An Instructor's Manual is available on request.

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am happy to have the occasion here to thank Robert Atwan for his help in the organization of this book and for many particular suggestions for the essays included. I also thank Richard Garretson, John Wright, and Steve Pensinger for support and advice from the start. Eric Anderson, Dave McTiernan, Ted Mason, and Lisa Haugaard helped in the book's production, which may never have happened were it not for the exceptionally able assistance of William Millard.

WILLIAM VESTERMAN

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A DIFFERENT DECADE

It is pleasant to think of any humanly organized change as progress: a movement of advance and of improvement over what has been established by the past. But many changes—in particular many social changes—seem to come more out of reaction and opposition to what has gone before than from any sense of positive continuity. In this way, the social prophets and innovators of the 60s and 70s were frequently concerned with making clear that, whatever other virtues their ideas might have, these ideas were based firmly on a contempt for, and rejection of, their counterparts in the immediate past.

Their rejection of the conventional wisdom of the time included older proverbs, such as “those who live by the sword shall die by the sword.” When *their* values and assumptions in turn became objects of popular rejection, the seers of the 70s began to experience the kind of surprise that still characterizes their public pronouncements as token relics from what they are now chagrined to admit has become the past.

Just what were the values and assumptions that characterized the decade preceding the 1980s? Tom Wolfe, who came to prominence as a chronicler of many innovations in the social life of the 60s and 70s, makes an effort to put the times into an American-historical perspective in “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening.” Wolfe argues that, far from being an unprecedented

and unique age, the 70s clearly fit into a pattern of what poet William Carlos Williams called "the American grain."

The next three selections are written by thinkers who have tried to provide social prophecies for the decade looming before them. Since this was the decade chosen by one of our most famous social prophets, George Orwell, as the setting for his *1984*, an easy framework suggested itself: to what extent had Orwell's fears been fulfilled?

Malcolm Muggeridge finds that the spirit if not the letter of *1984* has been manifested. Muggeridge began as a social revolutionary before coming to deplore any form of "utopianism," which he sees as the misguided spirit of the twentieth century in democracies and totalitarian states alike. In "On the Threshold of the Eighties," he first outlines the various forms utopianism has taken in the twentieth century, then concludes that, while the materialistic values on which they are based remain too sterile to provide anything but the opposite of the human freedom they promise, a rebirth of Western civilization may come out of its own despair.

Feminist Gloria Steinem takes a brighter view of the 70s. "The Way We Were—And Will Be" traces the course of feminism in the decade, concluding that "we are now ready for more institutional, systematic changes in the 80s." She sees the continuing areas of focus for progress as including employment, child care, and what she calls "reproductive freedom." Her illustrations of social change include a survey of changes in language—the honorific "Ms.," for example—that entered the common vocabulary during the 1970s.

In the next selection, writer and editor Norman Podhoretz directly takes on the issue of George Orwell, the man who haunts all speculations about the decade. Podhoretz points out that Orwell, like Dickens, is the kind of writer whom people of widely differing political viewpoints all seek to claim as their own. In "If Orwell Were Alive Today," Podhoretz claims him for "neoconservatism," in spite of Orwell's self-definition as a "socialist." Podhoretz bases his view on the claim that only Western democratic capitalism has been able to fulfill the hopes of Orwell's brand of socialism, while the self-styled socialist systems of the rest of the world have come to fulfill Orwell's worst fears.

The theme of the course the decade was to take is replaced

in the section's last two selections by the stories of two prominent events with which the decade in fact began: the continued imprisonment of American hostages in Iran and the first election of Ronald Reagan as president of the United States. These two events came to be seen as symbols of the nation's situation but, like all symbols, they were open to differing interpretations. In "The Year of the Hostage," Steven Roberts goes for interpretation not to intellectuals or to social prophets but to the American man and woman "on the street." Reporting just weeks before Reagan's November 1980 election, Roberts sought out the feelings and thoughts of the people who were shortly to reject the incumbent President, James Earl Carter. Carter's handling of the hostage crisis became one of the key campaign issues for both sides.

Who was the man who became the people's choice, the man who inspired so many hopes and fears but who had never before held national office? Writers Joel Kotkin and Paul Grabowicz present, in "Dutch Reagan, All-American," an irreverent but on the whole balanced account of the biographical facts about a man whose overwhelming re-election in 1984 was to confirm him as the most important political figure of the decade.

THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening

TOM WOLFE

Tom Wolfe, one of the pioneers of the "New Journalism," has been imitated widely since his groundbreaking work of the 1960s, but none of his imitators has yet captured the balance of manic intensity and sober judgment that distinguishes Wolfe's writing. After studying at Washington and Lee, then at Yale, where he earned a doctorate in American Studies in 1957, Wolfe commenced a career in journalism that has brought him wide recognition and

occasional controversy. His first article for a national magazine launched him, almost by accident, into his present role: upon accepting a freelance assignment for *Esquire* covering the car-customizing culture of California, he found that traditional journalistic methods could not capture the true spirit of his subject. Wolfe contacted his editor, Byron Dobell, and arranged to send a set of notes so that another writer could complete the job. Sitting down one night, he began typing "Dear Byron," and followed this salutation with a description that grew wilder and longer, finally reaching forty-nine pages by early morning. When Dobell received these "notes," he and the other *Esquire* editors realized they were onto something; removing only the "Dear Byron," they printed the Wolfe one-night wonder in its entirety.

Wolfe's technique—approaching nonfictional subjects through technical methods more often associated with fiction, such as personal points of view and stream-of-consciousness structures, and employing exuberant punctuation and sound effects for extra emphasis—was born with this piece, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," which was later to become the title piece in his first collection of essays. Wolfe's fame increased with *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, the book-length study of Ken Kesey's *Merry Pranksters*, perhaps the only accurate and intelligent work written about users of LSD, then with *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*, which contained the unforgettable portrait of New York liberal intelligentsia anxiously showing their *nostalgie de la boue* at a fund-raising party for the Black Panthers, hosted by conductor Leonard Bernstein. In the 1970s Wolfe took on the modern art world: *The Painted Word* and *From Bauhaus to Our House* attacked modernist trends and spare, "industrial" form-follows-function design as elitist and un-American, drawing the rancor of the art and architecture establishments but also winning a legion of amused adherents. His account of the early days of the American space program, *The Right Stuff*, combined his usual wry humor with a tone of genuine, uncompromised admiration for test pilots and astronauts. It is Wolfe's own favorite work, and the only one of his books to be made into a motion picture. In recent years he has made two drastic changes: he has stopped wearing his trademark \$600 white three-piece suits (reportedly because of the popularity of similar attire resulting from the film *Saturday Night Fever*), and he has written his first novel.

The saga of the Me Decade begins with one of those facts that are so big and so obvious (like the Big Dipper) no one ever comments on them any more. Namely: the thirty-year boom. Wartime spending in the United States in the 1940's touched off a boom that has continued for more than thirty years. It has pumped money into every class level of

the population on a scale without parallel in any country in history. True, nothing has solved the plight of those at the very bottom, the chronically unemployed of the slums. Nevertheless, in the city of Compton, California, it is possible for a family of four at the very lowest class level, which is known in America today as “on welfare,” to draw an income of \$8,000 a year entirely from public sources. This is more than most British newspaper columnists and Italian factory foremen make, even allowing for differences in living costs. In America truck drivers, mechanics, factory workers, policemen, firemen, and garbagemen make so much money—\$15,000 to \$20,000 (or more) per year is not uncommon—that the word “proletarian” can no longer be used in this country with a straight face. So one now says “lower middle class.” One can’t even call workingmen “blue collar” any longer. They all have on collars like Joe Namath’s or Johnny Bench’s or Walt Frazier’s. They all have on \$35 superstar Qiana sport shirts with elephant collars and 1940’s Airbrush Wallpaper Flowers Buncha Grapes & Seashell designs all over them.

Well, my God, the old utopian socialists of the nineteenth century—such as Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, and Marx—*lived* for the day of the liberated workingman. They foresaw a day when industrialism (Saint-Simon coined the word) would give the common man the things he needed in order to realize his potential as a human being: surplus (discretionary) income, political freedom, free time (leisure), and freedom from grinding drudgery. Some of them, notably Owen and Fourier, thought all this might come to pass first in the United States. So they set up communes here: Owen’s New Harmony commune in Indiana and thirty-four Fourier-style “phalanx” settlements—socialist communes, because the new freedom was supposed to be possible only under socialism. The old boys never dreamed that it would come to pass instead as the result of a Go-Getter Bourgeois business boom such as began in the U.S. in the 1940’s. Nor would they have liked it if they had seen it. For one thing, the *homo novus*, the new man, the liberated man, the first common man in the history of the world with the much-dreamed-of combination of money, freedom, and free time—this American workingman—didn’t *look* right. The Joe Namath-Johnny Bench-Walt Frazier superstar Qiana wallpaper sports shirts, for a start.

He didn’t look right . . . and he wouldn’t . . . *do right!* I can remember what brave plans visionary architects at Yale and Harvard still had for *the common man* in the early 1950’s. (They actually used the term “the common man.” They had brought the utopian socialist dream forward into the twentieth century. They had things figured out for the