

Chapter 1

HERITAGE ASCENDANT

THE WORLD REJOICES IN A NEWLY POPULAR FAITH: the cult of heritage. To be sure, heritage is as old as humanity. Prehistoric peoples bequeathed goods and goals; legacies benign and malign suffuse Homeric tales, the Old Testament, and Confucian precepts. But only in our time has heritage become a self-conscious creed, whose shrines and icons daily multiply and whose praise suffuses public discourse.

Regard for roots and recollection permeates the Western world and pervades the rest. Nostalgia for things old and outworn supplants dreams of progress and development. A century or even fifty years ago the untrammelled future was all the rage; today we laud legacies bequeathed by has-beens. Once the term patrimony implied provincial backwardness or musty antiquarianism; now it denotes nurturance and stewardship.

Devotion to heritage is a spiritual calling "like nursing or being in Holy Orders," as James Lees-Milne termed his own career of rescuing historic English country houses for the National Trust. A successor's verbal slip as he spoke with me, "When I joined the Church—I mean, the Trust," echoed the analogy. The Trust's supreme tidiness recalls those Victorian restorers who scraped medieval churches and cathedrals clean of the debris of time and neglect, so as to perfect their divinity. The English, however, are not the only such devotees; heritage awakens piety the world over. Australians are said to "spend more of their spiritual energy" in quests for enshrined symbols of identity than in any other pursuit; "worship of the past in Australia [is] one of the great secular religions."¹

The creed of heritage answers needs for ritual devotion, especially

where other formal faith has become perfunctory or mainly political. Like religious causes, heritage fosters exhilarating fealties. For no other commitment do peoples so readily take up arms. Once a dilettante pastime, the pursuit and defense of patrimonial legacies is now likened to the Crusades—bitter, protracted, and ruthless.

The religious analogy extends to modes of belief: heritage relies on revealed faith rather than rational proof. We elect and exalt our legacy not by weighing its claims to truth, but in feeling that it *must* be right. The mainstay is not mental effort but moral zeal. “You can’t be taught jazz,” says American singer Cassandra Wilson, “it’s a legacy.”

As doctrine, heritage is mandatory. It comes to us willy-nilly and cannot be shed, however shaming it may be. To share a legacy is to belong to a family, a community, a race, a nation. What each inherits is in some measure unique, but common commitments bind us to others within our group. Inheritors are fellow countrymen—not just patriots but *compatriots*. Mutual identity demands mutual allegiance. Those deprived of a legacy are rootless and bereaved; those who seek to reject one are unnatural ingrates. Nations bereft of birthrights today lament their loss much as Esau did in the book of Genesis. Whatever its burdens, a heritage ought never be denied: self-respect requires us to accept, husband, and transmit it.

The traits that align heritage with religion help explain its potent pull, but they also pose serious risks. A dogma of roots and origins that must be accepted on faith denies the role of reason, forecloses compromise, and numbs willpower. Credence in a mythic past crafted for some present cause suppresses history’s impartial complexity. Touting our own heritage as uniquely splendid sanctions narrow-minded ignorance and breeds belligerent bigotry.

Benign and baneful consequences are alike manifold, and heritage vice is inseparable from heritage virtue. This is little understood, though; because few realize how heritage actually functions, most are content either to admire or traduce it. Devotees ignore or slight its threats, while detractors deny its virtues and suppose that simply cursing heritage can excise its ills.

The current craze for heritage seems to me likely to last and hence essential to understand. Its potential for both good and evil is huge. On the one hand, it offers a rationale for self-respecting stewardship of all

we hold dear; on the other, it signals an eclipse of reason and a regression to embattled tribalism. I aim to show how and why heritage has come to matter so much, to caution that heritage credos are by their very nature manipulative, and to counsel that we learn to control heritage lest it control us.

HERITAGE RAMPANT

Heritage is not our sole link with the past. History, tradition, memory, myth, and memoir variously join us with what has passed, with forebears, with our own earlier selves. But the lure of heritage now outpaces other modes of retrieval. If our era heralds the end of history, as pundits like Francis Fukuyama contend, perhaps the eclipse of history heralds the rise of heritage. Heritage may be heir to the “continuous nourishing tradition” that the historian Carl Schorske, by no means alone, fears history has abdicated.²

Yet these diverse routes to the past are neither fixed nor firmly bounded; they overlap and shift their focus. Much that was once termed history or tradition is now heritage, as shown in Chapter 5. But neither history nor tradition ever commanded the ubiquitous reach that heritage has today.

Never before have so many been so engaged with so many different pasts. Spanning the centuries from prehistory to last night, heritage melds Mesozoic monsters with Marilyn Monroe, Egyptian pyramids with Elvis Presley. Memorials and monuments multiply, cities and scenes are restored, historic exploits are reenacted, flea-market kitsch is elevated into antiques. Retro-fashion rages and camcorders memorialize yesterday. Historic sites multiply from thousands to millions; 95 percent of existing museums postdate the Second World War. Budapest, for instance, boasts museums of everyday life that enshrine the telephone and the tram, pastries and pharmaceuticals, advertising and animal husbandry; nothing seems too recent or trivial to commemorate. Invoking heritage justifies any collector’s obsession. “I do love pigs,” a self-styled fanatic in England defends his rare-breeds hobby, “but after all pigs are part of our heritage.”

Fifty years back, book titles and indexes suggest, heritage dwelt mainly on heredity, probate law, and taxation; it now features antiquities,

roots, identity, belonging. The French near-equivalent "patrimony" shows the same shift: the Larousse definition of *patrimoine* has expanded from "goods inherited from parents" to embrace bequests from remote forebears and cultural legacies in general. "We derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers," held Edmund Burke two centuries ago; these days that inheritance determines our very selves. Prior possession once primarily legitimated title to land or lucre; today it sanctions claims to sites and relics. Stressing traditions that are especially our own, heritage magnifies self-esteem and bolsters communal ardor.

Modern preoccupation with heritage dates from about 1980, alike in Reagan's America, Thatcher's Britain, and Pompidou's France. In France, 1978's Year of the Woman and 1979's Year of the Child made a Year of Patrimony in 1980 a logical successor. Nostalgia was everywhere: in 1975 Hélias's *The Horse of Pride*, an elegy for rural Brittany, and Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*, an intimate glimpse of a medieval Languedoc village, won these scholars popular fame; the annals of the hitherto unsung spread fast and far. Patrimony graduated from construing the civil code to celebrating the national estate.³

The pull of the past differs from place to place, and each tongue has its own nuance—French *patrimoine* is more personal than English *heritage*, German *Erbgut* more patriotic than Italian *lascito*. Each people supposes their newly inflated heritage concerns to be unique, reflecting some trait of character or circumstance, some spirit of veneration or revenge that is peculiarly their own. Some impute these concerns to patriotic ardor, some to nostalgic fancy, others to specific needs for mourning or celebrating. Vaunting our own legacy, we are unaware how strikingly concurrent it often is with those of our neighbors. Here is a typical list of unique heritage goodies from a 1994 Canadian travel brochure:

Chestnut canoes . . . O Canada! . . . Emily Carr . . . golden wheat fields of the prairies . . . Blackfoot medicine wheels . . . moss-covered Haida totem poles . . . fishing villages such as Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island . . . donning skates on a crisp winter's morning . . . Northern Lights . . . Anne of Green Gables . . . soapstone carvings . . . loons . . . igloos . . . toboggans . . . maple syrup . . .

These items are Canadian, to be sure. But the resonant words and the stress on wilderness, ethnicity, and childhood typify heritage anywhere.

Maxims current in Manchester and Minneapolis, Madagascar and the

Marquesas stress similar communal concerns. "If wealth is lost, nothing is lost," says Sikhs; "if health is lost, something is lost. If character is lost, much is lost. If *heritage* is lost, *you* are lost." To a Cameroon diplomat heritage is "beyond price, beyond value; it unifies the tribe [and] is the spirit of the nation, what holds us together." Canada's Inuits and Indians, like France's Minister of Culture, claim that "everything is part of our heritage." UNESCO protocols enthrone heritage as the sovereign core of collective identity and self-respect, a nutriment as necessary as food and drink.⁴

Global popularity homogenizes heritage. Its aims and traits are assessed in similar terms in Bergen and Beirut, Tonga and Toronto. The same concerns with precedence and antiquity, continuity and coherence, heroism and sacrifice surface again and again, nurturing family bonds, strengthening fealty, and stressing stewardship. Most heritage is amassed by particular groups, but media diffusion and global networks make these hoards ever more common coin.

Heritage care and conveyance conjoin the stewardship of relics of nature and culture unique to Australia or Amazonia, New Mexico or New Guinea. Display and tourism layer diverse legacies with common facades. The same multinationals finance restoration in Prague and Peru, using techniques devised in Rome and London. Legacies of nature, prehistory, art, and architecture are hyped in terms ever more alike. Exotic dragonflies and endangered dialects are not yet priced alongside Old Master paintings in Sotheby's salesbooks, but their collectors and protectors talk the same legacy lingo.

The language of heritage that suffuses the world is mainly Western. The first historic monuments meeting in 1931 engaged Europeans alone; Tunisia, Mexico, and Peru joined in 1964; in 1979 eighty nations from all continents crafted the World Heritage Convention.⁵ The remotest village in Vanuatu may vaunt Sotheby's auction schedule. Swedish, Japanese, and German firms built the "living" Shona village and replica of Old Bulawayo at Zimbabwe's Heritage Centre. Under the aegis of national patrimony looms a multinational enterprise.

CAUSES OF MODERN HERITAGE CONCERN

Why does heritage loom so large today? Answers differ from place to place. Heritage in Britain is said to reflect nostalgia for imperial self

esteem and other bygone benisons, in America to requite economic and social angst and lost community, in France to redress wartime disgrace, in Australia to replace the curse of recency to forge indigenous pride.⁶ But no explanation specific to one people can account for a trend so contagious. What is involved is a cluster of trends whose premises, promises, and problems are truly global.

These trends engender isolation and dislocation of self from family, family from neighborhood, neighborhood from nation, and even oneself from one's former selves. Such changes reflect manifold aspects of life—increasing longevity, family dissolution, the loss of familiar surroundings, quickened obsolescence, genocide and wholesale migration, and a growing fear of technology. They erode future expectations, heighten past awareness, and instill among millions the view that they need and are owed a heritage.

Dismay at massive change stokes demands for heritage. Market forces swiftly outdate most things now made or built; migration uproots millions from familiar locales; technology transforms familiar scenes at shocking speed. The intricate texture of downtown Boston visible in 1930s photos is today totally effaced by packing-crate office blocks; the old Massachusetts State House, a minuscule survivor among overgrown monsters, becomes an ornamental snuff box in a museum case. Landscape itself is replaced ever sooner: London's trees, the mighty oaks and majestic limes Victorians planted to endure, give way to fast-growing, short-lived species.

Beleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability. Hence preservers' aversion to letting anything go, postmodern manias for period styles, cults of prehistory at megalithic sites. Mourning past neglect, we cherish islands of security in seas of change. "In a throwaway society where everything is ephemeral," a London College of Arms spokesman explains the rise of ancestor hunts, people "begin to look for something more lasting." The passing of close-knit families spurs such searches. Since "grandparents no longer take the youngsters on their knee and tell them about *their* grandparents," noted an American genealogist in 1974, youngsters have had to find them for themselves.⁷

Legacies at risk are cherished for their very fragility. The heritage of rural life is exalted because everywhere at risk, if not already lost. So

rapid is French scenic and social decay that tourists were urged in 1993 to "see France while it is still there." Landscape is Britain's archetypal legacy; two centuries of city celebrants made country life a metaphor for the national soul, yearning to "win back a share in the common heritage filched from them with Enclosure and the Industrial Revolution." The historian Herbert Butterfield lauded Englishmen's "inescapable heritage" of Whig history as "part of the landscape of English life, like our country lanes or our November mists or historic inns." The glossy magazine *Heritage* is subtitled "British Life and *Countryside*." Landscape-as-heritage stresses time-honored verities at risk.⁸

Modern genocide and iconoclasm magnify needs for legacies to outlast ourselves. Doomed Jews resolved to leave witnesses attesting to the Holocaust. Along with human slaughter we mourn art that cannot be replaced: Harold Nicolson in 1944 would have sacrificed himself to save Giotto's frescoes and would have given up his sons sooner than St. Mark's, Venice.⁹ The ruin of Mostar's bridge built to outlast the centuries, or of a minaret's poignant reach toward eternity, truncates our own lives as well.

Such losses now seem graver than ever before. A pace of change "peculiar to our times," declared UNESCO in 1972, menaced mankind's cultural and natural heritage and mandated its protection. English curriculum caretakers in 1993 lauded time-honored lore as a "cultural link with the long-valued past [essential] in these turbulent times."

Yet horror at upheaval is not new; each generation since the French Revolution has felt buffeted by turbulent times. Marx's 1848 *Communist Manifesto* noted the "constant revolution of productions, the uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, ideas becoming obsolete before they can ossify." Our great-great-grandparents were more severed from their past than are we—heirs to two centuries of change, schooled to expect and until recently even to welcome innovation.

After Napoleon, by contrast, many felt stranded between a past when life had been much the same from eon to eon and a present that sundered each year from the last. They were the first to mourn the recent as beyond recall and to limn a childhood unimaginable to their own children. This total rupture of experience was just what the Jacobins intended: a new order expunging all the old, from priests and patricians to customary practices. Discontinuity was their deliberate bequest to the

next generation, savagely disjoining them, as many attested, from any familiar past.¹⁰

It is a common belief that technical invention has soared without precedent in recent decades. But is it true? Have television, computers, nuclear power, and space flights altered life more in our time than did the auto, telephone, electric light, airplane, radio, and cinema between 1900 and 1950? Or the railroads, gaslights, steamships, telegraph, factory-made clothing, and household goods that transformed the Western world between 1800 and 1860?¹¹ No one from the 1750s could have imagined the new world of 1800; in contrast, no one from the 1950s would find most present-day scenes unfamiliar—"blink, today, and you could be in the 1950s," wrote a journalist in 1992. While the 1890s seemed like the Dark Ages in 1945, fifty years later 1945 seems like only yesterday, laptop computers and seatbelts aside.

Our precursors were no less estranged by novelty, rueing lost familiar vistas just as we do. But they were less ceaselessly reminded of their loss. Nor did a socially certified nostalgia sanction their yearnings; on the contrary, they were enjoined to praise the new and take change in their stride. They suffered change more violent than ours, but we *perceive* ourselves to be its unexampled victims.

Modern media magnify the past's remoteness. We digest and domesticate written accounts as we read them, but even recent visual images (street scenes, home decor, hairstyles, and clothing) at once strike us as anachronistic. Everything in the 1940s movie *Brief Encounter*—morals, fashion, etiquette, and language—is staggeringly different from its 1985 renewal *Falling in Love*. Old photos, posed in studios, seem inconceivably remote. Our great-grandparents look more like foreigners than forebears; they resemble Jonathan Raban's ancestral portraits of people who "might have been anyone's distant relations. They certainly didn't look related to us."¹²

Growing longevity cuts us off even from our own pasts. Many who reach ninety are "punished for their great age," a columnist suggests, "by being reminded that they are out of touch with the world." Bereft of familiar scenes and companions, their memories grow unrecognizable. "If you age a lot, there is finally almost nobody left who shared your vast experience" of a bygone world. You look around for "*anyone* of the older generation . . . to satisfy your curiosity about some detail of

the landscape of the past. There is no longer any older generation. You have become it, while your mind was mostly on other matters," notes William Maxwell.¹³ "I went to the kitchen to fix a cup of coffee when I was 59," goes the tale; "when I came out I suddenly found I was 84."

Those poised between two worlds, two ways of thinking and acting, find heritage of crucial import. "My Breton-speaking contemporaries will perhaps be the very last people to have spoken Breton on their mothers' laps," says the folklorist Hélias. Hence their stewardship duty transcends that of their predecessors and successors. "The former were not much concerned with the fate of their idiom"; the latter will condemn us for failing to protect their heritage.¹⁴ Thus we feel uniquely accountable. Previous generations likewise looked back to a congenial world just gone, but their laments were formulaic; ours harden into heritage doctrine.

Massive migration also sharpens nostalgia. This century's diaspora have suffered incomparable displacement. Fleeing violence, hatred, and hunger, tens of millions seek refuge in lands not their own. Mass exodus has many precedents, to be sure; famine made exile and emigration customary in Ireland 150 years ago, when more Irish lived outside their country than in it. But refugee exodus, up tenfold in twenty years, is now a global commonplace. Over half of all Palestinians, Liberians, Rwandans, and Bosnians, one in three Lebanese, one in four Poles, Mozambicans, Eritreans, and Afghans mourn lost homes. So do billions of rural folk forced into cities. "Displaced persons are displaced not just in space but in time; they have been cut off from their own pasts," writes Penelope Lively, severed from her own Egyptian childhood by removal to England. "If you cannot revisit your own origins—reach out and touch them from time to time—you are for ever in some crucial sense untethered."¹⁵

Quests for roots reflect this trauma; heritage is invoked to requite displacement. Provincial newcomers to French cities haunt archival registers for family links, and tame alien milieus with rural furnishings and old farm tools. "The more people are on the move," observes a columnist, "the more they will grasp at tangible memorials of their collective past."¹⁶ Much as bereft parents enshrine the rooms of departed children, so mementos of bygone lifestyles console those torn from native scenes.

Diaspora are notably heritage-hungry. Five out of six ancestry

searches in Italy are made by Italian-Americans. Dublin is deluged with inquiries from Sons of Erin abroad, some seeking a long-lost legacy or an heir on whom to bestow one, others just hoping to find someone who remembers Uncle Seamus. So many Jews today seek memories of *shtetl* forebears that East Europeans call them "roots people."

Emigrés are also vital in sustaining ancestral heritage. West Indian, Hebridean, Dodecanese, and Polynesian islanders abroad nourish homeland traditions. Armenia's diaspora celebrate the ancient nation's past glories and bewail its griefs. The most ardent patriots are returned exiles; Fresno-born foreign minister Rafi Hovannisian is termed "the best Armenian in the world."¹⁷ Diaspora nostalgia refreshes heritage for those at home. Returnees from North America reanimate traditional Ukrainian *bandura* music that is close to dying out. Remittance-dependent Ithacans revive obsolete folkways to give visiting American kinsfolk a nostalgic "taste of home."

To identify a past as heritage one need not have known it firsthand. "I come from Rotuma," says a Fijian who has never been in Rotuma; home is where the ancestors came from. Up to the 1950s, fourth-generation New Zealanders spoke of Britain as "home" with no intention of ever living there. Descendants of Southern planters who fled with their slaves to Brazil still cleave to ancestral Dixieland ways: "Preserving our heritage helps us pass cherished values on to future generations."¹⁸

Heritage is also nurtured by technophobia: an idealized past replaces a discredited future. The horrors of fascism, the failure of Marxism, the threat of nuclear and biological catastrophe, and the rise of factional animus have put paid to the ideology of progress. Many doubt their leaders' vision or ability to sustain a livable globe; dismayed by technology, they hark back to a simpler past whose virtues they inflate and whose vices they ignore. We show chronic affection for anything apart from the present, clutching at the outworn and the obsolete.

Those who express such dismay are newly legion. Heritage expands especially because more people now have a share in it. In times past, only a small minority sought forebears, amassed antiquities, enjoyed Old Masters, or toured museums and historic sites. Such pursuits now lure the multitude. No longer are only aristocrats ancestry-obsessed, only the super-rich antique collectors, only academics antiquarians,

only the gentry museum visitors; millions now hunt their roots, protect beloved scenes, cherish mementos, and generally dote on times past.

Heritage growth thus reflects traumas of loss and change and fears of a menacing future. "How many preservationists does it take to change a light bulb?" runs the adage. "Four: one to change the bulb, one to document the event, and two to lament the passing of the old bulb." Heritage cannot be equated solely with felt decline; it also allures celebrants of success. On balance, though, obsessive concern with rooted legacies is more backward- than forward-looking.

HAZARDS OF HERITAGE GLUT

Our newly augmented heritage answers a congeries of needs, but the magnitude and momentum of its growth are also alarming and in the end self-defeating. Heritage of every kind accumulates to counter the transience of everything else. We cordon off more and more against the rapid demise of the disposable. A mounting legacy of protected sites and objects links us with the past; heritage thrives as the felt opposite of obsolescence. Salvaging ever more from erosion and discard, we seek to redress the balance between the ephemeral and the enduring.¹⁹ Fending off irreversible change, we preserve, restore, or replicate. Any extinction, even of pestilential germs, becomes a crime against the legacy of diversity.

Crusades to save endangered heritage take little heed of custodial resources. For example, archaeologists bemoan sites plundered or lost to developers, yet by the mid-1970s so much prehistory was being salvaged that scholars and museums could not handle it, and more and more of what has been excavated languishes unseen and awaiting analysis.²⁰ Thus the accretion of archives has multiplied holdings a thousandfold within decades. Each American president's papers are said to outnumber those of all his predecessors combined.

Every enterprise becomes memorable; not only banks and bureaucrats but bakeries and beauty shops file dossiers, notes Pierre Nora.

No epoch has deliberately produced so many archives as ours, due alike to technical advances in reproduction and conservation and to our superstitious

respect for these traces. As traditional memory fades, we feel obliged religiously to accumulate the testimonies, documents, images, and visible signs of what was, as if this ever-proliferating dossier should be called on as evidence in some tribunal of history. Hence the inhibition against destroying, the retention of everything. . . . In classical times, only great families, the church, and the state kept records; today memories are recorded and memoirs written not only by minor actors in history but by their spouses and doctors.

Once reproached for saving too much, archivists are now adjured to keep everything. The glut causes chaos: reduced publication and maintenance funds make the augmented heritage ever less accessible. New acquisitions go unrecorded, lacking even rudimentary maintenance, their very existence unknown to the public lest some seek to use them.²¹ Inheriting a growing legacy of unsorted verbiage, chroniclers often feel, like Tristram Shandy, that they are losing ground all the time.

The problem of heritage overload is not entirely new, to be sure. "The world is accumulating too many materials for knowledge," observed Hawthorne after a day at the British Museum in 1855. "We do not recognize for rubbish what is really rubbish; & under this head might be reckoned almost everything one sees at the British Museum; and as each generation leaves its fragments & potsherds behind it, such will finally be the desperate conclusion of the learned."²²

Only in our time, though, has the glut become suffocatingly unmanageable. Yet heritage is such a sacred cow that few will heed a call to halt its growth. For example, Italy is so stuffed with heritage that only a fraction of it is catalogued, let alone cared for, least of all open to the public.²³ Everyone knows this, yet no steward dares publicly affirm the unpalatable facts. To query a worthy cause goes against the grain. As a heritage activist I myself almost instinctively applaud the renewal of pride in ancestral roots, the protection of relics threatened by erosion or plunder, and the rescue of cherished legacies from purblind greed.

Hapless stewardship is one of many heritage dilemmas. Tangible mementos and documentary traces threaten to swamp creative life. Worship of a bloated heritage invites passive reliance on received authority, imperils rational inquiry, replaces past realities with feel-good history, and saps creative innovation, as I discuss in later chapters. Yet the fact

remains that heritage expands, and goes on expanding, in response to new needs. What are these needs, and how do they change the character of heritage?

FACETS OF GROWTH

Until modern times most peoples trusted tradition, lived in accordance with what was constant and consistent, and customarily communed with ancestors. Handing down modes of life and thought to descendants was more a matter of ingrained habit than of deliberate effort; the inheritance of land and livestock, lineage, and reputation was socially codified and largely closed to personal decision. Few clung to artifacts that had outlasted practical or spiritual use. By contrast, heritage now reflects not just habit but conscious choice. Ways of valuing the past that arose in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe and were bolstered by nationalism and populism have now become commonplace the world over.

Earlier folk largely fused past with present. Stability and cyclical recurrence muted marks of change and averted the breaches that now sunder old from new, useful from obsolete, the dead from the living. Spirits of the departed remained intimately involved with everyday life, bonding what could be seen and touched with what was veiled or imagined. For most peoples, the past was not a foreign country but their own.

While in our world the new replaces the old, in theirs the new was but another aspect of the eternal; as the book of Ecclesiastes put it, there was nothing new under the sun. Hence few desired to preserve what was old. The only vestiges of the past medieval Europeans systematically conserved were princely talismans and spiritual icons—the vestments and bodily traces of saints and sovereigns. Ancient edifices were allowed to decay or were demolished with little sense of loss.

The razing and rebuilding of St. Peter's in Rome in the 1500s was wholly consonant with stewardship as then seen. The old stones meant nothing in themselves; it was the site that signified the Church's indestructible permanence. Hence the visible legacy going back twelve centuries to Constantine was supplanted with little regret. To be sure, ancient Roman buildings still in use (the Pantheon, Castel Sant' Angelo, the Capitol) were

kept up by repair. But old structures bereft of utility mattered only as examples to emulate, and such lessons were better conveyed in words or images than in bricks and stones.²⁴

Over ensuing centuries, as will be seen in Chapter 3, material relics played an increasing role as emblems of power and piety, then of popular purpose. Heritage today is more substantial, more secular, and more social. Three dimensions of its enlargement merit attention: from the elite and grand to the vernacular and everyday; from the remote to the recent; and from the material to the intangible.

VERNACULAR BENTS

Like its new clientele, the past doted on is populist. Formerly about grand monuments, unique treasures, and great heroes, heritage now also touts the typical and evokes the vernacular. The homes and haunts of Everyman and Everywoman have spread from Scandinavian open-air museums into historical theme parks the world over. The humble English half-timbered, mock-Tudor, semidetached house—the cartoonist Osbert Lancaster’s “Bypass Variegated”—is lauded for “epitomizing the traditions of the race.” Colonial Williamsburg fosters dirt, ruin, and decay (unmown grass, peeling paint, and horse manure) in an everyday scene more authentic, and hence more virtuous, than the genteel fictions of previous restorers. To their disgust, Williamsburg craftsmen now have to make shoddy replicas true to supposed 18th-century prototypes.²⁵

Traditionally controlled by the well-born and the well-off, heritage remains more an elite than a folk domain. But if palaces are more lavishly stewarded than folk haunts, the latter are better loved. Historic-house visitors nowadays flock to kitchens and servant and slave quarters; folk museums stress the humdrum over the exquisite, the ordinary in place of the unusual, the popular rather than the patrician. In reenacting the past, peasants and artisans now get pride of place.

Auction prices attest the value of folk legacies, with the bibelots of Everyman as pricey as those of princes. The bedroom carpet and plastic houseplant from Elvis Presley’s Graceland mansion are his fans’ Mona Lisa and Elgin Marbles. Old baseball cards, beer cans, Coke bottles, and barbed wire thrill ten times as many collectors as Queen Anne chairs or

mahogany highboys. Genre scenes, decoy ducks, and mangle boards that once cluttered lofts and attics get reclaimed as art. Liverpool tourists throng Beatles’ locales—Strawberry Fields, Eleanor Rigby’s headstone, olden haunts of Lennon and McCartney. All pop memorabilia are treasured, however trivial or tawdry.

The more who engage with a heritage, the less esoteric and exacting it becomes. The grass roots fertilized in journals like *Foxfire* suggest that if the weak and the meek have not inherited the earth, they at least become the keepers of its castoffs. Vestiges of folkways formerly seen as backward are now prized as quaint. Once a stigma, Italian-American cooking now signals legacy pride: “Starting in her kitchen, my mother found her way back to her heritage.”²⁶

Sanctuaries that used to be exclusively elite now cater to the hoi polloi. The Victoria & Albert Museum hypes New Age grunge and “street cred.” New York’s Metropolitan Museum shows a Honus Wagner 1909 baseball card “worth” \$1.2 million (card collectors spend \$2 billion annually). The generals and grandees glowering along the walls of Britain’s National Portrait Gallery are now outaced by grinning athletes, pop stars, and media celebrities.

To be sure, some decry such plebeian trends. “Can a perfectly ordinary house in a perfectly ordinary town really be a part of our national heritage?” carped a critic in 1993, when England’s National Trust was bequeathed a Victorian semidetached house in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, that had been kept in a time warp for sixty years by its reclusive tenants. Rather than “a worm’s-eye view” of the past, the Trust should “illustrate the *finest* examples of architecture and furnishings.”²⁷ Yet heritage lovers had already made *Our Grimy Heritage* (1971) and SAVE Britain’s Heritage’s *Satanic Mills* (1984) coffee-table best-sellers.

The populist trend is worldwide. In 1980s France, a Socialist regime legitimated a wide range of working-class legacies. A heritage once wholly patrician now includes 20th-century factories and merely familiar locales; “a simple oven or a village lavatory elicits the patrimonial ardour once given an artistic masterpiece.”²⁸ Populist in theory since the Revolution, American heritage became visibly proletarian after the Civil War, when (as noted in Chapter 6), George Washington got repackaged from austere aristocrat into common man.

Australians zealously promote the folk past with museums dwelling

on migration and newcomers, the poor and homeless, and events within living memory. Australian populism reflects a general view that they *have* no elite past worth notice. No monuments to wealthy taste, no heroic episodes, no significant events like Magna Carta come to mind. Australian history “consists of happenings so small, so everyday, so endlessly repeatable that they draw no attention to themselves,” avers the writer David Malouf. Anything pompous gets mercilessly mocked. Gallipoli and Aborigines apart, heritage is more apt to be sent up than extolled. Authority figures—governors, judges, admirals, clerics—are ridiculed at reenactments.²⁹

Genealogy typifies the populist trend. Millions of roots-seekers swamp registries. In America, fallout from *Roots* and the national bicentenary by the mid-1980s spawned fifty thousand family-tree experts. “Not long ago most Europeans would have stared blankly if asked to give their great-grandmother’s name,” noted a 1988 survey, and “genealogy was a hobby for aristocrats, maiden aunts, and eccentrics.” Now all our forebears are upgraded to ancestors; Americans on Debrett “Roots” tours dine at their own British ancestral homes. In the last two decades, France’s three hundred authorized genealogists grew to twenty thousand, and hunting for ancestors has become “a veritable national sport.”³⁰

In these quests, humble origins are newly chic. Bastards once hidden now festoon the family tree. “When I was a boy at Harrow School in the 1920s,” the architectural historian Sir John Summerson told me sixty years later, “I did all I could to prevent *anyone* finding out my grandfather was a common labourer. Today I’d make sure *everyone* knew.” The writer Jonathan Raban relates his father’s switch from genteel to rougher roots. In the 1950s he mounted an “antique truffle hunt [for] an unbroken arc of pure ancestry, a trail of blood [from] helmeted centurions [and] Anglo-Saxons in mead halls” down through army officers and minor gentry. But by the 1980s Raban *père* was digging up “our criminal past,” ancestors “engaged in smuggling, privateering and the slave trade,” showing that “rapine, plunder, fiddling the books and dealing under the counter ran in our blood.”³¹

Only now do Antipodeans reclaim ancestral black sheep. Even in the 1970s, as Tasmania’s chief archivist told me, respected figures used to rip out pages of convict records bearing their forebears’ names. When a

young assistant told his father of these goings-on, the father paled: “That’s all very well, my boy; but you must never let the aunts know.” The aunts now all know, but they no longer mind. Convict forebears who once disgraced Australian descendants now lend them radical chic. Some limits remain: “Murder, rape—no, we wouldn’t brag about that,” said Norma Tuck of the Society of Australian Genealogists in 1988. “We would brag about highway robbery, though; . . . *that* was fun.”

It is more typical of heritage populism, though, that most family historians hope to find either fellow-sufferers or “simple, honest, law-abiding” ancestors, in Carol Shields’s words, whose “robustly rounded” lives will compensate for their own complex fears and doubts.³²

INSTANT TRADITION

Once confined to a distant past—pre-1750 buildings, centuries-old antiques, Old Master paintings—heritage now spreads into yesterday. Houses become “historic” in mere decades, school history takes on events within living memory, a “Heritage” car is one made before 1970. The commemorative pace quickens from centennials to fiftieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries. Mere weeks after the Gore-Perot North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement debate in 1994, television host Larry King donated to Planet Hollywood’s souvenir collection the green suspenders he had worn at the event; they already had the hoary aura of memorabilia.

Heritage today hails even the living. Fans of Dan Quayle boast the first museum honoring an extant U.S. vice president, featuring baby and Bible-school snapshots, a fifth-grade report card, and his Little League baseball uniform: “A lot of people wait 50 years, after the person is gone, but we had all his stuff lying right here, so why not do it while he’s still living?” The 1993 inaugural opening coincided with a plastic duck race, the annual highlight of “Heritage Days” in Huntington, Indiana. A New Jersey museum of Bruce Springsteen memorabilia opens *and* closes while the rock star yet lives. Hits from the 1980s become relics while they still reverberate.

Stress on recent heritage mirrors the shift to mass clienteles. Especially for those with little schooling, things within living memory have a relevance absent from remoter times. Replacing steam engines with

diesel in the 1950s gave rise to England's most popular preservation mania—for steam railways.³³ And recent souvenirs soon gain scarcity value: fountain pens and vintage cameras are already rare, antique TV sets the latest collectibles.

Novelties at first decried in the end gain legacy status, and the end is nigh ever sooner. From hated eyesores Victorian railway viaducts mutated into beloved scenic features defended with the same zeal as castles and abbeys. The transit from horror to heritage that once took a century now happens in two decades. The Fylingdale Beacons, Cold War strategic warning outposts on the North York Moors, were “monstrous intrusions” when erected in 1964. Obsolete by 1992, these giant golf balls were esteemed so scenic that English Heritage was on the point of saving them until they were disqualified as 1980s replacements, not 1960s originals. Verandas proscribed by Australian towns through the 1950s as shabby reminders of a hated past, by the 1970s became treasured heritage; in the 1980s they were being added to buildings that had never had verandas, as “typically Victorian.”³⁴ The golden arches of McDonald's eateries are concurrently a detested novelty in Hampstead and a cherished legacy in California.

New heritage is in turn soon superseded. A Long Islander in 1990 stripped off the late-Victorian porch tacked on to his 1790s house; local heritage officials forced him to rebuild a replica porch. What had thirty years back been an excrescence was now a sacrosanct relic of East Hampton's Boarding-house Era; in thirty more years, sliding glass doors and jalousie windows might well be preserved as archetypally 1950s.

Like populism, the vogue for recency shows that heritage is open to change. A mean or meager legacy can always be augmented, a too-limited time span lengthened. Today's new clients supplant or supplement preexisting legacies with icons of their own. “Other great Americans will be born whose birthdays will force their way in to the calendar,” cautioned a 1911 essay against a fixed ancestral canon. “Our boundaries of national gratitude are not finally set.”³⁵ They never are. As shown in Chapter 7, rosters of historic persons and places ever annex what becomes newly relevant and shed what loses pertinence.

The pace of heritage replacement does exact costs. Fads for things barely past, like those for vernacular culture, hasten the attrition of historical memory and diminish shared canonical legacies. American

students today are said to find even such 20th-century icons as Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway as remote as Dickens or Fielding. Thus, as heritage expands its range, it becomes less consensual and more ephemeral.

Moreover, accruing ever more recent relics makes heritage harder to demarcate from the ongoing present. Yesterday's traces merge with those of antiquity and modernity; conserved legacies coalesce with current locales. Proximity to the present makes heritage ever more relevant to, but ever less distinct from, today's world. At length all that distinguishes heritage is its history of previous use. For all the stone-washing and sandblasting meant to make new blue jeans seem old, a German wholesaler finds that “used jeans simply look better and feel better”—especially if pre-worn by fabled, ill-starred American athletes.

LIVING FOLKWAYS

Along with the recent and the vernacular, heritage today stresses intangible folkways—kinship, language, poetry, music. Such concerns are not new: Homeric lineages sustained feudal perquisites; folk legacies generated European nation-states. Indeed, two centuries ago the philosopher Herder made language and folklore the crux of collective heritage. Yet during the 19th and early 20th centuries, national patrimony came to inhere more and more in tangible monuments and memorials, with material preservation an overriding concern. Even now, heritage crusades are more apt to conjure up images of castles and cathedrals than of quatrains or cookery.

But legacy concerns now refocus on ideas and images. This shift reflects improved techniques of enhancing the quality and value of images. It also reflects the influence of cultures that do not share the Western mania for material objects as heritage. For example, Korea cherishes masked plays, musical genres, and skills like knot making, brass smelting, and pot glazing, supporting master performers and craftsmen. Japan's Living Cultural Treasures enact similar roles in a culture that admires ancient forms and skills but shuns old buildings (save for sacred shrines) as *furukusai*—so old they stink.

Poland speedily restored Nazi-raided historic centers felt to be crucial to the national identity, but Polish heritage today is more concerned

with the thoughts and memories such buildings evoke. And peoples who build or make little meant to long endure find Western conservation zeal bizarre. Emphasis on original materials in UNESCO's canonical Venice Charter of 1966 is said to "leave other cultures and traditions ill at ease, [for] they place more emphasis on spiritual values, on authenticity of thought, than on material symbols."³⁶

Cultural heritage stresses words over things above all in China, where esteem for tradition goes hand in hand with recurrent destruction of material remains. Mao's orders to demolish most of China's ancient monuments proved easy to carry out, for few historic structures had survived the dynastic iconoclasm of past millennia. Revering ancestral memory and calligraphy, the Chinese hold the past's purely physical traces in small regard; indeed, old works must perish so that new ones can take their place. Memory of art, not its physical persistence, suffuses Chinese consciousness and spurs new creations. The "capacity for metamorphosis and adaptation" over three and a half millennia, Pierre Ryckmans suggests, "may well derive from the fact that this tradition never let itself be trapped into set forms, static objects and things, where it would have run the risk of paralysis and death."³⁷

Famed old Soochow has no ancient ruins. "We in the West tend to equate the antique presence with authentically ancient physical objects," observes a Sinologist. "China has no ruins comparable to the Roman Forum, or even to Angkor Wat," not for want of skills "but because of a different attitude about how to achieve an enduring monument." Ancient cities became sites of heritage through "a past of words, not of stones." Soochow's Maple Bridge is famed as a locus but not for its looks. "No single poem refers to its physical presence"; what mattered "was not the stones forming the span" but its associations realized in words.³⁸ The Chinese gain immortality not with imperishable monuments but with imperishable words exalting others' enduring thoughts.

Sentiments linked with sites override tangible concerns elsewhere, too. In western North Carolina a folklorist found many old family homesteads empty and neglected, but often used for family reunions; what mattered was "the memory of the experiences within and the meanings attached to the homeplace, . . . not the walls, the roof, and the foundation. [They] preserve stories about old houses better than they preserve the structures themselves."³⁹ Family feeling outlasts other

tangible heirlooms. Inheriting no more than a soup pot and a roasting pan, a woman finds her vital Thanksgiving legacy in recipes and in an "appetite for togetherness."

The marginalized are most apt to demote material legacies. Preserving old houses is a serious threat to working-class or ethnic neighborhoods that risk being gentrified. Heritage to them is more likely to mean folkways (faiths, foods, forms of music and dance) than fabric, performance more than product. Until America's National Trust enlarged its sphere of concern, it made little headway among minorities who gave priority to intangible folkways.⁴⁰

Intangible folkways now gain mainstream patrons. Copying Japan and Korea, the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts awards annual heritage fellowships; 1995 recipients include a blues guitarist, a cowboy balladeer, a basket weaver, a step dancer, a luthier, a quiltmaker, and a blacksmith. A publican, a thatcher, a cheese-monger, and an umbrella-handle maker figure among *Country Life* magazine's monthly "living national treasures." More than bricks and mortar, Britons hanker after old moralities, the "amalgam of faith, diligence, loyalty, independence and authority" immortalized in the novels of Anthony Trollope.⁴¹

That heritage can be sustained only by a living community becomes an accepted tenet. To sustain a legacy of stones, those who dwell among them also need stewardship. "*We are the heritage*," declaimed the mayor of Dijon in 1980 of plans to conserve that indigent city; the French government should "extend patrimonial solicitude to us." Though their crafts revive, Georgia's Sea Islanders are beleaguered by tourist development: "We, the black native population of these islands, have become the new endangered species."⁴² As modes of active life fade away, material remnants become mere curiosities.

HERITAGE DEPRIVATION, HERITAGE POSSESSION

Hunger for heritage takes diverse forms. The poor and the powerless market any antiquities they can unearth; millions of Guatemalans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Italians, Lebanese, and others eke out meager livelihoods by selling off ancestral pasts. "To be rich, dig up an ancient tomb," runs a Chinese peasant saying; "to make a fortune, open a coffin." Against such acts legal codes are impotent and moral entreaty

otiose. Why should the indigent not hawk their heritage to feed their families?

Indeed, how can they view it as their heritage at all? A local leader about to loot the pre-Incan Lord of Sipán's newfound gravesite was persuaded first to view it, then asked if he dared "steal from the ancestors" and "sack his father's sacred tomb." Instead of just a storeroom of gold, awed villagers gazed raptly on an esteemed ancestor. But such local veneration is rarely evoked; prehistorians in Peru still require armed police. Mayan descendants in Yucatan were told that in plundering pre-Columbian sites they were destroying their legacy; they were unrepentant. "The ancient people made it," they said; "it is not a part of what we are."⁴³

Only a heritage that is clearly ours is worth protecting. "The issue is ownership and control," says a civil-rights veteran battling both Hollywood and the National Park Service for interpretive stewardship of the movement and its sites. "If we don't tell the story or control the telling, then it is no longer about us." Egyptians whose antiquities have mostly ended up in Europe, and Jamaicans whose beaches are fenced off for exclusive tourist use, cannot suppose these legacies truly their own.

Such dispossessions are legion. Westernized Javanese sundered from indigenous roots under Dutch rule felt like exiles in their own land; "living in a hotel owned by others, we seek neither to improve nor equip it as we do not feel that it is ours." Sicily remains "always a colony, never a country"; a chronicler details Sicilians' corrosive sense "that none of these riches—the Greek temples, the Byzantine mosaics, the Catalan-Gothic churches—are really" theirs. Near Syracuse, the faceless, limbless stumps of a dozen statues of the goddess Cybele, hacked to pieces by a peasant tired of tourists trampling his onions, attest "the danger presented by a people that feels that its past doesn't belong to it."⁴⁴

Even those intimately attached to their past may sell it. Expert tomb robbers in Sicily and Tuscany feel fully justified in smuggling their heritage to Swiss dealers. "They consider that these tombs contain the bodies of their ancestors and they are therefore entitled to the contents," explains a Sicilian antiquities official. Tuscan tomb robbers claim communion with and sanctions from Etruscan forebears who tell them when and where to dig, while leaving certain sacred tombs inviolate. The skills of *tombaroli* specialists are passed on within particular families, but they share proceeds with the whole community.⁴⁵

Others eager to slough off past social constraints find legacies crippling. "In an egalitarian culture like ours," says an American folklorist, "people don't want to be tied to the past." Heritage gets transmitted only in "dead countries, or secure and by-passed ones—where men can cherish the past and think of passing on furniture and china to their heirs"—places like Sweden and Canada, imagines V. S. Naipaul. "Everywhere else . . . the past can only cause pain."⁴⁶

One reason is that conquerors persuaded others they *had* no proper patrimony. Children in French Africa were taught to revere "our ancestors, the Gauls." All over the Caribbean, in Jamaica Kincaid's rebuke, British colonizers built schools and libraries, "and in both of those places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own," leaving millions with "no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, . . . no tongue." The glory of earlier legacies is little solace. "No periods of time over which my ancestors held sway, no documentation of complex [African] civilisations, is any comfort to me." To reconvert such lost legacies into national heritage today is harder still. Third World efforts to regain attributes or forge emblems of tradition are mocked as imitative and obsolete, an *opéra-bouffe* parading of flags and folk costumes, not authentic heritage.⁴⁷

The point of heritage, in a British custodian's words, is "not that the public should learn something but that they should *become* something." Merely to inherit is not enough; people must realize they are "heirs to the past, heirs to the collections which they own, free to decide for themselves what they are going to do with the past, what it means for them now and what it may mean for them in the future."⁴⁸ Choices are constrained, to be sure; most heritage comes already packaged by precursors. But to secure the past to our present lives, we must feel that its legacies have become our very own.

The signal value of heritage possession was the point made by soldier-scholar-mythmaker Yigael Yadin to Israeli army recruits sworn in at the Dead Sea fortress of Masada:

When Napoleon stood among his troops next to the pyramids of Egypt, he declared: "Four thousand years of history look down upon you." But what would he not have given to be able to say: "Four thousand years of *your own* history look down upon you."

What is our own matters most. But we have a stake in what others care for, too. "History did not need to be mine in order to engage me," writes a Haitian scholar. "It just needed to relate to someone, anyone. It could not just be The Past. It had to be someone's past."⁴⁹

VULNERABLE AND VALUABLE LEGACIES

—We value our heritage most when it seems at risk; threats of loss spur owners to stewardship. Just as impending civil war impelled the 17th-century antiquary Thomas Dugdale to record England's imperiled ecclesiastical monuments, so did the menace of the Second World War mobilize the art historian Kenneth Clark's colleagues to record the national legacy. "Heritage never means more to us," remarked a British art historian viewing Constable paintings at Yale, "than when we see it inherited by someone else."

Only when the English spoke of dismantling ruined Norman abbeys and shipping them across the Channel did the French rescue them from further neglect; only when a London museum bought the 's Hertogenbosch 17th-century rood-loft did the Dutch rally to defend their national legacy; only when Americans were about to export Tattershall Castle brick by brick did Britain in 1913 legislate to protect its built heritage. When J. P. Morgan bought a staircase from Burgos's Casa de Miranda, the outraged Spanish were told to be glad Americans had prodded them into heritage pride.⁵⁰ The Tower of London in 1836 casually disposed of two Hanoverian state crowns. Their whereabouts were long unknown, their very absence unremarked. But in 1995 widespread dismay greeted the news that this "purest national heritage of priceless importance" might be sold abroad. (A Brunei prince rescued the crowns for Britain.)

Sneers at a lack of heritage impel efforts to retrieve or re-create it. Voltaire's slur that "German is a language for horses and servants" spurred Herder's quest for "the ancient German soul" in tribal lore. Gibbon's taunt about debased Athenians "incapable of admiring the genius of their predecessors" kindled philhellene pride in the classical legacy. Lord Durham's dismissal of French Canadians as "a people with no history, and no literature" catalyzed Québécois militancy.⁵¹

England's heritage owes much to a student binge at historic Rousham, Oxfordshire, about 1930. Helplessly watching his drunken

host take potshots at garden statuary and slash family portraits with a hunting crop roused in James Lees-Milne "some deep atavistic compassion for ancient architecture so vulnerable and transient, and some paternal instinct to protect and safeguard all tangible works of art." Thus inspired, he became the guiding spirit of the National Trust country-house crusade, limned in Chapter 3.⁵²

Conservation efforts are commonly couched in terms of some national legacy at risk. Groombridge villagers decried the 1991 breakup of their estate as the loss of "part of the feudal system." Fending off animal-rights advocates, fox hunting is defended as a quintessential rural ritual. Pig fanciers note with alarm the decline of stewardship. "Once there was a strong link between the aristocracy and swine," snuffles *The Ark*, the farm breeders' bible, but by 1995 breeds were dying out for want of elite support. The aristocracy itself feels endangered: "We are now down to 25 breeding dukes," warned the Duke of Buccleigh in 1992. "At this rate we shall soon need our own rare breed society."

For living icons, extinction seems always imminent. In World Wildlife Fund appeals every species of bird is on the brink, every mammal all but doomed. So scarce was the bald eagle, America's national bird, that corporations launched a costly (and successful) 1980s drive to restock eaglets. To save shrinking rain forests, conservers cry havoc over acreage felled and species lost.

As developers ravage and robbers ransack prehistoric sites, the world's material legacy shrinks as fast as the rain forest. So does its cerebral patrimony. Nine-tenths of the world's six thousand existing languages are thought soon to succumb to global media forces. Such fears are not chimerical; many dwindling legacies do seem destined to die out. But as shown in Chapter 10, alarmism is part and parcel of the heritage mindset. Attrition is usually exaggerated. "Hurry. The bulldozers are coming. Historic buildings are falling. The best of our past is being sacrificed," warned America's National Trust in 1970; similar pleas were common in 1870. Britons fear their patrimony is fast diminishing—yet theirs is perhaps the world's best protected national legacy. Distressed by the drain of treasures to Japan and the Getty, they forget the flux was ever thus. "Precious things are going out of our distracted country," agonized a Henry James grandee a century ago, "at a quicker rate" than they ever came in.⁵³

Heritage loss and recovery are better understood as ongoing routine than as perilous plight. To expunge the obsolete and restore it as heritage are, like disease and its treatment, conjoined processes less discordant than symbiotic. When a nuclear accident destroys Britain, in David Ely's tale, a massive campaign restores the whole peopled island, "every stick and stone, every blade of grass, every hedge and bush, every mansion, palace, hut and hovel. . . . Insects, too, and even vermin. Everything." Restoration justifies destruction. "The vaporization of Britain was logically necessary to express the dual impulse of our age—vast devastation coupled with equally vast reconstruction." It brought manifold benefits: history learned, relics conserved, stewardship lauded, and global tensions abated. It might be useful "to vaporize and then restore one nation every generation. That would ease the population pressure and provide a harmless outlet for human energy both at the same time."⁵⁴

The facts of history had presaged this fiction. The Nazis gutted Old Warsaw to obliterate an icon of Polish identity that postwar Poles speedily rebuilt as a symbol of communal care. The world's greatest technocrats combined a genius for annihilation with an instinct to preserve: the inventor of dynamite, long the globe's most destructive agency, is now best recalled for the Nobel Peace Prize; Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, whose juggernauts doomed older modes of life, became exemplary collectors and custodians of the heritage their oil and engines outdated, as Ford's Old Dearborn and Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg bear witness.

Heritage that affronts new orthodoxies is jettisoned in turn. The heroic Soviet statues recently blasted or carted away are just the latest victims of cycles of veneration and iconoclasm, chronic from the Hitites to Hitler. "Bolsheviks topple czar monuments, Stalin erases old Bolsheviks, Khrushchev tears down Stalin, Brezhnev tears down Khrushchev . . . no difference," says artist Vitaly Komar. "This is classic old Moscow technique: either worship or destroy. . . . Each time it is history, the country's true past, which is conveniently being obliterated. And usually by the same people!"⁵⁵

Heritage also succumbs to those who love it to death. Devotees wear down old floors, abrade ancient stones, erode prehistoric trackways. Banning hobnail boots and stiletto heels merely retards inevitable decay.

Only withdrawal from use avails; as a town clerk said when asked to replace park benches, "benches will not wear out so fast if people do not sit on them." The more we learn of the ill effects of light, the less can old fabrics and watercolors be displayed. Since breath is lethal to the cave paintings, legacies like Lascaux are closed to public view; to see Leonardo's *Last Supper* visitors today must first be decontaminated.

To prevent heritage being ravished by admirers proves all but impossible. Eco-friendly tourism swamps the fragile sites it was designed to safeguard. To protect Galápagos tortoises and birds, an annual ceiling of twelve thousand visitors was set two decades ago; this "ultimate environmental experience" now disastrously lures five times that many. In Donald Hall's "Scenic View," each snapshot eats up scenery:

Every year the mountains
get paler and more distant—
trees less green, rock piles
disappearing—as emulsion
from a billion Kodaks
sucks color out.
In fifteen years,
Monadnock and Kearsarge,
the Green Mountains
and the White will turn
invisible, all
tint removed,
atom by atom to albums
in Medford and Greenwich,
while over the valleys
the still intractable granite
rears with unseeable peaks
fatal to airplanes.⁵⁶

"The White Cliffs of Dover Experience" heritage center arises from the ruins of the legacy it celebrates. A 1995 superstore in Dorchester, England, is festooned with Edwardian views of the bustling city center the new shop signally destroyed.

The best intentions prove lethal; the more heritage is appreciated, the more it decays or turns to dross. Public concern boomerangs when

structures denoted as historic are surreptitiously weakened or hastily torn down to avoid burdens of care. Ending military hostilities may actually heighten the risk to prized legacies. During Lebanon's civil war, Druze forces saved the 1500-year-old Cedars of Lebanon from being chopped down for firewood. Peace left them more precarious, at the mercy of tourists who trampled new shoots and took cuttings from the ancient trees.

Stonehenge, Britain's heritage archetype and a major global site, typifies such dilemmas. First a fearsome pagan relic, Stonehenge has been ascribed to Satan, to Phoenicians, and to Druids, among others. Demonized by the medieval Church, fount of Tudor sovereign claims, and icon of Welsh nationalism, Stonehenge has served (and suffered for) myriad purposes. Locals took stones for fencing and building and rented tools to visitors to chip off bits of sarsen—one antiquary grumbled at being "Obliged with a Hammer to labour hard three Quarters of an Hour to get but one Ounce and a half."⁵⁷

National property since the First World War, Stonehenge is now shared by English Heritage (the stone circle) and the National Trust (the surrounding land). A decade's joint stewardship has spawned a self-confessed national disgrace. Safe from religious zealots, farmers, and souvenir hunters, Stonehenge now suffers ceaseless custodial folly. Access is through a dank concrete tunnel; barbed wire intermittently festoons the stones; car parks and lavatories, a cramped gift shop, and a dingy cafe's Sarsen Sandwiches degrade the ambience. "We've managed to separate the stones from their setting," English Heritage's chief seems to brag; "we've surrounded a great monument to the genius of the early British with the worst excesses of the 20th century."⁵⁸

Cult groups and commercial pressure aggravate these woes. Stonehenge is sacred to modern Druids and hippies, celebrants at the solstice rituals since the 1950s. The few Druids posed little threat, but their dawn vigils lumped them with a motley crew of New Age cultists, commune nostalgists, ley-line mystics, and drug addicts. To farmers' mingled dismay and profit, thousands camped in nearby fields, got stoned and laid, and left behind condoms, needles, and excrement. To make Stonehenge seemly for paying tourists, its custodians in 1983 banned solstice visits and set Wiltshire police on would-be intruders. Over three summers convoys and encampments for miles around were broken up, heads smashed, hippies jailed.

Razor-wired, dog-patrolled, and arc-lit, Stonehenge was cleansed of riffraff by 1987. The sole solstice celebrants were police, who ensured no one else got in. Weirder than Druids, cops in spiked helmets stared up at their ceremonial helicopter, circling over the sarsens to spy out subversion. Meanwhile English Heritage pledged a purified Stonehenge as honeypot and sanctuary. But making it over from "national disgrace" to "eighth wonder of the world" fell foul of the Transport Ministry, Wiltshire county, archaeologists, the disabled, and six million in cars whom a proposed tunnel would deprive of prized views from the road.⁵⁹

Barred from worshippers and bereft of magic, Stonehenge remains squalid and minatory, its splendors at once hawked and subverted by fearful custodians. But Stonehenge's woes are not unique; they reflect confusion over heritage goals and means common to many famous sites. Popularity equally degrades Mont-Saint-Michel. Bandits drawn by the antiquities market machine-gun their way into Angkor Wat, ill protected even when floodlit and wired like a concentration camp; tourists must evade land mines planted to halt plunder. Hyping Cycladic figurines led to looting thousands of graves and a flood of fakes from the Dodecanese. Florence's Uffizi Gallery and Roman sites were bombed by terrorists who, custodians wryly noted, seemed uniquely appreciative of Italy's heritage.

A million and a half ritual and cultural objects from five hundred American museums will go back to Indian tribes under the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1991. Half of them will be reburied, exposed to the elements, or destroyed for purposes of purification, as happened with bones and grave goods repatriated to Australian Aborigines after 1984. Some argue that such returns will deprive indigenes' own better-educated (in other words, Westernized) descendants of an invaluable legacy. One archaeologist predicts that "Aboriginal people may come to acknowledge the good fortune that European collectors preserved fragments of their cultural heritage."⁶⁰

Or they may continue to deplore preservation. Aborigines who have schooled themselves to accept loss remark that "white people don't know what to remember and what to forget, what to let go of and what to preserve." Unsure how to relate to their past, whites need to keep it all. An American curator recalls a meeting where anthropologists were arguing against reburial because knowledge might be lost:

Finally one Native American activist said, "Why do you white people need to know all this stuff? Why can't you just let it go?" Listening, I had such a visceral reaction of horror, I knew he had hit on something very sacred to *my* culture. The thought of deliberately letting knowledge perish was as sacrilegious to me as the thought of keeping one's ancestors on a museum shelf was sacrilegious to the Indians in the audience.⁶¹

Such disputes are now endemic. They can be resolved, I suggest in Chapter 10, only by understanding what heritage means to myriad claimants, whose desires differ with culture, time, and circumstance.

The past feels more accessible, more controversial, and more vulnerable than ever before. Heritage appetites outpace heritage growth. Awareness of its fragility endears what we inherit, but our very embrace dooms it; we kill what we love. Ever more popular, heritage becomes ever more perishable. When possession and stewardship are contested, as discussed in Chapter 10, risks to heritage are heightened.

What heritage means for us as individuals and as members of families, and how our personal concerns link with national and ethnic legacies, is shown in Chapters 2 and 3. How heritage needs reshape old and invent new pasts, spurning historical fact, occupies Chapters 4 through 7.
