European and American factions of existentialism.

Despite these high points, *Existential America* underplays the battle of ideas between progressive thinkers and their adversaries throughout American history. The book seems to dismiss the fact that those ideological debates took force in the first three decades of the twentieth century and eventually led to shaping the policies and the culture of the Cold War. At the end of World War II, ruling ideas were being reshaped by institutions and individuals that rejected existentialism—and did not endorse it, as Cotkin suggests. Ayn Rand's objectivism may propel action and commitment, but it is positively not existentialism; nor did Arthur Schlesinger's assertions in *The Vital Center* (1949) target the status quo that reigned since the late 1940s in the Western world and more prominently in the United States. Also, the rise of first the New Left and later the politics of identity should not be considered direct consequences of the end of ideology. Instead, they laid a bridge to the highly idealized, intellectual Popular Front of the 1930s. A closer look at the mechanisms of the cultural politics of the Cold War may have led Cotkin to redefine American existentialism as an intellectual attitude much more akin to the Continental version than he thinks.

Still, *Existential America* is a very appropriate text for our understanding central issues in American cultural and intellectual history. One may or may not agree with George Cotkin's arguments, but he has in a timely fashion refreshed central topics in American culture, which have recently been brought to the fore on account of the responsibilities the current U.S. administration has claimed for itself.

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Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s. By Michael Johns. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. x, 148 pp. $29.95, ISBN 0-520-23435-9.)

Some observers look back to American urbanism in the 1950s as the last civic golden age—when governments governed, you could leave your door unlocked, men wore hats, and songs had melodies—before the 1960s plunged cities into a long dark night from which they have never emerged. A competing but equally conventional school of thought treats the city in the 1950s as one among many artifacts shaped by the decade's ruling imperative to contain Others—blacks, women, radicals, homosexuals, dissenters from Cold War consensus—by controlling and unjustly suppressing difference.

Michael Johns's *Moment of Grace* navigates between and well beyond these two orders of received wisdom, evoking an urban moment without idealizing it or seeking to annihilate it with critique. Slim, elegantly presented, written in precise and fluid prose that welcomes any reader, the book captures the moment when the city peaked in its dominance of American life and began to give way to the suburbs. Assembling evidence that ranges from architecture to fashion to quotidian routines, Johns renders the moment's suspended quality, reconstructing city-based ways of life that achieved a rare coherence even as they began to decline under pressure from postindustrial transformation, suburbanization, migration, government policy, the push for racial equality, and other large-scale forces.

The book is at its best when presenting resonant details that add up to composite portraits of downtown and the neighborhoods. A Hopperesque paragraph describing warehouse districts makes palpable the textures of brick and wood, the bustle and stillness. A virtuoso passage on the "greater sexual spark" of center cities in the 1950s evokes the "formality, the voluptuousness, and the conviction that downtown was worth dressing up for," which "all lent downtown an air of romance" and made it "a central place for wooing" (pp. 23–24). The chapter on the neighborhoods finds edifying nuances in such well-known types as the corner grocer and in lifeways often pined for but rarely analyzed. Johns's discussion of social glue—the formula features mothers at home, teenagers at ease with adults, nearby retail streets, and stoops to hang out on with no TV or air conditioning to clear them—astutely traces the qualities of this social order that in-

spire sentimental memories of it, yet he does not give in to sentiment himself. Like Robert Beauregard's *Voices of Decline* (2003), *Moment of Grace* often accomplishes the difficult trick of addressing the substance behind popular historical truisms—such as "Back then, kids had respect"—while granting those truisms their emotional and explanatory power.

There is less complexity, less sense of discovery, in the closing chapter on the suburbs, perhaps because the world it describes is not so "lost," suburbanity having supplanted urbanity as the social and cultural dominant. The milieu, and the sources and anecdotes used to evoke it, seems familiar in ways that the sexiness of downtown no longer is. Still, the final chapter completes the argument's arc, tracing the outlines of the suburban order that emerged on the periphery of American urbanism before becoming the central ground of American life.

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The Greatest Menace: Organized Crime in Cold War America. By Lee Bernstein. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. xiv, 237 pp. $34.95, ISBN 1-55849-345-X.)

The title of this book is a pointed one: organized crime, even more than the Communist conspiracy, provided a focus for the anxieties of Cold War Americans. Much evidence is adduced to support this view, and one can readily agree that the issue of crime in the postwar polity has not been given the attention it deserves.

Lee Bernstein is not the first scholar to note the twin obsessions with Communism and crime in the 1950s, but none has developed the comparison with so much insight. Nonetheless, it is the substantive chapters in this book—ranging across such topics as racial conflict in Cicero, Illinois, the televising of the Kefauver congressional committee's investigations of the mob, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics's pursuit of Lucky Luciano, the role of the television show *The Untouchables*—that are more compelling than its interpretative structure. Bernstein seems to argue, for example, that the investigations of crime and labor racketeering owed something to the social strains consequent on the emergence of a white ethnic middle class and of organized labor, which is reminiscent of Richard Hofstadter's explanation of the radical right in terms of status anxieties. But the argument is not clearly spelled out, and the evidence is less than conclusive.

This stricture is perhaps unfair given the author's ambitious analyses of the intersections of politics, popular culture, and crime. These include examinations of "true crime" stories, the new role of television in defining public issues, and the attempted manipulations of the media by politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups. The preoccupation with and understanding of crime was related to the shifting boundaries of class, ethnicity, and gender, and, it is argued, the campaign against "the greatest menace" sought to promote a consensus on American identity in the Cold War era. Such arguments must necessarily remain rather conjectural. The anxieties discussed here seem to arise more from internal changes than from any external threat, which may well have been the case, though where then does that leave the Cold War?

Fascinating though the parallels identified by Bernstein are, the comparison with anticommunism could have been carried further. The discussion of state and local crime committees misses the opportunity to compare them with the "little HUACs." The local anticrime measures appear to have peaked a little after the little HUACs, just as the national anticrime campaign achieved its fullest momentum around 1959 when McCarthyism had faded. In short, while the anticommunist context may have shaped perceptions of crime, it may have needed the red scare to abate before energies could be fully directed against the other enemy within. The differences between the two phenomena need also to be considered. The drive against the Mafia targeted Italian Americans, who, unlike Central and Eastern Europeans, did not make plausible Communists. McCarthyism, at least in part, may have been an attempt to coerce certain immigrant groups to cleave to patriotic values; the anticrime crusade arguably performed the