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On 'Southern Manners'

I've just finished reading the second of John Shelton Reed's articles (Letter From the Lower Right, December 1991 and January 1992) praising his own manners, and those of other Southerners. I've encountered this in Southern print before, and it has never failed to annoy me. I was taught that bragging is bad manners, and that public sneers against "outsiders" is provincialism.

There is, of course, a difference between traditional northern and Southern manners. In the upstate New York region where I spent the more important of my formative years, we did not dwell on the fact that it was one of Washington's headquarters during an important period in the War of Independence, nor did we allude to our regional heritage on social occasions.

The best American manners I recall were those exhibited by the northern pre-World War I people, who were genuinely graceful and democratic. Such manners were well represented by FDR, who managed to conceal his innate snobbery with remarkable ease in public, and Hamilton Fish, one of his contemporaries, who more honestly did the same. They were members of my father's generation, and their manners reflected those of their fathers. I mention them as representative because both became well-known and many were exposed to their manners. Both my father and my grand-

fathers (one of whom was not an American, but a Scot) had the same ease, and took the same care to not carelessly offend others. In my view, they had the Anglo-American manners of their generation.

In recent decades American manners have shown a deplorable decline, due largely to the influence of various sub-cultures scornful of earlier traditions and customs. Such changes are also altering the South. Mr. Reed apparently resides in some pocket that time forgot, and writes as if Southern courtesy is still widespread, as in antebellum days. My experience with Southern manners in recent decades has been considerably less pleasant, but I will not follow his example and cite instances. That approach simply exacerbates a sad situation.

—Otto Scott  
 Murphys, CA

Mr. Reed Replies:

My intention has always been merely to show that Southern manners are different, not that they're "better." It would be foolish to deny that many Southerners believe that, but others of us are quite ready to acknowledge that courtesy comes in many forms. (See, for instance, Donald Davidson's appreciation of Vermonters, in *Still Rebels, Still Yankees*.) My favorite definition of a gentleman is "one who never gives offense unintentionally," so I apologize to Mr. Scott.

CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS

AN NEA GRANT has been awarded to an "artist" in Utah to erect a monument to the myth of a pre-Roe v. Wade "back-alley" abortion holocaust. Darin Biniatz, a 26 year old who has discovered that "art" is more profitable and less demanding than actual work, has received \$2,000 to create a "sculpture" called "No Choice (No Freedom)." The work will consist of a rust-red 40-foot I beam and a sealed box containing the names of 100 American women who supposedly died as a result of illegal abor-

tions between 1932 and 1989. The "sculpture" will blemish a tract of public land leased to Biniatz by the Bureau of Land Management. Previous works by Biniatz have also dealt with political subjects. Last year he filled a Plexiglas cube with air from Deer Valley and dangled it over a Salt Lake City intersection; a sign informed the public that "The Clean Air Is in the Box." In April he presented a work entitled "No Home for the Brave" about homeless children. These pieces persuaded NEA jurors to

fund the pro-abortion sculpture.

According to Galen McKibben of Montana's Helena Presents (which co-administered Biniáz's grant), the abortion sculpture was found "at the very top" of 160 applications. Juror Casey Jarman of the Salt Lake Arts Council explained that Biniáz's proposal "came at a time when the panel felt it made a strong statement and was worthy of funding." The decision to fund the sculpture came shortly after the Utah legislature, acting with overwhelming support from the state's electorate, passed a restrictive abortion law. The panel decided to subsidize the pro-abortion side of the Utah argument: in principle, anti-abortion Utahns were being taxed to fund a shrine to pro-abortion mythology—a situation of the sort Jefferson defined as the very essence of tyranny.

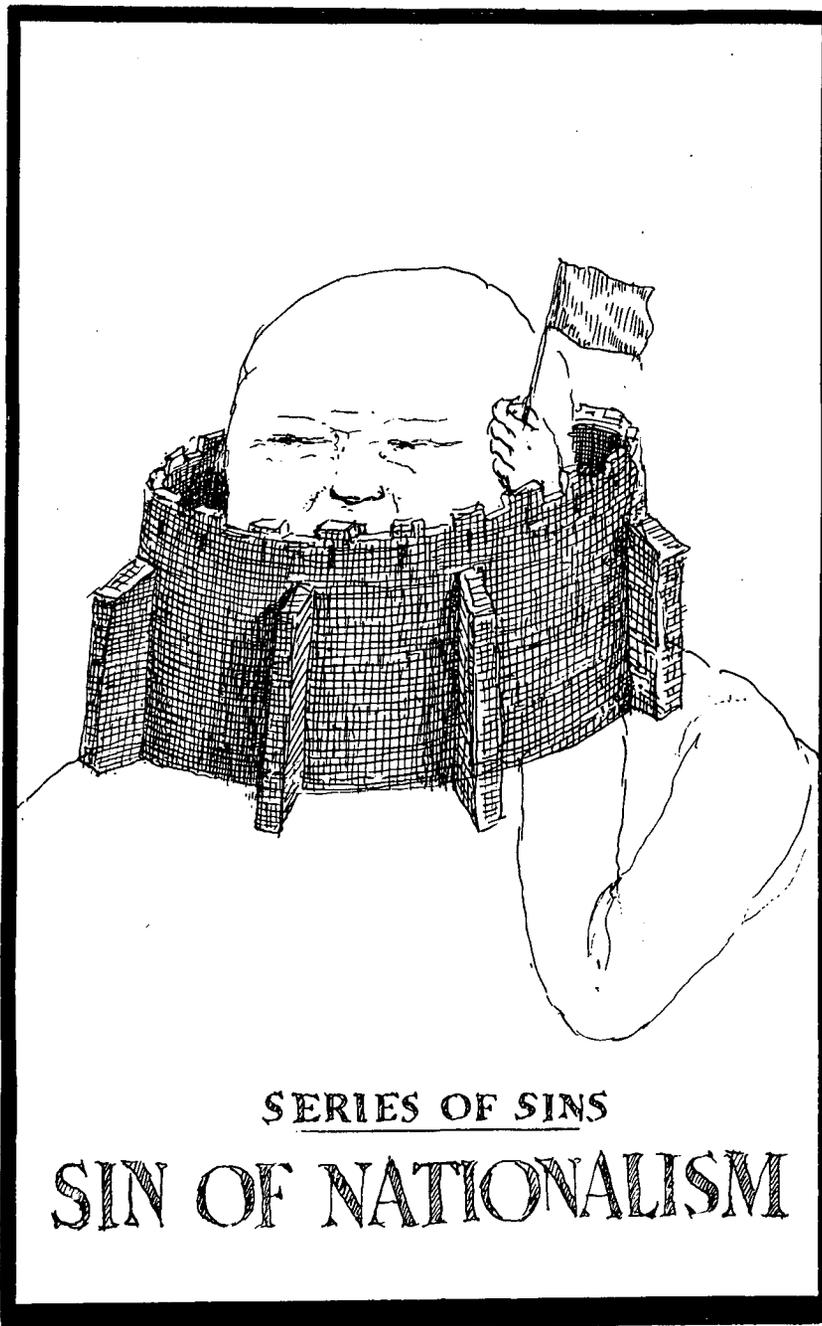
The names placed in the monument were provided by Susanne Millsaps, who is executive director of Utah's branch of the National Abortion Rights Action League. According to legend, hundreds of thousands of women died at the hands of "back-alley butchers" before the 1973 Roe decision. (For this reason it is significant that some of the names on the handwritten list provided by Millsaps were those of women who obtained abortions after 1973; legalization did not make abortion any safer.) Abortion advocates have borrowed heavily from the language and imagery of holocaust survivors. Signs declaring "Never Again!" are prominent at abortion rights rallies; Utah ACLU director Michelle Parish insists that permitting the state to restrict abortion "would be like allowing Nazi death camps." Through the NEA the federal government has placed its imprimatur upon the pro-abortion legend: the monument will offer tangible testimony of the "truth" of the myth.

Unlike the actual holocaust, the "back-alley holocaust" resides in the realm of historical apocrypha. Marian Faux, author of several books about the abortion debate, observes that "When I began to look into [illegal] abortion, several pro-choice reformers suggested that illegal abortion was not as dangerous as it had been depicted during the reform movement. Admittedly, an image of tens of thousands of women being maimed or killed each year by illegal abortion was so persuasive a piece of propaganda that the movement could be forgiven for its failure to double-check the facts." In fact, according to Faux, "women [were]

probably better off in the hands of competent but 'illegal' abortionists who did hundreds of the minor surgeries every week than with the family doctor who did one abortion a year."

Writing in the *Progressive*, Linda Rocawich strives to make vivid the "reality" of "back-alley abortions" for those "women and men who are too young to remember what we women did before January 22, 1973." She offers testimonies taken from a handful of women who obtained illegal abortions before Roe, but insists that "each individual included here stands in for the thousands of others like

her." The stories shared by Rocawich actually continue the work of debunking the pro-abortion mythology. With the exception of one terrifying story of a woman who beat herself into a miscarriage, the vignettes offered by Rocawich are not particularly unpleasant. "Carol" obtained an abortion in 1966 at the hands of a Cuban physician; the procedure was performed in a "child's room, just like every little girl always wanted. Pretty white bedspread, frilly curtain, stuffed animals. And it was clean. Really clean." The procedure was competently performed: "There were no complications, a little cramping is all."



Janusz Kapusta