

good taste abounded in the view of the more sensitive citizens, but such violations were in tune with what was commonly (though not always openly) accepted. Today we are confronted with a different, and *unadmitted*, series of assumptions. Racial and religious politics, which have always existed, have grown increasingly obvious. Today the accusation of racism can ruin careers and create damages that are both unconstitutional and beyond the protection of the courts. Yet such accusations abound. Religious dissension as deep and fierce as any we have ever before seen is now out in the open again, and the opponents of the Moral Majority have taken their place alongside the historic hate groups and—unlike these—menace both civil debate and reasonable action.

Beyond these growing problems, there is the larger and seemingly permanent problem of a government that refuses to listen to the majority of Americans regarding their traditions and opinions. Our courts, which were once held to be unable to rule on constitutional matters (Theodore Roosevelt ran on a third-party platform of establishing special means of overruling the Supreme Court) are now so arrogant that even lowly District Court judges make “constitutional” rulings. In general, the Justices consider themselves beyond reach; they glory in their use of power without force—as though force, as an element in human affairs, has been made obsolete by their rulings.

One result of the indifference of government to the actual desires of the people is that the people are growing increasingly indifferent to the government. Our black markets grow, the American people no longer believe in the equity of the system so tax evasion is now widespread, and discontent looms on all sides. Elections, which once settled issues in this land, are now held almost irrelevant by the losers and the media alike. If elections no longer end arguments, the American system is in trouble. This means that the boundaries of taste, which were once limits upon what was politically possible, are now being stretched beyond recognition. To trace our civil decline, we must look back to the slanderous campaign against Herbert Hoover in the early 1930's. That campaign—by blaming the Depression on a President barred by a Democratic Congress from any effective action—started the rise of the theory that the President is responsible for the entire American economic system. From then on, this argument has been used to expand the government's authority to “help” the public. After all, it's argued, in order to do good one must have the power to do good. In the 50 years since Hoover was felled by this theory, the idea that every citizen should be immunized against shock, surprise, loss, disappointment, and grief has grown into a shibboleth. Instances where Americans have, through no fault of their own, been forced to suffer are now featured in every newspaper and appear nightly on television. The promise that a government can guarantee everyone against such calamities is, of course, one that no government can meet. Yet such promises are made in every campaign by men and women eager for authority and heedless of how they attain it.

Social Register

What's the difference between *chic* and *class*? From Sheridan to Proust, many have tried to define it, only to discover that a lot of illusory pitfalls loom along the way. Success may be in sight, however, now that our epoch of chintzy chic is making the distinction easier. Consider *New York* magazine—the



organ of Manhattan arrivistes with some money to spend. We saw there recently a large feature on the famous Dean & DeLuca delicatessen emporium in East Hampton, the Riviera of the Manhattan “in” crowd. The article is written in NY's routine sweet-irony-and-sigh-in-jest style, which pretends to deride, but advertises more than chastises. It informs us that there are people who spend \$12 for a pound of rice, \$14 for a pound of tomatoes, and \$120 for four ounces of caviar. Now, that's nothing new, but is it in good taste to blast it from the pages of a large-circulation magazine at a time when people in Flint, Michigan are receiving their final unemployment checks? Of course, it is no worse than the sight of Mr. Dan Rather, multimillionaire anchorman of CBS News, doing a piece on the plight of the jobless in Pennsylvania. What the *New York* and the CBS people have in common is their own sense of ready-to-wear *chic*. The problem, however, is that they think it's *class*. □



Cynicism and disgust are the inevitable consequences of such promises based on such theories. Can a culture endure in the face of such disillusion? Not very likely.

Once the bastions of reason as applied to the reasonable powers of human beings in office crumble, other and lesser principles are bound to give way. These principles are not confined to the political sphere, but influence all people. The boundaries of slander were lowered once the targets were held to be “public figures”; the boundaries against perversion were dropped in the name of free speech and human rights; the boundaries of taste were abandoned when sexual acts appeared on stage and blue movies were packaged into cassettes for family audiences. Can anyone actually believe that politics can be conducted in good taste in such an environment? Or that a decline à la Athens is not possible?

—Otto J. Scott

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Life as Junk: A Duologue

Jean Stein: *Edie: An American Biography*; Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

When Henry Geldzahler and I went to visit Andy [Warhol] at the Factory we talked for a while about the Sixties. . . . I asked him about sin. Andy sat quietly staring at the table: 'I don't know what sin is.' He paused, then turned to Henry, 'What is sin, Henry?'

Jean Stein, quoted in *Edie*

[Andy Warhol] was really the unconscious conscience of the sixties.

Henry Geldzahler, quoted in *The Scene* by Calvin Tompkins

Reading fashion magazines is a task that few people with a serious interest in culture do unless they have a specific reason (e.g., they like to be well dressed and composed) and to which still fewer will admit. Rather, they read *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Review*, *New York Review of Books*, and the like. It is, in a sense, unfortunate that fashion magazines go unread, because their influence on American culture is significant. They determine who's who; what's what ("in" or "out"); which foods should be eaten, when, how much, and how; the type of "look" for which one should strive; what constitutes beauty in any given season; and much more. While the law as given by these glossy magazines may seem as if it is limited in its effects to but a rarified few, that is simply not the case. Their influence is pervasive. Why does K-Mart aim to hang designer clothes on its racks if not because it has been advised that it is important? The pages of any Sunday newspaper in a major city are filled with display ads from department stores that tout names: Halston, Calvin Klein, Saint Laurent. Hollywood has an insatiable need for new faces; fashion models, the cover girls in particular, feed the screen: Lauren Hutton, Brooke Shields. Perrier didn't become a popular beverage simply because people suddenly decided that club soda tastes better in a green bottle from France; the beau monde in America's fashion center, New York, led the quaffing, and the outlying

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by Mary Ellen Fox

In the mid-60's, authoress Jean Stein and the eponymous protagonist of this book were as close as sisters. Stein relates this fact in *Women's Wear Daily*, the trade publication of the fashion industry which has become the bible of those dedicated to achieving the chic and affluent existence of the so-called "beautiful people" chronicled in its pages. Stein still can't believe her own naiveté toward Edie. "She was just . . . so poetical . . . so magical," she maintains. So when Edie, comatose with drugs, accidentally set herself and her apartment on fire, Stein invited her to stay as houseguest in her posh Manhattan apartment. Stein looks back on her ignorance of the real cause of the fire, her obliviousness to the reasons why her frequently stocked refrigerator was perennially empty while Edie was there ("She was too slender to have eaten all that food"), and why Edie was in constant panic when her doctor didn't call ("So I thought, well this is sort of strange"). Today, Stein realizes that her guest was bulimic, gorging herself on inhuman amounts of food and then forcing herself to throw up in order to maintain that delightfully fashionable gauntness. She now knows, too, that Edie was totally hooked on an incredible gamut of drugs prescribed for her by one of the many "Dr. Feelgoods" so much in demand in the 60's. "Of course, if I had known, I would have found some way to shelter her but away from my two young children. . . . it's hard to believe I could have been so innocent," an older but wiser Jean Stein asserts today. "The last thing I'd ever want to do would be to exploit. Never, never, never did I want to glamorize that period. . . . I don't think there's one seamless, intact truth, and this book gives the reader a chance to make his or her own interpretation."

The parallels in attitude between Stein and the German population of the years between the First and Second World Wars when confronted with a certain dynamic, charismatic personality bear mention. In the last 40 years it has been repeated countless times that ignorance of evil—and this ignorance itself strains one's credibility—is not an excuse. Stein refers in a self-deprecating but flattering way to her "innocence." Countless Germans have done the same.

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