

Washington, assured Mr. Agnew that it would probably be considerably sooner than that.

The reporter knew his Washington press corps better than did the Vice President; Mr. Agnew's calculation was off by about 5 months, 29 days and 12 hours, give or take a little. Some of those present told their close friends about the meeting at breakfast a few hours later. A good share of the press knew of it and its general gist by noon Monday.

Most of the press managed to ferret out the story, motly in bits and pieces picked up second, third, fourth and fifth hand; for the most part the participants were understandably reluctant to talk. But enough of them did tell bits and pieces to their close friends, which was enough to let the story out. These friends, in turn, told their friends in order to save them from getting beat on a story that was obviously going public.

The story also quickly spread around Washington early Monday because the participating newsmen called their offices to inform their editors of the late-night meeting, its substance and its off-the-record status. The editors, also gossips, managed to spread the word to their counterparts in organizations which did not have reporters attending the meeting. Soon those editors were phoning their reporters in Williamsburg demanding that the reporters find out what happened at the meeting.

The first published account appeared Monday afternoon in the late editions of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, whose enterprising political reporter, Tom Ottenad, had nailed the story down early. So had the *Los Angeles Times'* Jules Witcover and David Kraslow. The Associated Press bureau in St. Louis picked up the *Post-Dispatch* story and transmitted it to papers across the country; the *Los Angeles Times-Washington Post* wire service on its daily schedule notified its newspaper clients that the story—optimistically billed as “exclusive”—was on its way.

The Catch-22 of the ground rules for off-the-record conversations is that they bind only those present; other reporters, by long tradition, are free to ignore the rules. The Associated Press, for instance, had its top political reporter at the meeting but, bound by the rules, he couldn't write a line about it and could only stand by helplessly as the AP transmitted the *Post-Dispatch* story.

Several of the participating reporters were under severe pressure from their editors to go ahead and write the story after it became public, but all refused; they appealed to Mr. Gold to lift the ground rules, but the Vice President, embarrassed and furious by this time, refused. Some did the second best thing. They interviewed some of the governors to whom Mr. Agnew had expressed the same sentiments and quoted them in their stories.

By the end of the working day Monday, slightly more than twelve hours after the meeting adjourned, just about everyone in the press in Williamsburg had written something on the meeting—except, of course, the nine participants who to this

day haven't written a word about their meeting with the Vice President. Mr. Witcover later sported a sardonic press badge that read: “Free the Williamsburg Nine.”

There was little disagreement—or denial—about what the Vice President said. There was a lot of speculation, however, on the reason he said it. Some participants argue that he is concerned about the propaganda harvest Communist China reaped from its Ping-pong diplomacy, and, being an honest and direct man, Mr. Agnew expressed it candidly. Others are convinced that Mr. Agnew believes he has his own constituency of conservative Republicans and that this was his way of reassuring them that the Administration was not abandoning Nationalist China. A corollary of this speculation is that Mr. Agnew fears being dumped from the ticket in 1972 and is firing up this constituency in self-defense.

Still another theory, held by a Machiavellian school, holds that Mr. Agnew does nothing without the permission of President Nixon and that Mr. Agnew's statements are Mr. Nixon's assurance to supporters of Nationalist China that he is not abandoning it.

The first school of speculation would appear to have the edge in this debate; two days after the ruckus the Administration let it be known that the President was unhappy with Mr. Agnew's criticism of a new policy in which Mr. Nixon reportedly takes great pride.

For his part the Vice President can only nurse these new wounds inflicted by the media and speculate about why the participating newsmen would leak a story that finally put them at a disadvantage. It's a good question, and best answered by the suggestion that the news business exists in part because of a powerful human urge to tell what you know, particularly if you're in the know. The professional and congenital needs of newsmen to know what's happening makes them possibly the worst gossips of all. There were ties of long

friendship at work last week and—few can doubt it—a willingness on the part of some to embarrass a man who has been exceptionally antagonistic to the press. Those not invited had their own obvious motive to get the story.

Mr. Agnew could speculate on one other thing: the rule of thumb that, in Washington, particularly, if you don't want something known, you just don't tell anyone. Not even your wife.

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Flip Wilson the Traditionalist

Jay Parker

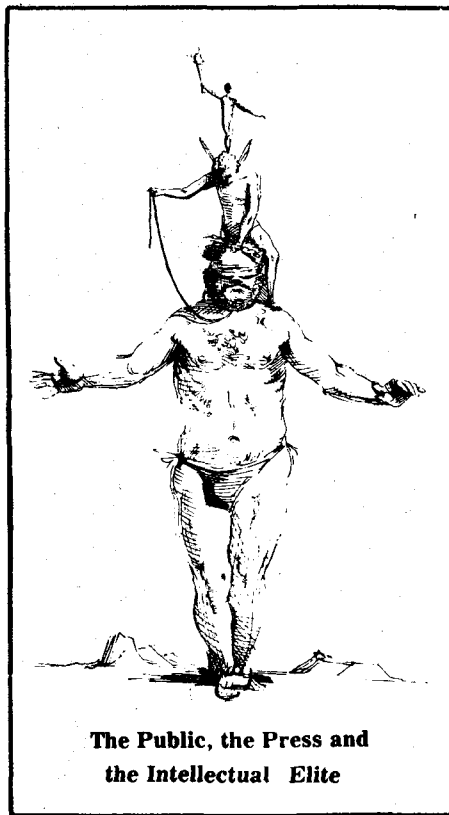
Whether you're talking to the lady who works part-time at Sears or TV critic Harry Harris, you are guaranteed to evoke excitement when discussing Clever Clerow, better known as Flip Wilson.

A middle-aged woman who works part-time for one of the Sears department stores in Philadelphia, was asked what night she would like to have off. Her instant reply was “Thursday of course, Flip Wilson is on.” TV critic Harry Harris and others have named Flip Wilson “Comic of the Year.” Legions of Americans, black and white, have rearranged their schedules to make it possible to view Flip.

In this observer's opinion, Flip Wilson is the greatest entertainment phenomenon since the aborted “Amos and Andy” radio and television show, and rivals it in popularity. According to the *New York Daily News* radio and TV critic Ben Gross, “Amos and Andy” changed everyone's life-style during its run. Critic Gross recalls that before the advent of the transistor radio one could hear the “Amos and Andy” show while strolling down the streets of any American city. Gross said just about all homes would have their windows up and the show turned up in volume.

There is sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate Flip's near-equal popularity. The “Flip Wilson Show” had, at the start of 1971, garnered a 27.1 per cent “AA” (average viewing) national rating and an astounding 42 per cent “share” which means that of every 100 homes tuned to television nationally, 42 per cent were zeroed in on Flip and his outrageously comic characters: the Rev. Leroy, hustler Pastor of the Church of What's Happening Now; or Freddie Johnson, raunchy bachelor who can't keep his hands off the girls; or the fiercely independent, shrill-voiced, aggressive and sexy Geraldine Jones. In terms of free market place success, Flip Wilson's Show is raking in the dough. Far and away the No. 1 new show of the season, the price for a minute of time on it was \$45,000 when it premiered. In the early fall, the price was raised to \$50,000 and on 19 October to \$60,000. On 18 November the price was increased to \$65,000, making it the most expensive show on the NBC-TV network.

The man responsible for this success read everything he could on comedy and comedians, studying the professional



The Public, the Press and
the Intellectual Elite

comics from the time he was a youngster. He learned then that it took fifteen years for most of them to become successful funnymen. Flip says, "I'm a story-teller rather than a comedian, because story-tellers last longer." Flip contends that he is a host and that he is not limited to acts or routines, as were some other blacks who had their own shows but couldn't make it because, as Wilson puts it, "They weren't equipped." By this he means that "they were out of their bags as hosts." Blacks have been successful in dramatic and situation comedy shows—such as Bill Cosby and Diahann Carroll—but Leslie Uggams, Sammy Davis, Jr., and the late Nat King Cole didn't last as hosts of TV variety shows. Clerow (Flip) Wilson, who may well be the first black comic in modern times to reintroduce black ethnic humor in a raffish, self-assured way, realizes that he is black, but is convinced that his show will succeed or fail on its (and his) own merits.

Flip Wilson's appearance on the scene is especially significant during this impossible period of hand wringing, teeth gnashing and greening of America. Flip is in the tradition of the hard-working American who has made it and will continue to succeed because he has staying power.

Visibly, Flip is a fantastic traditionalist. When one views Flip, the first thing seen, apart from the boyish grin, is his "hustler" haircut of the early fifties which apparently means a lot to him. If it did not mean a lot surely he would have succumbed to the pressure of the fads, which are so enormous on public figures. Consider the new look of "peace" cheerleader Sammy Davis, Jr., who abandoned his lacquered looking process for the "fro." Dresswise, Flip did not go the route of the Nehru suit and the Mao jacket like so many others.

Consistent with his appearance, Flip has

maintained all the mannerisms of the post-war era. Those who were "hanging around" on the corners of south Philadelphia during the late forties and early fifties recall this period vividly when Flip is on the stage. One need only take note of his walk and especially his greetings, both verbal and non-verbal, as when he appears to throw a shoulder into the one he is greeting. Of course the "give me five" routine is recognized by all sports buffs.

Flip has also bucked the pressures to conform by doing the unpopular. He had the nerve or the courage, depending upon your point of view, to do a series of National Guard commercials and public service announcements on radio and TV, at a time when it was not in his best interest according to some "crazies" and "moderates."

There are some who wrestle with Flip Wilson's "degree of blackness." They fear that Flip is not joining swelling ranks of those who call themselves "Black" regardless of pigmentation. These are the same persons who are upset because Flip Wilson does not appear to be one of "the 'lost' children of the diaspora who will be gathering their pride and power about them and coming home again."

Flip means a lot to all Americans—young or old; black, white or plaid. Those of us who remember, say that Flip Wilson is the greatest since Amos and Andy. Surely Flip has brought us together. □

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Relevant Editorial Contest Award

CONGRATULATIONS!

On behalf of the Saturday Evening Club I wish to congratulate not one but two winners in our "Relevant Editorial Contest." Both Dennis James Fitzgerald of Miami, Florida and George H. Nash III of Cambridge, Massachusetts correctly identified H. L. Mencken, the distinguished political scientist, as the author of April's editorial which first appeared in the June, 1929 issue of his popular journal *The American Mercury*. As Mr. Fitzgerald's entry was dated earlier than Mr. Nash's our distinguished panel of pundits and merry-makers has awarded the Saturday Evening Club's scholarship to Mr. Fitzgerald. But as Mr. Nash displayed such a profound knowledge of the early literature of political science, and as M. Stanton Evans has certified him as a gentleman of the top chop, we are awarding him a free "Evening on the Town with R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., Our East Coast Bureau Chief, and the Harvard Bad Boys." The town may be any town in Massachusetts where English is spoken, where roads and bridges are well marked, and where bartenders with political opinions have taken the vow of silence.

Garrison Traffingwell, B.A. and A.B.
Director of Such Activities

when their return on capital, including all nonmonetary benefits assumed to result, is below the return on alternative investments.

There are also several market solutions to the problem of providing a public good. For instance, the entrepreneur might estimate how much the dam is worth to each farmer, draw up a contract obligating each farmer to pay that amount on condition that every other farmer agrees to pay his share, and circulate it. Each farmer knows that, if he refuses to sign, the dam won't be built, since the contract has to be unanimous. It is, therefore, in his interest to sign.

The larger the public for a given public good, the harder it is to successfully arrange such a unanimous contract. The larger the difference between the value of the good and its price, on the other hand, the easier the entrepreneur's job. He can leave a generous margin for error by charging each farmer less than the dam is probably worth to him, and still raise enough money.

Another way to provide a public good without coercion is by temporarily converting it into a private good. The entrepreneur could do this by purchasing most of the land in the valley before telling anyone that he is thinking of building a dam. He can then build the dam and resell the land at a higher price, since the dam raises the land's value. The rise in value of the land measures the total benefit from the dam. If it is much larger than the cost of the dam, the entrepreneur makes a profit. There may be a few farmers who

The Problem of National Defense in a Free Society

David Friedman

National defense has traditionally been regarded, even by believers in severely limited government, as a fundamental function of government. To understand why, one must understand the economic concept of a "public good," and the difficulties in financing a public good without coercion.

A public good is an economic good which, by its nature, cannot be provided separately to each individual, but must be provided to the public as a whole. A simple example is the control of a river whose flooding injures the land of many farmers. There is no way that an entrepreneur proposing to build a dam can protect only those farmers who agree to pay for the dam. Thus, an individual farmer may refuse to pay.

This is the traditional problem of the

public good. It is a problem because if there are enough such farmers, who reason that it is in their self-interest not to contribute to construction of the dam, the dam will not be built, even though the combined value to all the farmers is more than the cost of building the dam.

In our society, the usual solution is to use government force—taxation—to make those benefited (and others) pay for the dam. The trouble with this solution, aside from moral objections to the use of force, is that the dam may be produced even when its value is less than its cost. The government has no market mechanism for measuring the value of the dam. And since government decisions are made on political grounds, the government may choose to ignore cost and value entirely. Thus, in practice, public dams are often built even