

separate, alternate, or autonomous systems of values to evolve within its body, it ceases to be a nation and becomes a society—an organism unable to survive in larger stretches of history. In the past, the formative substances of a nation derived from commonly shared perceptions of ethnic homogeneity, or religious beliefs, or acquisitive instincts nurtured by feelings of tribal superiority.

America, of course, in spite of all its inherent centrifugal forces, is still a nation—as she wished to be since her inception. She evolved the most modern norms of a commonwealth, that is, a functional body of laws, tradition, and conventions; she possesses the most advanced tabernacle and holy scroll which endow her with an exemplary nationhood envied by other polities. It is an ideological nation, conceived in the name of common faith and a vision of future that transcended the immediate and coalesced into a historical ideal. Up to now, when blacks and women sought an improvement of condition, everything was acceptable. Once they wish to superimpose their particular code of values over the hitherto generally accepted *nomos* and *ethos*, we are in a danger of becoming a society—at a time when statehoods without nationhoods can no longer survive on this planet. Once black and feminist tenets become more important than, or prevail over, American tenets in individual consciences, we all are lost. However, fortunately, reading Mr. White, one soon notices that he, in fact, deals in synthetic summaries. And once we realize that both among blacks and women there still exist a plentitude of thinking individuals, things do not look so gloomy. □

Little Ado About Something

The United States Information Agency—a government outfit that's appeared under various names and which is little known for either the originality of its ideas or for its bureau-

cratic lightness of touch—came up with another poky script for a new *School for Scandal*, D.C.-style. Allegedly, it concocted a proscription list of people who should not represent this country's amalgamated genius and savvy abroad because of their ideological untrustworthiness. The list, as it was furiously propelled by the liberal press into the national awareness, is, in fact, an exercise in the bizarre. What James Schlesinger, David Brinkley, and Stansfield Turner did to get on it, we will never understand. However, the mere fact that a Federal agency of conservative administration is reluctant to send out into the world Messrs. Ralph Nader, Allen Ginsberg, or Tom Wicker as spokesmen for America's sociopolitical concerns should not be surprising. Delegating Mr. Walter Cronkite, our telegenic sweetheart (the man who recently found Orwellian big brotherism in American technology but failed to notice it in the Soviet power structure), as a standard

bearer of American intellectual potential could be seen, in some European countries, as a parody—certainly not a field of creativity for our government's propaganda arm. The fact that Prof. J. K. Galbraith, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, and Ms. Betty Friedan are viewed with unwillingness by Reagan's USIA people should be put into proper perspective by a simple question: Were Prof. Milton Friedman, Phyllis Schlafly, Irving Kristol, Russell Kirk, James Burnham ever asked by the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter information agencies to represent American mind and principles in foreign countries? (For that matter, Nixon's and Ford's agencies were not much better: some men on the very top have changed, but their operating staff culled all their wisdom from the *New York Times*-Ivy League-*Time*-CBS axis as ever before.) Certainly, American pluralism suffers, but it was not Reagan's people who began to gnaw and nibble at its living flesh. □

In the Mail

Center Journal (Winter, 1983) edited by Kerry J. Koller; Center for Christian Studies; Notre Dame, IN. On things Catholic, in every sense of the word.

Taiwan: Facing Mounting Threats by Martin L. Lasater; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC. Chances are, given the U.S. government's overtures to the People's Republic of China, officials in Taipei don't sleep well.

Rights and Regulation: Ethical, Political, and Economic Issues edited by Tibor R. Machan and M. Bruce Johnson; Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research; San Francisco, CA. Mr. Machan concludes: "In the last analysis, government regulation has no proper place within a just legal and political system. Human reason, not force (except in response to force) marks the genuine humanity of a system of law." Blueprint for Utopia?

Greek Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism edited by Erich Segal; Harper & Row; New York. Given his knowledge about true tragedy, we are even more astonished at Dr. Segal's *Love Story*.

A Need to Testify: Portraits of Lauro de Bosis, Ruth Draper, Gaetano Salvemini, Ignazio Silone by Iris Origo; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego. An aristocrat, an actress, an academic, and an artist versus Mussolini.

Bedbugs by Clive Sinclair; Allison & Busby/Shocken Books; New York. Infectious.

The McNeil Century: The Life and Times of an Island Prison by Paul W. Keve; Nelson-Hall; Chicago. Isn't it a bit much to designate the 20th century with the name of a prison in Puget Sound?

The Age of Charisma by Arthur Schweitzer; Nelson-Hall; Chicago. The point: it takes more than just a pretty smile and a firm handshake. But do charismatic people read books like this?

JOURNALISM

Physician, Heal Thyself—

That American society is vile, unequal, unjust, and unfair is by now a sort of commonplace, a once-and-for-ever fixed obviousness, as self-evident as the presence of McDonald's hamburgers and Coca-Cola. The trite naturalness of this characterization has been driven into the popular consciousness by the omnipotent and omnipresent liberal media. And no other power of the

American universe has more intensely flailed, flagellated, and badmouthed us for our wicked racism than the editors, columnists, and anchormen of liberal persuasion who rule the media empire. Now, we can read in a UPI release:

Fifteen years ago the Kerner Commission said newspapers were shockingly backward in the recruiting and promoting of blacks.

Five years ago the American Society of

Newspaper Editors set the year 2000 as a target for making American newsrooms proportionately representative of the nation's racial and ethnic groups.

During the five years the minority percentage on daily newspapers has gone only from 4 percent to 5.6 percent, or 2,800 reporters. . . . Sixty percent of the dailies have no non-white reporter, and growth has been flat in 1983.

That the liberal media are the chief liars and hypocrites of contemporary America is by now an unequivocal banality. Everybody knows it. However, this simple truth cannot be made public. For obvious reasons. □

Notables

Barnum & Bagels

Whether one considers Darwin a sinner or a saint, the concept of evolution, which he effectively popularized, is one that underlies virtually all aspects of daily living, with the possible exception of religion, and even there it is evident that there is an increasing emphasis on modernization (i.e., "evolving" with the times) and a consequent devaluation of tradition. "They" may not make cars or ice cream or anything else "like they used to," but it must be admitted that an electronic ignition is a vast improvement over a starting crank and that a carton of Haagen-Dasz in the fridge beats about with an ice cream machine's crank. The "standard of living" may be improving, but the standards of *life* seem to be winding down into a vast sewer. This assertion straddles the two defining terms of Patrick Bratlinger's *Bread & Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Cornell University Press; Ithaca, NY): "positive classicism" and "negative classicism." The former, which doesn't get much ink, refers to consulting the past for a touchstone, or cultural paradigm. The latter, *the concern*, refers to making comparisons of "modern society with Roman imperial decadence." Bratlinger is forthcoming with his objective—"My chief purpose is to provide a critique of the mythology of negative classicism as it has developed over the last two centuries

in relation to 'mass culture': the mass media, journalism, mass education, the cultural effects of the processes of democratization and industrialization"—yet he never gets around to it.

Instead, he merely provides a compendium of practically all the writers and social theorists who let loose with the phrase "*panem et circenses*" during a weak moment of composition, from Juvenal to McLuhan. He repeats it or a variation over and over again, and it is surprising that he doesn't cite the saw "If you can't ride two horses at once, you shouldn't be in the circus," nor Murphy's "Buttered bread falls buttered side down—and if it's a sandwich it falls open." Bratlinger seems to think that all those who referred to the decadence of their day or to the existence of "cultural barbarians" were not only incorrect, but crabby. He, through Marxist Raymond Williams, shivers with the *frisson* of possibility: the mass media, if used as he sees fit (but which he never explains), will aid in "the construction of a shared culture of the highest humanistic and creative value on a mass, even global scale," and the bouquets go to what we have and the Romans didn't: TV. Bratlinger, in effect, makes Pangloss appear to be a pessimist. Perhaps he was so busy with his nose in books while running down the multitudinous citations that he hasn't taken a look at reality—or even TV—lately. □

Une Petite Crapule

This is to pay honor to the genius of French language as the most expressible of tools. No other tongue approximates its precision in articulating contempt for human sleaziness and despicability. There are many delicious and delicate French denominations that English lacks but which would help us convey *our* image of one Alexander Cockburn, a British red snob of quasi-aristocratic lineage, a New York bedroom revolutionist, and a fellow traveler columnist for both the *Village Voice* and—oh, how intriguing!—the *Wall Street Journal*. *Une ordure? Une canaille?* Each one of these epithets defines exactly how *we* feel, but, apparently they clash with what the editor of the VV thinks of Mr. Cockburn. Of late, Mr. Cockburn accepted some peculiarly scented Arab money to write a book about Israel. Judging by what he previously wrote on the subject, as well as about every democratic force engaged in the struggle against any vicious fanaticism on the Soviet payroll, Mr. Cockburn was probably out to make another routine propagandist kill, financed by a slush fund. The VV, an organ that lives off New York radical and mostly Jewish readership, couldn't go so far in offending subcon-