

marginalia

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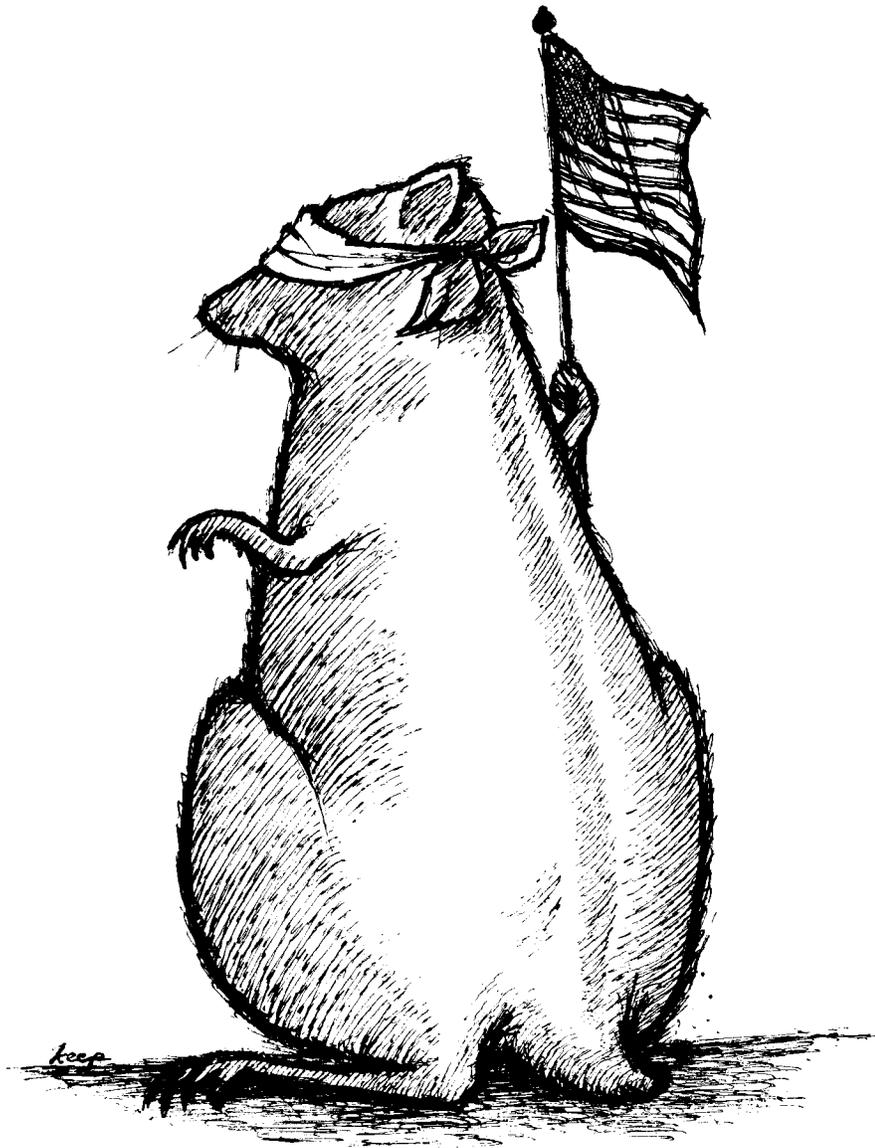
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THEATRE

ET CETERA

EDITORIAL:

The Year of the Lemming?



The period of mourning is over, the ambivalent interregnum is past; we now have a President. In that awkward year when he was neither president nor vice-president, Lyndon Johnson had to delicately finger the reins of authority that were still blood-stained by the awesome fratricide that took place in Dallas. As President pro-tem, Lyndon Johnson had to honor both a memory and a foreshortened adventure into the new frontier. As a result, no one could say where John Kennedy left off and where Lyndon Johnson began.

But this is done with now. We have a President. **Quo Vadis?**

Mr. Johnson won the presidency so handily that he runs the risk of thinking he has achieved an overwhelming victory over all those forces that would turn the clock back to a mythical past, and that he can now forge an American future in terms of what he describes as the Great Society. However, neither the President, nor the majority of Americans must dismiss those scores of millions who are profoundly disturbed by recent history. Indeed, they may be the prophets of our day.

Neither, however, can the President take as a mandate that which is not a mandate. This nation—indeed, the world—will suffer disaster if the President assumes that the American people, by their vote, are telling him, “Give us more of the same.”

We cannot have more of the same. This nation, this society, cannot perpetuate habits of thought that say “more money should be spent on education,” when the whole educational system is founded on values that have brought about the very crisis we are in. The American child is raised on an intellectual diet of competitiveness, of rewards and punishments, of beating out the other person, of chauvinism, and most wrongly, of the primacy of **things**. Do well in school to get a good job to make good money to buy good things to have the good life. Education must be practical; it must result in the production of things that will preserve the American way of life; i.e., a treadmill economy that must go faster and faster merely to stay alive.

The President cannot “give us more of

"... the lemming mentality that marches us to the sea of oblivion . . ."

the same" when it comes to defense (?) systems that already exceed the lusts of the most aggressive militarist. We cannot have a continuation of the lemming mentality that marches us all to the atomic sea of oblivion. Somehow we must rethink this problem and emerge from our suicidal state.

We cannot have "more of the same," more dollars and more intricate programs that are currently parading as a War on Poverty. Like the Chinese water torture, this dropping of soft dollar bills on the foreheads of up to 50,000,000 Americans will only end in a crushing agony of heightened want and increased despair among the vast majority of the truly poor. The War on Poverty is founded upon the Establishment philosophy of a new department in the old bureaucracy for a new and revolutionary action. The War on Poverty merely smoothes out exposed splinters on the bottom third of the great middle class; it doesn't touch the untouchables.

Vietnam will become another Algeria, with escalating barbarism, if we continue with "more of the same." Are we to hurl more napalm bombs on more women and children? Are we to continue our bombings in Laos? If Laos, why not North Vietnam and even Red China? If we decamp, we run the risk of a Communist take over, but as far as the Vietnamese people are concerned, one tyrant is the same as another—merely standing on their necks with different boots. But we are hung up on Vietnam; our national pride won't let us swerve off a ruinous course. We will be immoral rather than lose face.

Negro Americans have been receiving "more of the same" for centuries. A flow of new laws, sporadic arrests with scarcely a conviction, and tedious conferences will never resolve this most basic problem flaying the national conscience. We must cease viewing pigmented citizens as "the Negroes," we must begin to realize they are human beings. If Mr. Johnson fails to lead a resolution of the crisis in human terms, and instead follows the practice of politically expedient maneuvers more designed to placate white Americans than to grant justice to 20,000,000 Negro Americans, he will discover that what should be the American dream will remain the American nightmare. This is not to insist that morality can be legislated, but rather that behavior **must** be legislated, that laws, some of which have been in existence for a century, be enforced and that those institutions, North and South, that crucify Negro Americans,

"... the American Nightmare . . ."

"... a moral politics is needed . . ."

"We have inverted our hierarchy of values . . ."

be forthrightly and immediately done away with.

It is fatuous to talk of a Civil Rights Law that will grant public accommodations, when people do not have the money for either a meal or a lodging. It is to the heart of the matter that we must all penetrate: the segregation of Negro Americans into ghettos with all the psychological, social, intellectual, and vocational consequences that stem from this prime fact of segregation.

The ultimate issue is moral, but if politics is the extension of morality, then a moral politics is needed. Neither Negro Americans nor the conscience of man can tolerate more of the same.

These areas of vital national and international concern—education, thermonuclear war, poverty, Vietnam, racism, to mention the most obvious and pressing—call for solutions, but not in terms of "more of the same." If the President pursues courses that have been pursued before, he will preside over the dissolution of a nation.

What is needed is a revolution in the concept of man. Instead of thinking of segments of society—the segment that is poor, the segment that is Negro, the segment that is uneducated—we must think of the individual human being who is poor, persecuted, uneducated. Instead of thinking of "national" or "international" objectives that must be obtained or defended, we must think of the needs of people. We have inverted our hierarchy of values, with everything subordinated first to international considerations, then national objectives, regional designs, state requirements, county ambitions, city programs, before we can finally even begin to notice that underpinning all of this, and ultimately carrying the burden of all that is placed on him, is the figure of man.

Man may perish in order that systems might flourish.

This is a form of insanity; man who should be the beneficiary of institutions, becomes instead the victim of those very institutions. Rather than dominate systems, man becomes dominated by them.

This comes about because of our philosophical inheritance. Under the influence of scholasticism, (with its origins in Hellenic thought), an "essential" man was posited—a man who was no more than an abstract theory bearing no relation whatsoever to real man. It is as if a committee had come into being to draft an ideal creature—totally imaginary—and then formulated a complex system of existence for this theoretical creature. As a

consequence, when one observes living man, one observes a foreign substance who doesn't fit into the formula, thereby allowing whatever social or political systems that are momentarily operating to take over the center of the stage. The system works, with man distorted to fit within its rigid framework.

What is needed is a displacement of this grotesque "essential" philosophy that ignores the individual with an "existential" philosophy that sees man in terms of time and place. We must stop concentrating on institutions and systems and begin to see man the individual. We must stop knowing **about** the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised. We must begin to know **this** man in the slums who cannot find a job to support his family, **this** 75-year-old widow who dies slowly in some back room, alone and unloved, **this** Negro who cannot vote in Jackson, Mississippi.

And once we have discovered man, then we can proceed to construct new systems and institutions that will have at their heart man himself. These systems and institutions will become extensions of man whose fulfillment should be the purpose for which everything else exists. We must do away with the primacy of such abstractions as "society," "public interests," "private enterprise," or "communism," and instead have a new primacy—the individual human being. This is essential because it is he who suffers from disease, poverty, and ignorance. It is he who perishes in war. Only when individual man becomes the focus of our attention and concern can we do anything for him.

Systems may perish in order that man might flourish.

Therefore, when Mr. Johnson contemplates the problems facing us, he mustn't think of them as national, international or even regional problems, he must view them as human problems. This will create an urgency for solution, for no man can witness the suffering of another **man** and remain unmoved. Abstractions never suffer; only man. If this comes about, programs, policies, and all the rest will flow easily; if not we all are in mortal danger.

Mr. Johnson, as President, must lead us, not to the sea, but to the heights. Upon his leadership much depends. But we cannot place the weight of the world on the back of one man; we must all share in this vital revolution. We can all begin by being a little bit more human; we can begin at the beginning, with ourselves.

"... proceed to construct new systems institutions ..."

two reasons to vote no on 14

(the third is your conscience)



POLITICS:

In California They Vote 'Yes' on 'No'

Edward W. McHugh worked for the committee to defeat Proposition 14. In this article, he analyzes why his side lost.

The victory in California of Proposition 14 by a 2-1 margin is considered the "severest setback" to the forces of fair housing since the current phase of the civil rights struggle began.

Other setbacks in fair housing legislation—during 1963 and 1964 in the cities of Berkeley, Seattle, Tacoma, Detroit, Dayton and Akron—are roadblocks in the drive for equal rights.

But, certainly, the overwhelming defeat of California's state-wide Rumford Fair Housing Act is of singular significance—not only because it affects 10% of the country's population, but because the "No on 14" campaign was strongly endorsed, relatively well-financed and backed by a hard-working army of volunteers.

Although widely predicted, the defeat of "No on 14" was a bitter disappointment. But were the reasons for the defeat understood?

Dr. Henry Fuller of Bakersfield, a "No on 14" campaign worker, said, "We put our message before the people, they understood it, and yet they voted against us."

This interpretation has been accepted by nearly everyone. Substantially, it is

By
Edward
W. McHugh

An inquiry into the fate of Prop. 14