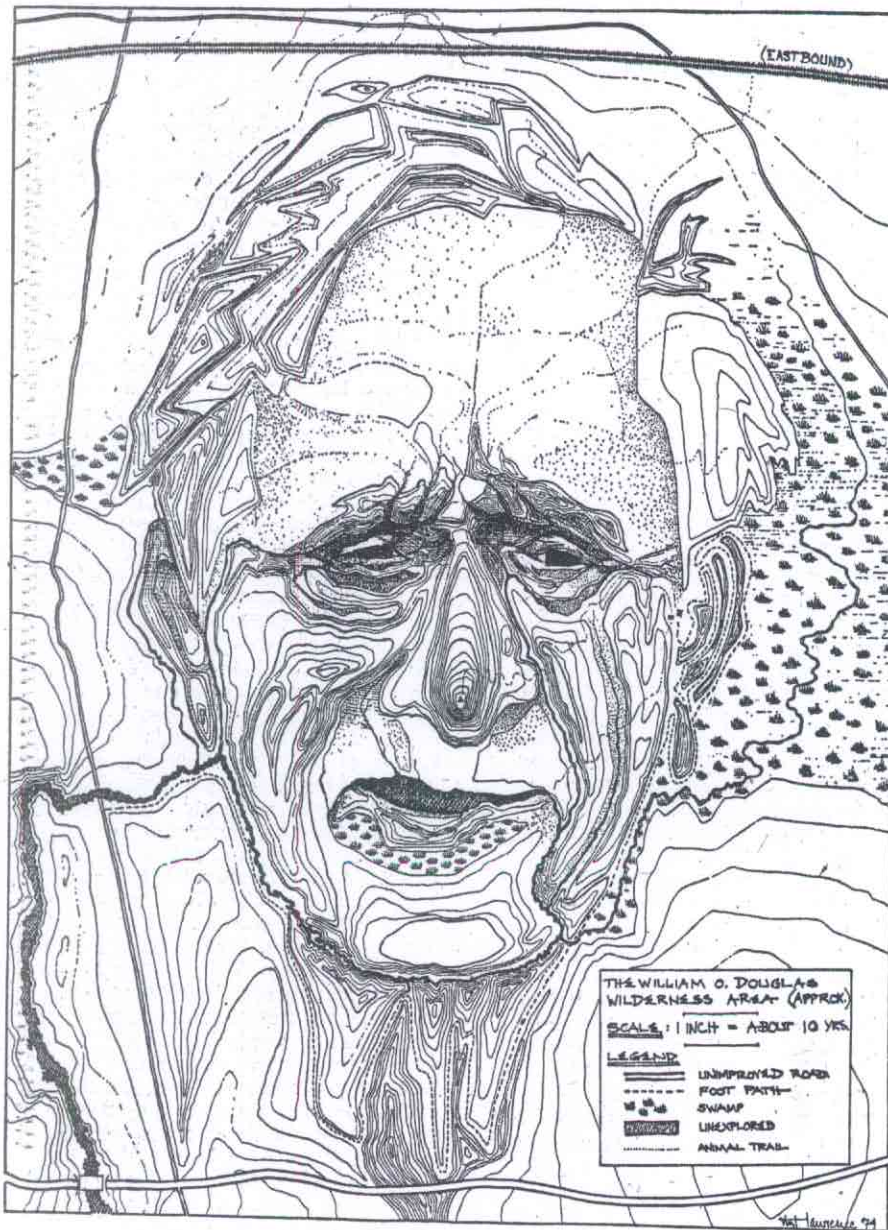


The Washington Post

# BOOK



# WORLD

## Mr. Douglas Goes to

*GO EAST, YOUNG MAN: The Early Years.* By William O. Douglas. Random House. 493 pp. \$10

By COLMAN McCARTHY

WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS, the Supreme Court justice who continues to spread hope that the Bill of Rights means something, has been in Washington longer than many of us have been alive, so we have plenty of catching up to do on this valuable, inspiring and canny citizen. With this first of two autobiographical volumes, he lets us gain on him a little. In graceful, easygoing prose, he begins with his boyhood in Yakima, Washington and ends with the Sunday afternoon in March 1939, when President Roosevelt summoned him from a Maryland golf course to offer him a "mean job, a dirty job, a thankless job."

Douglas, who has served as a justice longer than anyone in the Court's history, wrote *Go East, Young Man* in his spare time in the last dozen years. It is a volume not written in quick response to a publisher's command—"let's make a buck while you're hot," but from a coneemplative need to "retrace old paths to reactivate the 'feeling of intellect' as Wordsworth would have put it." In the preface Douglas lets out the word that, for him, Court life has never demanded more than four days a week, leaving time for much writing, hiking, rest and reflection. What he hasn't given the Republic as another fevered workaholic of Washington, Douglas now gives us as an autobiographer of warmth and honesty.

COLMAN McCARTHY is a member of the editorial page staff of *The Washington Post*. His recent book is *Disturbers of the Peace*.

One fascination in an individualist like Douglas telling us of his life is to trace the roots of his well-known views on civil liberties to the hidden subsoil of his boyhood. During summer vacations in his native Yakima Valley in Washington, for instance, Douglas worked among the impoverished migrant workers. He rode the rails and slept under bridges with them, always grubbing for farm work, and was deeply affected by what he saw and heard:

Their lives were mostly empty and filled with despair. I had been raised to believe in the Puritan ethic—that right was right and wrong was wrong, and that man, endowed with free will, could choose which he preferred. It was all a matter of good and bad, sin and righteousness, reward and punishment. Criminals were the product of the wrong moral choice. The poor were the product of lack of desire, energy and will power. The rich were those who took advantage of their opportunities.

Young as I was, I began to doubt the accuracy of this ethic. I sensed in this restless, lonely community, constantly pursued by law and order, personal tragedies that had somehow fragmented them. Was it a dissolute father or mother? Was it a broken family? Was it an impossible life generated by a slumlord?

Douglas was not a mere onlooker to his poverty. He was in it himself, the son of a Presbyterian minister who died when Douglas was six, leaving the family penniless.

While there were many children's parties in Yakima, we were never invited to a single one, and we were far too poor to have one in our own home. We grew up never seeing the inside of another home. In the after years, I thought it was a blessing



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## Washington

that I had not. For if I had been united with the elite of Yakima even by so tenuous a cord, I might have been greatly handicapped. To be accepted might then have become a goal in later life, an ambition that is often a leveling influence. To be accepted means living in the right area, wearing the right hat, thinking the right way, saying the right thing. What it means in the law is a Dean Acheson or John Foster Dulles or a reactionary president of the bar association. They cause all the beauty to disappear in pontifical emptiness.

Before leaving the West for Columbia Law School in New York, Douglas had seen illness also. He suffered polio. He fought against it heroically, pushing himself to walking and hiking in strenuous ways that he would never otherwise have done. As an adult, the thinking that influenced him as a boy—buck the odds imposed by polio—stirred in him even in his illnesses. Following a mountain-climbing accident when a horse fell on him fracturing 23 ribs, "I no longer had any lung expansion—not even part of an inch. The consequence was that all my deep breathing had to be done by the diaphragm, which of course slowed me down on the slopes of mountains. The doctors concluded that my mountain-climbing days and my days at high altitudes were over. To see whether or not the doctors were correct, I decided to cross the Himalayas in India." Some men are blessed with amazing grace, but Douglas was given amazing spunk.

Along with a strong will, Douglas also acquired strong opinions about some of the people he rubbed against. Early on he met John Foster Dulles in New York "and decided against him because he was so pontifical. He made it appear that the greatest favor he could do a young lawyer was to hire him. He seemed to me like a high churchman out (Continued on page 2)

# Douglas

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to exploit someone. In fact, I was so struck by Dulles's pomposity that when he helped me on with my coat, as I was leaving his office, I turned and gave him a quarter tip." Dulles was among three singled out by Douglas as ones "who I felt had greatly dishonored our American ideal." The other two: Cardinal Spellman and J. Edgar Hoover.

With humor, Douglas points out that his strong reactions sometimes influenced his judicial opinions. Discussing a "deep dislike" for New York City—its ugliness and expensiveness—he dissented in a decision that ruled against a Texas man because he did not list as taxable income a trip to New York he won in a contest. "The theory was that it was a great reward to come to New York City. I dissented, saying, 'If we were in the field of judicial notice, I would think that some might conclude that the weekend in New

York City was a chore and that those who went sacrificed valuable time that might better have been spent on the farm, in the woods, or along the seashore."

A New York Herald Tribune editorial knocked Douglas for that jibe, but the editorial that Douglas most relished came from his hometown Yakima Daily Republic. On his appointment to the Supreme Court, the newspaper produced an editorial titled "Yakima Not To Blame," arguing that however mixed and muddled up Douglas had become, his teachers and friends back home had tried their best. "We want to go on record as saying that Yakima is not to blame," said the editorial. "The piece delighted me no end," Douglas laughs.

Douglas eagerly shares his thoughts and opinions with us, but his autobiography lacks the full quality it might have had if he shared also more of his feelings and more of his interior life. He touches but briefly on his three divorces, saying generally that divorce is "the worst ordeal a man can suffer." We don't learn much either about his feelings when impeachment proceedings were brought

four years ago. He says only that they were "launched in 1970 by Nixon, Agnew and Gerald Ford." Nor does Douglas discuss Abe Fortas, although he was the best man at Fortas's wedding and his closest friend in his early days in Washington.

This censorship of feelings keeps the autobiography from joining the better examples in current American literature, such as Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* or Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness*. But even so, *Go East, Young Man* is one of the frankest and most reflective books to come from a public figure in years. It is a deft exposition of a long and worthy life, an exciting narrative because its author, with a novelist's touch, constantly points out the relationships and connections of ongoing life. Events of one era are repeated in another. Even in describing his mother,

Douglas reveals something both of himself and contemporary America:

... she was a faithful Republican watcher at the polls, making sure that no undeserving Democrat ever voted. I would chide her in good humor about it at night, but she was adamant in her philosophy that if we, the workers, wanted jobs, we must all vote for Republicans. Sixty years later—in 1972—I sat at a counter in a Washington, D.C. restaurant having a cup of coffee, and the waitress who served me told me the same thing. Mother had been upset when Wilson was elected; this waitress was overjoyed that Nixon won, for the Rich would stay in power and her job as a waitress would be secure. Even at the age of fourteen I did not buy that theory... □