

are partaking in another historical goings-on. It is but the latest edition of the miracles of television. Only Americans would think of combining the serious business of a cat house with that of a confessional box and put it on television. The pageantry of Watergate has even transcended the political conventions. It is a breakthrough in dreadfulness.

And when I posit my theory that Americans lust for the lurid and the calamitous, I am not confecting a mere literary flourish. I am presenting an axiom that is the only satisfactory explanation I can lay hands on for our tin pot *cognoscenti's* repulsive and moronic enthusiasms. How else can one explain the continued popularity of Philip Roth and Norman Mailer or the existence of intellectualoids like Tom Wicker and Nicholas von Hoffman? How else can one explain the celebrity of the unreadable *New York Review of Books*, unitarianism, astrology in high places, health foods, eastern gurus, and reform politics? This vulgar appetite was noted by Mark Twain years ago. It explains such enduring American abominations as Hollywood, which has crippled America's legitimate theatre for years. It explains why the American Shakespeare, Norman Mailer, devoted himself to a blowzy biography of Marilyn Monroe. And it explains why this pot-boiler will eventually be reviewed with steamy superlatives by all the journals of *haute culture* in America. The fundamental American craving for what is lurid and calamitous ensures that when you scratch the average American intellectual you generally discover a slob. Let them glamorize their enthusiasms as "radical" or "progressive" or "advanced" or "liberal"; in days of yore they were more accurately put down as simply uncouth.

Naturally, this indelicate appetite influences our politics also. The McGovern campaign was not only a campaign for bad judgment, it was a crusade for tastelessness. The great McGoo was not only a low-grade populist, he was an egregious charlatan, who did everything

trashy but campaign in cancer wards. And his slob audience is still mystified as to why the rest of the American electorate judged him below the salt. To them he was the dream candidate of the century, Bryan without the Holy Spirit. For they can only apprehend life when it is painted in blacks, reds, purples, and shocking pinks. Life must always be a revelation of incredible treacheries and heinous schemes. Nefarious designs rattle behind the most innocent facades, and foreign policy is decided by witches and goblins. Twelve Swiss bankers control the world!

So on the evening of June 17, 1972, when the lights went on at Watergate, multitudes of expectant Americans knew something stupendous was in the air. What surprises me is not that their lurid speculations were so accurate, but that their accompanying observations were so superbly hypocritical! After all, infantile skulduggery like the Watergate caper has been part of the normative politics of Washington for the past dozen or so years. In 1964 Barry Goldwater's telephones, unbeknownst to him, were transmitting messages all over the globe. His campaign was thoroughly infiltrated by Johnson's agents. Yet at the time, such technological achievements were viewed not only as manifestations of the Democrats' superior political wisdom but also of their virtue. God was on their side, and so much for old Barry.

Every president since John F. Kennedy has viewed himself as a Sun King, and every president since Mr. Kennedy has run his executive branch like a bureaucratized Tammany Hall. When Mr. Kennedy used the threat of IRS investigations against independent-minded steel producers, all the divines of progressive politics hailed his vision. This was presidential power exercised for the commonweal. For decades ritualistic liberals have prescribed centralization of power in the White House, and since Franklin Roosevelt they have praised forceful presidents for shady statecraft.

The current Great Awakening amongst them would impress me more deeply if I did not know that their chosen candidate for the presidency is a man who allowed an erstwhile lady companion to soak in the waters of Chappaquidick for a dozen or so hours. What is more, many of these hinds spent the golden years of the sixties extolling violent idealists, vulgar rhetoricians, and lawless demonstrators for selected acts of illegality meant to intimidate society and provoke government. They were furiously impatient with those prissy intellectuals who warned of the consequences of such primitive behavior. All that ever troubled them was some vaguely limned backlash that they expected to see marching out of Indiana or Iowa under the banner of apple pie or the Farm Bureau.

Well, the reaction did not come out of the Heartland, but rather out of the progressive East, and it came from a much provoked government whose strong executive used the same kind of tactics Johnson and Kennedy had used to cow their less virtuous opponents. It operated in the same atmosphere of malversation that allowed Johnson, Bobby Baker, Billie Sol Estes, and a cast of thousands to get out of town with everything but the Washington Monument. And it was done under the administration of a man who saw his first run at the White House publicly stolen from him in 1960 by Mayor Daley and Lyndon Johnson. So all the highfalutin piety that has become so infectious amongst the enlightenment mob merely adds to the many lurid visions that arise from the capitol of the great American republic during these golden days.

But it is not only the luridities that fascinate the American audience, it is the calamitous-crashing edifices, clouds of dust, and the faint sense that somewhere bodies are writhing and organisms are dying. That is what the enlightenment mob wants; it wants calamity, in full view from its armchairs.

Contrary to regnant myth, it is not so much a desire to implement what is new and progressive that characterizes the enlightenment mob, as a mania to scotch what is old. This mob of misperceived neomaniacs is forever destroying and disrupting established customs and institutions, because its members suspect them all as being the creations of superior men and because it is always easier for a second-rater to flummox the works than to chisel out some substantial achievement. Progress is not their goal, but rather the satisfaction and celebrity that comes from making a commotion—frankly stated, they like to bust things up. A life spent in progressive reform is more often than not a life spent overturning garbage cans and stoning alley cats.

Today in Washington, destruction is in the air. Though the enlightenment mob talks about reforming our politics and unveiling the truth for all the world to see, their real accomplishment is the destruction of the modern American presidency first embodied by Franklin

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Roosevelt and recently prescribed by the likes of James MacGregor Burns, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., John Galbraith, and other horrified spectators of the Nixon White House. Though contemporary American political etiquette, liberal interest-group politics, the Nixon Administration, and the reputations of countless administrators and politicians are being disfigured, the worthies of the Ervin committee are no closer to knowing the truth today than they are to understanding the evil. And despite all their talk of a better tomorrow, not one participant in the Watergate pageant has suggested a philosophy of government to replace the amalgam of notions they have all so furiously fallen upon.

Of course no intelligent observer ex-

pects a better tomorrow; it is unthinkable that any man is going to advance any lasting improvement in a system of laws without first possessing some coherent philosophy of government, and what passes for a philosophy of government amongst the participants of the Watergate pageant is indistinguishable from the razzle-dazzle *réchauffé* of the public relations hack. If Watergate has proven nothing else, it has proven that the greatest democracy on earth is presently in the hands of public relations men, ambulance chasers, and porch climbers. If such a mob had descended on Philadelphia in 1785 to initiate our first American government, James Madison would have thrown in with the Redcoats, Patrick Henry would have

bound himself over to the benevolence of crazy George, and General Washington would have burned Philadelphia to the ground.

It is a spectacle of extraordinary excess. The media mullahs, the ritualistic liberals, the bright boys of the Nixonian Era and the Senate's sages are all sweating and groaning in an enormous Gordian knot of humanity, straining to destroy each other and doing a pretty formidable job of self-destruction. Watergate is one of those rare historical episodes where not one of the participants distinguishes himself, not even a vagrant wit. The state overflows with blood and gore. It is America's equivalent to the Cultural Revolution. □

Duke J. Armstrong

A View of Child Development

In recent years the hue and cry has been raised for a national child development program by a plethora of liberal social workers and educators. The program would squarely put Washington into the business of raising the nation's children through federally funded and operated child care centers. If it is true, as we have so often been told, that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world, it should give us pause to reflect on the prospect of a single hand in Washington rocking cradles across the country.

The program, so the advocates state, promises to solve a host of individual and social problems which plague contemporary American society—from juvenile delinquency through mental illness and tooth decay. Yet, lurking behind all these glittering promises lies a number of fundamental, philosophical issues raised by a massive federal program of this nature. And these issues have not been adequately discussed. Debate on the program has suffered from what columnist James J. Kilpatrick has described as the "Phenomenon of the Vanishing Threshold." That is, controversy over the program has centered not around the threshold question of whether or not the United States should have a national child development program, but rather on the routine bureaucratic questions such as how much it will cost, how it will be administered, what delivery system will be used, and whose children will use it. Somehow the threshold vanished leaving only methodology to argue. Considering the importance to future generations of the establishment of a child development program, this is a tragic omission. That a change of such massive proportions is contemplated points out the imminent need to debate that threshold question, to analyze the root assumptions behind the new child development concept, and to consider the grave legal and social implications for American society.

As their strategy, child development advocates chose the old-line liberal tac-

tic, successful since the 1930s, of *ex nihilo* manufacturing a right and then pressing the federal government to guarantee it (through expenditure of vast sums of money and use of legal sanctions). Thus in the last few years a new "inalienable right" has emerged from the copious and redundant child development rhetoric (Tom Jefferson negligently omitted it from the Declaration of Independence). Perhaps the most striking example (and never mind the infeasibility) comes from the final report of the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children (Fall, 1969) wherein the Commission states that among other rights, the infant has the "right to continuous loving care." (Yes, and supposedly each American adult has the *right* to a happy married life. Should the federal government subsidize miracle computer dating and marriage programs?)*

The sanctioning by the state of a vague "right to happiness" of this nature holds explosive legal implications. Who exactly possesses this right? May the parent assert it for the child against the government? May the child assert it against the parent and the government? May the government assert it for the child against the parent? These questions are of no small judicial concern in a free society. Yet, these questions have never been raised, much less answered, in the present controversy. No one seems concerned about the threat explicit in a program built on such an ambiguous foundation. Child development proponents have made only one thing perfectly clear: they desire to take a long stride down the path toward standardized federal programs governing the development of American children.

If the child care program were merely to be another in a long line of absurd social services dished out by HEW and doomed to a bureaucratic fate, one could perfunctorily remonstrate those responsible for the waste of federal revenues, and then proceed to ignore the monstrosity. The child development program is, however, of a very different kind from

all that has gone before. Over the course of the last forty years Americans have seen increasing government involvement in their lives. Washington has, to a greater or lesser extent, undertaken a role in determining how we are housed, how we are clothed, how we eat, how many cigarettes we consume, and so forth. But this is the first time it has set a hand to the task of determining what kind of people we are.

Granted, all government programs have an indirect effect upon the character of those subjected to them, yet this still marks an ominous beginning for the involvement of the U.S. government in drawing guidelines for the personalities of U.S. citizens. The concept advocates the turning of government from its proper bailiwick of regulation of the extrinsic conduct of its citizens to the regulation of their intrinsic nature. The social implications of such a program are manifest.

First is the obvious detrimental effect upon the family institution—the basic unit of social organization in society. The family group as a basic social institution is very nearly universal. It has survived, virtually intact, since antiquity in a myriad of societies as the basic living arrangement, with primary responsibility for meeting the requirements of its component members for food, shelter, recreation, and what we now must call child development.

Proponents of the child care program argue that they wish only to supplement the family institution and not supplant it. Yet their actions belie another motive. They propose more than mere advice and counsel; they propose the creation of a force paramount to the family and advocate direct federal involvement in the growth and training of American infants through providing a full panoply of services. The entire concept builds upon the basic and false postulate that banks of computers and batteries of trained technicians and "experts" can somehow substitute for the traditional family institution. To tamper with that