

Second Thoughts

by Thomas Fleming

These days everyone is having second thoughts—about Vietnam and the 60's, about American history, about what it means to be a liberal and what it means to be a conservative. Rather than be left out of the rewrite, I too have been having second thoughts about what I did and did not do some 20 years ago. I was on the point of being drafted on three separate occasions, and while I should have realized that the Army would never take a flat-footed man who had had operations on both eyes, I still brooded about the war and my possible participation.

Conventionally leftist, I did not see any reason for our presence in Southeast Asia—although I did believe we were engaged in a global struggle against the Soviet Union, one we could not afford to lose. I wrote my congressman, L. Mendel Rivers, to declare my opposition to the war. Mendel, in addition to being chairman of the House Armed Forces Committee, was a sort of friend of my father. (I also knew his godson, aide, and successor, Mendel Davis.) Even so, I did not expect an answer and when it came, it gave me a jolt. The greatest hawk in Washington said he agreed with me, that if we were not going to fight to win, then it was wrong to waste American lives.

One American life I had no intention of wasting was my own—not that I was afraid of dying in Southeast Asia. Mendel had promised my father that if I were drafted, I could have my pick of places to go and suggested Army Languages School and a tour in the Mediterranean. But at

the time it seemed absolutely pointless to interrupt my studies and live like an overworked Boy Scout for six months. I'm sure it would have done me good.

I principally thought about going to Canada, not so much to evade the draft but in search of a less bureaucratized country (how little I knew about Canada!) that still contained vast stretches of wilderness and preserved a sense of traditional community. Some of my ancestors had fled to the Maritimes in the 1770's to evade a war they could not honorably take part in (as Scots they had taken the oath not to fight against the King), and I foolishly saw myself as following in their footsteps. I fixed on Cape Breton as my destination—surely the loveliest place in North America—and discussed the project with my father, expressing great dissatisfaction with life in these United States. He only gave me one piece of advice. "When you go up there among the bluenoses," he warned, "don't be running down the United States. Decent men, Scots in particular, have no use for a man who speaks ill of his own country."

In the end I did not go to Cape Breton and faced the induction physical in Raleigh. Of course I flunked it, but I kept on thinking about what my father had said. Was I guilty of disloyalty to my country, and didn't I have to choose either to remain here as a loyal citizen or else emigrate? I'm not sure that I was ever disloyal, but the answer to the second question was undubitably yes, and I gradually began to develop a strong dislike for the flag-burners, excrement-

hurlers, big-talking nothing-doing rioters who shut down universities and disrupted the Democratic Convention in Chicago, 1968. I thought then and I continue to think of them as spoiled children who, if they could not have this country on their own terms, would do anything they could to destroy it.

They were, by and large, repulsive people: Tom Hayden, a man willing to live off his wife's earnings until she booted him out; Jerry Rubin, who now prances around the country celebrating his version of free enterprise and debating with his old pal, the recently deceased Abbie Hoffman—a classic 60's nerd, witless and shameless, who in later years turned into a drug-dealing con-artist with an appetite for women under 21.

Some of the 60's kids have wised up, and Americans, as always, have been quick to forgive them. I don't see why we should. The Christian doctrine of forgiveness is very clear: the sinner must confess his faults, ask forgiveness, and resolve to sin no more. I'm still waiting for these ex-radicals to beg forgiveness, and even when they do I'm not sure that any sensible person is particularly eager to hear their opinions on politics, literature, religion, or American history, because—and this should hardly come as a surprise—most



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of them have not changed as much as they would have us believe.

What did they believe then? That the history of America was in domestic affairs a record of atrocities against blacks, Indians, Jews, immigrants, women, "sexual minorities," and against nature itself; in foreign affairs it was a story of white Christian capitalist imperialism against meek and virtuous native populations. It would take, so they said, a revolution to clean up this sinful and polluted land.

What do they believe now? Those who call themselves conservative have dropped a few items of the indictment. They no longer oppose capitalism—at least in the sense of welfare state capitalism—and have lost their sympathy for Indians, homosexuals, and the environment, and many of them have come to realize that the Third World includes violent Muslims whose principal aim in life is to destroy Christian America along with the state of Israel. But that is about as far as it goes.

Of course, they no longer talk so loftily about the criminal record of the United States, but that is because they actually had their revolution in the form of a civil rights movement that destroyed the autonomy of state and local government and elevated a radical leftist (if not worse) satyr to the top of

the American pantheon. Unlike the serious left, they do not need to rewrite American history, because they already have rewritten it as the march of democracy and equality, first across America and now across the world.

Whatever they call themselves—leftists, liberals, or conservatives—the 60's radicals still hate the United States as it actually was and is, and in all their pretended patriotism they are as sincere as the Anglican clergymen who say, yes, they believe in the Christian doctrines summed up in the Nicene Creed, because there is a sense in which God could become man, which is to say that every man has it within himself to attain to a purer spirituality, and in a sense God could be said to have created the universe, etc., etc. It is in this same sense that the flag-burners of 1968 are the really loyal and patriotic Americans.

Perhaps they are right. Cultural leftism, in both its benign and malignant forms, is now the dominant ideology in the US. The malignant form is easiest to comprehend, because it is an open attack on all that is best in the traditions of the civilized West. The radical cultural leftists are against Greek and Latin, Christianity, and the languages, history, and literature of Europe. On one flank, they are rewriting the syllabuses of humanities and history courses at all levels of instruction; on the other, they are tearing down all obstacles to mass migrations from the Third World. These two movements are part of a concerted effort to destroy any residual sense of what America owes to its European past.

I never heard it more clearly expressed than in a throw-away remark delivered by a University of Texas law professor at a philosophy conference in Atlanta. Commenting on the furor over changes in the Stanford humanities curriculum, the professor (whose salary is paid by the good people of Texas) asked what all the fuss was about. Sure, the old curriculum had good things in it, but it also included examples of Christian bigotry—writers like Dante and Milton. As a Jew, he said, he was glad that Stanford students would no longer be required to read such authors. The same man agreed with several Ivy League professors, who expressed some trepidation about being in so dangerous and bigoted a city as Atlanta. Compared with what, I asked; New Haven? This all took place on the grounds of a Methodist-supported college.

In the context of American universities, the UT law professor hardly counts as a radical, and it is hard to understand what is going on in American education if one fails to realize that such opinions are mainstream. With very few exceptions, even the opposition to malignant cultural leftism shares most of its fundamental assumptions. This is why I refer to it as the benign form of the cancer, although benign is not quite the *mot juste*. ("Temporarily in remission" might be a more accurate term.) For example, defenders of the Stanford humanities curriculum argued that even if Western civilization was rooted in bigotry and oppression, what better way was there to learn about such things? Besides, the only important thing to know about America is its openness to all forms of experience. According to educationists like Diane Ravitch, schools can have Third World humanities and the classics. And anyway, with unrestricted immigration the ruling classes will need some form of introduction to turn these people into obedient

citizens, i.e., religious skeptics, sexual equalitarians, and global democrats. Americans who continue to love their country, respect its traditions, and study its history—what are they, after all, but bigots, nativists, xenophobes, and racists? That, at any rate, is what the cultural leftists would like us to believe. A rather different approach to our history is provided by a black Virginian, Don Anderson, who contributed an essay to *Why the South Will Survive*, edited by Clyde Wilson. Unequivocally opposed to slavery and highly critical of the behavior of Southern whites, he refused to write off the experiences of the black men and women who lived as slaves; holding no brief for Southern slaveholders, he still tended the graves of his ancestors. At the same time he has learned to play the bagpipes enjoyed by the ancestors of his slave-owning white ancestors. Most important, he has turned to the slaveholder Jefferson as the inspiration for his National Association for the Southern Poor. Like most Americans, he had reasons for condemning some aspects of the American historical experience, but unlike cultural leftists he refused to fall into the habit of hating his country.

Loving one's own people does not imply a diminished regard for the rest of the human race. On the contrary, a man who does not cherish his family and fellow-citizens and national traditions is probably incapable of loving anyone or anything. Here lies the basic fault of all global ideologies—Communism, Socialism, Democratism: they are all based on hatred of the particular, and what begins in hate can never result in love.

How unloving and unlovable the 60's radicals really were. They mistreated their girlfriends, lived like pigs, and gloated over the destruction they could do, if ever they got into power. More to the point, perhaps, they were deliberately rude to anyone who got in their way or made the mistake of trying to reason with them.

Once in the late 60's I found myself in Los Angeles during an airline strike. My mother had been desperately


sending messages up and down the West Coast, informing me that I only had a few days to get back to South Carolina, because I had been drafted. Wearily, I stood in line at the Greyhound terminal and succeeded in catching a bus for El Paso, which was at least vaguely in the right direction. Sitting next to me was a gigantic Marine, just back from Vietnam. Without too much rage, he began describing how the "peace queers" had assaulted him at the airport in language almost identical to Johnny Rambo's great speech: "Who the hell were they to protest me?" As luck would have it, we were both headed for South Carolina. It was a long ride, catching buses that zigzagged our way across the continent. No matter how many times I changed buses, I couldn't shake him. He dogged me as persistently as the memory of a bad blind date.

It was not as if we had a great deal in common. "How bout you and me getting some books to read at the next stop?" he asked. When I returned with a light novel (deliberately chosen so as not to avoid the charge of pretension), he couldn't conceal his disgust and disappointment. When I asked what books he had bought, he proudly showed me a handful of comic books.

Among the things of the trip that I recall—eating the best beef barbecue in the world and drinking Mexican beer in a little diner he knew in Dallas, the endless gruesome stories of combat told in a matter-of-fact voice, and his eagerness to go back and start collecting the combat pay again—one incident stands out.

It was the first day, and the bus stopped at a crossroads town and a pleasant-looking (not exactly pretty) country girl dressed in gingham got on board. My friend confessed that he knew a girl just like that back in Arkansas and he intended to marry her some day. His reveries were disturbed by loud talk and coarse laughter from the back. He turned around and spotted two "long-hairs," obviously half-stoned. He barked at them to pipe down, but they kept up their increasingly offensive banter. It was unpleasant, but no worse than what we often hear in public places. "If they don't quit, I'm going to have to do something."

I thought he was just sounding off, and when the Marine got off to get a cold drink at the next stop, I thought nothing of it. When I awoke from a short nap, a few miles later, I noticed that the long-hairs were gone. I asked my friend what happened. "Nothing much," he said, "I just persuaded them to wait for another bus."

My friend was probably a religious bigot and a xenophobe, but while I and the liberal college students were enjoying ourselves, he was off defending the honor of our country. He knew it was a war designed by the upper classes and fought by the lower classes, but he didn't resent it. He knew I was a middle-class college student and probably not too different from the "peace queers" that had spit on him, but he didn't resent that either. For several days, we were together virtually every minute, but he was nothing but kind and scrupulously considerate. He was the sort of decent, tough man our ancestors were, and he is worth more than all the high-minded students and intellectuals whom Richard Daley in his infinite wisdom locked up in a Chicago jail in 1968. However many second or third thoughts they might have, the unrepentant radicals don't have to apologize to me: they have to apologize to him. 

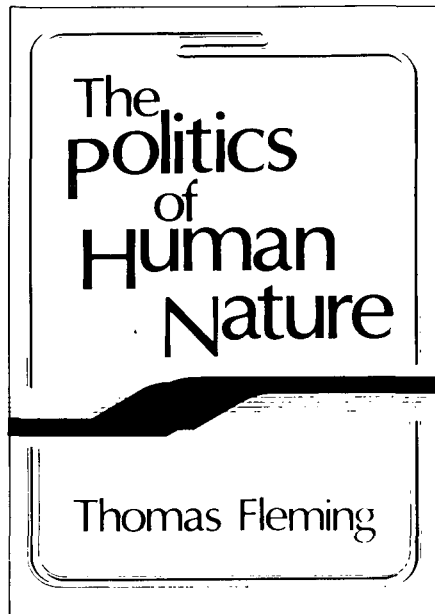
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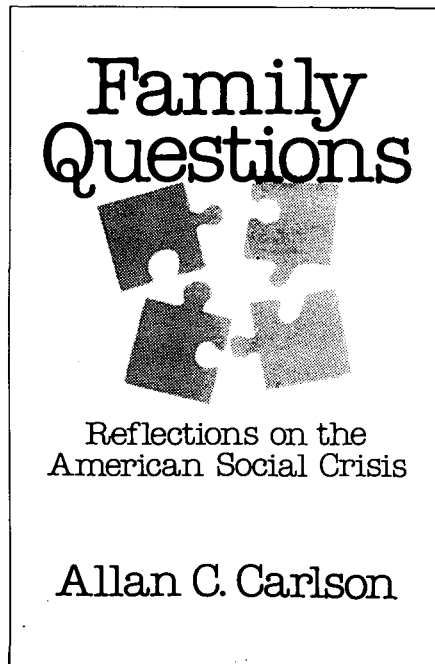
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Liberalism: Collectivist and Conservative

by Edward Shils

I never exchanged a word with Richard Weaver. I knew him because he was a figure at the University of Chicago. I heard that he was a teacher who expected his students to meet a high standard of intellectual probity and rigor; I think that he expected the same of his colleagues. I was told, with a mixture of admiration and resentment, that he was not a member of any of the ruling parties at the college in the years in which he taught there.

To me, when I occasionally passed him on the campus or on 57th Street, he looked the part. He looked quietly and concentratedly independent; not bellicose, but determined to follow the path that he thought right. The path he thought right was not one that was plucked out of the air; it was one that had been taken deliberately and adhered to with purposeful tenacity. It was not easy. At that time there was a certain enthusiastic mateyness among the teachers of the humanities in the college at the University of Chicago.

They were ebulliently confident that they had the protection of Robert Hutchins and Richard McKeon. There was much optimism in the United States at that time and they shared in it. Although they knew nothing of economics and little of politics, I think that they were generally devotees of the New Deal. Those who did not agree with them were ostracized as "reactionaries." That was Richard Weaver's situation.

Among collectivist liberal intellectuals, the University of Chicago now has a reputation for being a nest of "right wingers." Of course, the imputation is untrue. The fact that it has that reputation may be traced to the appearance and rootedness there of a strong tradition of genuine liberalism—individualistic or constitutional or conservative—from the time of J. Lawrence Laughlin and especially of Frank Knight, and since then contained in the outlook shared by



Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Allen Wallis. This kind of genuine liberalism at an American university is scarcely to be found outside the University of Chicago, and even at the University of Chicago is espoused only by a minority of the teaching staff, even among the social scientists who ought to know better. Most of the social scientists are collectivist liberals—the kinds of liberals who made off with the good name of liberalism and brought it into disrepute.

If, even now, when collectivist liberalism, social democracy, and communism are on the defensive, this kind of thoughtful distrust of the power of the state and of the omniscient wisdom of politicians and civil servants is to be found only in a minority of the senior members of the University of Chicago, they were a much smaller minority in the 1940's and 1950's when Richard Weaver taught there. Collectivist liberalism was then at the

height of its pride and it required much firmness of character and deep seriousness to stand out in opposition to it. Richard Weaver had that seriousness of demeanor and outlook.

Seriousness is not gloominess. It is not dullness. It is not cheerlessness. To be serious is to take serious things in the way in which they ought to be taken. Foremost among the serious things are religion, the family, human life itself, the national society—i.e., the country and the traditions of the civilization we have inherited with its works of intellect, imagination, and morality. They include the discovery of truth and its protection. Serious things include the state of one's society and one's civilization. They also include the difficulties of human existence that reason alone and scientific knowledge cannot cure. All these things have to be given the weight that their central position in human existence entitles them to.

Seriousness is the mood and state of mind appropriate to the appreciation of serious things. Seriousness is not the only response to serious things: one other major response is frivolity or lightheartedness. Another is shoulder-shrugging

Edward Shils is a professor at the University of Chicago and the recipient of the Ingersoll Prizes' 1988 Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters, for which this was his acceptance speech.