

that they are spooked. And the more spooked they become, the less inclined they are to shut up. Their contradictions, their collective mood swings, their insistent protestations of self-approval, their incessant self-analysis combined with an underdeveloped ability to *process*—all of it indicates a kind of collective befuddlement. It was inevitable. This most self-referential of generations has arrived at midlife with virtually no context in which to appraise their journey. If you have lived only the insular life of the Self (rejecting the example of your foremothers and, presumably, your forefathers also), doubt—a potentially powerful means of growth—will feel like failure, reassessment like hypocrisy. The life of the Self results, with the onset of middle age, in the worst of all worlds: the inability to examine a lengthening past with the clarity necessary to enhance a shortening future. Self-justification is a behavior unto itself, one whose emotional consequence is psychic loneliness. On an intellectual level, the result is merely coarse—sentimentality with no redeeming sweetness.

There is comfort in reaching 50 and knowing that you have been right after all about some important things. But it can be exhilarating—almost liberating—to realize also that you have been wrong. To know that pride or stubbornness or vanity or fear once blinded you to something you now see as true—this is to feel both humbled and emboldened. We may be nothing more than a speck on the great continuum, but we are a part of it nonetheless. To reject that in favor of the dinky insistence that you and your peers are the coolest people ever is, it seems to me, an act of spiritual suicide.

But there is a bright spot on the horizon. It is the Generation X-ers, the twenty-somethings held in such disdain by Children of the 60's for being too cynical, too ironic, and insufficiently idealistic—and we haven't even touched on their disinterest in Changing the World As We Know It. Boomers don't trust X-ers, in other words, because X-ers aren't like boomers. Wary of political nostalgia and put off by middle-aged self-absorption, twenty-somethings are watchful and determinedly cautious. And in their way (they are young, after all), they are rigorously independent-minded—which is another reason boomers are suspicious of them: they are not easily led. This leaves baby boomers with no one to lead but each other—surely not how

they imagined spending their prime years. The last thing they ever expected to become was ignorable.

My son exchanges regular letters with his 76-year-old grandmother, wherein they discuss the relative merits of old Artie Shaw recordings. Not long ago, I asked my son what he thought of Bill Clinton. He said, "He's . . . silly, a silly guy." My son is 25 years old, a member of the demographic group that is considered culturally cutting-edge, and he thinks that Grandma's cool but Bill Clinton is embarrassing. If you are a boomer elitist, that's got to hurt. If you are too old to be a boomer and too busy to be an elitist, you might feel inclined to smile. While you're at it, score one for our foremothers.

Janet Scott Barlow writes from Cincinnati, Ohio. Her website, "Out Here: Commentary from Middle America on Politics and Culture," can be accessed at www.Out-Here.org.



The Hollywood Ten(nessean)

by Bill Kauffman

Fifty years have passed since the orgy of squealing and sanctimony, of perfidy and posturing, that begat the Hollywood blacklist. What a cast of characters paraded before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC): at this table, communist screenwriters making \$2,000 a week scribbling claptrap and convincing themselves that it was revolution; and at that table, stool pigeons betraying their friends, creating on the American right the nauseating figure of the noble Judas, whose name has been Elia Kazan and Whittaker Chambers and Linda Tripp.

None of this would have happened if the film industry had been decentralized; if "local photoplayers in Topeka, or Indianapolis, or Denver" made the movies, as Vachel Lindsay once prophesied. But the coal shortages of the First World War drove movie production to

Southern California, and the rest was—alas, for those who love our country—not history.

The HUAC hearings destroyed careers: one highlight of *Tender Comrades*, the new oral history of the Hollywood blacklist by Paul Buhle and Patrick McGilligan, is a lively chat with the feisty Abe Polonsky, writer-director of the commie-noir classic *Force Of Evil* (1948). Cinephiles grieve over all those films that Polonsky & Co. never made.

But there are other Hollywood censorship stories that never get told: for instance, the tale of *Tennessee Johnson*. (Not available on video, the movie pops up now and then on the Turner Classic Movies cable network.)

Tennessee Johnson, an MGM biography of President Andrew Johnson, was released in January 1943. Directed by William Dieterle, whose credits include the dreamlike *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), one of the finest movies ever made, *Tennessee Johnson* starred Van Heflin as the cursed tailor of Greeneville and Lionel Barrymore (one of Hollywood's great New Deal-haters) as Thaddeus Stevens, Johnson's radical Republican nemesis. The movie received the sort of respectful notices often given to earnest historical films. *Commonweal* judged it "a sincere visualization of American democracy"; *Time's* reviewer thought it was "one of Hollywood's grown-up moments." It was also one of Hollywood's most craven moments.

The film originally was titled *The Man On America's Conscience*. The script, by John L. Balderston and Wells Root, took the traditional Claude Bowers view of Reconstruction and Johnson's impeachment: that is, that Johnson "fought the bravest battle for constitutional liberty and for the preservation of our institutions ever waged by an executive" against Pennsylvania congressman Stevens, the brilliant but hateful clubfoot who wished to mistreat the conquered Southerners like a vast peonage. (Stevens, rechristened Austin Stoneman, also played the devil to the archangel Abraham Lincoln in Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s notorious KKK romance *The Clansman*, translated to the screen by D.W. Griffith as *Birth of a Nation*.)

Enter Walter White, secretary of the NAACP. White was annoyed, and understandably so, by Hollywood's depiction of blacks as scraping and bowing simpletons. When he learned that

The Agony of Kosovo

by Alex N. Dragnich

The agony of Kosovo, Serbia's ill-fated province, is recorded in the pages of history. Over the centuries, Kosovo was transformed from an ethnically homogeneous center of the Serbian medieval empire to an embattled region populated predominantly by ethnic Albanians demanding independence. To appreciate the position of the Serbs, imagine Hispanics controlling large areas of Texas or California and demanding independence, while at the same time engaging in guerrilla actions against local police and state officials. To understand how the Kosovo situation evolved, we must turn to history.

Although the largest state in the Balkans for over 100 years, Serbia left a legacy which is known mainly to the historians. Art historians have written volumes about its Christian monuments, mainly the many churches and monasteries with their impressive frescos. Two of the monasteries (Sopocani and Studenica) have been declared "World Art Treasures."

Medieval Serbia was a part of the international community, actively involved in matters of political, military, and cultural importance. Serbian royal courts communicated on levels of respect and honor with Venetian Doges, Hungarian Kings, Bulgarian Tsars, and Byzantine Emperors. Unlike many of these, however, Serbian emperors did not build fortresses or ostentatious castles and palaces in which to enjoy the fruits of this world. But all of them felt duty-bound to build at least one church or monastery. Some built many. Pre-World War I archeological findings show that as of 1912, some 1300 monasteries, churches, and other Serbian monuments existed in Kosovo and Metohija (after a Greek word signifying monastery property). In the domestic political sphere, medieval Serbia's outstanding achievement is Tsar Dusan's Code of Laws, studiously prepared over

MGM was producing an anti-Reconstruction film, White complained to Lowell Mellett, director of the Bureau of Motion Pictures of the Office of War Information. The OWI, a propaganda agency created by one of FDR's executive orders, requested a copy of the screenplay from Louis B. Mayer. Mayer complied, piously assuring Walter White that "I live and breathe the air of freedom and I want it for others as well as myself."

When Mellett and White previewed the unedited film, they hit the roof. Mellett demanded that key scenes be reshot or removed. Thad Stevens, the screenplay's villain, was humanized; one new scene had him kissing and petting Andrew Johnson's grandkids. A scene in which Stevens plied Johnson with drink before his legendarily incoherent vice presidential Inaugural Address was left on the cutting room floor. Rewritten dialogue assured us that Stevens was "sincere" if a mite vengeful. The essential character of Lydia Smith, Stevens' mulatto housekeeper and probable mistress, disappeared. Despite the changes, a gang of Hollywood liberals—Ben Hecht, Zero Mostel, Vincent Price—petitioned the OWI to *destroy* the picture, in best fascist fashion, in the cause of national unity.

Tennessee Johnson—the OWI demanded a conscience-less title—was released in its denatured form. It's a fairly standard biopic: Johnson, nicely played by Heflin, is the runaway tailor's apprentice and self-styled champion of "poor white trash" who is only trying to act upon his predecessor's wise policy of malice toward none and charity toward all. With the exception of Jefferson Davis, secessionists are depicted as huffy churls and hotheads. Lionel Barrymore plays Thad Stevens as though he's rehearsing

for the role of Mr. Potter. Growling, snarling, commanding a wheelchair as he would in *It's a Wonderful Life*, he seems to regard Johnson as a mere irritant who exists only to distract him from his real quarry: George Bailey and the Building and Loan.

Nevertheless, *Tennessee Johnson* is far better than a contemporaneous "President movie," *The Remarkable Andrew*, which was written by the soon-to-be-blacklisted Dalton Trumbo. *The Remarkable Andrew* is a witless fantasy in which Andrew Jackson, played as a whiskey-swilling lout by Brian Donlevy, materializes to assist William Holden in rooting out corruption in a Colorado town. The film presents Jackson as the first New Dealer; think of it as a slapstick version of Arthur Schlesinger's *The Age of Jackson*.

One consequence of Walter White's protest was the omission of Lydia Smith, a meaty role for a black actress. The part was recast as the corpulent "laws a mercy!" black maid of stereotype. (There are parallels with today's Hollywood, in which black actors can never play complicated villains, only bland authority figures or the jivey sidekick of the white hero. Will Smith, meet Walter White.) The excision of Lydia Smith not only warded upon truth, it also made Stevens' Negrophilia less comprehensible. Love, after all, is always a higher afflatus than political principle.

Walter White's autobiography makes no mention of his role in altering *Tennessee Johnson*. The title is absent from a shelf full of books on censorship and the movies; censorship, it seems, only worked one way in Hollywood. The most intelligent review of *Tennessee Johnson* was written by Manny Farber in the *New Republic*, of all places. "The picture looks to have been pretty thoroughly censored, so as not to rake up any coals still burning," wrote Farber, who concluded, "censorship is a disgrace, whether done by the Hays office and pressure groups, or by liberals and the OWI."

The bluenoses and red-baiters of the Hays office, HUAC, and the Legion of Decency have gotten their historiographical due; when, if ever, will Lowell Mellett and the OWI get theirs?

Bill Kauffman is the author, most recently, of With Good Intentions? Reflections on the Myth of Progress in America (Praeger).

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