

The Harold Robbins Award

Theodore H. White has devoted the past fifteen years to developing a new kind of book, a book alluring to the aural tastes of that vast throng of Americans whose ebullient spirits would wither into mere smudges were it not for the constant companionship of hundreds of millions of radios providing soundtracks for their lives and of millions more tvs illuminating their stupefied faces wherever they pause to roost. Radio and television have dealt crippling blasts to the publishing industry, but White has with his quadrennial tomes been striving to overcome these electronic monsters. If *Breach of Faith* continues to be the gorgeous success that it presently is, history will remember White as the man who revolutionized book publishing, degrading old Gutenberg's art to a level about which Marshall McLuhan could only fantasize. These are exciting times in which to live.

Up until now reviewers could write of a book that they could not put down or a book that they would never forget or a book that changed their lives, but now with Mr. White's literary breakthrough they can write about a book that will not shut up. When you purchase it you purchase something more than a bestseller, you purchase a mother-in-law. As you carry it home it begins to stir beneath your arm. Under your reading light it lurches violently, and when you open it you are practically flattened as it roars its first orotund sermon and shrieks its first condemnation. Soon it is gushing forth with its message. It bellows. It vaticinates. It croons. It is the noisiest book ever printed. Close its cover and it still chatters away. Bury it beneath pillows and it will not relent. Drop it in the bath and it hisses, it gurgles, it drones on, invincible and unabashed. This is a book for the modern aural audience. It is written for people who do not like to read. It shouts at you. It is the worst book of the year. White is one of the most garrulous writers ever uncorked on these shores. Next to him Hubert Humphrey could be a model librarian.

Breach of Faith is White's bombastic rendering of Richard Nixon's latest crisis, the Watergate pickle. It covers the period during which Richard Nixon played cat and mouse with reality: the reality that for some 42 years Presidential conduct both visible and arcane has often been unconstitutional, the reality that a President cannot hoodwink a Democratic Congress for long unless he is a Democrat, the reality that bureaucracy has become an informal fourth branch of government possessing veto power over the legislative and executive branches, the reality that about half the nation's press corps is neurotic, and, finally, the reality that Mr. Nixon, despite White's earlier encomiums, is an untutorable second-rater with

delusions of grandeur—a Jay Gatsby remodeled. Unfortunately, White never describes the conditions attendant with Watergate and Nixon's resignation quite so sparingly. For him history is soap opera, and one is remiss in narrating it unless he spruces it up with abundant quantities of hellfire.

His story begins with RMN hunkering under his desk, hoping that the American people are unable to comprehend plain English when they hear it on tape. Alexander Haig is pleading with him to rise to the occasion and retire, and Peter Rodino is weeping in the Capitol while Gerald Ford furiously burns his entire wardrobe of double-knit suits. Next, White discusses recent changes in American life, slipping into a tone astonishingly remi-

ical biography takes on the proportions of an American saga. It provides us with all sorts of luscious information about RMN, his associates, his adversaries, and his country, everything except that one transcendent fact that everyone must know to understand RMN, to wit: he had a biological aversion to principle. Next to RMN Stalin was a philosophe. That White never mentions this in all his verbosity about RMN is suggestive. More suggestive still is the following: "His votes on domestic affairs were conservative; but his votes on foreign affairs always, under Truman, were enlightened and supportive." My suspicion is that a White book on American political thought would be even more half-baked than his present work.

By chapter five White has roared and sobbed portentously about the numinous qualities of the Presidency and the enormities about to be perpetrated by RMN. Now White has us gathered up around him in a fever to find out how it all began. Here is how it all began. Tom Charles Huston, a staff assistant to the President, "because he was a favorite of Bob Haldeman, because his ideas had reached the President, he could sit with the masters of American intelligence, commanding millions of dollars and thousands of agents, and dominate all but one of them, J. Edgar Hoover." And for any intelligent reader here is where it all should end. Here is where White's book blows up as a work of history or of journalism, and where it becomes devastatingly obvious that White in his windiness is either unable or uninterested in chronicling events accurately.

What White calls the Huston Plan was a plan calling for the restructuring of the American intelligence community and recommending various activities such as surreptitious entry, mail covers and interceptions, the penetration of reputed subversive groups, and the monitoring of international cable traffic. The recommendations had been made to the President through his young White House aide, Huston. The plan went into effect on July 23, 1970 and was withdrawn on July 28, 1970. That White can seriously suggest that a 29-year-old White House transient "dominated" the chiefs of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency would strain the faith of a Boy Scout. That he also claims that the Huston Plan represented: (1) an ominous turning-point in the Nixon Administration, (2) a direct route to Watergate, and (3) a "Heresy, or truly dangerous thought," is sheer fustian. Possibly White puffs out such stuff to keep his audience awake or away from the tv. It is

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THE WORST BOOK OF THE YEAR

*Breach of Faith:
The Fall of Richard Nixon*

by Theodore H. White
Atheneum \$10.95

HONORABLE MENTION

*Against Our Will:
Men, Women and Rape*

by Susan Lee Brownmiller
Simon & Schuster \$10.95

The Fight

by Norman Mailer
Little, Brown \$7.95

*For his achievement, Mr. White will receive the entire paperback library of the works of Harold Robbins (used).

niscient of Genesis. It is a chapter of exceeding beauty, though its perceptions are variously incomprehensible, ignorant, and only intelligent when plagiarized from writers like Josiah Lee Auspitz and Paul Weaver.

Then we get another of those sweeping biographical sketches for which White is so justifiably famous. We see RMN struggling up from the log cabin, passing through the searing experience of California politics, treading water as Vice President behind one of the greatest dog paddlers in American Presidential history, and finally the most searing experience of all: a Presidential campaign against John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and the Democratic voters of several populous cemeteries. In White's hands this polit-



Milton Friedman

Economic Myths and Public Opinion

(This article has been adapted from a William Arthur Maddox Memorial Lecture at Rockford College, given by Mr. Friedman in December 1974, and printed in Rockford College's Widening Horizons.)

This morning I'm going to deliver a sermon, and my theme comes from Josh Billings, the famous American humorist of the nineteenth century who said, "the trouble with people ain't ignorance, it's what they know that ain't so." I propose to discuss five myths about American society which are very widely accepted, which have a great deal of influence on public attitudes and public opinions, and yet which in my opinion are wholly false.

The first myth that I want to talk about is what you might call the robber baron myth. In your courses in history—ordinary political history, to a lesser extent even in courses on economic history—you will have learned that the nineteenth century in the United States was an era of rugged, unrestrained individualism in which heartless monopoly capitalists exploited the poor unmercifully, ground the helpless under their heels, and profited at the expense of the rest of the community. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer; Wall Street was set against the working man. You will have learned from the standard history book that the farmers in the Middle West were being ground between the millstone of falling prices for the products they sold and higher prices for the products they purchased. You will have learned that that was the reason for interest in the greenback political movement, the reason for the development of the Populist sentiment in the Middle West and the South,

the reason for that magnificent speech by William Jennings Bryan in 1896 when he asked whether mankind shall be crucified on a cross of gold.

That's the myth, and there is hardly any myth, I believe, that is more deeply imbedded in people's attitudes. The myth was spread by the reformers, the muck-rakers of the early twentieth century, by the intellectuals who contributed to the drastic change that has occurred in our attitude toward the market on one hand and government on the other, which has in turn produced such a drastic change in the character of our society in the past forty or fifty years.

There is only one element of that myth that is correct. It was an era of rugged unrestrained individualism. It was an era with the closest approximation to pure economic laissez-faire in American history. It was an era in which, except for the Civil War, spending by the federal government never exceeded about 3% of the national income, a sum which is derisory by today's standards when federal government spending is approaching 30% of the national income. It was an era in which there was, for most of it, no ICC, no FCC, no SEC, and you pick out any other three letters of the alphabet and it wasn't there either.

It was a period when about the only interference with what people could do, aside from the taxes that were being imposed to finance a small armed force, courts, legislatures, and the like, consisted of a protective tariff on imports. Laissez-faire economists objected then as they object now to such tariffs, but in any case the level of the tariff was mild compared to the duties that were imposed later on. This situation did not develop, in-

terestingly enough, out of any philosophical belief in laissez-faire. It developed much more simply. In the 1830s, state governments throughout the country proceeded to engage in what we would call socialist enterprises. They built canals, they set up commercial banks and extensive banking systems, they financed railroads, they put up industries. There was no objection to doing this; this was a great era of government enterprise. But in the recession, panic, depression, whatever you want to call it, of 1837, many of these government enterprises went broke. They turned out to be inefficient in the same sense in which all government enterprises have been inefficient from that day to this. By contrast with the situation today, however, they were allowed to go broke and fail. It was this experience that in the nineteenth century really set the United States on the road to laissez-faire.

While the nineteenth century was a period of rugged unrestrained individualism, almost every other feature of the myth is false. Far from being a period in which the poor were being ground under the heels of the rich, exploited unmercifully and the like, there is probably no period in human history in this or any other country in which the ordinary simple man had as large an increase in his standard of living as in the period between the Civil War and the First World War, the period when unrestrained individualism was most rugged. The evidence of this is to be found in the statistics that economists have constructed of what was happening to national income, but it is documented in a much more dramatic way by the numbers of people who came to the United States during that