

marginalia

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EDITORIAL:

The Wagner-Wallace Syndrome



Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in. Romans 11:25

For those with hearty appetites for violence it is no longer necessary to stay awake half the night watching late, late shows on television. Nowadays one only has to tune in the six o'clock newscast to see the sights and hear the sounds of violence in American society.

There is sufficient violence to satisfy most every taste or proclivity. For those who prefer a less vicarious violence than the news of the day offers, more direct exposure and excitement is readily available. One can, for example, spend the January and spring collegiate holidays at some beach where students congregate to riot, and, later in the season, go to Newport for all the jazz. The Governor of Alabama, no novice about violence, recommends a ride on a Philadelphia subway since, should you not witness an assault or have the fortune to be attacked yourself, you have besides the chance to be bitten by a police dog. According to the New York Daily News, which also has an affection for violence, those who enjoy their violence above-ground should stroll in Central Park at night. For those who would rather be victims than aggressors, one can attempt to register to vote, or assist other citizens to do so, in the "black belt" of the deep South; for the academically inclined, it is possible to enroll at the University of California at Berkeley. Italian-Americans can, of course, apply for membership in the Mafia; white gentile Protestants are eligible for the Ku Klux Klan; the young and hardy can enlist in the Marines and, with any sort of luck, end up in Vietnam; with the right connections, opportunities for violence are available in the Teamsters' Union. As, perhaps, a last resort, one can become a cop.

This is only, obviously, a way of saying that violence is manifold and commonplace in American society. It seems always to have been: in the colonial protests for fair taxation and political freedom and in the Revolution; in the Indian

*...the troopers
vaguely charge...*

wars and the conquest of the frontier, in the War Between the States and in the trauma of the Reconstruction; in the emergence of the labor union movement and in the era of prohibition, to mention but a few examples, as well as in the present day. Whether violence is more characteristic today than in earlier times, I seriously doubt, though I do not know how the matter could be measured. Whether there is a new pattern of violence which did not previously pertain, I equally doubt, though I do not think any man really knows. Whether the violence modern society suffers is more vehement than in other periods, I do not profess to assess, though that conclusion strikes me as too simple to trust. What is most significantly different nowadays is that communications are virtually instantaneous: the whole country saw Ruby shoot Oswald. And the impact of the incidents and images of violence is immediate upon the consciousness and, hopefully, the conscience of citizens: everybody, practically, saw the troopers savagely charge and then lash and gas and stomp the Selma marchers. What is different today is that the facts of violence cannot be suppressed or distorted or rationalized because there are too many onlookers to every violence that happens.

That makes it difficult to account for the popularity, especially among the white middle classes in both the North and the South, of the false notion equating civil rights demonstrations with violence in the streets. The blunt truth is that violence initiated by Negroes and other citizens in the civil rights movement has been rare and minimal, especially so if the scope and duration of the protest are considered. The facts are indisputable that the overwhelming number of acts of violence in the racial crisis have been instigated and executed by white racists and that their murders, tortures, bombings and other terrorist activities have usually been perpetrated with impunity. No plaintive rationalizations can erase that dismal record; no brainwashing will expunge the truth.

The violence that *has* erupted in which Negroes have taken initiative so far has been in the riots and skirmishes in the ghettos of the urban North. These incidents have not been associated with any civil rights demonstrations as such. They cannot fairly be blamed upon Negro civil rights leaders; on the contrary, they most immediately threaten the incumbent non-violent leadership of the Negro revolution. Yet that very fact enhances the seriousness of these riots and invites urgent inquiry into the causes of them.

*...a plot
to assassinate
Hitler...*

I am an Anglican, not a Quaker, and though, I trust, a man of peace, I am no ideological pacifist. As such I do not suppose that all violence is the same or that every incident of violence is to be uncritically deplored or that one may never revolt or that a Christian may never resort to violence. Most likely, the American democracy could not have been constituted without the Revolution; colonialism elsewhere has seldom been overthrown without violence; the conscience of Bonhoeffer involved him in a plot to assassinate Hitler; Jesus was no stranger to violence. There are different sorts of violence.

No attempt is made here at any definitive analysis of the ethics of violence beyond suggesting that in the history of American social protest a distinction exists between intentional, tactical violence and unpremeditated, spontaneous violence. Thus, in the early part of the labor revolution, those in protest and those defending the *status quo* both engaged in deliberate violence as the means of accomplishing their respective social aims. For each, violence was integral to strategy and thought to be a necessary or effective way of achieving certain objectives.

That, as far as I can discern, was not characteristic of the ghetto riots of 1964 and 1965. Rather, these riots represent a quite different kind of violence; a violence of despair.

Nobody planned and plotted these riots, no one conspired beforehand, no one calculated that such violence would gain anything for anybody, these riots were not the work—as the FBI has verified—of professional agitators or Communists or disconsolate beatniks or adolescent hoodlums, though, once ignited, it was only to be expected that attempts would be made to exploit and aggravate the trouble.

Moreover, significantly, the violence of the riots was internalized, it happened within the ghettos, it did not represent deliberate or direct assault upon white society or white property or white people. It was an abortive violence.

The riots were occasioned in every instance save one by comparatively trivial provocations. In New York, at least, there had been a very serious and caustic incident — a Negro boy was killed by an off-duty white policeman under, to say the least, extremely ambiguous circumstances (not yet exonerated to my satisfaction at least, as an attorney and as a citizen). But, anyway, there was an awful thing which happened and people were aroused by it. In the other places where there has been riotous violence,

*...disconsolate
beatniks...*

*unpredictable,
undisciplined,
chaotic ...*

such has not been the case. In the other cities, the occasions for riot were inconsequential and innocuous. In Rochester, for example, a man and his wife, evidently drunk, were arguing with each other on the street and were properly arrested for disorderly conduct by the police. In Philadelphia, for another, there was an ordinary traffic violation. Such common and minor happenings were enough to kindle the passion, frustration, hostility, hurt and grievance of the ghetto people to make a riot.

In other words, these riots represent a most radical form of violence, perhaps the most volatile violence there can be: unpredictable, undisciplined, chaotic, without focus, quickly, even casually, provoked. These riots represent a spontaneous combustion of violence. At one recent rally in Washington, a speaker put it in memorable and reliable words when she said that Negroes in America "are sick and tired and (they) are sick and tired of being sick and tired." That is the mood which overtakes the civil rights movement, as the Northern city riots prove.

The spirit which moves the people is not wrath but despair.

Despair is probably the most poignant and pathetic spirit of all, one which has concluded that there is no earnest or honest hope of change which will affect meaningfully the ordinary lives of human beings, one which can not be suppressed or any longer appeased by promises of eventual improvement, one which expresses the defeat of human expectations for society, one which, now unleashed, will not easily be deterred or displaced.

Despair is nourished at least as much by the apathy of white society as by the abominable conditions of ghetto existence. The despair of urban Negroes is as profound as the apathy of white citizens is obstinate. The violence which issues from despair has its proximate cause in apathy.

No more appropriate symbol of the apathy of the white establishment in America exists than the incumbent political administration in New York City. Mayor Wagner has fashioned a career out of active indifference to the multiple and critical problems of urban society and, when it comes to the issues of the inner city — of Harlem and the other black ghettos of New York—he has made apathy a badge of sophistication. Typical was the response of the Mayor to the riots of the summer of 1964. After the trouble had been suppressed ruthlessly by the police, the Mayor mentioned that the unrest in Harlem had a

*...black
ghettos of
New York ...*

*... the inertia
of city hall ...*



Mayor Robert F. Wagner

connection with the conditions in which the people exist: the decrepit, vermin-infested tenements; the obsolete, academically inferior schools; the shortage of jobs and the absence of equal employment opportunity. The Mayor went on to suggest that something should be done about these conditions.

A year later, just as in all the years before, nothing has been done: *literally nothing at all*. If the Mayor's professed concern seems, thus, to the people of the ghetto, hypocritical and untrustworthy, if the Mayor's promises are thought to be not only empty but calculated deceptions, if the Mayor is regarded as a shrewd, if not very subtle, cynic, it is the inertia of city hall which, more than any other thing, spawns the despair in Harlem.

There is more to it than that, in fact. The hidden promise of the Mayor's intentions, even if taken seriously at face value, is that the circumstances of ghetto life should be improved, *but* that the ghetto should remain indefinitely. What is the incentive to despair is not simply the default in remedying housing and education and employment within the ghetto but rather the assumption that, even if somewhat bettered, Harlem would continue to be a ghetto.

The promise, however, which is required to absolve despair is that the ghetto must go—**every ghetto which blights every city and town in the land with a Negro population must be erased**. Only by beginning with that commitment is there a serious possibility of conceiv-

ing and executing public policies which can both free the prisoners of the ghettos and release the rest from the confinement of their own complacency. Only then is there any chance to banish despair and the violence which despair breeds. Only then can there be any hope for this society.

I mean to offer no comfort to Governor Wallace of Alabama, but truthfully, there is no significant ethical distinction between his regime and that of Mayor Wagner in New York. There are, no doubt, some aesthetic differences: Wagner seems not to be as vulgar a man as Wallace; on the other hand, Wallace seems far more candid than Wagner. As to ethics, they are in the same league: Wagner's indifference is the moral equivalent of Wallace's impudence; both are intransigent toward change in the status quo.

The moral kinship between the two regimes is documented in the similarity of the tactics upon which each relies:

Separation — both regimes depend upon the separation of society between the ghetto and the rest of the city in order to nurture a mentality of acquiescence and a capacity to endure hardship among the ghetto residents, on one hand, and to supply the ignorance and prejudice of other citizens about the ghetto people, on the other.

Concealment — both must substantially conceal the suffering and deprivation of Negro citizens by keeping the actual conditions of ghetto existence out of the convenient sight of the citizens of the outer city, a necessity now usually met by the routing of traffic under, over, around, but never through the blighted section.

Toleration — demonstrations for equal rights, while undesirable, must often be tolerated within the ghetto where, sometimes, they tend to relieve tension but seldom impress the people outside; marches, however, outside the ghettos must be, if possible, stomped out.

Suppression — if violence does occur, it must, at all costs, be localized within the ghetto and it must be suppressed by overwhelming force, in the name, of course, of preserving law and order and domestic tranquility.

Rationalization — when trouble does occur be quick to locate a scapegoat: in Harlem, hoodlums or drug addicts are always handy; in Alabama, blame the Communists and outside agitators. Be sure, in applying this principle, to repeat the scapegoat charges **after** the trouble subsides in order to impress the people out-

side and, just as important, in order to prepare them with an excuse for any future violence.

Procrastination — appease everybody by promising anything. Usually the ghetto people will be quiet for awhile if a delegation of them is received at the executive mansion, allowed to refer to grievances (which, in such a reception, will be understated, generalized and vague) and solicited with a few indefinite assurances that whatever should be done will be done. Sometimes inviting the delegation to pose for news photographs quickly ameliorates tension and abets evasion. Invariably the white folks and their leaders will have been satisfied by the prior allegations as to scapegoats since the complacent and comfortable believe what they like and are reluctant toward the truth. Just to be sure, however, in an emergency, keep promising to get to the bottom of things and to cure any legitimate ills or evils. If pressed further, though it is unlikely, appoint a committee (if truly desperate, try to keep one's head and instead name a commission, because it sounds more important and impartial) of prominent citizens to investigate. An investigation has an automatic, magical, effect in getting off the hook since citizens have been brainwashed into supposing that investigation is a synonym for decisive action.

Distraction — diversions always help a mayor or governor through a crisis and they are relevant here. Preempt attention, for example, by staging a parade for astronauts or by denouncing air pol-

... Wagner's
indifference ...

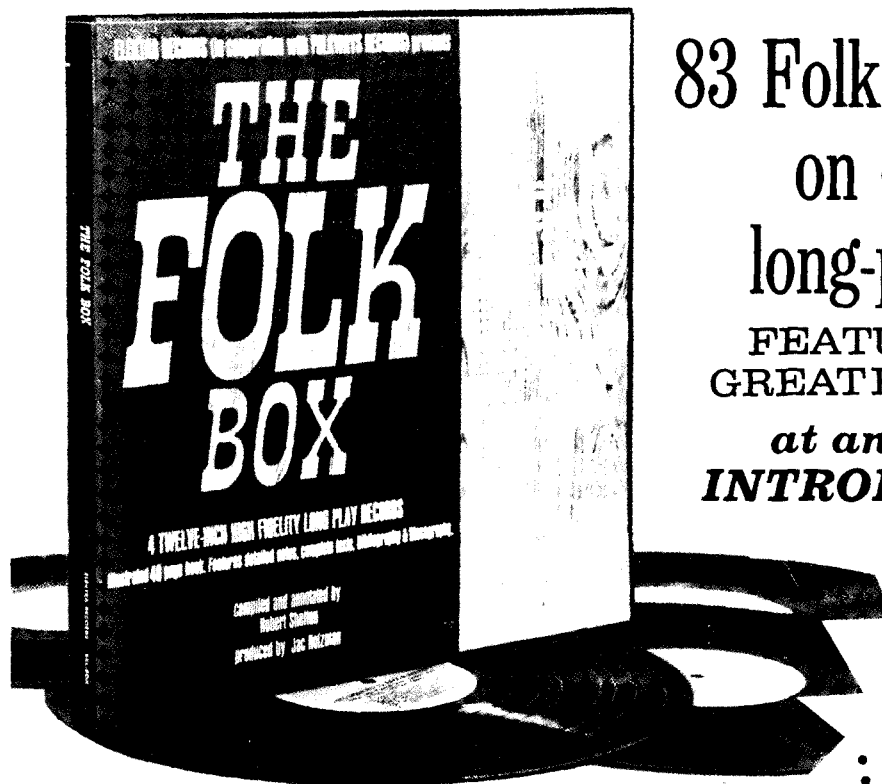
... try to
keep one's
head ...

... suppressed
by overwhelming
force ...



Governor George C. Wallace

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Zebra Dun/Cisco Houston
Field Holler/Horace Spratt
Linin' Track/Koerner, Ray & Glover

Now Your Man Done Gone Willie Turner
Timber Josh White
Grizzly Bear Negro Prisoners

MANY WORSHIPPERS, ONE GOD

Mary Had A Baby/Marilyn Child & Glenn Yarbrough
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Dark Was The Night/Blind Willie Johnson
Twelve Gates to the City/Judy Collins
A Zemer/Theodore Bikel
Wayfaring Stranger/Glenn Yarbrough
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Meetin' at the Building/Leadbelly
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Amazing Grace/Doc Watson & others
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Green Corn/Dián and the Greenbriar Boys
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See That My Grave is Kept Clean/Blind Lemon Jefferson
House of the Rising Sun/Hally Wood
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John Brown's Body/Ed McCurdy
Virginia's Bloody Soil/Frank Warner
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Masters of War/Judy Collins

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Blow The Candles Out/Theodore Bikel
Love is Teasing/Jean Redpath
Sally Ann/Claarence Ashley & Doc Watson
Little Devils/Jean Ritchie

HOPE

The Hammer Song/The Limelites
This Land Is Your Land/Woody Guthrie

BROADSIDE, TOPICAL SONGS, PROTEST SONGS

Which Side Are You On?/Pete Seeger, Almanac Singers,
with audience
No Depression in Heaven/New Lost City Ramblers
Talking Dust Bowl/Woody Guthrie
Black, Brown and White/Big Bill Broonzy
Talking Atomic Blues/Oscar Brand
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lution in a special telecast or engaging in a little harmless controversy with a colleague — a politician in the other party or the President of the United States or, if the situation warrants the risk, the President of the World's Fair.

Apart from such tactics, and their multiple variations, the Wagner and Wallace administrations have other similarities. Both are just as condescending and paternalistic toward those outside the ghetto as those within. Neither Wagner nor Wallace could long survive but for the entrenchment of apathy; by default in public leadership which each exemplifies, that apathy is encouraged and racism is in fact condoned. By soothing and whitewashing the conscience of white society, each, in his inimitable way, scorns the intelligence and social responsibility of his white constituents. By catering to white apathy, both show contempt for the self-interest of those who are prosperous and white just as much as those who are poor and black since racism annually depletes the gross national product by more than \$23 billion — a loss suffered by every American. Far from being executives of government for all citizens, each manipulates racial divisions and fears to cling to political office. Neither can be deposed until apathy is renounced.

Both Wagner and Wallace outrage democracy.

Now some assert optimism that the Negro revolution has reached a decisive climax in the voting rights demonstrations in the "black belt" of the deep South. The long suffering patience of Negro citizens is about to be recompensed; the conscience of white citizens, notably of the middle class, has finally been aroused and apathy wanes. After all, the ruthlessness of the rout of the Selma marchers on that awful Sunday in March by the posse and the troopers provoked a flood of new entrants into the civil rights struggle who had never been involved in direct action before. Among them were some very important personages in the nation — leaders of the white establishment in the North and the West, ranking members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of practically all the churches, heirs of some of the first families in the land, along with nuns and ordinary clergy and students who were also novices in the racial crisis. The President became more emphatic in his advocacy of equal suffrage and justice for Negro citizens than any President has ever been, and the Congress rallied to his side in a way without precedent in matters of civil rights legislation. Negro citizens of Alabama actually gathered at the state

*... the great
turning point ...*

capitol, encompassed by a great host of witnesses, to petition for the redress of their grievances. Multitudes of other Americans, if not moved to direct involvement, were at least (at last) shocked into sympathy and many even walked a mile or two to their local courthouses or congregated in the churches to give witness. Nothing, it has been now much repeated, will be the same again: the great turning point has happened. Let it be hoped so.

Not everyone regards these events as so climactic. Some have had the temerity to cite, for example, the difference in the response of white citizens and public officials to the murders of Medgar Evers or Jimmy Lee Jackson as compared to those of James Reeb and Mrs. Viola Liuzzo. It does not, by the way, question the commitment or courage of the white victims at all to do so; the only issue raised is the reaction of white society and the action of the authorities to, on one hand, the assassination of Negroes and, on the other, that of whites. It appears that the difference is significant, not only in the zeal and alacrity with which the authorities responded but also in the outcry and indignation of white society. If such a view, which is held by some Negroes and asserted by some whites, seems unduly embittered, then let white people discomforted by it remember and memorialize the uncounted numbers of Negro citizens that have been killed, tortured, maimed and brutalized by the violence of white racists — sometimes including police, sometimes just ignored by police — during these years of protest and agony. And let all white citizens realize that this is a legacy of the racial crisis which can neither be disowned by white men nor readily forgiven by black men.

*... all over
but for the
shouting ...*

Is Selma the symbol of the turning point in the revolution? To me it seems both premature and perilous to say so. To me it seems a self-indulgence to now relax in any simple assumption that it is all over but for the shouting. I suspect it is really only the shouting which is over and that now the nation barely enters the momentous, undramatic, traumatic and arduous task of reconstructing society so that a citizen may not only vote but work and have the education requisite for both; so that a citizen can live in a decent home in any neighborhood, obtain a mortgage or a loan to start a business, travel where he pleases, hold any public office he can win in a fair and free election; and even, if he would like to do so, be a member of any congregation in the Church. For that struggle, all who enlisted at Selma will be needed back in their home communities along with liter-

*... Wagner and
Wallace outrage
democracy ...*

ally millions more for whom Selma was only another newscast. And while I, for one, do not challenge the motives of any of the very important white people, much less the unimportant ones, who descended into Alabama, the veracity of the white involvement there depends upon the vigor and persistence of just these white citizens and multitudes of others like them in every sector of the American democracy where racism is a fact. If the white commitment is not in that way verified, then Selma will have been some feigned expiation, no climax but a mere catharsis which heralds no new or great society but a resurgence of great apathy and a new condescension of white man for Negro citizens.

Selma will be an historic turning point if, on that gruesome Sunday when the posse charged the citizens, the legions of contented, prosperous, white people began at last to comprehend what has been happening to this nation and how the nation could be destroyed — and resolved that such would not take place even if they have to surrender their apathy to prevent it.

— William Stringfellow



ART: The 'Cactus Curtain' Rebel

By
Judy
Stone

At 31, José Luis Cuevas is an "old master" among young Mexican artists.

He is obsessed with death, but conscious of the life beneath the nightmares; filled with hatred for Mexico and her nationalism, restlessly roaming the world, but always returning home; in revulsion against colorful romantic murals of patient Indians and disdainful of attacks on him by Mexican critics, but not impervious to them.

He is attuned to the world of Kafka, Ionesco, Beckett, and Genet, but is not unmindful of the world of Madison Avenue: mass media, midtown; art market, uptown. And this says less about him than it does about our absurd world.

There was plenty of time to absorb Cuevas' macabre grey view when I visited his apartment last January. He was late for our appointment. A maid brought coffee into the simply furnished room; Cuevas' two little daughters peered in and disappeared. The walls were covered with his work: self-portraits of himself as Rembrandt, of himself sketching at

...madhouse
in the
palace...

Coney Island, as he imagines himself a clown to his daughters; sketches for his autobiography "Cuevas por Cuevas" just published in Spanish and English; framed letters, scrawled and illustrated, that he sent home from New York, Paris, Rome, Morocco, Spain. His original illustrations for **The Worlds of Kafka and Cuevas**, reprinted in the new book. Sombre drawings of the poor, the mutilated, the insane, the funeral of Franco.

Time Magazine calls him "the golden boy"; rich collectors rush to buy his work. Who knows the investment value?

"In the world of Cuevas, the insane have already installed their madhouse in the palace; jesters have become lawgivers; buffoons establish moral standards; the blind order executions; and the deformed set themselves up as the image and likeness of the ideal," his friend, the novelist Carlos Fuentes wrote for the catalogue of Cuevas' recent Los Angeles exhibition **Horror Theater**, dedicated to Tod Browning and James Whale, "masters of the horror film."

Through a narrow slit in the catalogue cover, a pair of appraising eyes look out;



José Luis Cuevas