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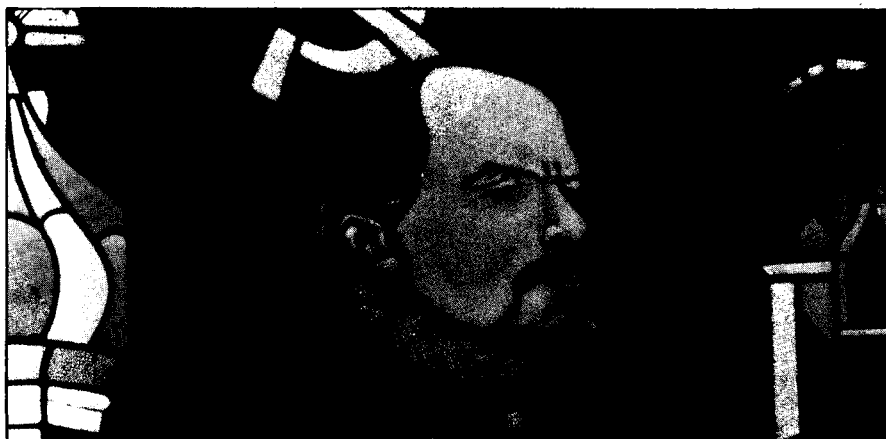


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EDITORIAL ROOMS AND MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE

1940 Bonita Avenue
Berkeley, California 94704
Telephone: (415) 849-4771

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A Letter from Camp Venceremos

Compañero—

There is the most beautiful consciousness here in Cuba. I want so badly to tell you all about every single experience, every bit of what has happened so far. Let me begin by saying life here has been a constant up, marred only by news from the States—Fred Hampton's murder, the L.A. Panther shoot-out, the usual war shit and, of course, worst of all, Doris Day's son's connection with the Sharon Tate murder house (how will the American Dream recover?).

It's very hard to convey anything of our experience on paper. The best I can come up with seems to be a page of superlatives. Maybe the only way to ever try would be to wait and use my face and my hands to explain.

The things I really want to write about are nuances and implications, but to talk about these things without first describing the norms, the backgrounds against which they occur, may not be the best way to make sense. Guess it's best to just throw a collage at you and rely on some of the essays I've begun to clarify and pull things together more.

The camp is located in Habana province near the town of Aguacate. It's rustic but not primitive. We sleep on bunks made of crushed *cogollo* (top of the cane plant). Home is a tent which houses 20 women. Sometimes the temperature gets down to 35 to 40°, so the well-dressed comrade usually wears a couple of sweatshirts, pants, gloves and two pairs of socks to bed.

The work is really an ass-breaker. We were broken in

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gradually: two hours the first day, four the next, then the full seven hours, five-and-a-half days a week. We're up at 5:30 A.M. (to the sound of *de pie* yelled over the PA system), out to the fields by 7:00 where we work until about 11:00. There is a three-and-a-half hour siesta, during which we usually talk, write, have political meetings or work meetings, do laundry, etc.; then we work again until about 6:00 P.M.

The work is rough. The late mornings and early afternoons are usually very hot, yet often the fields are muddy. The individual stalks of cane are six to ten feet tall and 3/4 inch in diameter. You should see us walking home at night—caked all over with mud and sweat. A favorite line is "Think I'll go freshen up—throw a little dirt on my face."

Physically, we're holding up okay, although periodic diarrhea storms hit the camp, along with various allergies, bad reactions to food and minor machete wounds. The only trouble I've had has been cutting into a couple of hills of red ants in the field.

Yesterday was Christmas. The Cubans have postponed all winter holidays until the end of the harvest (July), so it was a regular work day for us except that Fidel, Major Montane,

Melba Hernandez of the Central Committee and some NLF and DRV members came to cut cane with us and have dinner afterwards.

Fidel is totally fantastic—completely overwhelming. He is direct, candid, immediate, humble, brilliant, audacious. Some of us were able to have an informal rap with him and he told us wonderful stories about the fighting in the Sierra Maestra. Lots of funny incidents came rushing out. Jesus, he was so lit up—could have gone on for hours, I'm sure.

There have been two meetings with the Vietnamese so far. One took place at our camp, the other at the dedication of Ben Tre, a city of workers' homes just built which commemorates the South Vietnamese city which was leveled by the Americans. At least two other meetings are being scheduled, and a delegation of Vietnamese will be working in the fields with us during the week we arrive at our one million *arroba* quota.

The Cubans have such a strong sense of internationalism. Children we spoke to knew all about the struggle of the Vietnamese. One kid, six years old, explained to us how the victory of the people of Vietnam would be a victory for people's struggle throughout the world. All over the coun-

tryside are billboards reminding the *macheteros* that the crucial 1970 sugar harvest is dedicated to the people of Vietnam. A common poster has a drawing of a cane-cutter on one half and a Vietnamese soldier on the other. The caption reads “*Como en Vietnam.*” This idea of billboards and signs is interesting. The first thing we saw when we landed at José Martí Airport in Havana was a gigantic (four or five stories) poster of Che, and next to it, one of Ho. All over the place are magnificent posters—right where some of our most garish advertisements would be. Office buildings in Havana have huge signs reading “*Patria o Muerte—Venceremos!*” or “*Hasta la Victoria Siempre.*” Farmhouses have homemade murals of Che on their walls.

The news reports here show even Movement news service in the States to be truly for shit. There are zillions of important things happening all over the world every day that are never mentioned in our press—especially Latin American and Far Eastern news. Of course we all knew this before—but even the most skeptical of us never understood the degree to which everything is sifted, selected, distorted.

The reports here are fantastic—extensive, detailed coverage of even the smallest events in all countries. Radio broadcasts last for hours and offer not only good reportage but a lot of analysis. As a result, the general level of political consciousness here is something not to be believed. Farmers I meet on the road, who are busily picking up horseloads of cane leaves for their cows, stop to chat, and I find they know about the Panthers.

The Cuban press evidently thinks we’re really hot shit. Cartoons about us appear in every issue of *Palante*, the humor mag; *Granma*, the official party organ, covers our daily activities, as does *Juventud Rebelde*, the newspaper of the Young Communists. *Bohemia*, a weekly magazine, runs specials on us frequently, and Santiago Alvarez, the most active Cuban filmmaker, has put together a beautiful documentary about us in which we appear dedicated, earnest, clear-eyed, forthright, revolutionary, fun-loving (but intense), suffused with the light of New Socialist Man, etc.

By the way, the films of Santiago Alvarez and Umberto Solas are, without exception, the finest films I have ever seen. Some of them I think are shown in New York through Newsreel: *Cerro Pelado*, *Hanoi 13*, *79 Springtimes* (about Ho), *Manuela* and *Lucia*.

The physical beauty of Cuba keeps my mouth hanging open most of the time. When we walk to work (or ride in open trucks) in the morning, the sun is just coming up—a pink and purple sunrise—brilliant—on one side of the sky, and a pale moon on the other. There is always a complete, unobstructed dome of sky visible—360° of horizon—every inch of it beautiful, with silhouetted mountains, cane, and giant palm trees. At midday, everything looks psychedelic—all colors blink and twinkle and vibrate, the sun’s so bright. It’s very trippy—possible to see minute details at great distances. The air is so clear, so clean, that we sometimes feel drunk on it. Sunsets are almost unreal: a whole sky full of purple, gold and scarlet. In damp weather, the trees and the fields have this deep, wombby, wonderful smell. The trees at the camp are strange and enormous. A gigantic tree overhangs our open showers—it has huge, floaty leaves shaped like this [] that drift slowly down and stick to us while we wash.

The place is full of little animals: chameleons, tiny mice, piglets, puppies. I’m so happy here that I can hardly stand it. One day in the fields I looked down and found a little revolutionary frog on my boot.

Today is Sunday, January 11. We always have great Sundays, after the week’s work. This morning we visited the old Dupont mansion, which has been used as a restaurant since the revolution. What a place the slob lived in. Off the pig! When I get home, think I’ll write him a thank you note—for donating the old homestead to The People. Do you know what he once did? Built a waterworks, then sold water, by the gallon, to the poor townspeople in the surrounding area. Another practice was to parcel out little pieces of his gigantic estate to wealthy Cubans at exorbitant prices. Later in the day we went swimming and had dinner at the Internacional at Veradera. What an experience. Walking on the beach we met some technicians from East Germany, a Cuban busdriver and his family, and some typists from Havana. Before the revolution, only the fattest of fat cats could have come anywhere near the place—rooms averaged \$300 for two nights, with meals and drinks just as ludicrous. What a delight to look around and see all of us there. Christ, it had been too cold to shower for three days and most of us hadn’t even taken off our clothes for that long—there we were, smelly, in work shirts, dungarees, sweatshirts, bare feet, etc., dining in style at what had once been a bastion of pig hegemony.

Some of us are having a little trouble realigning our ideas about what constitutes bourgeois culture. When we first arrived at this hotel, for instance, we instinctively shrank from the opulence of the place—such bathhouses and mosaics, furniture, vases, chandeliers—but it’s important for us to overcome this. The people deserve the best. Nothing is bourgeois by virtue of its physical composition—things are bourgeois through the intentions surrounding their use and ownership. When railroad workers and bus drivers walk on marble floors with their kids, there’s nothing that makes those floors or chandeliers or silverware less than totally revolutionary.

The atmosphere is constantly and totally political among the Norteamericanos and Cubanos in the camp. But this kind of intense discussion somehow has become much more real, more important, people more tolerant, really listening, within the context of our witnessing the Cuban revolution. We’ve come up against some pretty heavy issues here which would take too long to go into. Struggling through these issues and living daily with some really good political people has educated me to my own liberalism.

We’ve made friends with Reynaldo Castro, the work-hero and super *machetero* otherwise known as “The Human Combine.” Our whole camp is peopled with remarkable Cubans who just happen to be absolutely typical. Anyone you sit next to at dinner can tell you stories about fighting in the Sierra Maestra at Moncada or at Playa Girón.

I’m trying to understand exactly why the political discussion that goes on here is different from that we know in the States. There is such enthusiasm and progress, involvement and general satisfaction among the people here that all of those old dreams that we had written off as being Utopian can be seen not as fantasies but as victims of our own pessimism—a whole fuckin’ country full of Marxist-Leninist



revolutionary fighters!

The warmth and optimism of the Cubans transforms everything—my first experience with non-alienating labor, for instance, was a real mind-blower. For the Cubans, everything, all work, is for the people; therefore, every task is revolutionary, is important and must be done well. I never realized the extent to which work in the U.S. is oppressive. Work there literally crushes you with its meaninglessness. We're always ready for more activity here. The slightest excuse, day or night, generates some spontaneous music, lots of it, and we all dance around, singing, noisy. When the Cubans reached their first million tons of sugar at 4:00 one morning, everyone jumped out of bed for another incredible celebration. So much energy is released when you no longer carry someone else's brick on your head. After work, know what? We play volleyball and take karate lessons. All on about five hours sleep.

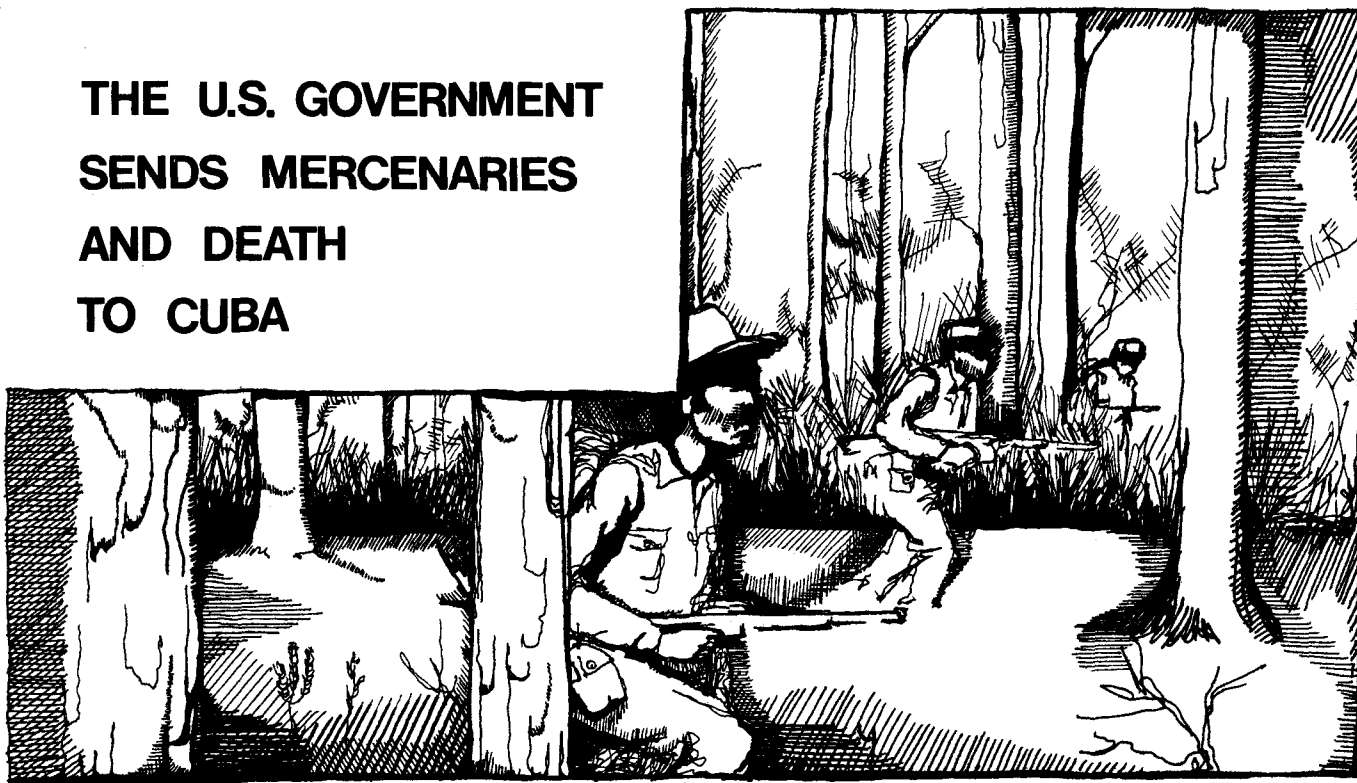
Children here are so totally great. Real people—fiercely intense, purposeful, responsible, full to the brim with the revolution. They literally *never* seem to cower—even when you first meet them. They step right up, no self-consciousness at all, with their eyes so healthy and bright, and talk to you so interestedly, directly. Kids in the U.S. seem confused, cluttered with so many pressures and fears and most of all, self-centered, by comparison.

Just as a sidelight, there are 53 flavors of ice cream in Cuba, including tomato, prune and watermelon (with the seeds).

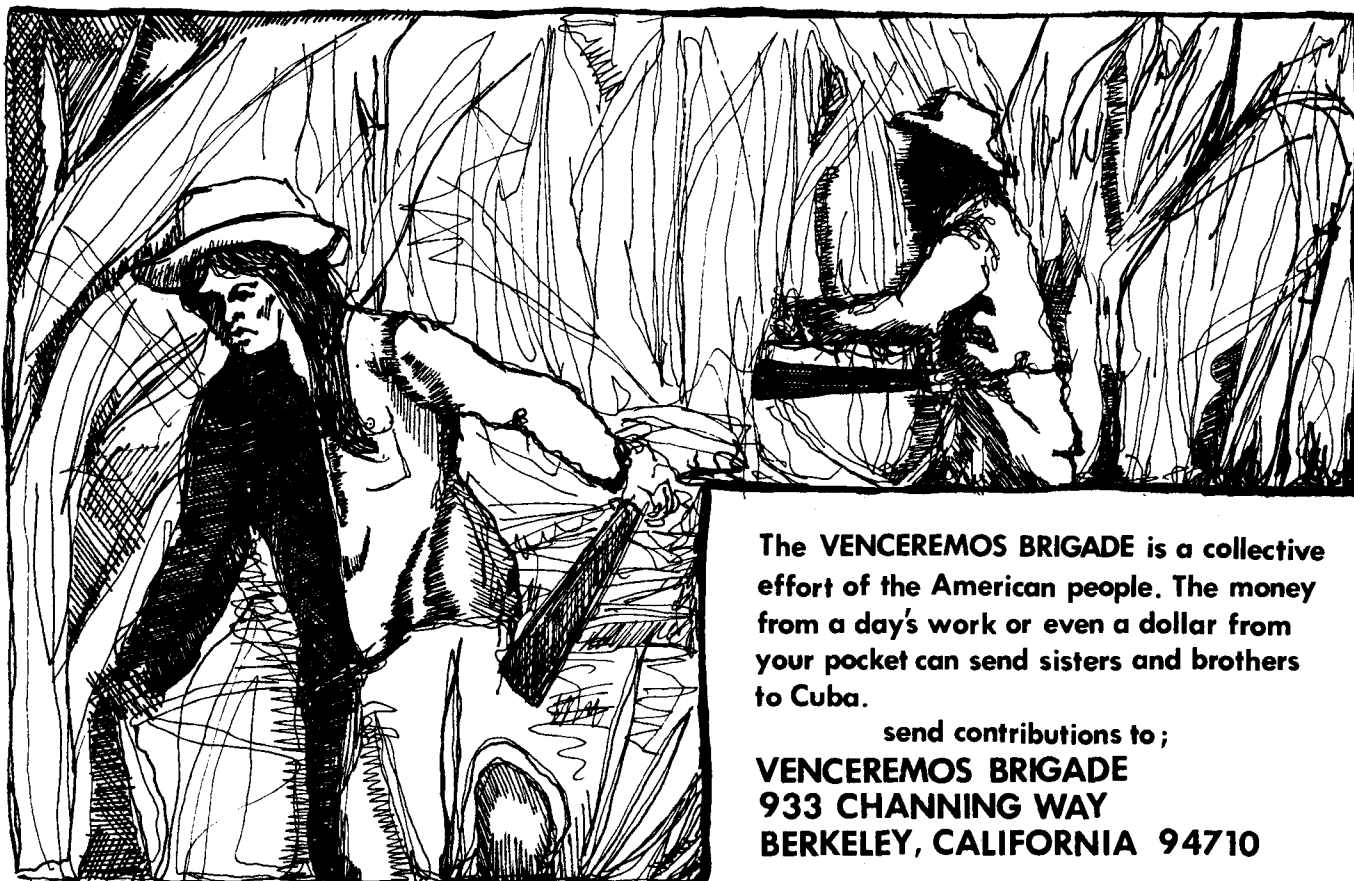
One time I was dumb enough to ask René, a Cuban, whether Moncada had been made into a museum or a memorial. "No," he said. "Out of every army barracks we made a school or a hospital."

The idea of coming home is beginning to seem awfully odd because, I think, I feel as though I *am* home. What's

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happened is that for the first time I am almost perfectly miscible with my environment. I am not involved in a struggle to maintain or protect myself—it's not even necessary to constantly be aware of positioning or defining myself vis à vis the surroundings. The peacefulness that occurs when inner and outer environments are in harmony is what really gives one a sense of being "home." That's what we feel here—even in a context of struggle. Imagine what it would be like to teach in a university where the amount of responsibility relegated to you depended upon increases in your revolutionary political consciousness, upon your being an exemplary communist, upon your progress in developing revolutionary ideas and teaching methods. Think of what it would be like to know that your best work could be presented, contributed, without your prefacing it with a defense—that it would be criticized in a comradely way, wouldn't be misread, shut up, crossed out or co-opted, and, best of all, would be for the benefit of everyone—kids of *macheteros* and shoemakers and fishermen.

The Cuban idea of sophistication is drastically different from anything we've known in our country. There is no complexity that exists for its own sake or for the sake of elitism or mystification. Things here which achieve a high level of complexity evolve in that direction because the most concrete kind of sense demands it. Yet this doesn't imply any sort of starkness, harshness or lack of aesthetic sensitivity. Rather, it means that aesthetic qualities and functional qualities are merged in a way that produces good, solid items and ideas which totally lack frivolity or pomposity. The sense of *reality* or honesty with which we often try to imbue our objects, art, political analyses, etc. (and which we can really only feign), is totally assumed, natural and taken for granted here. One never doubts the validity of any highly developed schema because implicit in its design is its motive—service to the people. Bourgeois mystification has no value or place here.

As I said before, home is a place which reflects one's inner organization. The kind of eroding friction between self and environment which produces constant self-accusation is missing here. There is time for other things—namely, awareness of one another. This must be what Fidel means by "the death of alienation."

Think of what it means not to have seen a piece of money for two months. Or to have listened to factory workers talk excitedly and proudly about the number of hours of voluntary labor they had worked (collectively).

We're so attuned to the present here. It strikes me that everything in the States works toward directing us away from the present—to be sentimentally attached to old ways which hamper change, or to be so intent on fantasizing about the future patterns of our lives (all of the bourgeois "benefits" in store for us) that looking at present affairs or generally living in the present clearly, is prohibited. We sense that "now" is not benevolent, and therefore to look at it clearly and squarely would be (and *is*) painful and self-destructive. None of this is the case in Cuba: the present is not only benevolent—the struggle is exciting, absorbing and exquisite.

I've begun to understand something about the need for possessions. Within the Movement, people are somewhat detached from them because they subscribe to the aesthetics

of functionality and because they want to define their separation from bourgeois culture. In Cuba, the basis for a non-obsessive attitude about personal possessions is entirely different. Life here has different qualities—achievable goals, safety, general feelings of being well taken care of, the knowledge that personal evaluations will not be founded on number or quality of things owned. There is no need for the people to insulate themselves from their environment by ensconcing themselves in their possessions. The same things which enable the Cubans to be a people who really live in the present are what makes this communist attitude toward possessions possible. They need neither compensation for, nor protection from, a harsh environment like the one we know.

There is no radical art in the U.S. Our art is still, by association, in the bourgeois stage. Our "radical" art comes off either as a parody of bourgeois life or as a repudiation of it. There is no comparison, for instance, between the Living Theatre and the Cuban Folklore Theatre. The one is an elite group, self-consciously anti-establishment (same for people like Godard or Oldenburg, certainly), the other is about Cuba, simply. And as for being a turn-on—Jesus, you'd be out of your fuckin' *head* over the Folklore Theatre. The group is made up of tobacco, textile and agricultural workers who put together these shows in their spare time. At the end of their performance, the entire crowd of us—performers, the directors of the camp, all the *compañeros*—surged out in a happy, dancing, hugging, silly, singing herd with this tremendous, overwhelming group energy—they with their amazing costumes—and grabbing on to everyone we stamped and yelled and improvised our way around the entire camp—people banging on all kinds of things: empty boxes, drums, spoons, bottles, anything.

A lot of work needs to be done before we can develop any understanding of the context in which experience occurs. How daily concerns like paying rent, buying food and clothing, etc., mean something for our consciousness. What the way we spend our time and the things we do mean for our lives and the way we see life. When we are not occupied with these things, what does this process mean we are ready and able to do with free time. What does revolutionary consciousness really mean in terms of the way people actually live on a daily basis.

What I'm really saying, I guess, is that we need to write a Marxist phenomenology. There's been so much to learn here—my former level of political consciousness was so feeble—what back-seat drivers we are within the Movement. We've only *played* with the idea of change.

I can imagine what you would be if you were here. You'd be so totally turned on—dying of emotional overkill from digging every single thing. Some days I almost wish I'd find some dirt under the rug to balance things out. But no—in its continuing struggle, the revolution is consistently beautiful.

Be back mid-February.

Love,

Chris

Chris Camarano wrote this letter while in the first Venceremos Brigade. She is currently organizing high school students in the New York area.

JOCKS-1 WAR-0

DESPITE THE ESCALATIONS in activism on the Berkeley campus since the Free Speech Movement in 1964, one group—the Cal jocks—has remained steadfastly isolated from the student movement. Until recently, the Athletic Department was able to proclaim proudly that theirs was the one remaining bastion of patriotism at Berkeley; and they always looked the other way when their football stars became involved in demonstrations as goon squads beating up left-wingers.

The Athletic Department staff is physically, as well as politically, removed from the campus community. On the walls of the elevator that takes you up to their offices on the fourth floor of the Cal student office building are the slogans you would expect to find: “Free Bobby”; “Riot on!”; “Judge Hoffman Is a Geritol Freak.” But when you step out onto the fourth floor, it’s like suddenly entering a 1950 movie set. The first thing you see is a line-up of photographs of formidable-looking Golden Bear Gridiron Greats. Then there are the coaches. With one or two exceptions, they are cut uniformly from the John Wayne mold—open-faced and square of jaw—and you can tell by looking at them that they pride themselves on their firm handshakes. Head football coach Ray Willsey, for instance, still believes that everyone on campus is concerned about Cal’s chances of making it to the Rose Bowl. And Paul Brechler, the athletic director, is trying hard to stop referring to Cal’s black athletes as “colored boys,” although he sometimes slips up. Talking to a group of students at the School of Education last year, Brechler responded to a question from a black graduate student about why he seemed so fond of one particular black football player. “I like John because he’s always laughing and grinning,” Brechler told the startled student, “and that’s the kind of colored boy I like.” Not surprisingly, it was before an athletic boosters’ banquet composed of this kind of man that Thomas Foran

was given a standing ovation when he attacked members of the Chicago Eight as being a “bunch of freaking fags.”

IT WAS IN THIS ATMOSPHERE that I began teaching a course in the School of Education last quarter. The course was titled, “Intercollegiate Athletics and Higher Education: A Socio-Psychological Evaluation,” and because it allowed jocks to articulate latent dissatisfaction, it quickly became something of a *cause célèbre*. Because they already regarded me as the worst kind of turncoat—a jock who had gone over to the radical cause—the Cal Athletic Department was suspicious from the beginning, especially when it became clear that an important purpose of the course was to explore the myths about athletes that the department worked full-time to create.

Approximately 400 students, over 100 of whom were athletes, had enrolled in the course by the second week. During the first lecture, I discussed my involvement in athletics and politics and told the class that although I could not be impartial myself, I would try to examine significant issues in the athletic world by opening the class to whoever cared to attend, including members of the Athletic Department. I invited guest lecturers ranging from Harry Edwards and pro football’s recently retired radical Dave Meggyesy, to conservative spokesmen in the athletic world such as Payton Jordan, 1968 U.S. Olympic track and field coach, and California State Superintendent of Public Instruction (and unsuccessful 1968 senatorial candidate) Max Rafferty, once a highly successful high school football coach who still gives speeches on the character-building value of athletics. Jordan and Rafferty, along with Cal’s football coach Ray Willsey (who said he was too busy recruiting high school football prospects), turned down my invitation, and therefore the tone of the course was given by liberal/radicals who spoke of the corruption in the world of athletes and of

by Jack Scott