

Changing times changed Cleaver

By Art Goldberg

Many people have been dismayed recently to find Eldridge Cleaver speaking on television or quoted in the newspapers denouncing socialist countries, extolling the virtues of the American system, and explaining how Charles Colson has become his "brother in Christ."

How, they have wondered, could such an eloquent spokesman for the oppressed and the alienated in the '60s, so radically change his views? What happened during his seven-year exile to move him from the far left over to the right?

I worked closely with Eldridge at *Ramparts* just before he went into exile, and we share mutual friends and acquaintances. Those who've been in touch with him in the recent past say that Cleaver hasn't changed much personally. What has changed, however, are the times, and the circumstances Eldridge found himself in when he decided to return to the U.S. in November 1975.

►Like a monarch.

Back in the '60s, when Cleaver was desperately trying to get out of San Quentin, the people who helped him were leftists. Attorney Beverly Axelrod battled the California Adult Authority until it granted Eldridge a parole. Critic Maxwell Geismar made valuable suggestions about the *Soul On Ice* manuscript and saw that it was published. *Ramparts* gave him the job he needed to get the parole, and Huey Newton gave him a quick political education.

Eldridge's basic instincts were towards the left when he got out of prison, but he was more into black art and black nationalism until he met Newton and Bobby Seale, and started working at *Ramparts*.

His own speaking and writing talents, his imposing presence, his charismatic personality, and the success of *Soul On Ice* quickly catapulted him into national prominence. The April 1968 shootout with the Oakland police in which Panther treasurer Bobby Hutton was killed and Cleaver himself wounded only added to the mystique. When he was released on bail in June 1968, he was a left superstar.

Except for the shootout indictment in Oakland, Cleaver seemed to have it made. He was the leader of a major political movement, he was invited to speak everywhere, he was constantly on radio or TV, he could write anything he chose to in *Ramparts*, and he was running for president on the Peace and Freedom party ticket. As an admirer once wrote, he "moved around the [black] community like a monarch."

The California Appeals Court decision ordering him back to prison punctured the balloon. Eldridge was extremely confident of winning the Oakland case, but he was not sure he would survive if he was imprisoned before the trial. So in late November 1968, he disappeared, and turned up in Cuba a month or two later.

►From Cuba to Algeria.

Once there, Cleaver learned to his chagrin that he would not be permitted to comment publicly on events inside the U.S., nor would he be allowed to organize paramilitary guerilla teams and infiltrate them back into the U.S. The Cubans feared that either activity could provide the excuse for another American invasion.

The sudden withdrawal from the media spotlight proved to be difficult, and one visitor reported that Cleaver sometimes walked around Havana conspicuously holding a copy of *Soul On Ice*. By mid-1969, he'd had enough of Cuba, and made arrangements to go to Algeria, a nominally socialist country that had no extradition treaty with the U.S.

For a time, Cleaver flourished in Algeria, making contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization, writing articles for the Panther newspaper, and meeting with reporters. In the summer of 1970, he led a delegation of "anti-imperialist" Americans on a tour of North Korea, China and Vietnam. When he returned



Ex-Watergate Chuck Colson and ex-Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver enjoy a cozy chat.

to Algiers, President Huari Boumedienne hailed him as a "revolutionary hero" and turned the former embassy of Vietnam's National Liberation Front over to Cleaver to use as the Black Panther party's international headquarters.

Shortly afterwards, the Weather Underground broke Dr. Timothy Leary out of a California prison and spirited him to Algiers with the idea that he and Cleaver could unite the political and "cultural" strains of the new left. This hope never materialized, and by January 1971, Leary was under "house arrest" on Cleaver's orders.

The "revolutionary bust" as Eldridge termed it, was supposedly made because of Leary's indiscreet use of drugs, but visitors in Algiers then, people whose first loyalty was to the Panthers, later reported that Leary's behavior had been exemplary, and it was Cleaver whose behavior was eccentric. They believed that the power Eldridge was given in Algeria went to his head, and that he resented the media attention Leary was getting.

►Break with Newton.

A month after the Leary incident, Cleaver publicly denounced Huey Newton on a telephone hookup arranged by a San Francisco radio station. Newton then expelled Cleaver from the Panthers, touching off a bitter intra-party feud that resulted in several deaths. The International Section in Algiers functioned as a separate entity for a time, but Cleaver soon found that on the international level, he didn't have much leverage as an individual. It was the Panther party that was important to the rest of the world.

The break with Newton also cost the International Section its Panther funds; after a time the financial situation became desperate. Eventually, the Algiers group split; Cleaver moved to an apartment, others took over from him. At one point, two planes were hijacked, flown to Algeria and held for ransom. The ransom money quickly found its way to the International Section, much to the annoyance of the Algerian government, which raided the headquarters and returned the money to the airlines.

Cleaver went to France in 1973, indicating that he was through with politics

and had resumed writing. It was an open secret that he was living in Paris, where he received a stream of visitors, but the U.S. never moved to have him extradited. By 1974 Cleaver was actively contacting his old friends in the U.S., urging them to find ways for him to return.

Jerry Rubin flew to Paris with his guru of the moment, Werner Ehrhard, the founder of *est*. The plan was to have Cleaver charm Ehrhard into financing his legal defense, but nothing came of it. Cleaver's leftist friends proposed various "scenarios" for his return. One of these revolved around Eldridge completing another book, and returning as a "black writer" rather than as a "black revolutionary," a stance from which most of his former friends would have rallied to his support.

►A deal?

However, in mid-1975 Cleaver's publisher rejected his manuscript, and the money he expected never materialized. His friends proposed other scenarios that Cleaver never approved. He told his friends to hurry, and informed journalist Stew Albert that he had already been offered a deal, but had turned it down. With two young children to support, Cleaver's money problems were more pressing than ever.

In November 1975 Cleaver suddenly announced that he was returning to the U.S. Several months before, he abruptly stopped communicating with his radical friends. The arrangements for his return were made through Allen Pizar, a Paris lawyer who normally represents multinational corporations. Magically, articles by Cleaver appeared in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*, explaining his newly discovered love for the U.S. and his disillusionment with Communism.

Asked why he had returned at Kennedy Airport, Cleaver said, "I got tired of waiting for my friends in the U.S. to arrange something." Translated, that seemed to mean that with his money problems, and feeling like "a fish out of water" in Paris, he had accepted the deal that he had originally turned down.

In addition to his public statements, the deal seems to have thus far included a four month stay in a federal prison in San Diego and four months in the county jail

Cleaver today: see page 24.
He and Chuck Colson, two
born-again sinners, are making
the revival circuit together.

in Oakland. He was not sent to state prison, as he surely would have been were his case being handled routinely. In return, Cleaver has been granted what he wanted more than anything else—his release on bail before the Oakland trial, now scheduled for early May.

►His way of making money.

None of this, however, explains how Cleaver "found Christ." He now says that his first visions came while he was still in France. Maybe they did, except that he never spoke of his religious experience when he first returned to the U.S. He also says that it wasn't until his stay in the Oakland jail that his religious zeal was "reborn."

What I believe actually happened was that Cleaver was visited by a representative of either the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, or a similar group, at whose urging I don't know. Cleaver could not get out of jail unless he posted a substantial bail bond, and he could not hire a top-flight lawyer unless he had a substantial amount of money. He had no prospects of raising money quickly. A defense fund was started for him by people like Bayard Rustin, A. Phillip Randolph and Nat Hentoff, but it was not inundated with contributions.

Half of Cleaver's \$100,000 bail was subsequently posted by Arthur DeMoss, a Pennsylvania insurance man who sits on the board of the National Campus Crusade for Christ. Since his release, Cleaver has spoken on more than 25 campuses.

Cleaver's espousal of Christianity probably can be taken with a few grains of salt. It's his way of making money right now. Besides, his grandfather was a Baptist preacher, he himself dabbled in Catholicism early in life, became a Muslim in San Quentin, and an atheist when he joined the Panthers.

Watching him on TV, I've noticed that he speaks of his religious experiences without the fire or passion he exhibits when he talks of some of his social and political concerns. This is where I believe his real interests still lie, probably more as a centrist social reformer than as a radical or revolutionary.

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ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

FILM

Eagles has handsome Nazi paratrooper in the role of the hero

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

Directed by John Sturges
Screenplay by Tom Mankiewicz, from a novel by Jack Higgins
Produced by Jack Weiner and David Niven Jr.
Columbia release, rated PG

It took almost 100 years to turn the Southern rebel soldier into a respectable member of our society. *The Eagle Has Landed*, a recent Columbia Pictures release, achieves redemption for the elite Nazi paratrooper and upper echelon officer in one-third that time.

Based on a novel by Jack Higgins, Tom Mankiewicz has written a fast-moving, old-fashioned adventure story about a German commando group in late 1943 trying to kidnap Winston Churchill in hopes of arranging a negotiated peace rather than the military collapse facing Germany.

The film opens with newsreel clips of Mussolini after his fall from power. So you are meant to believe the story. All the Germans in the film, with the exception of Himmler (cunningly played by Donald Pleasance), are decent types who do things like risking their lives to save little Jewish girls being shipped off to extermination camp, or jump into a millrace and losing their lives to save a little English girl from certain shredding by the

mill wheel. So early on we are relieved of the responsibility of finding our "heroes" odious. In fact the audience is placed in the peculiar position of really liking the German paratrooper Colonel Steiner (played by Michael Caine), because he's good to his men, keeps his word and generally represents all the decent virtues. (It is he who tries to save the Jewish girl from the cattle cars as he brings his exhausted commando group back from Russia.) You root for him because he's so valiant, upright and true, but he is trying to capture Churchill—and you know that's bad.

It would make the audience's situation a lot easier if the American Captain Clarke (Treat Williams) who is supposed to save the day, were less of an ass. Instead, it is the Jungian theory of synchronicity—I can't remember whether it was Col. Max Radl (Robert Duvall) or Admiral Canaris (Anthony Quayle) who brought that up—and a final plot twist that sets things to rights.

If Michael Caine is admirable as the Nazi commando leader, Donald Sutherland is dashing as the anglophobic IRA aide who almost pulls off the P.M.'s kidnapping. Liam Devlin (Sutherland) also supplies the love interest for Molly Prior, an English girl, charmingly played by Jenny Agutter. When Devlin more or



Robert Duvall as Col. Max Radl.

less walks off into the sunset, you know he will be back to claim her heart some more fortunate day.

John Sturges is a first-rate director (*Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, *Bad Day at Black Rock*) and he gets splendid performances out of all the actors. He has been most successful with action films in the past and *The Eagle Has*

Landed is no exception. The tension builds until it explodes in a noisy battle that rages through a very quaint English village. (One of the stars of the film is the English coastline and surrounding scenery.)

If you can turn yourself upside down and see what decent chaps this particular group of Nazis were (what a pity they were on

the wrong side!) you will be able to spend an entertaining evening at a well made adventure film. If right side up is your preferred position, just remember where we'd all be if Germany had been able to bargain for truce terms.

—Mavis Lyons

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Bakshi's brilliance can't save *Wizards* from simplistic story

WIZARDS

Written, directed and produced by Ralph Bakshi
Released by 20th Century-Fox, rated PG

In all his major works (*Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, etc.)

Ralph Bakshi has attempted to elevate the animated film above its supposed simpleness. But good animated movies have never been simpleness—conceptually or intellectually. They are accused of being so only by

simpleness critics.

Wizards, Bakshi's latest film, is another such attempt. That it fails, as have most of his others, is due to the unfortunately simplistic story. The setting is Earth, three million years after the nu-

clear holocaust. The surviving races are divided between the radioactive (mutants) and the restored (fairies and elves). The separation is emphasized by the cosmic birth of opposite twins. The good one is Avatar, peaceful but lazy. The bad one is Blackwolf. Having been driven out of the Garden, Blackwolf settles in the nether world and plots to conquer the upper one through the use of a relic of the shattered past technology, an old film projector called the dream machine.

With the help of a few reels of films from the same remote past (*Triumph of the Will*, *Alexander Nevsky*, *Zulu*, and World War II newsreel footage), Blackwolf inspires his mutant armies to attack the regions of peace and magic. When the dream machine projects the film clips during battles with the elves, the images stun them and destroy their will to resist. The new juggernaut rolls over most of civilization.

But Avatar is finally roused to a mythic quest to defeat his brother. He succeeds in saving the world, but not the film.

Bakshi's animation is brilliant, a combination of manipulated photographed footage and complex cell (drawn) work. The character representations are inventive (although they never achieve the iconographic power Bakshi wants them to have). The colors are explosive, the editing is pre-

cise and the musical track well modulated. You are drawn into Bakshi's dream world by the power of his visual and aural imagination. But the weakness of his narrative imagination subverts the impact of the whole.

Wizards is fantasy rooted in banality; good vs. evil is reduced to Nazis vs. Innocents. The spectator is forced to follow the plot along such conventional lines that neither plot nor characters can develop fully.

Bakshi's sense of humor is biting. He is capable of making something other than "just for kids" features. (This one is inappropriate for children. Mayhem is the key to its action.) But he is trapped between his desire to make politically meaningful movies and family entertainment.

There is really no need to choose between these alternatives. But there is a need to make a coherent statement along with the brilliant visual pyrotechnics. Bakshi has not done that in *Wizards*.

When he achieves an intellectual conception embodied in a story that matches his talent as an animator, he will produce the complete work of art he is striving for so energetically.

—Joe Neumann

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