

<p>★</p> <p>The Bootblack Stand</p> <p>★</p>		<p>★</p> <p>by George Washington Plunkitt</p> <p>★</p>
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Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at avant-garde bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled *What's in It for Me?* Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to *The Bootblack Stand*, c/o *The Alternative*, P.O. Box 877, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

I am the only candidate who has ever run for the Senate from New York, wearing levis and hush puppies. Of course this is a real advance against the rich and the powerful, and it is indeed a black mark against our system of government that ten years ago no candidate in the state could have won the nomination of a major party while wearing this attire, which is so very much indigenous to the culture of urban poverty. Nevertheless here I am; I even wear work shirts (no starch).

As you can easily imagine the rich and the powerful are out to get me. They have leveled a blistering attack upon a magnificent human being, Herbert X. Blyden, who seconded my nomination at the state convention, because he has had a little legal difficulty. He is under indictment for four counts of kidnapping and two counts of murder as a 1971 Attica rioter. Well, what of it? I asked Brother Blyden to second my nomination, because it seems to me that it is about time that we fulfill the expectations

of the founders and extend the Bill of Rights to kidnappers and murderers in general. Are you willing to meet the challenge of the 1970s? Will you join my campaign staff?

Remember the Whales,
Ramsey Clark

Dear Ramsey Baby:

Aren't you a corker! I have read about your campaign, and I want you to know I favor what you are doing. With you and Gravel and Hartke in the Senate it will be like the rebirth of the Marx Brothers. But you don't want me on your staff. I suggest you call Woody Allen.

—GWP

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

On August 29th I read a very intelligent and, I must add, forward-leaning essay by Dr. Christopher D. Stone, on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, which began: "The notion of extending legal rights to environmental objects—oceans, rivers, forests—sounds absurd and unthinkable when first encountered.

But viewed historically, it is not so." Dr. Stone argued cogently and visionarily that it was only through "begrudged evolution" that Americans ever gave rights "to the insane, the blacks, aliens and Indians." How true. Crazy but true.

To come to the point, Dr. Stone believes it is about time that we extend the Bill of Rights to trees. I find his idea especially worthwhile as my November election approaches, for I find myself running against a so-called POW who has impugned my spotless, albeit complicated, war record. Dr. Plunkitt, can we get trees enfranchised before the November elections? And how do we get them to the polls?

Peace and Freedom,
George McGovern

Dear Senator McGovern:

Finally I find a New Politics proposal in the public interest! All your talking and caterwauling of doom has split the party into pieces and threatens the harmony of the country. The people like harmony, and they will vote for a party that promises harmony. Too often you people forget about votes. You don't want to attract votes; you want to attract television cameramen and such. The idea of attracting the votes of trees is a capital innovation in democratic theory, as I see it. If you can swing it, it will be as memorable an innovation as when Mayor Daley and Senator Lyndon Johnson enfranchised the residents of several reputable cemeteries back in 1960. But the way to do it is not to get your Harvard and your Yale hightoners to make speeches in the *New York Times* but to get back to your state. Wink at a few judges and let them know where the next "public improvement" will be built. Let them buy up a little real estate. That is what politics is all about—votes and taking advantage of your opportunities.

—GWP

and therefore of Watergate, the resignation will allow the long-term demographic and attitudinal changes that favor the Republican Party in general and conservatives in particular to work their effect on the electorate. Those changes—charted by analyst Kevin Phillips in his *Emerging Republican Majority* some years ago—are continuing, but their electoral impact has been blunted by Watergate.

The fact is that the American people are becoming more conservative. Poll after poll has shown this trend in recent years, and with Watergate out of the picture this has to work to the benefit of the Republican Party.

Another Nixon?

This brings us to the impact of the Nixon resignation on the Republican Party itself. Journalists and others always pictured Richard Nixon as a product of the conservative wing of the GOP, but conservatives never shared this perception. They never viewed him as one of their own, though many of them supported

him in both 1968 and 1972 against more conservative candidates who they felt could not win.

Most conservatives who knew Nixon sensed in him a man more interested in winning the Presidency than in doing anything with it. They saw him from the beginning as a manipulator rather than a man of ideas, as one who might do anything to get elected or to carve out a place for himself in the history books.

They were right, but they did not realize how little he cared for his own party. During the Nixon Presidency, the Republican Party organization was weakened and ignored. Nixon's victories were personal victories and he wanted them that way. Party leaders must today be hoping that his final defeat will be just as personal.

The fear now is that in terms of ideology and direction, Gerald Ford might prove to be just another Nixon.

Although many analysts describe Mr. Ford as a member of the right wing of his party, most conservative leaders consider him a centrist like Nixon. Indeed,

more than one movement conservative leader opposed resignation because of a fear that as President, Ford would continue most of Mr. Nixon's programs and block whatever chance their hero, Governor Reagan of California, might have in 1976.

It is too soon to say whether Ford will run for a full term in 1976, but as I have already indicated, he will be guaranteed his party's nomination if he does.

And it is at least likely that he will decide to test his popularity in two years by seeking the office in his own right. If he does so, he will bar the Presidency for all time to rivals like Reagan and Vice-President-designate Nelson Rockefeller, both of whom will be far too old to try again in 1980.

But it does not necessarily follow that conservatives will lose power within their own party at a time when the country is moving in their direction. Instead, they may emerge as a powerful voice within a party no longer willing to sit idly by while its President calls all the shots. □

★
The Great
American
Saloon
Series
★



★
by
Siegfried
Weisberger
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The Saturday Night Club

Last year we auspicated this illustrious series not with the intent of publishing a string of autobiographical essays on sophomoric debauches nor with the intent of competing with the likes of *Holiday* magazine. Even less did we intend to publish a series of irregular reports on the various low-grade alcohol pits spotting the Republic and serving as asylums for those human slugs whose mien is dependent on guff like the *Playboy* philosophy. What we intended was to do our patriotic part in restoring the saloon to its former high estate, by celebrating those grand palaces of bibulosity that have endured and that, taken one with another, suggest the timeless principles of conviviality and intelligent discourse.

Alas, I must admit that after four installments we seem to have exhausted both our supply of authorities in the field and our supply of subjects worthy of enthronement in this series. It is a horrible reality for a young idealist like your servant, and I will not accept it. Thus I have petitioned an essay from the man who taught me the crucial importance of sausages and pretzels for intelligent beer drinking.

Mr. Siegfried Weisberger is no stranger to this series. He is the founder of Peabody's Bookstore, the famed Baltimore librairie and beer stube analyzed by Mr. James Grant in our March 1974 issue. For years he was a close associate of H.L. Mencken and other literary figures of yesteryear, but in 1954 he retired from bookselling, warning that the country was going to "the boobs," and what sentient follower of the American scene will rise up to gainsay him? In his retirement he has continued to collect and read books, to study America's preposterous decline, and to elucidate his judgments at innumerable beer drinking sessions in and about the Baltimore area. It was at one of these civilized gatherings that James Grant and I first met Mr. Weisberger and were instructed in the art of dignified beer drinking. "When you drink beer, you must not sip but guzzle," was Mr. Weisberger's first injunction, and our education has progressed from there.

Such wisdom seems to have evaporated from the land, and so I asked the seventy-nine-year-old sage, who recently took up residence in Cambridge, to describe one of the great drinking organizations of Western civilization, the Saturday Night Club, a club that for nearly half a century maintained the highest traditions of the bibulous art. Its traditions embraced the ideals and principles which edified the great saloons of the past and

which still obtain in those that remain. It is my hope that Mr. Weisberger's piece will serve as a blueprint to discriminating bartenders and their clients, and will help us maintain standards. I pray that this essay will inspire our readers to scour the nation for those great saloons that remain and to report them to our Americana editor, so that this journal can continue its great mission.

—RET

H.L. MENCKEN'S Saturday Night Club evolved from its founders' core love of music. Each session began with a salute to the end of the week and ended with an emotional longing for another gathering. Saturday night without music was not Mencken, and without music a weekend had no chance.

The Saturday Night Club met in a small second-floor room of a Baltimore building. In years past, the building had been a private home. A violinmaker opened a small shop on the first floor, which may have been a partial magnet for Mencken when he looked for a spot for his Saturday Night Club. The second-floor room where the Saturday Night Club gathered was unpretentious, with chairs, a piano, and ample room where the quartet of musicians was to play.

The skeletal structure of the Saturday Night Club was a close group of four men for whom music was a cherished love, as opposed to an occupational expression. H.L. Mencken, a newspaperman, was the pianist; a lawyer played the violin; a university professor held the viola chair; and an older retired businessman was the bass fiddler. Each musician knew his instrument thoroughly and each was skilled at interpreting the notes of classical masters. The players and their few listeners were thoughtful men who wanted to be active, in a small group, for the sake of spirits, for the good of music, for the zest of life, and to carry on a tradition that useful men had kept alive throughout the ages. Musical poets have sung and their lyrics have conveyed messages to dreamers and troubadours; these were the traditions that the Saturday Night Club strove to maintain. As the years passed, the Club became institutionalized and expanded to embrace a small orchestra and a growing collection of listeners, but in its first years, it consisted only of these four men who shared the expression of musical composition with a small circle of comrades.

Before the quartet started there was usually chatter among the musicians and the guests of the evening. The men shared among themselves what had tran-

spired since the previous Saturday Night Club meeting; however, when Mencken nodded to begin the musical sequence for the evening, silence fell as a curtain falls on the stage. Mencken was a firm, gentle man and his reverence for music was respected without challenge. All gossip ceased when he shouted "Ruhe!" and cued his musicians to begin Haydn School Master for the first part of the concert. Frequently Haydn was the warmup for the Waltz King, Johann Strauss, and as the Saturday Night Club played his waltzes, Mencken's head swayed from side to side, his foot tapped the floor, and his entire body dramatized his internal love for the musical masters.

The repertoire of the Saturday Night Club was diversified but the "Beer Barrel Polka" was a special favorite. The "Beer Barrel Polka" mood was more spirited than some other melodies and it tinted the atmosphere with a moderate uproar, with speeding movements. Each member enjoyed polka playing, although the pleasure of the bass fiddler seemed most conspicuous during a polka rally. For the bass fiddler played the "Beer Barrel Polka" with the nostalgic reflection that he had inherited his bass from his grandfather, who had brought it to America when he fled from his native Germany during the revolution of 1848.

Each musician held his instrument masterfully as the skilled playing moved forward. It seemed that even the piano keyboard beamed as Mencken knowingly selected ivory or black notes with radiant pleasure. The Saturday Night Club was Mencken's party; he was the host, he was the conductor, he was the soloist, and he was the noble friend who eulogized musical masters or contemporary colleagues. Mencken clearly was the mainstay of the Saturday Night Club; however, in the spirit of his consistent emotional commitment to support those men he admired, Mencken endorsed solo performances from the viola, violin, and bass. Each performer bowed a perfect solo with a latent intent to please composer, conductor, comrade, and self.

With each musical expression, the Saturday Night Club saluted the will of a man who wanted to give justice to the spirit of music, and H. L. Mencken asserted that the spirit of music hailed ale. When the concert came to a close, the members and musicians seemed elated by the expression of musical masters as well as by Mencken's contagious endorsement of the spirit of the Saturday Night Club. So, regardless of the newspaper, legal, or academic pressures of the preceding week, the tone of the Saturday Night Club was refreshed and officially toasted with fine steins of beer.

At the end of each musical session, beer was served ceremoniously to Mencken and the other three musicians in traditional steins with attached lids. When not in use, the steins stood with stately dignity, on a special shelf. All other guests drank beer from regular sealed glasses which were described, with jovial respect, as "flat heads."

H.L. Mencken hailed the idiosyncratic qualities of fine beer: Munich beer, a Kulmbacher beverage, a Wurzbürger beer—the light and dark—each superb.