

crowd was unmistakably French, a legacy from a better age. They were people entrenched in some remnant of Frenchness which in itself was hard to define, but at the same time, it seemed natural that they were the bridge to the France of Clemenceau and Claudel, *Maréchal* Foch and Mistinguette, Mauriac and Chevalier. They now wore their French faces, their ribbons of *Legion d'Honneur*, their discreet nationalism like they wore their *pièces des vêtements*—carefully, in the European way, which makes plain that clothes are valuable possessions, not paraphernalia of minor pleasure as they are in America. Seeing them there, in that baroque, superbly cavernous church, gave one a sense of vanishing grandeur so clear that it was almost painful.

But—why is this? Countless historical, sociopolitical, or existential explanations can be put into tomes of scholarly or intellectual analysis. There are the joint pressures of East and West, with contemporary France right in the middle between two formidable forces: the first is that of American practical optimism and good sense, and the other is the Marxian (or post-Marxian) quest for mean, rigid doctrinary utopia. But the French version of the latter attitude—whose substance seems to be some sense of vengeance against imprecise evils—however grim and invidious versus Western civilization it may be, nevertheless does not want to give up its title to the Western brand of the good life and chintzy hedonism in its pursuit of sociomoral revanchism. It does not notice that Bernard de Clairvaux and the glories of French nationalism do not blend very well with the European sound of rock music, the *Playboy* “philosophy,” feminism, and political terrorism: Sartre and his intellectual gang promised such a concoction as deliverance, but it didn’t work; the sociomoral and cultural nausea that a visitor from Winnebago County can distinctly smell here seems to be an inescapable consequence. There’s little hope that the post-Sartrean intellectual tone-givers—the Foucaults, Der-

ridas, or Bartheses, as contaminated with radical blindness to sensibility as they are—will help to dispel the bad odors.

American optimism? Isn’t it a trifle cocky to invoke that here, on the *rue Jacob*, replete with the most splendid accoutrements of the impotent past? We do have our share of melancholies and nostalgias these days, especially in New York City. But we also feel a compelling

certitude that the ultimate struggle for the shape of Western civilization is still going on. We have our load of problems, number one of which is how to devise a compromise between genuine democracy and genuine common sense. But we are sure that the intellectual machines that belabor these problems are still buzzing—perhaps more effectively than ever. □

JOURNALISM

Neo-Theology

Not long ago the *New York Times* came up with a major theological problem: its influential editor, Mr. L.H. Gelb, prowled through the depths of his own mind and, after grave reflection, expressed doubts about whether communism should be regarded as and termed evil:

Mr. Reagan’s thinking appeared to develop along the following lines: Communism per se is evil and almost all Communist movements are controlled from Moscow. The Soviet Union is bent on world domination. Almost every serious challenge to American interests in the world is manipulated by Moscow. The Soviets cannot be trusted and seek to lull Americans into a false sense of security. It is a raw view, one that does not allow for real differences within the Kremlin about policy . . .

Even when invoking the most stringent criteria of formal logic, we can see little fault in Mr. Reagan’s reasoning. History, experience, current political events, and the daily news bear him out. Moreover, evil—as word and notion—is a bit worn out; it has been made a trifle shabby by several centuries of hypocritical preaching about it, but, nevertheless, it is also a perceptual symbol of something that has accompanied mankind since its

dawn. As such, it is an exclusively human idea which somehow has determined individual and common destinies from our historical beginnings to our supercomplex, modern reality. It expresses something rarely definable but often materialized—conceptual and actual in the same breath. If one were to ask people who live under communism about it, they’d answer that they have a constant, palpable recognition that they face evil, struggle with evil, are daily tormented by evil. We’re sadly positive that if he were describing the Moral Majority, Mr. Gelb would have little hesitation about using the word evil as an adjective, a noun, or a curse. □

Lest We Forget

Late last year America, by constructing a monument to the fallen and honoring the living in three days of ceremonies, finally paid—belatedly and insufficiently—its debt to the tens of thousands of servicemen who fought and died in Vietnam. Though some dissatisfaction persists with the bleak and somber design of the memorial, most Vietnam vets—most Americans in general—are deeply gratified to see *some* national homage at last paid to the war dead. Not everyone is pleased, though. Alexander Cockburn querulously complained in *Village Voice* that America

built the wrong kind of memorial:

Let me propose another memorial, to those who refused complicity in this murderous enterprise [i.e., the Vietnam War], who attempted to sabotage it.

Considering how the sabotage wrought by pro-Bolshevik journalists of Cockburn's stripe largely succeeded in making the sacrifice of American soldiers both thankless and in vain, perhaps such a monument—properly designed and placed—would be appropriate: beneath the motto "And we helped" the names of numerous Cockburns should appear on a shaft erected above one of the many shallow mass graves of "petty capitalists" in South Vietnam. (BC) □

On Emotions

As soon as the unpredicted outburst of the nation's true feelings in front of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial had found its way to general consciousness, the forces in the press dedicated to eradicating all rudiments of Americanism began to put up a fight. They did all they could to obscure, bemuddle, even soil the emerging picture of emotions. The old enemies were hard at work. *Time* venomously chastized President Reagan for saying that the war was a "good cause," contemptuously calling his remarks "ideological"; in the same piece, one who called it a "bad war" was,

of course, a nonideological good American. *New York Times* service slighted the marching veterans by a sentence: "a memorial that inadvertently reflects the divisiveness of *their* unpopular war [emphasis added]." Left-wing publications spoke approvingly about "public indifference" to the November demonstrations, as if this callous insensitivity had not been meticulously engineered in the past by the same ones who downplayed it now. Where in *Time* or the *Times* or any network programming were the stories about all those guys who have felt for the last 10 years exactly like those now being eagerly photographed by *Time* and CBS? Assiduously serving leftist sentiment, the Establishment, "independent," "middle-of-the-road," "liberal" media still nursed the image of the veteran according to the Ellsberg-Fonda-Berrigan gospel; thus the veterans who mourned their buddies and vowed revenge must have looked so surprisingly repulsive that supercilious editorial insults were all the defense they could muster.

The ultraleft-wing press like *Village Voice* and *The Nation* chose another tactic: they immediately embarked on a retrenchment job. With their well-honed skills of disinformation, subversion, and perversion, they featured articles full of hypocrisy, of spurious compassion for the wronged veterans who paid their dues to the heartless, capitalistic society only to be forgotten, alienated, rejected, ignored, spurned.

There was no mention of *The Nation's* or *Voice's* pro-Hanoi zealotry which was the seed of and incubator for all the spurning, reprobation, and repudiation, no mention of the marches for the Vietnam, burning of the flag, invention of such slogans as "baby killers"—as if *Nation* and *Voice* were not among those who originated and ruthlessly fostered the isolation and alienation the Vietnam veterans had to suffer. *The Nation* ran a particularly despicable article in which one Peter Marin, "a writer and a teacher," described a banquet at which the entire audience of veterans gave a rousing ovation to a speaker who urged them to "someday . . . return to Vietnam and finish the job they had started but had been forced to stop." Marin comments: "it was obviously not a sentiment most of them really shared." Here is a perfect example of the liberal intoxication with unreality, a supremely telling ideological characteristic which makes an icon out of a lie: facts, even the most eminently verifiable, do not count for Mr. Marin, and he is ready to kill and maim common sense in order to impose his antifacts on reality. He reports further about a vet who allegedly has been plagued by a gnawing feeling that "the Vietnamese people would [never] forgive him for what he did." But what did he do? He probably killed some Hanoi robots who carried "liberation" on their bayonets and who brought upon the South the worst oppression in Vietnam's history; according to the latest news from Saigon, he most likely would be considered there as a saintly hero. Mr. Marin ends on an ominous note: he wants "the intellectuals . . . [to] help them [the vets] think through their condition." What's their condition? According to Mr. Marin, it's a feeling of guilt.

What guilt? What did the vets do? What "intellectuals" does Mr. Marin have in mind to re-educate the vets? Those who did not let them win the war, who defeated them *actually*, as the Hanoi regulars could not do? Or those who, on their return home, made their

In the Mail

Slavery and British Society 1776-1846 edited by James Walvin; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge. The repercussions of slavery on various aspects of British life are examined in a series of essays that deal with topics including public opinion, propaganda, and demographics.

Sons of the Wind: The Search for Identity in Spanish American Indian Literature by Braulio Muñoz; Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ. *Indigenismo*—a socioliterary movement that took place in several South and Central American countries between 1919 and 1964—and its objectives are carefully examined in this readable text.

The Labyrinth by Reza Saberi; Exposition Press; Smithtown, NY. A story of a young Iranian traveling around the world shows that for him freedom has less to do with ideals than with girls.