

# Current Wisdom

## QUIDDITIES

A mortified Dr. Henry Steele Commager, formerly a famed tub thumper for gargantuan presidential power and forever a pedant, now tries the old fast shuffle to explain away one of his erstwhile enthusiasms.

All strong Presidents have aggrandized power just as all strong judges have "soaked up jurisdiction like a sponge." Are we witnessing now a shift from aggrandizement to usurpation? The distinction, not always clear, is that the former functions within the hospitable and accommodating framework of the Constitution, and the latter does not. Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt were indubitably "stronger" Presidents than Mr. Nixon, but Nixon is the first who has openly declared that he will not observe the constitutional grant of war powers to the Congress and that he will not permit any interference with his own interpretation of "national security"; he is the first, too, to treat the guarantees of the Bill of Rights with open contempt.

—New York Review of Books

## THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE REVISITED

If Webster had not been available we would not know that "billingsgate" refers to "foul and vulgar" talk . . . and we would not be able to point out the stunning illiteracy of the intellectualoids at Newsweek:

His Horatio Alger career had come to a police-blotter ending, but Spiro Agnew left one lasting monument on the national political scene: some of the most memorable billingsgate in modern oratory.

As the Administration's designated "cutting edge," he sallied forth to do battle with "troglodytic leftists," "radic-libs," "Spock-marked kids," and "self-appointed elitests."

—Newsweek

## THE AMERICAN CASANOVA

An American coed speaks of an amatory ambush she endured while improving her mind at one of America's revolutionary institutions of higher learning:

One night after a mid-winter mixer she and her roommate agreed to let two Dartmouth freshmen sleep on their floor. "I went to the bathroom in the middle of the night," she recalled, "and when I returned, one of them had crawled into my bed. I told him to get out, and he said, 'But it's nice and warm in here.'" Sally got him out all right, but she was kept awake the rest of the night by his talking and turning in his sleep. "He was calling for his mommy," she said.

—Wall Street Journal

## ARTS & MANNERS

An interesting exordium by Ms. Gore Vidal introducing his scholarly review of two volumes on the military academy:

On the table at which I write is a small silver mug with a square handle; it is inscribed to Eugene L. Vidal, Jr., October 3, 1925—a gift from the West Point football team to its mascot, which that year was not a mule but me. I drank milk from the cup for a good many years and from the look of the rim did a bit of teething on it, too. I have no early memory of West Point.

—New York Review of Books

## LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Clever rejoinder by Mrs. Joann Chapman, 37, the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company's first female jackhammer operator:

Sure I'm for women's liberation. I figure we need the money too.

—Associated Press

## TV INTELLECTUALOIDS IN ACTION

Writing in the New York Times Book Review, Elizabeth Drew shows that TV commentators are not only profound political analysts, but real graceful writers to boot:

It is becoming fashionable to dismiss the McGovern candidacy as an aberration, with or without Watergate, to assert that the Democratic party has taken self-corrective measures, that the left does not have a candidate now, that never again will the issues be acid and abortion and quotas and gays. I think that is missing the point of 1972. McGovern's nomination was, as are most candidates', partially the product of other politicians' failures, and the ineffectiveness of his Presidential campaign to a great degree a product of his own. His nomination was nonetheless a remarkable precedent. His candidacy was also the vehicle of reforming forces in American politics that I believe Hart is correct in saying are not going to disappear. Nor are the questions of life styles and values. Nor are some of the more worrisome questions, dramatized in 1972, about how we pick our Presidents.

—New York Times Book Review

## THE NEW DIPLOMACY

A thrilling tale of extraterrestrial lewdness:

Police at Winston-Salem, N.C., got a call from a woman who said she was passed in her front yard by a UFO that "had a very long blue tail, blew wind up her dress and made the trees in her yard sway."

—New York Post

## THE GURU OF BLOOMINGTON

While discussing the life and times of Tom Charles Huston, Rolling Stone, the journal of rock, canonizes a new American folk hero—possibly the Abbie Hoffman of the seventies:

He made his final exit from Washington in a five-ton U-Haul truck loaded with books—most of them political biographies—and driven by a wild man, R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., a one-time folk singer and suspected Marxist who turned down a speechwriting job with Spiro Agnew last January to continue as editor-in-chief of *The Alternative* on a rented 40-acre farm four miles outside of Bloomington. . . .

But in 1971, coming home to Indiana, the crazy Tyrrell, who once shaved off his mustache because one side was red and the other brown, bitched that there wasn't any cold beer and embarrassed Huston by exuberantly pounding on the side of the truck to get the attention of pretty girls driving west. And Huston, swigging Coke and smoking his "rotten smelling" pipe, talked about Calhoun and Randolph as the truck moved toward Indiana.

—Rolling Stone

## THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

High-grade fiction begins where low-grade political analysis abounds; read the Nation:

The development of the New Left gave to America what it had lacked since the end of World War II, a sense of optimism and dynamism. Problems were openly discussed, solutions debated, manifestoes issued.

—Nation

## VOICES OF MODERATION

Just another objective news story from the Newsweek neurotics:

He stood with trembling hands in the half-light of a Federal courtroom in Baltimore last week, awash in the evidence against him and bargaining like any run-of-the-street felony suspect to stay out of prison. For five years, Spiro T. Agnew, 54, had been the pre-eminent public moralist of the Nixon Administration—the scourge of crime and license and permissiveness in American life. But now Agnew found himself accused of crimes of the most squalid sort—selling favors for payoffs as a county official, as a governor and even as Vice President—and the cost of his freedom was dear. He pleaded no contest to one count of tax evasion, suffered the whole tawdry story to be spread on the record and left Washington in disgrace—the second man ever to quit the Vice Presidency and the first to go out a convicted criminal.

—Newsweek

CONTINUING CRISIS  
(continued from page 2)

forty-five year sentences of the Watergate gang, some of whom will be walking the streets in a matter of months. And hopes for the environment dimmed when Mr. Zbigniew Jaworowski found manifestations of pollution in the ice layers of the Himalayas. Law and Order infatuates have prevailed in Sri Lanka where food stealers will be flogged. And good news continues to bloom in the humanitarian paradise of Zaire where impolite tourists caught photographing pygmies will be shot on sight. Finally a flood of creativity has been released in Mbabane, Swaziland, where King Sobhuza II, the celebrated aesthete, has announced a contest to provide new music for the words of that great nation's national anthem. Rejecting the present melody as too complex to sing, the philosopher king is offering \$149 to the Swazilandic Beethoven who scrawls the right notes.

● Meanwhile back in the United States the President's fall offensive began, becoming increasingly so throughout the month. Speaking to businessmen, governors, congressmen, and senators, he insisted on his innocence. His most impressive performance came on November 17 when he held an hour-long, nationally-televised question and answer period with over four hundred newspapermen at Disney World, an unfortunate choice of location, but a choice that is still characteristic of much

White House behavior. But America was not the only country bathed in presidential oratory. In a stirring presidential address, dramatized by sobs and sniffles, President Kenneth Kaunda of democratic Zambia threatened resignation unless his people forswore their "excessive drinking habits."

● But there were signs of increased apathy in the United States. When Mr. John Harrington staggered into a Miami Beach saloon screaming for help after having been shot by a holdup man, he was ejected for being too noisy. With blood streaming from his chest he had to pant-handle thirty cents and take a bus to Jackson Memorial Hospital where he was reported in critical condition. In Britain moral vigilance was aroused when the Unitarian Church of America attempted to ship in a film on sex education which Her Majesty's custom agents confiscated for its lewdness.

● And finally, this will be remembered as the month during which one of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s favorite bits of facitiae lost its humor. That drollery of his about the Washington bureaucrats "tippey toeing" into the nation's living rooms to adjust thermostats became stunningly unfunny the evening of November 7 when Mr. Nixon divulged his energy plan featuring fifty-mile-per-hour speed limits, sixty to sixty-eight degree living rooms, and several other policy curiosities, proving that, in the welfare state, yesterday's buffoonery is tomorrow's policy. □

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