

THE CONTINUING CRISIS



•February, and things just are not working out right. The media savants—mid their reports of horrifying new diseases and unearthly calamities—had warned us to expect the most arctic winter in many a moon. Actually it was the mildest, with the February arrival of crocuses and daffodils signaling its premature death. Then too—mid their reports of unspeakable capitalist skulduggery and ecological suicide—the savants had prophesied continued economic drear redolent of a new Dark Age. Alas, by the end of the month the stock market was up 360 points from last August; the government reported that January's revised consumer price index rose at an annual rate of only 2.1 percent, meaning no rise at all in the old CPI; industrial production was up; housing starts were up; new unemployment claims were down. The savants were left maundering. Were things improving? The thought was unutterable.

•To the Democratic opposition and all the assorted cranks and idiots on its left the thought was not only unutterable but also a vision of hell. Thus they went about discovering dark infamies at home and heinous plots abroad. As the economy began to stir and to breathe they talked of jobs programs, elimination of the President's third-year tax cut, and the slaying of tax indexing. Looking abroad they talked of war where there is no war (nuclear holocaust!) and peace where there is no peace (El Salvador). Altogether the savants and Democratic pols dream idiot dreams of brave new worlds and sweat and quaver over bugaboos remote from human experience and unimaginable to normal minds. In Washington as they murmur about "the Reagan cuts" administration intransigence," "the looming deficit" and so forth they are living in a dream, a huge inviolable fantasy. Unfortunately the dream comes equipped with fine wines in excellent restaurants, credit cards, corporate limousines, pleasant conversation, cocktail parties galore, distinguished awards prestigious appointments, and hundreds of other amenities, all guaranteed to insulate them from the

normal lives of those whom they would liberate, enlighten, and enrich. Why should they ever sober up?

•From the great state of Maine, home of the Hon. Edmund S. Muskie and millions of even duller potatoes, comes word that Department of Corrections Commissioner Mr. Donald Allen has abandoned plans to appeal the order of a demented superior court justice to install shower curtains and toilet stall doors in the cells at the Maine State Prison, despite Commissioner Allen's pleas that doing so will create security risks and fire hazards. As is increasingly the custom in the American judicial process, the buffoon's order stems from an earlier specimen of absurdity, his order to grant women equal employment at the all-male prison. Yet Maine's hags may remain unmollified, for implicit in the judge's decisions is the notion that women guards are not the equal of men in viewing showering and evacuating male prisoners with equanimity. Nationally, feminists suffered goodly embarrassment when it was revealed that the chief shishka in the California chapter of the National Organization of Women, Mrs. Ginny Foat, was indicted in January for the 1965 tire-iron murder of an Argentine businessman, was probably turned in by a NOW snitch rather than by agents of the male chauvinist conspiracy.

•On February 2, Pope John Paul II bestowed the scarlet skullcap and biretta on 18 new cardinals, and in Tepic, Mexico a small-time god, Mr. Bautista de la Cruz, was bumped off by members of the local constabulary investigating claims that the controversial deity had incorporated human sacrifice into his religious observances. Homosexuals in San Francisco were clicking their heels when Mr. Scott Smith, the innamorato of the homosexual martyr, Harvey Milk, began legal proceedings to wrest a portion of the deceased city supervisor's \$50,000 worker's compensation death benefit. The case could confer legal recognition on homosexual households, many of which contain pretty little things whose whole days are devoted to scrub, scrub, scrub; and the kitty's needs;

and the canary; and the boa constrictor. When will the feminists give these hard-pressed queens a helping hand? Life is even gloomier for the Republic's necrophiliacs who on February 15 saw one of their own, Mr. Douglas Clark, a former boiler tender, sentenced to the gas chamber for six acts of what euphemists of the age may soon call "love murder." Mr. Clark, who had been convicted of murdering whores picked up along Sunset Boulevard and violating their corpses, apparently had many exceedingly boring dates in his formative years and according to his very capable defense lawyer, Miss Penny White, was "uniquely mentally ill." Flourishing the ethical wisdom characteristic of the age, she summed up her case declaring: "You don't have to kill somebody because he's a son of a bitch."

•In consumer news the amorous Mr. Giovanni Vigliotto, who claims to have married 105 women over the past 33 years, was convicted of fraud and bigamy, owing to his November 16, 1981 marriage to Patricia Ann Gardiner. A San Jose woman, Mrs. Betty Mentry, is suing a counseling center for one million dollars because it allegedly advised her to discipline her nine-year-old son by sitting on him. Unfortunately the 200-pound beauty did, for two hours, and she now is accused of having murdered the young man. There was evidence that the Cracker Jack company is moving into the adult opsomania market when boxes of the stuff began turning up containing sex manuals as prizes. In Columbus, Ohio, probate court Judge Richard Metcalf has ruled that if a father undergoes a sex change his children are entitled to a death certificate listing him as kaput, and in New York City Tennessee Williams was finally awarded his death certificate after years of fruitless effort.

•Though the economy seems to be resurrecting, times remain tough. In New York City it was reported that young boys are now sucking subway tokens from turnstile slots before subway customers can pass through. Authorities have tried everything including sprinkling the slots with

chili powder but to no avail. "I couldn't think of anything more downright unhealthy," was a top Transit Authority's rebuke; but these are very hard times and kids get hungry. In Reno, Nevada Mr. Fortunate Eagle's trial for selling precious feathers in contravention of the Migratory Bird Act has ended with a hung jury. Mr. Eagle is the Indian activist who in 1973 declared Italy a Native American possession after planting a spear in the ground at the Rome airport. Work was halted in Cleveland, Ohio on the horror film *Dark Reunion*, when an actor rummaging through the former mortuary that is the movie's setting discovered the carcass of an unidentified lady in her sixties who had been dead for anywhere between "seven months to seven years," according to the Cuyahoga County coroner's office. Readers who may have noticed an empty bed around the house are asked to get in touch with the coroner as quickly as possible.

•Apparently Environmental Protection Agency head Anne Gorsuch's sleazy artifice has failed. Gorsuch, who has been asked to step down by her Democratic critics, appeared at her office on February 21 with a new name after a hurried trip to the altar with Robert Burford—a true marriage of convenience that! But the new Mrs. Burford did not even fool Senator Kennedy, and by the end of the month still more progressive Democrats were hollering for her resignation and hugely indignant over the cheap subterfuge. Another of the enemies of Richard Nixon was mysteriously struck down when Mr. Frank Wills, the night watchman who discovered the Watergate break-in, was convicted of shoplifting a \$12-pair of tennis shoes in Augusta, Georgia. Finally in the month of Presidents four Democrats came forward announcing their intention to sleep where our Ron sleeps come 1985. By month's end Reubin Askew, Alan Cranston, Gary Hart, and Walter Mondale had announced. All are promising colossal amounts of virtue and best of all new ideas, for instance: more education, high technology, more taxes, *much* more taxes! —RET



Rita Kramer

MARVA COLLINS AND AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION

The "controversial" history of a contemporary innovator.

In the fall of 1975, after fourteen years of teaching, twelve of them in the Chicago public schools, Marva Collins opened a small private school (four pupils to begin with, one of them her own daughter) in a donated basement room in Chicago's run-down Garfield Park, the neighborhood where she lived and had been teaching. She made use of books salvaged from the trash bins of the local public school and a salary provided by the government-funded Alternative Schools Network.* Within months, enrollment had tripled and her previously "unteachable" or "learning disabled" pupils all learned to read, increased their verbal and math comprehension, and went on to read at increasingly higher levels. Their attitude toward school—and toward themselves—had changed.

At the end of that first year, she decided to take over the school herself, and moved it into her own home, changing its name to Westside Preparatory School. Again, she scrounged furniture, materials, books. She used her own pension money and her husband contributed the labor that made a classroom out of part of their apartment. Her success in teaching previously backward and unruly children got around. More parents brought their children, and local press reports were followed by national publicity about the one-room school in which so much was being accomplished by means of so little but one woman's dedicated efforts.

*In 1979 she ended her connection with the ASN, an arm of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, but her participation in the program would eventually become a weapon in the hands of her detractors.

Rita Kramer is author of *How to Raise a Human Being*; *Maria Montessori: A Biography*; *Giving Birth: Childbearing in America Today*; and, most recently, *In Defense of the Family: Raising Children in America Today* (Basic Books).

In the spring of 1977 Marva Collins sent a letter to a *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist who had written about suburban high-school students who didn't know who Shakespeare was or anything about his works, and invited him to visit Westside Prep. His story on the school, including some of the children's compositions on Michelangelo, da Vinci, Aesop, and Hinduism, was syndicated to newspapers around the country. And Marva Collins has been in the spotlight ever since. As journalist (and co-author of Marva Collins's book) Civia Tamarkin puts it, "Readers were touched by the story of children who had been discarded as 'unteachable' climbing to superior achievement in a school that was always short of books, paper, pencils, and even chalk."

An article in *Time* in December of 1977

brought thousands of letters from parents, thousands of dollars from individual contributors, and more publicity in other magazines—*People*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Saturday Review*, etc.—and newspapers. Educational journals ran stories about the school. Parents, teachers, press, all clamored to visit. School officials came from as far away as Europe. In the fall of 1979 CBS ran a segment on Westside Prep on "Sixty Minutes." It elicited six thousand letters and made Marva Collins a nationally known figure. By the end of 1980 she had been mentioned in the *New York Times* as a possible Reagan choice for Secretary of Education and a year later she was the heroine of a prime-time television "docudrama" seen by an estimated 19 million viewers.

What she had done and what she thought about it have now become the subject of *Marva Collins' Way*,† a book guaranteed to incur the wrath of just about everyone in the education world today. In it, she explains the ideas and methods that first brought her acclaim and, more recently, opprobrium.

As millions of magazine and newspaper readers and television viewers know by now, Marva Collins's classroom technique was to begin with a discussion of a book the children had read, writing each new word on the blackboard and breaking it down into its phonetic components and discussing its meaning, letting the discussion roam over matters of history, geography, poetry, botany, while making sure the children mastered new words and added them to their vocabulary as they added ideas to their experience. ("The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.") All the while she would be encouraging and

†J.P. Tarcher, Inc. (distributed by Houghton Mifflin), \$12.95.

