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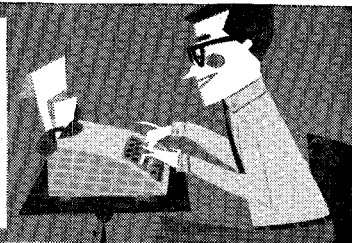
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Top of My Head



Cleopatra for Another Christmas

TO JACK GOULD, television critic, the *New York Times*. Dear Jack: Is this a private argument or can anyone get into it—this debate about your criticism of the Xerox TV special *Carol for Another Christmas*? If I may, and at the expense of appearing to be neutral, I want to say I liked both the show and your perceptive review.

While watching the show I said to myself, "I'm liking this and I know I shouldn't be because Jack Gould is going to say tomorrow it was too obvious, too on the head. And sure enough you did. And of course some viewers wrote in asking if the intent of the work was not entitled to generous appreciation because the show's espousal of the United Nations was "so much more worthwhile than the average Hollywood escapist fare."

I think, sir, you have the cart before the avaricious monster. Television consumes so much creative material that the standard must, by the very nature of the business, be mediocrity. So, since television has through all these years made mediocre viewers of us all, and if a show has an important message to convey to us all, how then shall such a program reach the millions—through the satire of O. Wilde, or the cynicism of G. B. Shaw, or the verse of T. S. Eliot, or in the oblique indictment of war by the film *Dr. Strangelove*?

I suggest, Mr. Gould, that when the Western Union operator calls with a birthday message she doesn't sing it in Swahili. Though your review was most judicial and though I agree with your statement that the worst of TV should not set the level for the best because this slide-rule thinking would soon equate fair-to-middling shows with excellence, I still feel this special show, for the medium in which it was presented, merited at the very least a mixed review—its notion applauded, hats off to its sponsor's courage, and a cheer or two for the network's offer of prime time, the ratings be hanged.

And there, I suggest again, is the nub of our problem—the ratings. The Nielsen report has been raised to a high level of esteem through the newspaper headlines (your paper is no exception). These ephemeral figures are quoted on the TV pages with the publication of each Nielsen as though there were some logic

to their mathematical gyrations or some substance to their method of compilation. Instead of calling a halt to this naïve and even Congressionally discredited manner of computing the cerebral capacity of viewers, the newspapers have annointed and proclaimed Mr. A. C. Nielsen the most profound and final critic of us all.

As I say, I agree with you that the program was "condescending and pretentious." At the same time it made its worthwhile point—the concept of involvement and charity and the necessity of dialogue among nations to prevent another war. I agree also with your method of asking yourself before you write a review: "What is the program trying to do and how well does it do it?" But there is also that other question: "Trying to do for whom?" I think Xerox answered that question in a statement in your paper before the show was presented, in which the spokesman for the company said, in effect, that since we have in this country a life of abundance let us make sure we have a country in which to live it.

Perhaps the fault of the show by critical standards was the employment of Joseph L. Mankiewicz as producer for the script by Rod Serling. Mr. Mankiewicz, you may recall, produced for us a sexpot *Cleopatra*. Teaming him with the usually singularly painstaking Mr. Serling is a combination of sex and the single man. Incidentally, one can understand Mr. Mankiewicz's involvement with the sex angle in *Cleopatra*. It was difficult to see where Liz and Dick left off and Mark and Cleo began when his two stars were so publicly entwined in the holy bonds of infidelity.

AT any rate, I liked your review and I liked the show. Sure it was obvious. But as I watched it I felt confident that its message was getting across to the millions of viewers whose selectivity has been so downgraded by the rating system that they accept only the obvious.

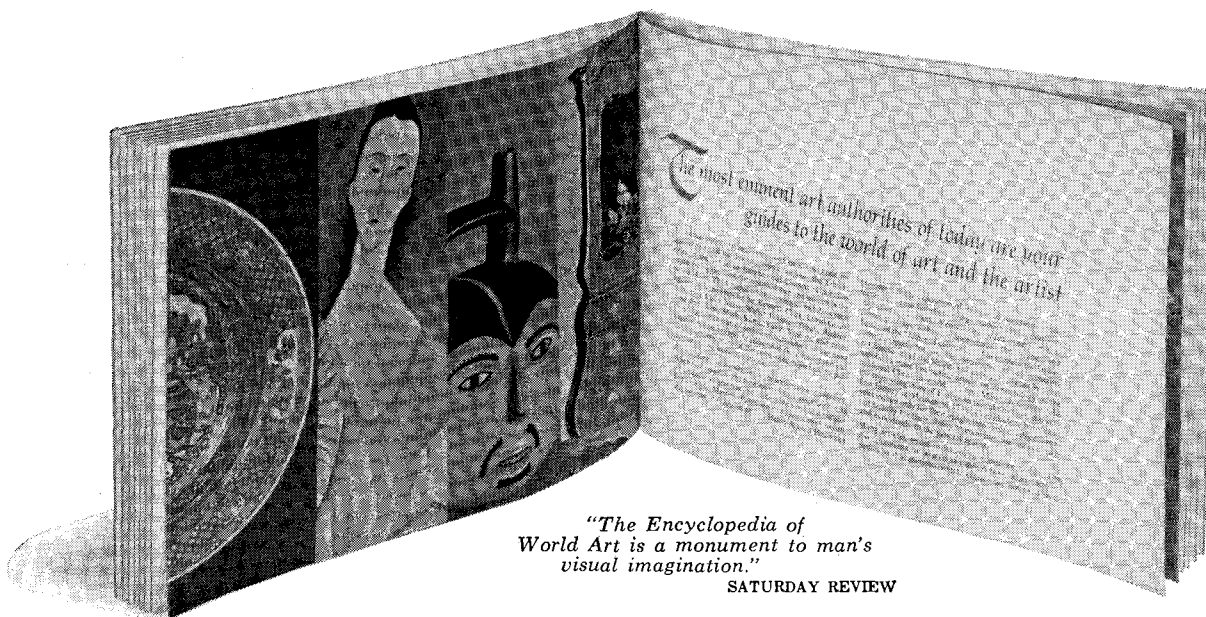
In closing may I say that I regard the *Times* as our greatest newspaper. And yet every day I find in your paper sentences explaining the obvious as if written for some time capsule: "The Democratic Congress made it difficult for President Dwight D. Eisenhower—Republican."

—GOODMAN ACE.



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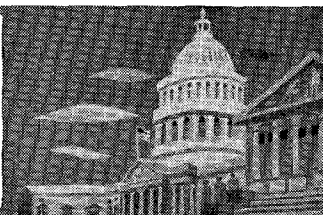
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State of Affairs



Prospectus for the Great Society

THE EMOTIONAL appeal that President Johnson's State of the Union Message has evoked is not the result of its significance as a new social or political manifesto. Nor is the slogan "the Great Society" beyond being flamboyant, one that sets minds af flutter. It is not even a great new sociological concept, since about two-thirds of the ideas it is called upon to signify are an extension of programs already in existence. Nor did the delivery convey any real drama; on the contrary, it was calm to the point of blandness, mixed with occasional flourishes that touched the heart rather than the imagination.

And yet President Johnson's "Great Society" has caused real excitement and ferment. The panorama of the social needs of this country, which he has promised to infuse with new inspiration, has caught the imagination of the nation. It was joyfully applauded by Democrats and grudgingly acknowledged as commendable by the opposition, and it has created a new intellectual stimulus that makes people look toward the future with fresh anticipation.

Why did this message have such an electrifying effect? Was it simply because the President succeeded in putting fresh and promising colors on an already well-limned landscape? The reason, I think, is its timing in history. President Kennedy's own great appeal had much to do with timing. People in the United States and practically everywhere else had got tired of old leaders and they welcomed with relief the advent of an attractive, intelligent, youthful man. In President Johnson's case he has caught the moment when Americans have become weary, even disillusioned or, as he put it, "restless" with the continued accent on the global responsibilities of the United States and the burdens involved. They have come to feel that for too long now they have been playing nanny to everybody except themselves and they think the time has come not to turn isolationist, for that is an outdated concept, but to focus attention on America's internal needs.

The costs and strains of the cold war have tended for some time to delay greater attention to these overdue social improvements, and now President Johnson is taking timely advantage of the current *belle époque* of affluence at

home and relative stability abroad to do something about it. He is also acting at a moment when the historic shift from a rural to an urban society is being recognized and implemented in various state legislatures, when therefore his own new stress on urban problems is in tune with the times.

The term "Great Society" was first used by the peasants in their revolt against Richard III. President Johnson by origin and upbringing was an agrarian populist but his rural orientation began to shift in the New Deal and today he is about to become the symbol of the shift in emphasis from the agrarian to the urban. Once his great interest was the development of farm and land resources. Now he has become the man who is giving a powerful new momentum to the improvement of urban life.

The New Deal, which shaped Johnson's politics and outlook, was a response to the Depression. It was an emergency plan to cope with unemployment, the need for shelter, the entire breakdown of the American economy. The "Great Society," on the other hand, is the result of economic affluence. It deals with quality rather than quantity—though in the end it may do both. It is in many ways a response to the ferment created over the last ten years or so by many intellectuals who pointed up the deficiencies of American society: men like John Kenneth Galbraith, the historian; James B. Conant, the educator; Michael Harrington, who put the spotlight on poverty; Lewis Mumford, who campaigned for greater beauty and health in the cities—and others who helped to generate new thought and to articulate the inadequacies of contemporary American society. They pleaded for the furthering of technological progress and science, not only to build more wealth and military power but to humanize the industrial order. They brought into the open the problems of coping with bigness, whether of industry, trade unions, or government, and of how to inject more inspiration, more beauty, more decency, more security into the life of the individual.

The theme of the President's State of the Union Message is also indicative of another transition. He no longer sees the crucial sociological problems chiefly in terms of conflict between races or reli-

gions or classes or between the wealthy and the poor, but as problems concerning how to make city life tolerable, how to improve the quality of education, how to bring order into planning on the federal, state, or city level, how to promote the arts.

Inevitably, when government takes the lead—and no state or institution, really, can organize such a broad program—it is also bound to assume a greater role in American life. The pace of the program at this stage is difficult to assess: too little is known about its costs. Mr. Johnson likes what could be called the "beachhead" method. He begins with a relatively small amount, partly to allow Congress to swallow it without getting indigestion and partly to see how it will succeed as a pilot program. It is probably for these same reasons that the President has directed that any assessments of the long-term costs of programs obviously designed to reach far into the future either be kept under lock and key or simply not be attempted at all.

The President used the "beachhead" method in launching the "war against poverty" last year. He started it with a modest budget and now, in the second year, he has doubled it. It will be roughly equal to half the total foreign aid program.

HOW far the relatively short and perfunctory survey of the foreign scene, on the other hand, indicates a detachment from foreign affairs, a desire to reduce American commitments overseas, is difficult to judge. His aides have been at pains to stress that this relative brevity was due only to the President's wish not to make the message too long. But whatever the truth, the fact is that his ideas for the internal evolution of the United States occupied about eight-tenths of the speech.

However strong the President's desire for reducing the commitments of the United States may be, he is also learning how difficult it is. He seriously considered, for example, the withdrawal of one division from Korea in order to save money and manpower, but after careful examination he agreed that with so much uncertainty in the Far East, such a move could have catastrophic repercussions.

It is also understandable that at a time when the President wants to direct public attention to the internal needs of the United States, the tendency is to play down the various crises around the world. He likes to dampen these fires, while President Kennedy tended to give them drama. There are, of course, risks in this approach if the realities are concealed. But if, as is now apparently the President's intention, he will hold public press conferences more regularly and if