

THE DEATH COMMITTEE

by Noah Gordon

McGraw-Hill, 361 pp., \$6.95

IF NOAH GORDON'S FIRST NOVEL, *The Rabbi*, left us uncertain about where the author was heading, his second one makes all clear. Place Mr. Gordon's name in dollar signs right up there beside the likes of Arthur Hailey and Allen Drury.

The Death Committee could serve as a prototype for the big, fat best-seller. It is written with professional polish, peopled with shallow, predictable and ultimately admirable heroes and heroines, and it portrays its milieu, a Boston general hospital, with the meticulous attention to detail that characterizes such novels.

Adam Silverstone is the brilliant, likable Jewish-Italian who wants to make big money in surgery but discovers, in his romance with a Radcliffe girl who may or may not be a hypochondriac (because of her bitter, broken-home background), that dedication is everything. Spurgeon Robinson, the black intern who feels he has betrayed his race by trying to become a professional man, falls in love with a twenty-four-

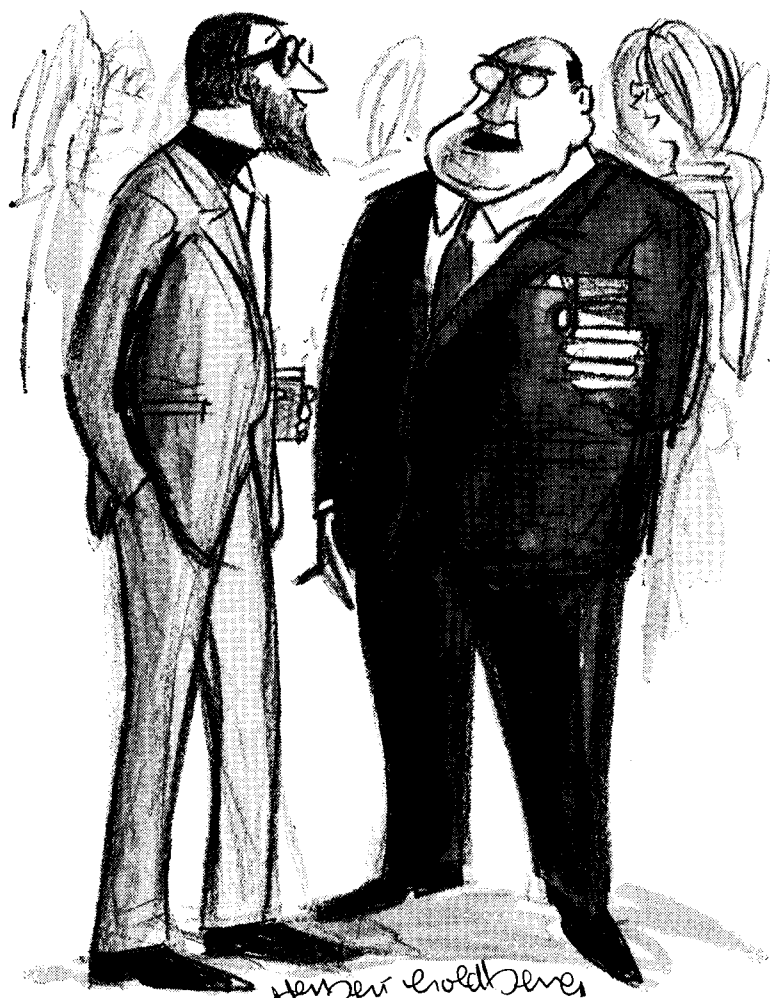
year-old Black Muslim-oriented virgin with Uncle Tom parents. Rafael Meomartino, scion of pre-Castro Cuban gentry, vies with Silverstone for a coming vacancy as chief of surgery and struggles to cope with his nymphomaniac wife. Dr. Harland Longworth, the chief of staff, is dying of kidney disease. And so on.

As soon as the characters and their problems are introduced, you know how they will be resolved. Even the "Death Committee" of the title fails to fulfill its dramatic promise: it's simply the regular staff conference to fix blame, if any, in patients' deaths, and Mr. Gordon leaves it pretty much at that.

Although this is not a bad book (in fact, what Mr. Gordon does he does extremely well), it does not advance beyond the defunct and gratefully forgotten Ben Casey. It's just another well-researched kill-time book that offers a semblance of a special side of life but fails to present either real life or real people.

Joseph Haas

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"Now that you've quoted Sartre, how about listening to some words from Mellon, Frick, and William Buckley?"

Urban Affairs

THE ECONOMY OF CITIES

by Jane Jacobs

Random House, 268 pp., \$5.95

TEN YEARS AGO official faith in the urban renewal program was flourishing. The cities' salvation apparently lay in hacking out huge chunks of decaying urban tissue and grafting high-rise luxury apartments, office towers, parking garages, public housing projects, cultural centers, and freeways into the gaping wounds. In 1961 along came Jane Jacobs's first book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a literary nuclear warhead that exploded on the planners. Mrs. Jacobs compared their methods with medical practice in the mid-nineteenth century, when doctors still drained their patients' blood to purge the evil humors causing disease. Like them, modern urban planners were mutilating cities and draining them of the potential for life. The consequent advent of more sensitive approaches to public housing and urban renewal is largely attributable to Mrs. Jacobs's concept of the city as a delicate, complex organism that can't survive the amputations performed by planners ignorant of its vital processes.

Having vanquished the planners, Mrs. Jacobs now tackles the anthropologists and economists in her second book, *The Economy of Cities*. Though only half as long as its predecessor, this work has more ambitious purposes: to explain the processes through which city economies prosper and expand and to trace the origin of cities in man's evolution. Like George Bernard Shaw attacking the Victorians, Mrs. Jacobs assails the defenders of the traditional "Dogma of Agricultural Primacy"—the doctrine that man was a farmer and villager before he became a city-dweller and that the earliest urban economy was a superstructure built on a rural, agricultural foundation.

According to Mrs. Jacobs's theory, the first cities were settled by hunters before the development of agriculture. Then, as now, the urban economy was the foundation of the rural economy; the earliest cities, built in the Neolithic era, established farm villages as specialized colonies (the first company towns) to handle part of the cities' work. Agriculture and animal husbandry developed in the city and moved out to the farm.

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Rock-Folk-Protest Scene

LONG TIME COMING AND A LONG TIME GONE

by **Richard Fariña**

Random House, 271 pp., \$4.95

THE AGE OF ROCK

edited by **Jonathan Eisen**

Random House, 388 pp., \$6.95. Paperback, \$1.95

RICHARD FARINA may still be a hero in the eyes of some youth cultists, but heroes wear out so fast these days that it is a little risky to say who is in the running at any given moment. Fariña certainly rates a place, however; born in Brooklyn to Cuban and Irish parents, he rejected middle-class values with the kind of dash that most Statesside Zorbas only dream about. He dropped out of Cornell and went to live in London and Paris; he made several trips to Cuba, presumably to take part in Castro's revolution; he married Joan Baez's sister, Mimi, with whom he made three first-rate recordings of his own folk songs; finally, two days after the publication of his first book, he died in a motorcycle accident at the age of twenty-nine.

His was an intensely colorful and eclectic life while it lasted, a continual assertion of individuality and creative strength. Fariña was so aggressively himself, in fact, that he probably had too much "ego" for most of today's

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teeny-boppers; he was more tuned in to the beat generation than to the McLuhanized "post-literates" who succeeded them, for, above everything else, he was relentlessly articulate.

The Fariñas' three records have earned them a place in the annals of folk-protest, at any rate, and Fariña's novel, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*, which established him as the Ginger Man of the college set, is still selling. His death created a large following of posthumous adorers similar to those who latched on to the memory of James Dean. *Long Time Coming and a Long Time Gone* is a book for the adorers, a loose collection of short stories, song lyrics, poems, and magazine articles, with an introduction by Joan Baez and casual notes by Mimi Fariña. Most of the pieces originally appeared in *Mademoiselle*, *Playboy*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Transatlantic Review*; they were not planned as parts of a book.

Long Time Coming and a Long Time Gone is haunted by a paradox. On the one hand, it displays an almost incredible mastery of moods and styles; on the other, it creates an impression of enormous talent lost in a blur of conflicting identities. In the title story Fariña speaks in the voice of a Southern poor white. Later on he becomes Irish, with strong overtones of Dylan Thomas; then somber Cuban, with echoes of Hemingway at his most pompous, and finally slick New York, in a glossy magazine piece about an encounter with some Birchers at a country fair. A few general themes—death, romance, lurking demons, socialism, the decline and fall of Amer-

ica—remind us that all the pieces were written by the same person, but Mimi's observation that "he was so mystical that I still don't know what to think" can only strike a sympathetic chord. Fariña was a brilliant posturer and a vibrant personality, yet the best work surviving him is his songs. One realizes after reading this book that as a writer of prose he never found a voice of his own.

One of the chapters in *Long Time Coming and a Long Time Gone*, a tribute to Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, is reprinted in Jonathan Eisen's *The Age of Rock*, a collection of thirty-eight short pieces that will tell anyone who wants to know where it's at just where it is at, much better than the saga of Richard Fariña, which is, after all, only part of the story. Interestingly, however, *The Age of Rock* is dedicated to Fariña's memory, a reflection of the fact that Fariña was a vital part of the rock-folk-protest scene for several years and that the anthology is much closer to Fariña's own literary point of view than its title would suggest.

The Age of Rock is not a book for teeny-boppers, either. It is a genuinely witty assemblage of opinions, interviews, journalistic memoirs, sociological analyses, and literary exegeses. The pieces trace rock from its earliest origins in rhythm and blues and country music to the most sophisticated electronic studio recordings of the moment, with major emphasis on such personalities as the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Dylan, the Mothers of Invention, Janis Joplin, and James Brown.

The sources of these articles range from essentially left-wing political periodicals—*Partisan Review*, *Studies on the Left*—to such sybaritic fantasies as the ill-fated *Cheetah*. Basically, however, the emphasis is on sound critical thinking, a good deal of it anything but devotional (Robert Christgau's imperially condescending put-down of rock lyrics, for example). Most of the essays speak in a well-modulated voice of reason with a touch of hip, though at times high (or maybe camp) seriousness creeps in, as in Richard Meltzer's "The Aesthetic of Rock":

Rock has implicitly operated on this infinitude of random, eclectic evolutionary pathways, something merely suggested by Thomas Pynchon in his *V*. My categories "ponytail rock" (the group the Poni-Tails; "What Is Love?" which describes this emotion as "five feet of heaven with a ponytail"; "Chantilly Lace," with its reference to the hairpiece as a criterion of socio-sexual adequacy), "fear-of-loss-of-be-
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—Courtesy Vanguard Records.

Richard and Mimi Fariña—"a symbol of today's youth cult in its early stages."