

CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS



Convicted traitor Clayton Lonetree wept as he described his upbringing on an Indian reservation orphanage and with his father, a brutal alcoholic. The Marine Corps was, he said, a way out of his misery, although his principal reasons for joining were patriotic. The military jury, unmoved by his arguments and those of his celebrity lawyer William Kunstler, sentenced Lonetree to 30 years. Why they didn't make it life—and why they couldn't make it death—is one of those mysteries which, if you had the answer to it, would go a long way toward explaining what is wrong with our country.

Lonetree's version of the events—true love with a Russian girl and a heroic plan to trap a KGB agent—was never taken seriously. He had to be stupid to make up such a tale, but then his predicament was itself a sign of imbecility. Retaining Bill “Chicago 7” Kunstler as counsel in a treason case was only the last straw. The Lonetree case is still more interesting than other recent spy stories. It is a kind of parable of American history. As the American republic swelled into a continental empire, the only resistance it met came from the impoverished savages on the plains. The Indian wars are the heroic period of America. If we treated them with brutality and indifference, they paid us back in full with rape, torture, murder, and perfidy. To excuse their acts of habitual brutality on the grounds of cultural differences is really to indict an entire race. For nearly a hundred years, we celebrated the frontiersmen and soldiers who fought in the Indian wars as heroes. It was a standing joke in Hollywood that the Indians always lose—although they did in fact lose everything—and the most important white loser, George Armstrong Custer, was treated as a heroic martyr.

It is a pardonable mistake to celebrate the virtues of a defeated enemy, but the role-reversal of cowboys and

Indians is a sign of a very deep sickness in American cultural life. Now it is the Indians who always win—or deserve to. The difference between a film like *They Died With Their Boots On* and *Little Big Man* is the difference between two Americas; and the decline from Custer the white knight to Custer the degraded moron represents a vast change in our attitudes toward our own manhood and leadership. In the same transmutation, the Indians went from savages to saints, the masters of a secret wisdom that was in harmony with nature. Castaneda's Don Juan initiated American students into a sci-fi world of shamans and demons, while Chief Dan George (the real star of *Little Big Man*) provided an Indian folk wisdom somewhere between Will Rogers and Myron Cohen. (I suspect the real Dan George is more like the engaging loser he portrayed in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.)

After all is said that can be said against them, the Indians of the plains were brave and able opponents and deserved honorable treatment—either freedom or death. Instead, we instituted an experimental welfare state in the form of reservations and gave them neither incentives nor opportunities to escape from bondage. Anyone could have predicted the results: a culture of dependency in which men without honor neglect their families, get drunk, and waste their lives tomcatting. The “conservative” response has usually been, “Get a job, make something of your life.” Some do, and it is to their credit that they have escaped. But many more do not. Like most of us, the failures lead lives bound by the community norms in which they grew up. Such a man is Clayton Lonetree.

The strange part of Lonetree's story is not his background but his treason. Prosecutors tried to establish a motive of Indian resentment against the white man's country that had enslaved his people. While there are such Indians,

especially among the young smart alecks who have listened to some community college teacher as he recites the record of their sufferings, more often Indians have proved to be unusually loyal Americans. They also make good soldiers—as if they still dimly remembered that courage in battle is a primary requirement of manhood. If you go to an Ojibwa powwow, as I did several years ago, the one thing that stands out is the patriotism of the men. In the midst of the phony Indian art (made by Navaho a thousand miles away), the foul smells of frying venison and human waste, the men are introduced on the dancing ground. One after another is announced, giving his rank, his branch of service, his regiment, his decorations, and always the main fact: *combat veteran*. In addition to their tribal ensigns, the men carry American flags and stand proud, basking in their deserved honor as combat veterans. I have never seen such sentimental pride in the American military as I have witnessed among Indian veterans.

Lonetree has done more than betray his country and his uniform; he has also betrayed his people, whose poverty, misery, and dependence should stand as a stern reminder of the fruits of all empire. The red men were our first conquest, and the hypocrisy we have lavished upon the very real problem they present (both for themselves and for the nation) is a good indication that we are not yet ready to play in the major leagues of international politics. (TF)

The children are back in school now, and it is almost time to face the ordeal of the first parents' conference with the teacher. If you're lucky, Miss Muggs is smarter than the students and seriously concerned about their progress. If there are any problems, though, you

may be in for trouble.

The first signal may not come until report cards arrive. Little Johnny, it turns out, gets a C- in reading. Since Johnny is reading four years above grade level on all the tests, you wonder what is going on and arrange for a meeting with Miss Muggs. Rather nervously, she says she's glad you've come, because she can't do a thing with the boy. (You wonder at this point why she hasn't said anything for six weeks.) She admits that Johnny is the best reader in the class, maybe the best she's ever had, but he doesn't do his workbook pages well, has sloppy handwriting, and does not use a #2 pencil. Worse, he's always fiddling and distracted; he seems bored with the work.

At this point you mention that the work he has brought home does not seem very challenging, and she explains that because of his workbook performance, he has been put into the lowest reading group, where most of the children are seriously below grade level. Rather than put him up to his level of ability, Miss Muggs recommends counseling and a visit to a pediatric neurologist. Attention Deficiency Disorder, she calls it.

After several expensive visits to the neurologist, it turns out that Johnny may have a minor problem, and, come to think of it, your teachers always described you as inattentive at that age. The remedy? A disciplined environment and lots of intellectual stimulation. Challenge his mind, you are told.

Miss Muggs is unimpressed and is insistent upon keeping him in the bluebird (or the shoes or the basement) reading group. By now you have discussed your problem with other parents and discovered that many children—all boys—have the same problem in Miss Muggs's class and that last year enough parents got so upset over this sort of thing that they went to the principal.

And so with fear and trembling you take your problem to the administration. Six months later, after dozens of unreturned telephone calls and unanswered letters, fruitless meetings at which the parents are told to mind their own business and let the professionals run the schools, you begin to get the picture. Johnny's grades have got worse, and even the other children

think the teacher is picking on him (and on the other boys whose parents are upset); your name is mud with everyone from the janitor to the superintendent, and now the school is recommending (i.e. requiring) Johnny to repeat the grade and spend another year with Miss Muggs. This, despite the fact that the achievement tests show work well above the national, state, and school average. "He's just not emotionally ready for fourth grade." You sigh, and if you can afford it, you put Johnny in a private school. If you can't, you do your best to repair the damage by teaching him at home.

This little drama is played out every year in school districts across the nation. One journalist who interviewed hundreds of parents discovered a general feeling of being shut out of the educational process. This is not just a political question of who should be in charge of education—people or bureaucrats. As Education Secretary William Bennett has stressed in several reports, one of the characteristics of good schools is their openness to parents. The more influence parents have over sensitive areas of curriculum and over important decisions affecting their children, the better the school is likely to be.

Unfortunately, the history of public schooling is a record of consolidation and centralization. Where once there were small districts, large school boards, and frequent meetings open to the public, there are now enormous districts, small boards, and little public access. Parents have few opportunities to express their opinions, much less to influence decisions. The rationale for all this centralization was simple: Local politics (i.e. democracy) would interfere in the massive effort to reform and professionalize education. Let the people with the education school degrees handle the schools, so the argument went; they know what they're doing.

If centralization had resulted in excellent schools, the petty tyranny of school boards and administrators might be tolerable. However, the dismal record of the past 20 years should have convinced even the die-hard professionals that the system was not working. What is more, politics has not been driven out of education. Far from it. Recent studies reveal a consis-

tent bias in textbooks and curriculum. The schools are militantly antireligious and uniformly left of center on social and political issues.

The underlying assumption of consolidation was that parents could not be trusted to look after their children's best interests—that we were either too stupid or didn't care. Now, the shoe is on the other foot, and it seems apparent that our children's education is too important to be entrusted to the professionals. (TF)

The Bork Confirmation Hearings answered, once and for all, the age-old question: "Why are there so few good men in public life." What a scene: reptile-faced politicians putting insolent questions to a distinguished jurist, whose every word and gesture in a long career are subjected to the most minute, hostile scrutiny, Judge Bork backpedaling furiously in a heroic effort to disclaim every honest and courageous position he has ever taken.

The opposition case was best expressed by former Transportation Secretary William Coleman, who complained that on constitutional questions Bork "always comes out the wrong way," i.e., against the vested interests of feminists, homosexuals, and professional minority activists. The high point in comic relief, however, came in the testimony given by the creative community. Artist Robert Rauschenburg solemnly declared that "democracy is not the product of law. Democracy is the need of the people to be free in dreams and reality." There's another constitutional right Bork hasn't heard of—the right to uncensored dreams. Rising to heights of eloquence not ordinarily heard in the Senate, the artist expressed the art world's fears of Bork: "Young, old, rich, and hopeful are united by repulsion that a nouveau changeling by his tongue and his unproven change of ideology might entrap decades of innocences." A hundred dollars to anyone who can translate that into English.

The eloquent artist was succeeded by the equally eloquent writer Mr. William Styron. Speaking for Pen America's 2,000 writers (and voters), Styron affirmed the desire of writers "To write as we wish to express ourselves in prose and poetry on whatever

subject and in whatever way we choose free of every sort of governmental restraint." The members have reason to worry. Since so much of their livelihood comes from government grants, who knows what might happen if a literate man entered any branch of the government? Even the directors of the American Booksellers Association have joined the side show by voting 19-0 against Bork.

The performance of Kennedy, Biden, and Metzenbaum was particularly stellar. Here were men whose personal conduct would bar them from any decent home in America, but they never missed the chance of leaping to the moral high ground. In my dreams, the hearings went like this:

Senator Thurmond: Judge Boik, have you evah cheated in law school?

Bork: No, Senator, I have not.

Thurmond: Well, then, did you ever get a friend to take an exam for you or receive hundreds of thousands of dollars to "arrange" a suspicious business deal?

Bork: No, Senator.

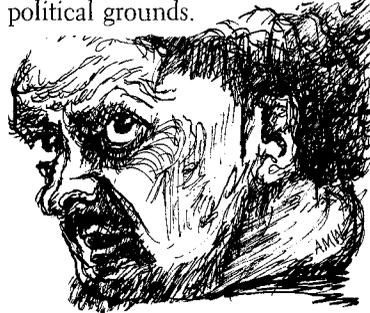
Thurmond: Judge, have you ever committed plagiarism, committed adultery, or driven a car off a bridge and watched as your ladyfriend drowned in a few feet of water?

In the mounting scuffle, Senators Kennedy, Biden, and Metzenbaum are tarred, feathered, and run out of Washington on a rail. Around their necks hang signs saying "The Duke and the Dauphin" and "Sic Semper Tyrannis."

Unfortunately, there is no reason to suspect that these publicly acknowledged scofflaws are in any way exceptional members of Congress. The alacrity with which Republican colleagues leaped to the defense of Senator Biden's character can only raise the gravest doubts over the probity of the entire body.

Bork deserves our respect and gratitude, if only because he once fired Archibald Cox—as smug an enemy of the Constitution as ever taught in law school. A firmer conservative would have stood his ground against the scoundrels and the zanies. Judge Bork is neither unintelligent nor unprincipled. He is only ambitious. To reach the pinnacle to which he has aspired for so many years, he must eat crow on his hands and knees. Some conserva-

tives are saying that Bork has only made *strategic* retreats. Once on the bench, he would be there for life, and short of an impeachment, there would be nothing his enemies could do. There is enough merit in this argument, obviously, to convince Senator Packwood—a self-styled Catholic who advocates abortion rights, a Republican who routinely opposes the administration. In any event, the socialist wing of the Democratic Party must vote against Bork's nomination on good political grounds.



Biden and Kennedy, still, know what they are doing. All appearances to the contrary, they are not entirely stupid. They realize that if a nominee can be made to grovel, he will never live long enough to regrow his backbone to its original stiffness. Even Supreme Court justices worry about the history books, which means—in effect—they believe what they read in the *New York Times*. Even if Robert Bork should survive his ordeal, he will have so abased himself that he would present no threat to the ruling establishment. And that, if you did not know already, is what the process is all about. (TF)

The United Methodist Church is hardly a hotbed of Christian orthodoxy in recent years, and it came as a mild surprise when Bishop George Bashore of New Hampshire, presiding over a jury in Dover, announced that the Rev. Rose Mary Denman had violated the church's rule that excludes practicing homosexuals from the ministry. The Rev. Ms. Denman had asked the church to "look beyond the law and see what is right." The jury did its very best and handed out the mildest possible sentence: a suspension. Since Denman was already on leave, it was the lightest of slaps upon the wrist, but even that proved to be an insufferable affront. Denman recently announced

that nothing the Methodists do can touch her: She's gone Unitarian. Denman is used to such changes, of course—she used to be Roman Catholic.

Some Christians would respond: Methodist, Unitarian—what's the difference? But there is an issue at stake. Methodist clergypersons are at least nominal Christians, which means they accept the divinity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the trinity taught by John Wesley. How many United Methodist clergymen really are Christians is a matter it would not pay to investigate too closely. Of course, the Methodists are in good company. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans have as little cause for rejoicing in their shepherds. One Anglican clergyman of our acquaintance said that at his ordination, the Bishop refused to ask him (or any candidate) about his faith and conviction—for fear of getting an honest answer.

It is hard not to sympathize with poor Ms. Denman. Years ago, the churches insisted that women couldn't be ordained, because that would violate the clear meaning of the Scriptures. Well, the Methodists and Episcopalians have been ordaining women right and left and forcing them down the throats of unwilling congregations in rural areas. They used to regard homosexuality as an abomination; now it is just an unpleasant condition—something like "unsightly fat." It just doesn't seem to go with a funny collar. How long can it be before sexual deviance will be regarded as a positive blessing? Once upon a time even Unitarians would have rejected Sister Rose Mary. At the rate they are progressing, the United Methodists are only a decade or so behind, Christologically speaking. In a few years, the main-line churches may be joining the Unitarians in singing their beautiful doxology:

From all that dwell beneath the
skies
Let faith and hope and love
arise.
Let beauty, truth, and good be
sung
In every land by every tongue.
Amen.

It's like saying amen after "Ode on a Grecian Urn." (TF)

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ON MIGHT *by Momcilo Selic*

"I chant the new empire . . ."

—Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman sang what he saw—in 1860, he gave a name to Madison's and Jefferson's vision of the new commonwealth. "[Our success]," Jefferson had said in 1801, "furnishes a new proof of the falsehood of Montesquieu's doctrine, that a republic can be preserved only in a

small territory. The reverse is the truth." Despite Jefferson's belief, however, the American Experiment will probably be remembered as the only reluctant empire in history: no Homers, Vergils, or Kiplings, but a Whitman, sang its praise. Theodore Roosevelt, the only unabashedly imperialist President, saw America as an international do-gooder that spoke softly and carried a big stick.

Yet, as Brooks Adams wrote: "Nature is omnipotent; and nations must float with the tide. Whither the exchanges flow, they must follow." Theodore Roosevelt's friend and advisor, Adams may not have been nurtured an imperialist, but, like Whitman, Roosevelt, or even Jefferson, he could not deny what he beheld: an immense, rich, populous country, in a world that had become no more meek than in Themistocles' time. His fear of a glacial America, slipping towards rot and destruction, finds its echoes in the hearts of many conservatives. A melancholy generalizer and a visionary, Brooks Adams tried to tell us that destinies, manifest or not, may not be shirked in a world of machine-like men. As Woodrow Wilson set up the stage for a century of wars, Adams might have felt vindicated—but whether anything salved his soul, we may never know. If early-20th-century America was a pain to him, what would he say now?

While this country basks in video games, Irangate, pacifism, affirmative action, "justice for all," and junk mail promoting Hammacher Schlemmer "solar-ventilated golf caps," Henry Ford's words should be recalled. "In my mind," wrote Ford, the creator of the production line, "nothing is more abhorrent than a life of ease. . . . Let every American become steeled against coddling. . . . It is a drug." Though Ford has been accused of many things, he was, above all, an American: In my youth in Yugoslavia, I remember the almost religious awe his cars caused. "I can reach the engine like a cow's udder," a mechanic friend told me, "nothing like a Mercedes, or any of this European junk, where you have to use a can opener before you can get at anything." Henry Ford was an American because he was fearless: He would look, see, think, and do, regardless of any chorus. It took a long time (until the 1970's) for American windbreakers to start boasting false pockets, bad zippers, and the theatrical tailoring, typical of Italy, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

"During the seven and a half years that I was President," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, "this nation behaved in international matters towards all other nations precisely as an honorable man behaves to his fellow man. We made no promise which we could not and did not keep. We made no threat which we did not carry out." Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh would have concurred. Though resolutely op-

