

Village," the same fifteen-year-old girls, bra-less and in college T-shirts, the same groups gathered around lone guitar players who struggle with the same two or three chords. The filth will remain. In a year or so the Fillmore will be forgotten; modernity forgets quickly and completely, for neomania demands the new. The dabbler in nostalgia will, of course, continue to prowl the back issues of the Village

Voice, but not everyone finds that type of boredom palatable.

They were all at the Fillmore East at one time or another—Janis Joplin, Elton John, Jimmi Hendrix, the big rock groups. While it lasted it had its say, but it could not, in effect, cope with the time. That is a damning commentary. Who knows who is sadder for it? I'm afraid that is the extent of my reaction to the end of the Fillmore East. □

The Counter-Thinker

First Things, Last Things

By Eric Hoffer
Harper, \$4.95

A few years ago a woman from California wrote one of those songs that just happen to catch on. It became a commercial success, was listened to and talked about for a while and then died a natural death from over-exposure. The song told us of "ticky-tacky" houses inhabited by "ticky-tacky" people. The message was clear: we live in a nation which is being smothered by conformity. Our conformist suburban "ticky-tacky" housing developments reflect the personalities of their robot-like inhabitants and the conformist spirit of the nation.

It so happened that at the time I was working as a meter-reader for a gas and electric company in a large eastern city. My job took me to many types of dwellings, from six-family walk-ups to enormous housing developments, and the more homes I saw, the more I became convinced that the song was wrong. The housing developments may have a look alike from the outside, but the inside of each development home was different, reflecting the particular taste (or, if you wanted to get nasty about it, lack of taste) of the owner. Far from being proof of conformity, the mass-produced homes of the developments were proof of the incredible diversity of American life. Yet day after day I would hear that song and, what was worse, would listen to people tell me how accurate the song was in exposing the outrageous conformity of our national life.

If I had not had the opportunity as a meter-reader to see the reality of the housing-development, I would perhaps have gone along, willy-nilly, with the intellectual attitude represented by the song, for at that time the "conformity" thesis was the fashionable idea without which no cocktail party could be a success. The intellectuals who shape our opinions told us we were conformists and what could be better proof of our conformity than our mass-produced homes, each indistinguishable from the other? The only thing wrong with that idea was that it wasn't true and it was most demonstrably untrue precisely where the intellectuals told us it was most true, i.e., in the Levittowns and other developments. If you simply went to the developments and looked at the seemingly identical houses, you couldn't help but notice that each house was different because the people who lived in the houses were different.

When I raised this point with my intellectual betters, I was inevitably told

that no matter what I had seen with my own eyes, no matter how much evidence of diversity I saw every day as a meter-reader, no matter how much empirical evidence piled up to disprove the fashionable doctrine—the doctrine was right. Americans were conformists; proof that no matter what I had seen with my and, by God, let's have an end to quibbling! Were there not dozens, nay, scores of books laboriously fashioned by professors and other holy men which proved we were conformists?

The "ticky-tacky" song craze finally ended but the intellectual malady it represented lingers on. The gap between the fashionable ideas of the intellectual and the realities of America life has, if anything, widened. All the more reason to be grateful for the existence of Eric Hoffer, the major thrust of whose career from *The True Believers* to *First Things, Last Things* might be summed up in the phrase, "a lot of what intellectuals know just ain't true."

Hoffer is the intellectual counter-puncher *par excellence*. While the establishmentarian intellectuals think, he counter-thinks, throwing aphorisms like jabs, blinding them with his intellectual foot-work and, all in all, having a good time for himself. It is as if a bar-room brawler got in the ring with a professional boxer and proceeded to beat the hell out of him.

Oddly enough, for a few years he had a certain vogue among the intellectuals. His appearances on CBS with Eric Sevaried were immensely popular. But the Hoffer fad soon ended when it was discovered that he had all the wrong (i.e. unorthodox) ideas on race relations, the war and LBJ. Most unforgivable of all, to card-carrying literati, he insisted on publicly exposing his love for the United States of America.

It became all too much for the potentates of the media and the *Gauleiters* of the intellectual magazines. Here, after all, was the man they had been looking for: the proletarian intellectual, the natural man who read Montaigne, Roosevelt's common man, but one who knew big words, egalitarianism incarnate. And, to their surprise, he turned out to have all the wrong ideas. Instead of worshipping black militants he said they should stop yapping and start working; instead of hating the racist hard-hats, he said they were more deserving of praise than their intellectual masters; instead of humbly paying

obedience to the power-hungry intellectual types like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (who had highly praised *The True Believers*), he ridiculed the very idea that intellectuals should have a leading role in governing our society. According to the Liberal theory, any self-instructed, formally untutored longshoreman who showed intellectual brilliance would fit in nicely, thank you, among the pages of the *New Republic*. But as always, reality played a trick on the certified public intellectuals and Hoffer proved to be a maverick. The intellectuals dropped Hoffer and continued their search for a proletarian intellectual, this time one who would play by the rules.

And what of Hoffer? He continues on his merry way, saying things like the following:

"The cores of our cities are packed with people who lack the enterprise to take advantage of opportunities, and the character to resist temptation."

"The trouble is not chiefly that our universities are unfit for students but that many present-day students are unfit for universities."

"Crime in the streets and insolence on the campus are sick forms of adolescent self-assertion."

"The common people of Europe eloped with history to America and have lived in common-law marriage with it, unhallowed by the incantations of men of words... The intellectuals and the young, booted and spurred, feel themselves born to ride us."

"Indeed, the uniqueness of modern America derives in no small part from the fact that America has kept intellectuals away from power and paid little attention to their political views."

"It seems that every time a millionaire opens his mouth nowadays he confesses the sins of our society in public. Now it so happens that the rich do indeed have a lot to feel guilty about. They live in exclusive neighborhoods, send their children to private schools, and use every loophole to avoid paying taxes. But what they confess in public are not their private sins but the sins of society, the sins of the rest of us, and it is our breasts they are beating into a pulp."

Hoffer is, obviously, one of a kind. He has a way of saying obviously sensible things in an outrageous way. Since most of our anointed thinkers have made their careers saying outrageously silly things in an obvious way, Hoffer is a man to be revered. Admittedly there are times when, to use his own words, he has "an old man's tendency to snort at the self-important young," and other times when he lets his righteous anger dictate his thoughts. In running from the folly of American intellectuals he seems to me at times to swing too violently to the other side and overpraise working people, seeing in their civic virtues even they wouldn't claim to possess. At times, his attacks on intellectuals often seem to border on attacks on intellectuality itself. But these are quibbles. Hoffer has courageously refused

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The Bootblack Stand



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, has just completed a penetrating study of the last Congolese election. Published in August, it focuses on the unique position of minority groups in the Congolese electoral process; it can be purchased in all bookstores. It is titled *Escape! A New Demand Response System*. Now, the distinguished Dr. Plunkitt has agreed to, through this column, advise American statesmen in this time of troubles. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

After a newspaper story disclosed my belief that I had communicated with my dead brother I felt it best that I withdraw as a candidate for the Democratic

Presidential nomination. Do you think this was a prudent course?

Cordially,

Harold E. Hughes, Senator

Dear Senator Hughes:

Between you, Senator Gravel, Senator McGovern and Senator Socrates from Arkansas there is never a dull moment under the big dome, is there? Yes, indeed you made the right decision. Now can we get your brother to run?

— GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

I am a tall, handsome mayor who will be fifty in November. I have quit the Republican party and become a Democrat to fight for new national leadership — mine. In a sense, this step recognizes the failure of twenty active years in progressive Republican politics. In another sense it represents a new decision for new national leadership — by me. In still another sense it represents my consuming desire to live in the inner city — mainly the inner city of Washington, D.C. I feel that the Nixon administration has shown indifference to the plight of the poor, and failed to respond to the problems of unemployment, housing, hospitals, crime, poverty and race polarization. Also someone is listening to my phone. I shall work as a Democrat without abandoning my personal independence. My problem is what shall I do?

Very truly yours,
John V. Lindsay

— GWP

counter thinker

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to listen to the "ticky-tacky" songs of the intellectuals; he continues to sing his own song and for that we owe him thanks and praise.

One final note: In Calvin Tomkins' useful little books, *Eric Hoffer*. Eric Sevaried confesses that he had "shied away" from Hoffer's books for years "because Eisenhower had publicly praised one of them." Say it ain't so, Sevaried!

John Avey is a mortician and soldier of fortune working in Washington, D. C. He has served several Presidents and his favorite hobby is skindiving.

John Avey

A Hair in My Caviar

Boss: *Richard J. Daley of Chicago*

By Mike Royko
E.P. Dutton & Co., \$5.95

For if experience teaches us anything at all it teaches us this: that a good politician, under democracy, is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar.

H.L. Mencken

Prejudices, 1919

Royko is irreverent, perhaps as irreverent as Mencken, and that's what makes him fun to read.

What those who value their liberty can share with the liberal Royko is the presumption that all politicians are scoundrels. Royko accepts nothing from politicians on face value and has an unerring instinct for the jugular. Both of these are attributes of a good reporter.

Unfortunately, Royko's liberal bias shows; he seldom uses his scalpel against the left. His book must be read with this in mind.

Boss: *Richard J. Daley of Chicago*, is based on fact and inference. Royko has tried to interview Daley but was rebuffed, to no one's surprise. His book, therefore, is not an inside behind-the-scenes story, but a biography written by a pretty narrow-minded liberal who happens to be a superb writer.

Although it contains inaccuracies, distortions and some uncalled for blows below the belt, it is a fascinating story of a lower-class politician who has become one of the most powerful men in America.

When liberals read *Boss*, they alternately rub their hands in glee as Royko skewers the old-fashioned, right-wing mayor and shriek in horror as Daley is shown stomping all over their pet liberal projects. For example: "His urban renewal program amounted to a stack full of charts and blueprints. Rats gnawed on black infant's feet, while money was used to build new police stations around the corner. The Daley years were underway with the values that would never change: things, concrete, glass, steel, downtown, business profit. Then if there's anything left, maybe something for the human being."

Obvious distortion, but the point is not without its kernel of truth.

Dear Mr. Lindsay:

My, what a springtly letter you pen! Run for the Presidency of the United States of America; the progress you have brought to New York convinces me that the White House is the only place for you (you see, I too live in New York).

Also I can see from your letter and from the import of your August announcement that you have grasped the real issue at stake in the coming election — hospitals. Hit hard on the hospital issue; it is a natural. Our hospitals are a disgrace, why, there are Americans dying in them every day. Also after reading mountains of your elegant public utterances I suggest you capitalize on your repute as an intellectual. Intellectuality, yes that is the style for you. We have not had a man of your wisdom and erudition in the White House since President Grant. Never be seen without a copy of the *New York Review of Books*, pronounce either as though it were spelled eye-ther and grow bushy nose hair. Involve yourself in some humane endeavor — perhaps a national movement to free Richard Speck. While campaigning in northern California wear your wife's clothes. Make frequent trips to Algeria. Gad, your campaign whets my appetite for a good laugh. I shall direct the whole gorgeous venture. Give me an office in Gracie Mansion and stay off the hard stuff.

But Royko, who grew up in Chicago's streets, is not above hitting below the belt: "Since childhood he has attended daily mass, as his mother did before him ... Regardless of what he may do in the afternoon, and to whom, he will always pray in the morning."

For the most part, what Royko says about Daley is probably true. But while a liberal will look at the picture Royko paints and say, "What a horrible mayor ... Look how he has been building the city at the expense of the poor," the conservative will see a man who has run the city with an iron hand, but run it well. Although his accomplishments — Chicago's strong financial base, its soaring building rate, and its revival of the central business district — are not praised in Royko's book, most of them are given at least backhanded recognition:

"It (the city campus of the University of Illinois) wasn't easy to build because thousands of families in the city's oldest Italian neighborhood had to be uprooted and their homes and churches torn down. They cried that they were betrayed because they had been promised they would stay. But he built it."

If Royko's liberal bias is kept in mind, *Boss* can be read to shed light on Daley as mayor and boss of the last big city political machine.

Such light is valuable. Few of us labor under the illusion that our politicians are saints or angels. Any book aimed at yanking lefty politicians off their pedestals cannot be anything but beneficial as long as it serves to remind us that our liberty hangs by a tenuous thread even when good rulers are in power.

Frank W. Blatchford III