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"Let me tell you about born-again Christians. They are different from you and I." There are many differences, Alan Peshkin goes on to tell us in God's Choice, but the difference that riveted his attention for three years of research and defined his voice in this book is that they are "true believers."

God's Choice is an account of Peshkin's journey into the world of Bethany Baptist Academy, a small church school in Illinois. The church is in the Bob Jones orbit: it is independent, evangelical Baptist and old-guard fundamentalist, that is, apolitical but still separatist in ways that other fundamental Baptists under leaders like Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye have forsaken. Peshkin presents himself as coming from the other end of America: an education professor specializing in public schools and community maintenance, a practicing Jew, a man who does not hold absolute beliefs, a "genuine pluralist." "Never had I felt so alien so geographically close to home." He cannot conceive of converting into a fundamental Baptist and acknowledges "the probability of constraints" on his understanding given his background, but says he encountered no "unfathomable mysteries" at Bethany and "it is absurd to think that only insiders can truly understand." True understanding, Peshkin is convinced, is fully separable from true belief.

From his journey, we get what appears to be a study of behavior, beliefs and attitudes that mark these born-again believers as different from the author, plus a critique and threat-assessment of contemporary fundamentalist culture; just below the surface, we perceive Peshkin struggling to hold together the pieces of his identity, an awkward but intriguing combination of detached and passionate perspectives. It would seem it is the author's culture, not the natives', that is in jeopardy in this study. This is not surprising, since the natives continuously and vigorously questioned Peshkin's authority to know them, denied the validity of his culture, and tried aggressively to convert him to theirs.

A school based on absolute truth leads to a "total institution," one that endeavors to organize and orient the life of its students around the clock, to separate them from "the world" in manifold ways, and to integrate its doctrines into every aspect of student experience. Doctrine shapes the curriculum (God is omnipresent), class sessions (all open with prayer), teaching ("our job is teaching the truth"), discipline ("we don't have any rules here that nobody ob-


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An historian describes the transformation of a Massachusetts farming village into a Boston commuter suburb, casting it as the matrix of a history of the origin of a high school within sight of Harvard Square. He stages the story around events and political maneuvers to establish various parts of a free public school system. In a richly fretted narrative of processes, causes, and people, he links the origin of Somerville public high school to the expansion of the middle classes into the suburb during the final decades of the 19th century, as the American industrial revolution flourished in the Northeast. It became the seat of the ideology of equal opportunity and upward social mobility, despite the fact that, statistically speaking, its success was in mobility of sons of lower-white-collar families to upper-white-collar occupations rather than in the movement of blue-collar and working-class sons into the white-collar occupational ranks.

Ueda's story is loosely framed as a test of whether the high school actually helps sons and daughters in significant numbers to change classes from those of their parents, or instead, maintains the existing