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A LONG HARD ROAD

IT is still possible—although effort is required—to hear voices of sanity amid the roar of meaningless "communication" that pollutes the air, consumes the forests, and dispenses information that we cannot use, entertainment that coarsens taste, and opinions that cater to the prejudices of people who, because they are able to read, suppose they have had an education. We are all born into this situation, involved in its pretensions, saturated with its slogans, and swayed by its infantile dreams. Recovery from what is misnamed "progress" is the major task of the time, and the first step is clear analysis of a complex of influences which have not only turned our lives upside down, but have perverted the language in which we talk about what ought to be done.

A brief discussion ("Popular Culture and the Illusion of Choice") by Christopher Lasch, in *democracy* for last April, examines what "modernization" has accomplished. Technology has given us an incredible variety of things to buy, services to enjoy, and machines to run, and indeed has eased our lives in numerous material ways, but it has also, Mr. Lasch points out, "made it more difficult than ever for people to exert any control over their immediate environment."

> Those changes have made communities less self-sufficient and increased their dependency on the market both for their livelihood and for their culture. Soon they find that the expanding array of choices provided by the market is an illusion. As the market is organized into larger and larger units, commodities become increasingly standardized, and the mounting cost of producing commodities for a mass market, moreover, discourages innovation and experimentation. While industrialization in its initial stages may promote variety, in the long run it brings uniformity and lower standards. The rise of a "communications industry" illustrates the effects of industrialism on culture. Corporate conglomerates swallow up publishing companies, motion picture studios, newspapers, magazines, television channels, and radio stations; the production of books or movies or television programs gives way to a "total manipulation of package," as one Hollywood executive puts it; and ideas for "literary properties" increasingly originate not in the brain of a single author but in corporate board rooms. Just as industrialism long ago eliminated the artisan's contribution to the production of goods, so it now eliminates his contribution to the production of ideas. The "concept" now comes first, then an author is chosen to carry it out—one whose name is sufficiently well known to command immediate recognition. Books are no longer written, they are "developed," as Thomas Whiteside shows in his study, *The Blockbuster Complex* (Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

This recalls Ananda Coomaraswamy's aphoristic remark in *The Bugbear of Literacy* nearly forty years ago: "Men overlook that 'education' is never creative, but a two-edged weapon, always destructive; whether of ignorance or of knowledge depending upon the educator's wisdom or folly." Here, as in so many other ways, we have mistaken means for ends. What, for example, has happened to "literature"? Enlarging, in effect, on what Christopher Lasch says, Jay Rosen began an editorial in the Fall of 1981 *et cetera:*

> Anyone who still believes you can judge a book by its cover needs a lesson in marketing. As market research grows ever more sophisticated, the product becomes secondary to the discovery of a market for it. In a sense, the cover precedes the book. Accelerate this trend and you find that research, marketing, production and consumption begin to resemble each other. The whole idea of a product dissolves into a process, in which information and imagery merely circulate in slightly different forms.

It is the same with the "news":

> The polls ask people about issues they heard or read about in the news. The possible responses consist of attitudes pollsters expect people to have. These expectations are formed from other polls and news stories. . . . The results of these polls show up in

> news stories which contain weighty pronouncements about shifting public moods. These stories are necessary complements to the rest of the political news, for they provide the image of an eager, informed citizenry ready to play its part in the democratic process. Walter Lippmann ridiculed this image and the journalist's devotion to it in *Public Opinion*, published in 1929. Today his book provides precise descriptions of the imaginary journalism the public accepts without question. This image is necessary because it frees the press from examining the dismal state of democracy in this country—where voter turn-out is a worldwide embarrassment, alienation from politics is almost complete and irreversible, leaders have no one to lead, and government is so complex and distant that the only reform imaginable is to have less of it. These facts are so threatening to a way of life among the press corps that no one seriously considers them.

The illusory results of the polls—"people in America believe in their right and duty to have an opinion about everything"—provide, Mr. Rosen says, "the raw material for a campaign of catch words and buzz-phrases." The pollsters' reports then shape the political candidate's rhetoric, and the people "get back what they put into the polls." Often the issues on which the candidates take stands "have little connection to running a government," yet they became the basis for news about the campaign.

> The important thing to remember about all this is that the product—news stories, polling results, speeches and stands, even the issues—are all secondary to the process, or flow of words and pictures. Politics is now a story of automation, and the old mechanical sequence of issue-platform-campaign-vote is a quaint fiction. Thus Jimmy Carter was able to weep in defeat before anyone voted against him. Automation is efficient; it had settled things the night before.

A Canadian scholar, Harold Innis, who died in 1952, anticipated this general effect through his study of the control exercised by technology over communication. Eric Havelock provides an account of his work in this issue of *et cetera*, calling Innis "The Philosophical Historian." Innis sought an "antidote to the cult of the present that was inherent in the economics and politics of modern communications monopolies and was robbing political man of his roots in experience, and thereby of his good sense." In one of his books, *The Strategy of Culture*, Innis said:

> The overwhelming pressure of mechanization evident in the newspaper and the magazine has led to the creation of vast monopolies of communication. Their entrenched position involves a continuous systematic ruthless destruction of elements of performance essential to cultural activity. The emphasis on change is the only permanent characteristic.

Like Coomaraswamy, Innis had a particular respect for oral cultures. His view (or "bias"), Havelock says, was that—

> The orally spoken word as it interchanged between persons possesses certain virtues denied to the written version. It reports experience more expressively, its effects are more flexible, and tentative; it avoids the dogmatism of a fixed statement; by leaving some things unexpressed; it leaves the way open for further exploration; it avoids fixed positions. As for the oral tradition, he says that it "implies the spirit," whereas "writing and printing are inherently materialistic." . . . As invention has increased the rapidity with which information is processed for consumption and multiplied in its amount, the mind of modern man becomes preoccupied with instantaneous experience, at the expense of long-range calculation. It is being deluged with the ephemeral, at the expense of retrospection over the past and forethought for the future.

Why, asks Havelock, did Innis, an economic historian, make language his primary concern? There is this answer:

> At the time when he was writing those studies [of furs and fish], another staple product, this time a raw material processed by technology, was entering the market, with great effect on Canada's economic relations: this was wood pulp, processed to make the paper conspicuously consumed by the American and British press. . . . I suggest that he became fascinated and perhaps repelled by what the Canadian forests were being turned into—a new means of mass communication by language, conspicuously lending itself to monopoly control.

Ignored and lost by present-day communication—totally involved in the

"instantaneous experience"—is the sense of time and of history. The time-span of the politician's interest is two or four years—his term of office—and few businessmen plan for more than ninety days ahead. The communication monopolies, commercial to the core, have spread this attitude everywhere, always stressing the present moment (the purpose of the "commercials" is to generate an immediate impulse to buy). The writer notes that Innis paraphrased and quoted his own (Havelock's) essay, *Prometheus* (1950), in the following words in *The Strategy of Culture:*

> Intellectual Man of the nineteenth century was the first to estimate absolute nullity in time. The present—real, insistent, complex, and treated as an independent system, the foreshortening of practical prevision in the field of human action—has penetrated the most vulnerable areas of public policy. War has become a result and a cause of the limitations placed on the forethinker. Power and its assistant force, the natural enemies of intelligence, have become more serious since "the mental processes activated in the pursuit and consolidation of power are essentially short range."

For full confirmation of this analysis and conclusion, a reading of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* is in order.

Various cultural historians have foreseen other consequences of the onset of technological control of social life. After speaking of the forms of freedom brought by labor-saving machinery, Roderick Seidenberg, in *Post-Historic Man* (1950), went on to say:

> But it is well, in this connection, to bear in mind the necessary price that a machine technology will exact: against the boon of a nicer balance between labor and leisure we must weigh the subtle question of the meaning and quality of both under an ever more intensified technological dispensation. And here it is clear that the machine will exact increasing loyalty to its own rhythm as the price of that very freedom. For the expanding complexities and increased coordination of a machine technology will inevitably exert a peremptory demand upon society, and both the leisure gained through the further development of the machine and the freedom to use it creatively will be decisively conditioned by a more general and more insistent mechanization of life.

Here one recalls the recent remark of a British journalist, comparing the mechanization we now endure with George Orwell's 1984:

> Orwell never conceived a power as anonymous as the power we must deal with today. His Big Brother has an actual face, his spies and villains are palpable people. . . . He never heard the modern refrain, "The machines are down," meaning that you can't get your money out of the bank or your story written or your phone call processed, and there is absolutely no one you can blame. He never guessed how faceless, how amorphous, how ubiquitous, how easily accepted and assimilated automation can be.

What of the arts, and their historic function of refusing to submit to money-grubbing and acquisitive conventions—called by Herbert Marcuse the "Great Refusal"? In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse wrote:

> Now this essential gap between the arts and the order of the day, kept open in the artistic alienation, is progressively closed by the advancing technological society. And with its closing, the Great Refusal is in turn refused; the "other dimension" is absorbed into the prevailing state of affairs. The works of alienation are themselves incorporated into this society and circulate as part and parcel of the equipment which adorns and psychoanalyzes the prevailing state of affairs. Thus they became commercials—they sell, comfort, or excite. . . .
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> Unquestionably the new architecture is better, i.e., more beautiful and more practical than the monstrosities of the Victorian era. But it is also more "integrated"—the cultural center is becoming a fitting part of the shopping center, or municipal center, or government center. . . . It is good that almost everyone can now have the fine arts at his fingertips, just by turning a knob on his set, or by just stepping into his drugstore [for a "quality" paperback]. In this diffusion, however, they become cogs in a culture-machine which remakes their content.
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> Artistic alienation succumbs, together with other modes of negation, to the process of technological rationality. The change reveals its depth and the degree of its irreversibility if it is seen as a result of technical progress. The present stage redefines the possibilities of man and nature in accordance with the new means available for their realization and, in their light, the pre-technological images are losing their power.

> Their truth value depended to a large degree on an uncomprehended and unconquered dimension of man and nature, on the narrow limits placed on organization and manipulation, on the "insoluble core" which resisted integration. In the fully developed industrial society, this insoluble core is progressively whittled down by technological rationality. Obviously, the physical transformation of the world entails the mental transformation of its symbols, images, and ideas. Obviously, when cities and highways and National Parks replace the villages, valleys, and forests; when motorboats race over the lakes and planes cut through the skies—then these areas lose their character as a qualitatively different reality, as areas of contradiction.
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> And since contradiction is the work of the Logos—rational confrontation of "that which is not" with "that which is"—it must have a medium of communication. The struggle for this medium, or rather the struggle against its absorption into the predominant one-dimensionality, shows forth in the avant-garde efforts to create an estrangement which would make the artistic truth again communicable.

Can we ask or expect this of the artists? We might ask it of Blake, or of Tolstoy, if they were among us, but hardly of the present world of art. The poets of our time (with one or two wonderful exceptions) seem to have withdrawn into a private sensibility and a preoccupation with *words;* and as for the arts in general, one might turn to three books concerned with their decline: Ortega's *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel* (Princeton paperback, 1968), Erich Kahler's *The Disintegration of Form in the Arts* (Braziller, 1968), and *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (Vintage, 1964) by Wylie Sypher.

Writing in a tolerant mood, Ortega said (in 1925):

> For a real understanding of what is happening let us compare the role art is playing today with the role it used to play thirty years ago and in general throughout the last century. Poetry and music then were activities of enormous caliber. In view of the downfall of religion and the inevitable relativism of science, art was expected to take upon itself nothing less than the salvation of mankind. Art was important for two reasons: on account of its subjects which dealt with the profoundest problems of humanity, and on account of its own significance as a human pursuit from which the species derived its justification and dignity. It was a remarkable sight, the solemn air with which the great poet or the musical genius appeared before the masses—the air of a prophet and founder of religion, the majestic pose of a statesman responsible for the state of the world.
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> A present-day artist would be thunderstruck, I suspect if he were trusted with so enormous a mission and, in consequence, compelled to deal with matters of such scope.

Yet, deep down, the modern poet may feel nostalgic regret for the calling he has given up. He is unable to cry out, with Shelley, who demanded of the West Wind, "Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth, Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind," but the oracular impulse is not dead. In the Spring *Hudson Review* Andrew Kappel, drawing on Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era*, tells of a day spent by Ezra Pound, his wife, and his friend, T. S. Eliot, near the medieval town of Excideuil, in Provence. They stopped by the ruins of an old castle. Eliot began the conversation.

> Out of the blue, with all the unnerving intensity of which he was capable but which he rarely expressed, he turned to his two friends, the proud inventor and his proud wife who were enjoying the sunshine and the cool well-water, and said, very simply and in a flat tone, "I am afraid of the life after death." The sipping, the basking and the beaming, we may imagine, stopped cold. Eliot had forced the moment to a crisis. . . . The author-to-be of the longest poem ever written couldn't think of anything to say. That remark about the afterlife was not the sort of behavior one expected of the perfect London gentleman. It was, in tone and substance, pure Tiresias, as if come back from the dead to tell us all.

That seems exactly right. For if we could find some way to evoke the seership of Tiresias, the blinded sage who told Oedipus what he in fact had done—if we could evoke his wisdom, not his shade—and have him tell us what we have done, both the arts and philosophy might bloom again.

For that is the real question: How to arouse ourselves to thinking about the Great Questions. The languid Eliot found refuge in theological memories, and continued his exquisite brooding,

while Pound, years later, took up the challenge in the Cantos—in Canto XC most of all, Mr. Kappel tells us—but poetry, for our people and time, remains a coterie affair. We have no magnificent oral culture in which peasants as well as patricians speak in Homeric accents. We are subdivided by language and thought as well as by the imperatives of technology, which crowd us together in a quantitative fashion but make alienation the foremost quality of life.

What will it take to make us brood to some effect on our lives in both time and eternity? Something more, no doubt, than the solipsisms of artists whose lives our civilization has twisted out of shape. Yet Eliot's *sotto voce* exclamation is one key to the questions that need to be asked. There is a long, hard road ahead, to be traversed in getting back to them.

REVIEW
WHAT THE PAPAGOS CAN TEACH US

WE have for review a book of great charm (and substantial value)—*The Desert Smells Like Rain—A Naturalist in Papago Indian Country* (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1982,$12.50), by Gary Paul Nabhan, "an ethnobiologist and plant ecologist." The author worked with the Papagos in the Southwest, in the deserts of Arizona and Sonora, Mexico—the Indians regard the national boundary as a presumption by white strangers who had no business cutting up their territory—theirs by right of occupancy and use for hundreds of years. In this book Nabhan tells what the Papagos know about producing food crops on the desert—much more, it turns out, than Western agricultural "scientists"—and how they live and think. From their myths and their experience they learned the ways of desert plants and how, by a delicate and complex collaboration with nature, to grow the food they needed to survive. The comparison of their knowledge with our ignorance makes an embarrassment for the reader: why didn't we leave the Indians alone, since they did so well before we came to interrupt their lives? Recurring questions of right and wrong rise from the pages of such books—one of the cardinal lessons of the twentieth century it may be, for the "dominant race."

Turning the pages, you are made to go back in history, back, say, to 1881 when Helen Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* was first published—telling the story of what the white settlers did to the Indians over a hundred years. Then, in 1947—skipping a long period, well covered by Felix Cohen in his *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* (1942)—Elliot Arnold gave us *Blood Brother* (which became *Broken Arrow*, the movie about Cochise and the Chiricahua Apaches), helping a growing audience to understand how the Indians felt about the invasion of their land. Step by step our minds have been turned around, but there is still a long way to go. Scholars have done their part. John Collier, author of *Indians of the Americas* and *On the Gleaming Way*, reached a great many people, while his wife, Laura Thompson, in 1947 wrote *The Hopi Way*, which had a wide influence among general readers as well as ethnologists. Dozens of similar books have come out since, including those by Frank Waters, of which his novel, *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, is perhaps the most memorable. Since the 1940s there have been many contributors to the change in attitudes, which began with feelings of guilt and sympathy, followed by surprise at the quality of Indian thinking and moral ideas. Today, a measure of humility accompanies serious study of Indian ways and lore. Benjamin Lee Whorf's revealing account of the Hopi language (in *Language, Thought, and Reality*) gave evidence of the philosophic depth of Indian thinking about the natural world, and recently Vine Deloria's comparison of Indian traditions with the latest tendencies in Western scientific philosophy has helped to deepen our respect for the original inhabitants of America.

A quotation from *The Hopi Way* will show the Indian anticipation of attitudes now slowly coming into view among those affected by ecological themes and discoveries, since, say, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring.* Laura Thompson wrote:

> In the Hopi system of mutual dependency, which gives basic form to the universe, each individual, human or non-human, has its proper place in relation to all other phenomena, with a definite role in the cosmic scheme. But, whereas the non-human orders fulfill their obligations more or less automatically under the law, man has definite responsibilities which have to be learned and carried out according to a fixed set of rules. These rules form an ethical code known as the Hopi Way. . . . a large part of the training of the child is devoted to learning this code. . . .
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> The individual's success in life and also the welfare of the tribe depend on wholeheartedly, and with an effort of the will, cultivating the Hopi Way. . . .
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> It is interesting to note . . . that the Hopi use the same word (*na 'wakna*) for "to will" and "to pray." The Hopi believe not only that man can control nature to a limited extent by observing these rules, but

> if he does not do so, the universe may cease to function.

Pragmatically speaking, this seems an excellent idea; and it might even be an accurate form of prophecy, if you consider the behavior of modern nations, wholly without recognition of *any* moral rule, quite likely to upset our world extensively, if not to destroy its function.

The fundamental thing learned by Gary Nabhan from study of Papago agriculture is that desert plants respond far better to natural rainfall than to artificial irrigation. "With one particular kind of desert wildflower," he says, "seedlings were fifty-six times more numerous after nearly an inch of real rain than they were after the more intense artificial watering." The flash floods on which traditional Papago agriculture was founded bring essential nutrients to the soil. The Indians don't think much of pumped water. Moreover, it is now realized by soil scientists that groundwater accumulated during the Ice Age is rapidly being depleted—water that cannot be replaced.

> Seventy miles north of the reservation, water levels are dropping as much as twenty feet per year, due to a pumping rate nearly one hundred times that of natural recharge. In many places throughout southern Arizona, the cost of pumping is greater than the value of certain water-consumptive crops. Mexican arid lands expert Enrique Campos-Lopez predicts that by 1985, rainfall-based agriculture will again be more energetically attractive than mechanized groundwater-irrigated agriculture on both sides of the border. Desert runoff farming is suddenly the "new idea" for hydrologists and crop scientists who live within an hour of Papago floodwater fields, but have never ventured out of their offices to see them.

More than water has been lost by modern methods:

> Concomitant with the resurgence of interest in rainfall and floodwater harvesting is a new appreciation of the value of desert-adapted crops. Yet many of the traditional drought-hardy crop varieties fell out of use and became extinct when commercial agriculture based on pumping and hybrid crops was initiated earlier in this century. Papago, leaving their floodwater fields to work for wages in irrigated fields, lost many of their bean and corn varieties as the life of their remaining seeds expired while they were away. At the same time, their water control structures deteriorated, and the washes which fed them were disrupted by new roads and livestock ponds.

Moreover—

> Not just crops were lost—whole field ecosystems atrophied. Roughly 10,000 acres of crops were grown via Papago runoff farming in 1913; by 1960, there were only 1,000 acres of floodwater fields on the Papago Indian Reservation. Today, Papago sporadically farm less than 100 acres using floodwaters.
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> While the remaining acreage is miniscule, it is all that is left of an ecologically sensitive subsistence strategy that has endured in the desert for centuries. Here, not only a rich heritage of crops remains, but also co-evolved micro-organisms and weeds, as well as pests and beneficial insects. Amaranths, for instance, are hosts for insects that control corn-loving pests. Papago fields harbor nitrogen-fixing bacteria which naturally associate with tepary bean roots. A species of solitary bee has been found visiting annual devil's claw in Papago fields, but despite a thorough search has not been found on wild devil's claw elsewhere. Moreover, there is a mutually beneficial relationship between these plants and their Papago stewards; the Papago have evolved field management skills that have allowed them to sustain food production for centuries without destroying the desert soils. The plants have evolved the ability to grow quickly, root deeply, disperse heat loads, and provide nutritious seeds for those who harvest them. These durable functional relationships between humans and other lifeforms are the products of a slow evolution and cannot be remade in a day. No amount of academic research on water harvesting and drought-hardy crops can replace a time-tried plant/man symbiosis such as that in which the Papago have participated.

Books like *The Desert Smells Like Rain* reveal attitudes that will in all probability form the practical basis for a changed civilization—eventually. People who think as this author thinks have left behind racial conceit and cultural arrogance, as well as the acquisitive drives of modern enterprise. They are warmly human, yet without sentimentality. Best of all, one might say, they are giving science a new meaning, restoring

to practice an element of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment vision that almost died away under the influence of doctrinaire materialism. The science Gary Nabhan practices is a science of *life*, in the full meaning of this term.

He is a student of the harmonies of nature, and of the ways in which man may be a contributor instead of a disturber. Toward the end of his book there is this passage:

> Papago families still seek out places where moist, rich litter has accumulated under these woody legumes [mesquite and ironwood], sensing what scientists have only recently confirmed. They then dig up the top two or three feet of organic matter around the trees, and take it back to their plants to enrich them.
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> The most important soil amendment for Papago fields is not something the People themselves carry into the fields—they merely encourage the floods to haul it in. By properly locating their fields "at the mouths of washes," and by constructing low, water-spreading fences of woven brush, they help floodwater to dump its load of debris within the fields. . . . I was surprised at the organic richness of its contents: rodent dung, mesquite leaves, mulch developed under trees, and water-smoothed twigs. The farmers at Topowa take this flotsam, spread it, and plow it into their soil. Enough of this humus comes into their fields to add an inch of organic matter to the cultivated surface each growing season, reducing soil alkalinity and increasing moisture-holding capacity. . . . whereas Mid-western farmlands are annually losing forty or fifty tons of top soil per acre and millions of dollars worth of nutrients to erosion, many Papago fields are gaining good soil.

It is time to go back to school to the Indians.

COMMENTARY
A FEW QUESTIONS

IF, as the conclusion of Review suggests, "It is time to go back to school to the Indians," what can we learn from them? The most important lesson may be the attitude ascribed to the Hopi by Laura Thompson (see page 3):

> The individual's success in life and also the welfare of the tribe depend on wholeheartedly, and with an effort of the will, cultivating the Hopi way. . . The Hopi believe not only that man can control nature to a limited extent by observing these rules, but if he does not do so, the universe may cease to function.

Should we try to persuade ourselves of something like this? There seems a sense in which the various thinkers and critics quoted throughout this issue are doing precisely that—trying to persuade us to accept and assume individual responsibility for the conditions—the function—of the world. Henry Adams (see "Children") was certainly so engaged. "Adams," William Appleman William says, "was an old-fashioned historian who felt the weight of that kind of responsibility." So was Harold Innis (see page 2), and so were (are) Eric Havelock and Roderick Seidenberg. Such scholars embody the conscience of society, which means that they do not have to be pushed into the position of responsibility, but embrace it naturally.

Why aren't more people like that? Why is the grain of the times so opposed to that sort of thinking? Why do so many submit so easily to conditions, habits, customs which violate nearly every rule of long-term balances and relationships as a matter of course, and foul our nest with systematic thoroughness, on the grounds, as maintained by Adam Smith, that self-interest is the law of life? Why, indeed, did a moral man like Adam Smith proclaim this principle, as though he had made a fundamental discovery?

The practical effect of Smith's "discovery" is the assumption that there is no moral struggle in human life. You do what you feel like doing, get what you want, and everything will work out.

The Indians didn't believe that. In their way, however "primitively," they made rigorous moral demands of themselves. Why don't we? Why is the assumption of individual responsibility left to so few—individuals who have become voices crying in the wilderness, and therefore, in their own view, failures? Why do well-intended movements such as the women's movement, when they become "strong," adopt the coarse standards of the status quo? (See Frontiers.) These are questions no expert can answer and no political arrangement resolve.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

THE more we read of William Appleman Williams, author of books and lecturer on history at Oregon State University, the more important he seems as a teacher. It isn't that all his conclusions (the political goal of Socialism, for example) seem worthy of adoption, but that he reads and writes with a sense of personal responsibility. (Some of our best critics are socialists.) The subject of his recent "review" article (*Nation,* March 6) is a consideration of what Henry Adams (1838-1918) attempted in *The Education of Henry Adams,* a book which Williams' students find exciting. Prof. William tells why:

> He [Adams] leads us to believe that he is offering a charmingly eccentric and quaint autobiography only to give us a remorseless commentary on the state of our culture. Not simply a report on the State of the Nation—but on the nature of the culture.
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> Consider his incessant talk about failure. At the outset, the reader (sophomore or sophisticate) is induced to feel sympathy for this man from a famous family who never became the Walter Lippmann or James Reston of his time, and who was never summoned to the White House or the State Department at odd hours to provide profound advice. But gradually we begin to understand, as the goose bumps rise, that Adams is talking about *his* failure only as a fundamental part of *our* collective failure.

Adams' *Education,* Williams suggests, is filled with what he didn't get around to saying in the nine volumes of his *History of the United States During the Administration of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison,* which, he says, not even Ph.D.'s in American history have read through. What is the real issue of Adams' major work? It is stated, Williams tells us, in volume nine:

> *"What objects, besides physical content, must a democratic continent aspire to attain?"* (Emphasis added.) Notice that crucial distinction between *should* and *must.* It is not incidental.
>
> Adams returns to that challenge in *The Education* after telling us a few delightful tales about his boyhood in a famous and once powerful family. . . . We learn a good bit about the austere, but nevertheless subtle and knowing, humanity of John Quincy Adams. But we also begin to see, as Henry Adams intended, why our culture has not won the minds and hearts of most other peoples.
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> Either help people or do not help people, but for God's sake do not lecture them. Do not prate about your own virtues—or what you assume to be your own virtues. Just do the job and get on down the line. If helping people is part of being an American, then help people. Let it go at that. After all, being an American ought to be enough in and of itself.
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> In such sly ways does Adams tell us that *The Education* is the tenth volume of the *History.* He drives the point home with one devastating remark: "From cradle to grave this problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education, as it is the moral of religion, philosophy, science, art, politics, and economy." Either a culture does that work or it does not.
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> And so, picking up the story where the *History* leaves off, after the Madison administration, Adams offers us a number of sharply disturbing evaluations. Consider, for example, his comment on the character of public education: "It is a sort of dynamo machine for polarizing the popular mind; for turning and holding its lines of force in the direction supposed to be most effective for State purpose." Anyone who knows anything about American schools can appreciate that marvelous summary of reality.

A first responsibility of a teacher, then, is getting this across to students able to understand it. There is a sense in which intelligent educators must always work against the grain of the institutions of the time, including their own. Since we shall always have institutions with us—some better, some worse—this distinction between schools and teachers is crucial. Without it institutions are likely to grow steadily worse. Can teachers keep their jobs if they adopt this attitude? Good institutions, if there be any, will insist on their presence.

Adams was a teacher and historian who took both his profession and his humanity seriously.

> Comfortably ensconced among the knowledgeable elite in Washington, looking backward and peering forward, Adams posed the central questions. The Civil War was done and done. Call it inevitable and just (even as you raise a naughty question about the Union's legitimacy) and leave it as that. But there were a million dead and maimed who must be honored. We need an education to redeem them. Adams was an old-fashioned historian who felt the weight of that kind of responsibility. And so the more one studied history, the more one discovered that it was impossible to avoid the disturbing questions.

There are so many ways of speaking of the "change in attitude," or in "values," that critics declare must take place if we are ever to come out of the mess we are in, one welcomes and cleaves to clear examples. Mr. Williams has given us one. In public education, and in private too, the obligation of the teacher is to declare, or at least to suggest, that everyone of us needs to feel "the weight of that kind of responsibility." The teacher might explain that rights have no meaning without corresponding responsibilities, and from a public (democratic) point of view, our responsibilities are great. Consider the number of the dead and maimed in wars since the conflict between the states. Even high school is not too soon to think about what might begin to redeem them.

For this we have the attempt of Henry Adams, and Prof. Williams shows a way of reading him.

> In one sense, so many commentators have noted, *The Education* is a tale of failure. We have never redeemed those I million. Henry Adams knew that. Just as you and I know that. And I think it is clear that Adams neither individually nor in association with his chosen friends imagined or defined the appropriate new order that would redeem them. But he tried. . . . the critics are ultimately wrong. Adams was not a failure except as American culture was a failure. We did not do what he did not do. None of us have yet used the deaths of the Civil War to create a new America. Adams knew that, told us that, and therein lies the greatness of *The Education.*

Young Americans need to be confronted with, and inspired to, the responsibility recognized and accepted by Henry Adams. As teacher William Appleman Williams is working toward this end with his students and readers. He gives further quotation from Adams, who pointed out that "The system of 1789 had broken down, and with it the eighteenth-century fabric of *a priori*, or moral principles."

> The choice was clear: "Either some new standards must be created" or "nine-tenths of men's political energies must henceforth be wasted on expedients to piece out—to patch,—or, in vulgar language, to tinker—the political machine as often as it broke down."
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> Unhappily, Henry was correct. We Americans have not undertaken to create "new morals and new machinery." We have not taken the "time for thought." We are "wandering in a wilderness." We have "become an economic-thinking machine which [works] only on a fixed line," an automated chain saw moving through one national resource after another. . . .
>
> I make no claim that Henry Adams literally anticipated nuclear weapons. But he did, unquestionably, warn us of the need to control the power we have generated. We still have to redeem those million casualties. But we seem unable to say no to what we all know is both wrong and suicidal.
>
> So we come to the end of the *History* and *The Education.* Consider that marvelous passage about learning the hard way: "Bombs educate vigorously, and even wireless, telegraphy or airships might require the reconstruction of society." Indeed. Fully aware that we had not seized the moment at the end of the Civil War, Adams nevertheless continued his efforts to educate us to create a new standard that would honor those 1 million Americans killed and wounded by Americans.

This is a mode of thinking on which any worthwhile future for America will have to be based. It is the *noblesse oblige* of democracy.

FRONTIERS

The Nurturers of Life

THE question, "How can we make a better world?", while continually asked, usually generates controversy rather than agreement. It may be more useful to turn it around and ask: "What are the ways in which it is impossible to make a better world?" Conceivably, if this could be settled, controversy would decline and people might at least hear and consider one another's suggestions.

In *democracy* for April, Jean Bethke Elshtain examines the efforts of the women's movement to better their portion of the world, using for the basis of discussion the stated determination of the National Organization of Women (NOW) to gain "truly equal partnership with men." NOW's bill of rights for women lists proposals and demands which include, the writer says, "the establishment of government-sponsored twenty-four-hour childcare centers, abortion on demand, equal pay for equal work, aggressive recruitment of women for top positions in all political and business hierarchies, and so on." Susan Brownmiller, a radical feminist, is quoted as declaring that the army "must be fully integrated, as well as our national guard, our state troopers, our local sheriff's offices, our district attorneys' offices—in short the nation's entire lawful power structure (and I mean power in the physical sense) must be stripped of male dominance and control of women are to cease being a colonized protectorate of men." Summarizing, Jean Elshtain says:

> As a feminist project this ideology required "the absorption of the private as completely as possible into the public." Women, formerly the private beings, would be "uplifted" to the status of a pre-eminently public identity to be shared equally with men. . . . Concentrating only upon the good purposes to be served, feminists did not bring into focus the possibilities for enhanced power of state surveillance and control of all aspects of intimate social relations.
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> In practice, the demand for a shift in the social identities of women involves their full assimilation into a combined identification with the state and the terms of competitive civil society, terms which have permeated all aspects of public life due to the close entanglements between government and corporations. The modern state, however, is the locus of structured, "legitimate" public life. It is this state feminists look to, to intervene, to legislate, to adjudicate, to police and punish on their behalf.
>
> This process emerges in stark relief in an *amicus curiae* brief filed by NOW with the Supreme Court that argues that the all-male draft violates the constitutional rights of women. The brief asserts that "compulsory universal military service is central to the concept of citizenship in a democracy" and that women suffer "devastating long term psychological and political repercussions" because of their exclusion from such service. . . . Holding up the public world as the only sphere within which individuals made real choices, exercised authentic power or had efficacious control, the private world, in turn automatically reflected a tradition of powerlessness, necessity, and irrationality. The darker realities of the public world, with the notable exception of its exclusion of women, went unexplored just as the noble and dignified aspects of women's private sphere were ignored.

This article of fourteen pages pursues the implications of this policy—or conception of identity—in detail, and in one place the writer seems to suggest that this politicalized drive by women stems from acceptance of the main currents of "political theory in the Western tradition" (made, incidentally, by men) which has "a very thin notion of the social world." There are better and larger ways to think of a good human society and the role in it of women. Jean Elshtain has two heroines for illustration—Antigone and Jane Addams.

Both these women contested the "reasons of state" by which the order of public life is maintained. Her article is titled "Antigone's Daughters," and the writer asks why Antigone has not been honored as a feminist heroine. This determined daughter of Oedipus defied the decree of the king that her brother, killed in a fratricidal war against Thebes, should not have rites of burial, but be left lying for dogs to devour.

> Creon's offense is his demand that political necessity justifies trampling upon a basic human duty, an imperative that lies at the heart of any

> recognizably human social life. In her loyalty to her slain brother and to family honor, Antigone asserts that there are matters of such deep significance that they begin and end where the state's right does not and must not run, where politics cannot presume to dictate to the human soul. In "saving" the state, Creon not only runs roughshod over a centuries-old tradition, he presumes to override the familial order, the domain of women. In refusing to accept *raison d'état* as paramount, Antigone sets the course for her rebellion and pits the values of family and particular loyalties, ties, and traditions against the values of statecraft with its more abstract obligations. In her rebellion, Antigone is as courageous, honorable, and determined as Creon is insistent, demanding, and convinced of the necessity of his public decree.

And so, Jean Elshtain contends, should be the feminists of today. The reasons?

> The question answers itself: the standpoint of Antigone is of a woman who dares to challenge public power by giving voice to familial and social imperatives and duties. Here is not the world of the *femme converse*, the delicate lady, or the coy sex-kitten. Hers is a robust voice, a bold voice: woman as guardian of the preogatives of the *oikos*, preserver of familial duty and honor, protector of children, if need be their fierce avenger. To recapture that voice and to reclaim that standpoint, and not just for women alone, it is necessary to locate the daughters of Antigone where, shakily and problematically, they continue to locate themselves: in the arena of the social world where human life is nurtured and protected from day to day.

Jane Addams was another standard-bearer of this social feminism.

> Addams recognized, in uncritical celebration of heroic male action, a centuries-long trail of tears. What classical political theorists dismissed as ignoble—the sustenance of life itself—Addams claimed as truly heroic. Rather than repudiating human birth and the world surrounding it as a possible source of moral truth and political principle, Addams spoke from the standpoint of the "suffering mothers of the disinherited," of "women's haunting memories," which, she believed, "Instinctively challenge war as the implacable enemy of their age-long undertaking."

Jean Elshtain calls this "maternal thinking," which "makes contact with the strengths of our mothers and grandmothers; it helps us to see ourselves as Antigone's daughters, determined, should it be necessary, to chasten arrogant public power and resist the claims of political necessity. For such power, and such claims, have, in the past, been weapons used to trample upon the deepest yearnings and most basic hopes of the human spirit."