

# Excerpts from the November 1999 MIND

The Newsletter of

[Central Indiana Mensa](#)

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## CONTRIBUTION GUIDELINES

MIND accepts contributions from all interested parties, with preference for publication going to members of Central Indiana Mensa. Contributions should reach the Editor's postal box **50946, Indianapolis, IN 46250** at least twenty days before the 1st day of the publication month. Materials must take the form of **legible written copy and/or camera-ready art. Please do not submit items on magnetic media.** Contributions may undergo editing for length and to eliminate patently offensive remarks, including personal attacks. The Editor must know the name of any contributor before publication; however, he will withhold that name from the public on request.

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## MY PIECE OF MIND

GEORGE DUNN

November

Months have their characters, deserved or not. Melville chose November to

represent melancholy. To ancient Saxons it was "blood month" (time to slaughter the animals you don't plan to feed through the winter); Celts began the "dark side" of the year with it.

People name their little girls for the spring months: April, May and June. Can you imagine a child of either sex named "November" ? <sup>1</sup>

O.K., partly it's due to lack of flair: eight months have names that reflect something memorable: the god of doorways; purification; the war god; opening of flowers; honoring the old; honoring the young; even honoring a couple of Emperors. The remaining four are just numbered: seven, eight, nine, ten. November happens to be nine.

Maybe in compensation for its poor image, November has been equipped with two federal holidays: Veterans'Day and Thanksgiving. Also, with November comes an easing of the subtraction of light. During the 3 months of August, September and October, we (at 400 ° North) have lost 4 hours, of daylight; with November this decline slows to about one hour per month. December, with its solstice, will end with days a mere 9 minutes briefer than those which began it. This displays the quadripartite cycle of rapid growth, slow growth, rapid decline, slow decline, or, as Asian sages saw it, young Yang, old Yang, young Yin, old Yin. Thought you might like to know. <sup>1</sup>There was one October; Fletcher's boy, Thursday October Christian. Fletcher, leader of the *Bounty* mutiny, wanted "no name that will remind me of England."

In a more pragmatic vein, Local Group icon Russ Washburne has chastised me for "beating up" on contributors by making use of this space to hammer on deadlines, so tell you what: I don't know if I can swear off griping forever, but I'll give everybody a two-month moratorium on scowling at the writers and see how it goes. Think of it as a pre-New Year's resolution.

\* \* \*

Since I just swore off grouching, I can only observe that October's contributions came through pretty heartily after all; we had some wide-ranging perspectives on the topic of Spiritual Renewal. Janette Greene Dollar's piece in particular drew some comments, which may (or may not) rise to the level of Letters to the Editor. Also, MJ Tala's offering, which she qualified as written in haste, pithily captured the value of focus in our frequently robotic lives. From new contributor Richard Jones we had an intellectual approach and from veteran David Vaprin an experiential one. Dom Jervis brought the matter around to the microcosm of Mensa, so in all we had Christian, Jewish, pagan, Utilitarian, skeptical and mystical snapshots of the issue. Nicely done, folks.

\* \* \*

Y'know, I was thinking... one thing we haven't seen too much in MIND is fiction. Recent efforts by Bob Adair and Jud Horning have been well received, so perhaps you'd care to try your hand? Same rules: about 500 words (one page), or 1,000 words if you think YOU need them, on any topic or genre, dramatic or funny, with a moral or without.

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**LOCSECTION**

## Grace Falvey

Fifty-two people showed up at our Penrod Art Fair booth to received more information about Mensa. This is great, but if we had a publicity chairperson (hint, hint), we could reach out to people more often and in different settings. We really do need to keep our organization before the public if we are to achieve more variety in our membership. Do you know anyone who could perform this job? Could it be that person you see in the mirror? Please let me know.

Heartfelt thanks go to those who manned the Penrod Fair booth and to those who helped set up the tent and take it away afterward: Dale Amlee, Dave A., Rick Barbrick, George Dunn, Madon Harcourt, Dom Jervis, Kishor Kulkarni, Larry Marcus and Peggy Sargent.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first Afternoon at IMA was pretty quiet. Only one member joined me for lunch and a stroll through the museum -- recently retired Mary Anderson, who said she liked the idea of an activity during the day. Talking with her made me feel like a new kid on the block. I have been in Mensa for 20 years, but Mary joined in 1965 and is a Life Member. We compared notes on some of those who were in the group long, long ago, and we were pleased that so many of them still are alive and well.

\* \* \* \* \*

American Mensa will hold its second annual National Testing Day this month. The national date coincides very conveniently with our chapter's regular testing date of November 13, so we will proceed as usual at the Haughville Public Library.

Russ Washburne is chairman of the event and can be reached at (317)839-9282. Our group will be one of 105 participating, with about 150 testing sites nationally.

We hope you will encourage friends, family, co-workers and others you feel may quality to lake this opportunity to find out whether they, like you, are "Mensa material."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dave Tess has received the new applications for the MERF Scholarship competition, which he will make available to schools and interested individuals.

In addition to the MERF stipends, \$600 from the John S. Mat- thews Scholarship Fund will be awarded next year. Stay tuned; there will be more on this next month, and we'd love to see a local member or member's child win some of this scholarship money.

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## RVC.Comm

by Will Steinke

First, I need to make a correction to last month's column about proctor

qualifications. A proctor must have a four-year degree and timed-testing experience. I originally stated one of the other; sorry for the confusion this caused.

As you may know by now, there will be a dues hike to \$49 effective January 1, 2000. I abstained on the motion because I didn't feel that I had enough information to make an intelligent decision, and considering the tone of this discussion, it looked as if it was my responsibility to convince myself to vote yes. We were only given an analysis of the revenue shortfall versus the budget; expenses were never analyzed. Part of the problem was the National Office was very effective in getting people to choose the 3-year and 5-year renewal plans, resulting in reduced revenues --- strange that success resulted in punishment. Thus, I have a question: if a revenue shortfall versus the budget resulted in a dues increase, would it follow that if the RVCs, Local Group Officers and the National Office are very successful in increasing membership causing a large revenue surplus versus budget, will the membership be entitled to a dues reduction (sort of like a tax cut)? Just asking.

Speaking of the 3-year (\$120) and 5-year (\$200) plans, I called the National Office and was told these price would also rise effective January 1, 2000. Thus, if you are planning to renew, it would be worth your while to renew early in order to take advantage of the savings. In fact, choosing the 5-year plan would be equivalent to getting five years for the price of four (\$196 at the new rate). Additionally, the second family member will be raised to \$33 (2/3 of the new rate under the formula --- which was part of the dues hike motion).

The members of the staff made a presentation outlining their goals, strategies and mechanisms to meet their plan. If they are successful in accomplishing their objectives our organization will be much better off for it. If our region can keep our side of the bargain by participating in and publicizing National Testing Day, the MERF scholarship program and GOTYA programs, we should be able to make great strides in averting the problems associated with the impending dues hike.

I want to thank Pam Donahoo and her staff at the National Office for assisting us in our work and making us feel welcome.

Finally, I want to create three additional regional coordinators (chairs) in addition to the scholarship chair to encourage our region's participation in the following areas: literacy, Project Inkslinger and gifted children. Please call me at (630) 898-9710 or e-mail me at [wjsteinke@commpuserv.com](mailto:wjsteinke@commpuserv.com), to volunteer.

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## LETTERS

Dear Editor:

Southeast Michigan Mensa would like to invite you and yours to attend Region 3's Leadership Development Workshop on November 20 in Southfield, Michigan.

Mensa leaders, both current and future, are invited to attend the Leadership Development Workshop. Mensans from all over the Midwest will meet to share ideas, problems and solutions for many of the issues that are important to Local Groups. We will listen to presentations, meet on panels and brainstorm such topics as Opportunities for Participation in Mensa, Developing New

Leaders, Newsletter and Web-Site Production, Financial Management, Event Planning and Strategic Planning and Crisis Management.

The Workshop is absolutely free and is open to all Mensans.

If you are someone who is even considering becoming more involved in the leadership of your Local Group, please join us. This program is designed to develop future leaders, as well as augmenting the skills of those currently in office. If you are currently a leader in Mensa, in addition to attending yourself, please take this opportunity to encourage those in your group to attend.

Please contact Diane Hartt (xxx) xxx-xxxx, DiHartt@compuserve.com or Loretta Olson or Tom Pyter (xxx) xxx-xxxx, LorandTom@compuserve.com to register or for further information. Low-cost hotel accommodations will be available nearby; please contact us for information.

Diane B. Hartt

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## **Dom Jervis**

### **The Ultimate Loss**

A popular bumper sticker reads, "Of all the things I've lost, I miss my mind the most." This would be amusing, if it weren't so true on a global scale. Rather than lament about dial phones, wooden tennis rackets and slide rules becoming victims of cultural evolution, we should be worried about the fact that our society is losing its sanity. Consider the following:

- o More than 50,000 American lives were lost in a war our leaders never had any intention of winning.
- o A typical working family pays one-half of its income in federal, state and local taxes. Much of this money goes to slackers and malingerers who are fully capable of working, but who can game the system so well that they qualify for a PhD in this realm of knowledge.
- o Those who claim to care about the poor really don't. They just use them to increase their own power base. Poverty cannot be eliminated in a society of any size. The only thing their efforts got us was a six trillion dollar national debt, which none of us will live to see paid off.
- o The people who provide the capital which fuels our economic system are rewarded for their self-discipline with higher taxes. Until recently, people who could not control their credit cards were punished with tax deductions.
- o One does not have to be very old to realize that cars now cost more than homes used to.
- o Personal responsibility is at an all-time low. Every criminal is a victim. They're from broken homes. They were given too much discipline, or too little. They have chemical imbalances. Their classmates ridiculed them, so they were perfectly justified in turning their school into Hamburger Hill.
- o Conversely, a law-abiding Person can be given the hassle of his/her life for having a few beers after work, even while driving within the ever-decreasing

legal limit.

o A frighteningly large number of mush-brained crackpots have risen to positions of power and decreed that no one in their state, not even serial killers, should pay for their crimes with their lives.

o These same inane cretins feel fully entitled to tell a woman what she can and cannot do to her own body.

o There are actually people who believe that animals should have more rights than humans. For a detailed discussion of these reality-challenged whackos, please refer to my article in the June MIND.

o A beautiful little girl was murdered in Colorado nearly three years ago. There is a zero probability that she was killed by a stranger. The authorities have not brought the perpetrator to justice, solely because they do not want to do so.

o People are in prison simply for having owned certain types of plants.

o Thirty-five years ago, a comic was repeatedly jailed for using vulgar, though non-threatening language. When he was sentenced to prison, he committed suicide. The authorities showed no discernible remorse.

o Prospective jurors are often selected for service due to their lack of intelligence. If you don't believe me, tell them you belong to Mensa when you are called for jury duty. The side with the weaker case will throw you out.

o If you are accused of sexual harassment, you are guilty until proven innocent, especially if you are a male. Have fun trying to prove that you did not say or do something. Telling a female co-worker, "You look nice today" will get you either a smile or a hearing, depending solely on whether she likes you or not. If she cries or swears, no one will side with you. It's a miracle inter-gender conversation even exists anymore, much less anyone being able to get married!

o People will go out of their way to interpret even the most innocuous comment as being a racial, ethnic or gender-bashing slur. We are almost to the point where having all but the blandest conversation is not worth the potential trouble.

o Many of the worst employees in a company are promoted to managerial positions. This is a fact, not a generalization. Merit as a means to success loses out to connections or, worse, "having the goods" on someone. Fellow Mensan Scott Adams nailed it when he said the most inept employees are made into managers, where they can do the least amount of harm.

o Companies eliminate thousands of jobs while earning record profits, claiming that they need to do so to remain competitive. What they do not realize is that, when they throw these people out of work, they are decreasing the pool of customers who can buy the very products they produce.

o Illegal aliens are given welfare and medical care, paid for by those of us who work. They are allowed to stay here by simply claiming political asylum, and then vanishing into the sea of humanity.

o Every Congressman is a crook and a liar, except for your own.

o Wealthy owners of sport franchises threaten to move their teams if taxpayers don't finance state of the art arenas for them. Fans must then buy licenses

giving them the opportunity to buy tickets. Then, they must purchase the tickets! I say, let them move!

Many people believe that putting "Mensa" on their resume hurts their chances of getting a job. I proudly include it on mine. If they won't hire me for that reason, I don't want to work for such a pack of insecure, short-sighted paranoid dullards anyway. If anyone tries to lay this line of mental mud on you, ask them, "Why wouldn't hiring a Mensan be analogous to a surgeon wanting the sharpest possible scalpel available for use in the operating room?"

You're welcome.

*[Al Gore should probably not count on Dom's vote - Ed]*

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## Random Sample

© by Julie A. Yates Harkey

### Mad Max, Jr.

This little GMC road warrior truck started life working for a pro-pane dealership in central Indiana. A high railing was added to its bed, and a lift gate replaced the tailgate. This first life was a hard one. There were seven or eight wrecks, as Max's owner was not a particularly gifted driver. The inside of the bed was hollowed severely from the inside by propane cylinders, and the wheel wells were holey from rust. Max carries evidence of road trauma, both chemical and the result of blunt force. At some time or other the control handle for the lift gate broke off, and was replaced by a screwdriver.

When we bought Mad Max, Jr. from its second owner, it was sitting in a cluttered yard amid tall grass. The left front wheel leaned in at an unnatural angle, the grille was missing, and the twisted bumper was lying in the bed. We bought two trucks that day—Mad Max, Jr. and a run-down yellow Chevy S10 to serve as a parts donor. Ted replaced Max's upper ball joint in about 20 minutes, righting the wheel, and we made the trip home. I followed in my car, the green deer hunter. We made it home safely, then repeated the process a few days later with the donor truck.

For several weeks we tried to diagnose an erratically running engine. This process involved changing, tightening and moving various engine appurtenances, then taking test drives on dark, bumpy country roads. At long last we realized that the flash of light I saw during one of these sessions was neither my imagination nor an alien space ship. One of the battery cables was intermittently rubbing against the alternator pulley, thus shorting the electrical system. A bit of tape and a re-route of the offending wire, and the problem was resolved. The next day we replaced the battery cable.

Soon Ted and his cohort Slider began to tinker. Max was just too vulnerable without a grille, so they made and installed a new one. It was constructed from an old grocery store shelf (the kind with little diamond-shaped holes), and painted battleship gray to match Max's remaining paint. Side mirrors, the passenger door handle, and a radio were transplanted from the yellow truck. Ted unbent and reattached the bumper, and replaced various essential parts in the front end. The finishing touch was installing stove vents in the leading edge of the hood. Eyebrows! This is what Mad Max, Jr. looks like today:

We hauled many things in Max's bed. Trash barrels made uncounted trips to the dumpster, and an assortment of sticks, weeds, and fireplace logs were transported. The cement mixer and lawn mowers have had several rides each. One day when Rob and Dave had been hauling dirt to the mosquito pit, a wasp flew into the open window and caused Rob to swerve madly. Max missed a large tree by inches. Luckily, Dave was sitting down in the bed and they were not going at all fast.

The only thing Max has hit recently was an unfortunate deer. That was the day we hauled 42 two-by-fours, eight sheets of ply-wood, and 24 rolls of insulation home from the store. Max looked like a layer cake. No one was hurt except the deer, but, alas, it ran away. Else, we would have arrived home with a deer strapped on top of that enormous load.

Max, having served us well for nearly two years and traveling 26,000 miles, will be leaving soon. The engine leaks oil rather badly (one quart every 30

miles) and the truck is showing other signs of decrepitude. Also, we just purchased another propane company veteran, a large red F150 pickup. It ran on either gas or propane, and has already had a transmission transplant. When Ted's hand heals, he'll drive it.

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## BULLETIN BOARD

**Petra Ritchie:**

### Glee and Sympathy

Sharing with those Mensans who are having memorable experiences of one sort or another.

If you know of a Mensan who has suffered a setback **or** who has something to celebrate, (*especially* something to celebrate) please contact Petra with the information; she will send a card on behalf of the Local Group.

(address and phone # deleted for web page)

[pritchie@ibj.com](mailto:pritchie@ibj.com)

**Nancy White:** *Good Homes For Your Used Books!* I still need used books in good condition for the Monthly Book Sale. Books that don't find a home at the Monthly Meetings will be offered to a wider audience at our Regional Gathering in January. Proceeds go to the Scholarship Fund.

**Marie Beltrame:** I miss my friends in Central Indiana Mensa! Even though I am now far away in real distance, won't you keep in touch with me in cyberspace? Either [MarieBeltrame@juno.com](mailto:MarieBeltrame@juno.com) or [Beltrame@fls.infi.net](mailto:Beltrame@fls.infi.net)

**Shirley Washburne:** Cheap Movie SIG meets Thursday, November 18 at the Hollywood Bar & Film Works, 247 South Meridian St. (park in Union Station garage next door for \$1) Movie titles and showtimes change weekly, so check movies page of the Star and/or call Shirley Washburne at 839-9282 for further information or to discuss options!

**Russ Washburne:** MENSA TESTING BASH! Encourage your non-Mensa friends to join us in celebrating National Testing Day (by being tested, of course). It's relatively painless; we haven't lost a testee yet; some even think it's fun. Join us at:

**Haughville Branch Library**  
3805 West Michigan St.,  
Indianapolis  
on  
**Saturday, 11 November**  
**at 2:00 pm.**

The process takes about an hour and a half, leaving plenty of time to watch your favorite college football team in action.

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by Basil Wentworth

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## To Keep In MIND

### Upcoming Gatherings and Events

#### \*\*\* 1999 \*\*\*

December 3-5	AMC Meeting, Minneapolis MN. Contact: Judith C. Hogan.
December 10-12	Cincinnati Area mensa, Countdown.

#### \*\*\* 2000 \*\*\*

January 28-30	Circle City RG: <i>Y2K Survivors' Party</i> . Waterfront Plaza Hotel, 2930 Waterfront Parkway West, Indianapolis, IN 46214; (317) 299-8400; rooms \$62, mention Mensa; registrar <a href="#">Karen Wilczewski</a> . rates \$50 to K-31 (12/1); \$55 to 1/1/00; \$60 thereafter.
July 5-9	Delaware Valley Mensa AG (Philadelphia) (Joint AG with Mensa Canada)

#### \*\*\* 2001 \*\*\*

July 4-8	North Texas Mensa AG (Dallas)
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#### \*\*\* 2002 \*\*\*

July 3-7	Phoenix AG
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**Helen Schmill, Wyoming**

**Lost Stuff**

Stuff is missing at the store,  
Pepperidge Farm Bread, for instance,  
Maybe the old store itself, the people and the merchandise.  
When an adult child leaves their family,  
Confidence and trust are lost, plus hopes and dreams.  
Our town has lost stuff. the local offices of the light  
company, the telephone company, the gas company.  
Casper has lost two refineries, resulting in lost wages,  
lost pensions and lost taxes.  
Wyoming has lost good jobs and security for many of its  
young families,  
As well as most of the people who started our churches.

We've lost excellence as the achievement of the public  
school and the common sense of right and wrong.  
We've lost confidence in much of our government.

Too many people have lost the time to eat supper together  
as a family, enjoying food prepared at home.  
Many children have lost daily care from their mothers  
and their mothers have lost those fleeting hours.

Many people have lost the Sabbath.

Many people have lost the knack of working with God.

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**Fiction by Robert O. Adair**

**Midnight Rendezvous**

"C'mon, man. Let me out of here! You ain't no lousy cop! You ain't got no right to hold me!"

"I will do exactly as I choose. Sit down." The one known as Lester Gibson stood planted on both feet between George Gillespie and the front door to the three-room cottage. The old-fashioned mantle clock was striking the hour of midnight. Outside the full moon shone, illuminating the winding country lane which ran up to the house.

"\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, locked!" George exclaimed, springing to the door to the back room, shaking it till it rattled.

"George, sit down." Lester uttered this command so calmly and dispassionately it was chilling. Instead, George leaped at him like a football

player trying to break through the line. Lester scarcely seemed to move, yet he stiff-armed and tripped him. George hit the floor so hard it knocked the wind out of him. As he lay there gasping for breath, Lester said, "I told you to sit down. I meant it."

"What you gonna do (gasp) about it (gasp). What you gonna do? Ain't nothin' you can do! That's what!"

"Nothing, George? Indeed? You raped her, George, and then you killed her."

"That's what you say, Mister Big Mouth! But you can't prove nothin'!"

"George, George," Lester's voice had a soothing tone. "There's so much you don't understand. But don't worry. I'm going to explain it to you. Helen was the only human being I've ever cared about."

"Well, well! Ain't that too bad? What do you expect me to do, break down and bawl like a baby?"

"Not precisely. Certainly not for that reason."

"Not precisely!" George jeered, mocking Lester's language. "Always so formal, always so proper! You and your kind always did make me want to puke."

"Possibly."

"Can't ever say a thing straight out, can you?"

"It is difficult sometimes. You see, before this happened, I was going away. I really only stayed around to settle this one thing."

"Alright, alright! Turn me in. It ain't no big deal. Suppose they got me for Murder One: that's life, mister. You know what "life" is? That's seven years with good behavior. I feel the same way Manson did: all my friends is there, man! What do I care!"

"I thought you'd feel that way. That's why I lured you out here. No, I'm not going to turn you in. What a waste of time!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! What you gonna do Lester? Kill me? You middle class phonies ain't got that kinda guts!"

"You're right, George. You're really right. I guess I am a phony. George, look at me; I want to show you something."

Lester began to remove his tie, then he opened his shirt. There was no undershirt, only an ordinary-looking expanse of bare skin. George was dumfounded. The thought "He's crazy" formed in his mind.

"Now you think I'm crazy, don't you, George?" Lester said, echoing George's thought so closely it was disconcerting.

"Wha ... wha...?" George mumbled.

"Look closely, George, very closely."

George stared at Lester. A six-inch square appeared on Lester's chest, then it popped out like a glove compartment door, forming a little platform. A jet black

crustacean crawled out. It looked like a cross between a crab and a spider. It flexed all ten of its legs for a moment and sprang. George let out one startled cry of terror before it sank its fangs into him. The venom acted almost instantly. George's eyes glazed and he fell dead. The creature ambled across the floor, climbed "Lester's" pants leg and back onto the platform, which closed behind it. Presently Lester's figure became mobile again.

"Yes, indeed," Lester said to nobody in particular, "the only human being I ever cared about."

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## Your Opinion, Please

By pure synchronicity, this election month brings you a chance to vote for something besides the Mayor of Indianapolis. Here are some Mensa issues, local and national, on which you, the members, have a right to be heard.

Put your views in a letter and post it to the Editor, POB 50946, Indianapolis, IN 46250.

**FIRST QUESTION:** What features, topics or columns would you like to see in the 2000 MIND? (You will not be stuck with providing the material you ask for.)

**SECOND QUESTION:** Should Central Indiana Mensa operate a local Scholarship Program? A bit of background for you: American Mensa (aka "National") has a relationship with a scholarship organization, MERF; this Local Group also has a scholarship program. We could designate our funds to MERF (or some other scholarship organization) or disburse them ourselves.

The advantage to a Local Group fund is that we would have control over who got the money; the drawback is that we would be responsible for the fund administration.

**THIRD QUESTION:** Should American Mensa reapportion its Regions?

Background: As you probably know, our national Mensa is subdivided for administrative purposes into nine "Regions," the administrators of which (Regional Vice Chairs, or RVCs) serve as voting members of the American Mensa Committee (AMC). These Regions are depicted on the maps on Pages 13, 14 & 19.

The idea behind establishing and realigning the Regions - which has been done before - is to have approximately equally-sized populations and equally-numerous Local Groups under each RVC's administration. This goal itself is open to your comments.

The fundamental advantage to having equal Regions is that it produces "equal" RVCs on the AMC. No one represents a disproportional number of Mensans.

An argument for increasing the number of Regions is that the resulting smaller Regions would be easier to administer. In this electronic age, this is mainly a matter of travel to Gatherings.

An argument for decreasing the number of Regions is that each RVC is a financial burden on the membership. Although they don't draw salaries, Mensa dues support their travel, lodging, meals, registrations and administrative



Treva Marks	♥H	♥	♥	♥			♥H	♥H			♥H	♥
Jean Miller				♥	♥							
Anna Marie Rutallie						♥H						
Russ Washburne									♥			♥
Shirley Washburne									♥			♥
Nancy White	♥	♥	♥	♥	♥	♥	♥			♥	♥	♥
Karen Wilczewski											♥	

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Primer for the January Topic:

## Sense of History

One of the most interesting things about the Middle Ages was that the people didn't realize they were living in the Middle Ages; they thought they were in modern times. So did the denizens of ancient Rome, the citizens of Periclean Athens, the people of Jericho and the herders of the Fertile Crescent.

Get the point? It's always now and yet everything in the now will someday be viewed as quaint and unenlightened. Modernity, which seems such a privileged vantage, is the crest of a wave, constantly tumbling over.

Everything is in the past, but there are different pasts: there's an immediate past, which looks just like the present, a minute ago, yesterday, maybe last week; a personal past, last summer, or as far back as childhood; a cultural past, which contained most of the familiar institutions; an ethnic past, in which people sort of spoke our language; a remote past, or "antiquity" we know only from artifacts, and an extreme past reconstructed from fossils.

Every person, event and thing is steadily sliding from one of these pasts into another, but there's no specific point that this transition takes place. Neither is experience of the past by any means universal. To a six-year-old, the family Christmas tree ritual is as venerable as the season itself while to his father, it's less hallowed than his current hairstyle.

While there are no sharp borders to the past, there are zones of significance we use for demarcation. The best known of these are wars. We refer to prewar, postwar, antebellum. Another one is the proliferation of new inventions: before the automobile; after the Bomb; since the invention of movable type. Sometimes a notable leader will lend a name: Victorian; Elizabethan; Eisenhower Years.

But since events don't always occur at convenient intervals, we have recourse to artificial mileposts in the form of decades and centuries. The 60's, the Roaring 20's, the Gay 90's, 18th Century Enlightenment; 15th Century Age of Exploration.

How do you structure History? Don't feel bound by textbook divisions; your order is not necessarily less valid than Mr. Gibbons', nor does one structure rule out a different one. Give us some eras from your personal history ("Puberty"; "Urbanization"; "Mensa"), the history of some interest of yours ("Gunsmoke: after Chester"), some obscure development ("the impact of bathroom tissue") or something entirely frivolous.

Or to take a serious tack, does History mean anything? Are there such things as wrong turns? Do the lives of great men (and women) make a difference?

Or again, how much history are we living with? Do we drive cars because we built roads for wagons or because we hold a myth of the restorative power of rural visitation or because city councils decided public transportation would let poor people move around too easily?

Or how do you think American standard history looks to Indians? To Latin Americans? To the Canadian descendants of Tories?

A final thought: changing the sense of history, a process called "revisionism," is a hot button topic because it calls into question the rightness of current conditions. Can you think of any cases of harmful revisionism, or any cases of history in need of some?

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