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Expertise and Disbelief: Post-1945 American Attitudes Toward the Authority of Knowledge

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EXPERTISE AND DISBELIEF:
POST-1945 AMERICAN ATTITUDES
TOWARD THE AUTHORITY OF KNOWLEDGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
Terry Wagner
B.A., Rice University, 2002
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2010
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“The thunder and lightning strike us,
And then we’re shocked to see the likeness
Between us and the things we’ve hated for a long, long time.”

The Godz
“Dirty Windows” 1973

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Abstract

“You can’t beat brains,” said President John Kennedy of the intellectuals and technicians he assembled in his cabinet. Kennedy was perhaps the greatest political champion for the virtues of expertise. However, all over America during the 1960s and ‘70s, diverse groups voiced doubts about how much experts, such as social scientists, policy specialists, and others, actually improved life. This dissertation examines how movements on the political left and right, and spiritual ruptures such as the rise of ‘60s counterculture and of evangelicalism, spoke in different language to express a similar point: human mastery over the world is profoundly limited. Many believed, as a result, that rational planning too should be limited. In this regard, the dissertation is part of the historiography of the decline of American liberalism, and its foundation, expert management.

The dissertation is foremost a cultural and intellectual history – locating for its sources the artifacts of mass culture – and, to a lesser extent, political. A reading of American cinema produced from the 1950s through the 1970s, as well as of songs, sermons, presidential rhetoric, and popular nonfiction, demonstrates the tense relationship Americans had with experts. The study pays especially close attention to several of the films of Henry Fonda, and the symbolic meaning of some of his characters as idealized rational humanists. Through the rhetoric of psychedelic music, presidential speeches, anti-war rallies, and evangelical nonfiction, this dissertation locates the sources of hostility toward those who justify their authority by appealing to expertise.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Our attitudes toward knowledge are complicated. The numerous meanings of the word *rationalize*, since its first appearance in the 17th century, are instructive. In its earliest use, the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us, *rationalize* meant “to make conformable to reason.” Examples of the term’s usage include finding logic in abstract notions such as happiness, or making plausible a philosopher’s utopian dreams. In such usage, rationalizing was often salubrious, as in Herbert Spencer’s 1883 assertion that science’s rationalization of life could lead people to take better care of their health and bodies. An expanded meaning of *rationalize*, in the 1930s *Encyclopedia of Social Science*, states that the aim of sociologists, psychologists, and economists was to find universal principles in the chaos of human life. Rationalizing, to that writer, was nothing less than explaining the mysteries of human thoughts and actions.¹

Explaining mysteries can introduce problems. A usage of *rationalize*, which first appeared in the mid-1800s, suggested that applying rational assessment to the world robbed life of mystery. In 1855, a British writer described his distaste for rationalization: “Away all the wonders, till we make them at last impossible, and give up caring to believe them.”² This “explaining away” through knowledge what had before seemed miraculous bothered some. When Walt Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*, also in 1855, he included the poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer.”³ The work was short and the sentiment direct:

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, “*rationalize*,” definition 1a.

² *Ibid.*, 2b.

³ Walt Whitman, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” accessed <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174747>.

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in
the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

The proofs and figures, the charts and diagrams, and the spirit-crushing columns and arithmetic of the lecture-room combined to make Whitman sick, wandering off in mystical silence. To many, “perfect silence” is the appropriate reaction to the majesty of the cosmos. The idea that people should end or challenge scientific study before scientists ruined our vision of the world resonated in the mid and late 20th-century among disparate groups: hippies, moon-landing commentators, back-to-the-landers, humanities professors, and evangelical Christians.

For psychologists in the 1920s, “rationalize” took on another negative meaning, one distinct from Whitman’s sense. These scientists of the mind used the term “rationalize” as a word that meant “to explain or justify . . . with plausible but specious reasons.”⁴ In 1925, a Freudian noted that a “patient’s consciousness . . . puts forward a sect of secondary motives . . . rationalizes them, in short.” Such a form of rationalization did not require pathology.

Rationalizing to assuage guilt, or explain away a lack of effort or courage, entered our speech in a broad and widely-understood sense. Rationalizing meant making excuses, using reason to arrive at an already-decided destination. It was a human trait but not an admirable one. The key word in the definition was *specious*: “wrong and misleading in appearance.” Through the term rationalize, we trace an etymological path – from elucidating to hoodwinking – in two

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, “rationalize,” 1c.

dictionary pages. At one moment, the English language contained a verb for putting knowledge into action. Before long, the term meant making the spectacular meaningless, or tricking someone by using evidence in a misleading way.

Something similar happened in American attitudes toward knowledge and expertise. Insofar as knowledge bestows on people earthly authority to study, test, and reorder the world, we find examples of acceptance, endorsement, but also a great deal of dissatisfaction and rejection. This dissertation suggests that we can sketch a narrative arc in which public faith in those who possessed essential but arcane knowledge did indeed, in the familiar phrase, “rise and fall” in the United States in the 20th century. The story of public faith in expertise bears striking, and not coincidental, similarities and chronologies to what historians have called the mid-century American consensus and its dissolution over the course of the 1960s and ‘70s. The consensus, sometimes “Cold War consensus,” embraced the social safety net of New Deal programs, anti-communism, and the spending necessary for an enormous standing military.

Such domestic and foreign programs required specialists in every echelon of the American system: social scientists for the administration of the welfare state; civilian and military analysts to train the military and assess global conditions; the businessmen and managers of private organizations that contracted with the state; and bureaucrats to administer agencies such as the Social Security Administration and the Pentagon. Overturning the consensus had a great deal to do with popular, intellectual, and political rhetoric that undermined the broad ideas of rationality. It utilized rhetoric that was hostile to reason, “intellectualism,” and expertise. The discourse that rejected authority based on knowledge circulated through 1960s and ‘70s America, in political speeches, academic writing, journalism

and popular nonfiction, cinema, sermons, and songs. My approach to investigation of public attitudes toward expertise is primarily cultural – locating for its sources the artifacts of mass culture – and, to a lesser extent, political and intellectual.

This dissertation conceives broadly of expertise, and the concept of what an expert is. The approach is distinct from some of the most celebrated studies of American attitudes toward knowledge. Richard Hofstadter’s *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* examined the intellectual in the United States as a social type and class.⁵ Intellectuals were, for Hofstadter, separated from the majority of Americans by work, thought, and residence. Intellectuals typically wrote about the United States from the remove of the university. The geographical separation and the intellectual’s work, isolated professors and essayists from other Americans. Academicism produced its share of the hostility to which Hofstadter alluded in his title.

I do not consider the college professor or social critic as the quintessential American expert, though in what follows there are indeed discussions of universities and professors, the second lives that professors sometimes led as Washington experts, and popular criticisms of “eggheads” in university and public life. The university is important to this dissertation as the place where experts are trained and the starting point from which they are launched into the world. Unlike professors, critics, and intellectuals, experts of the mid and late-20th century lived everywhere. Government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses harbored them. The social worker, NASA scientist, political scientist, civic engineer, Pentagon memo-writer, medical scientist and many others were experts without publishing social criticism or meeting together

⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963). Other works of the period, such as Christopher Lasch’s *The New Radicalism in America* (1965), similarly study the American intellectual as a type of social critic.

as a self-conscious repository of American brains. Different publics have demonstrated various degrees of trust toward each group on that list, but at one time or another, each has been described, and thought of, as a body of experts.

For this reason, the term “expert” refers to many people in many professions who have advanced education, specialized skills, and experience. “Experts” are not necessarily “intellectuals,” in the collegiate sense of the term, though some unquestionably are. The concept of expertise lives in the American imagination connected to a constellation of other concepts: bureaucracy, authority, irrelevant abstraction, and to the ideas of reason and rationality themselves.⁶ Large, multi-layered institutions of social organization are inescapable in the lives of most experts. The social worker labors as an arm of state or federal government or large nonprofit organization; the medical doctor is for years an intern in a large hospital; the research scientist requires an institution with funds for sophisticated equipment and management to coordinate massive projects. Certainly bureaucracy, and its cousin technocracy – a word that suggests large structures worked by trained technicians – are inextricably related to our vision of what expertise is, and what an expert does.

From at least as early as the Progressive reformers, the era when this study begins, the first problem of the expert in America has been the undemocratic nature of knowledge. Expertise has a difficult, if not impossible, relationship to democracy. For the expert, authority

⁶ We should include the inescapable relationship between expertise and privilege, both the privilege necessary to acquire expertise and that which expertise bestows. The privilege of expertise has distinct meanings within the contexts of race, gender, and class. The relationship between privilege and expertise, however, will require more study about the implicit and explicit ways that expertise has been encoded as white, male, middle and upper class, and sexually heteronormative. This study does not attempt to dissect the essential nexus. For an excellent consideration of intellectualism and privilege in the 1950s, see Aaron Lecklider, *Inventing the Egghead: The Battle over Brainpower in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013).

derives from the intellectual mastery of exceptional individuals, those who were referred to at the height of American liberalism as “the best and the brightest.” In democracy, authority flows from a balance between majority sentiment and an agreed-upon group of natural rights. The people who ostensibly know the most, and the majority of the people themselves, are likely to disagree regularly. Personal values, variant interpretations, and even hostility based in class distinction can all separate expert consensus from public will. Deference to the decisions of experts, like all authority, can erode quickly if the electorate decides it has been ill-served. This dissertation is most interested in forces that challenged the authority of the expert, especially during the 1960s and ‘70s. Those who did represented numerous constituencies. A short list of critics who believed that the undemocratic nature of expertise was problematic includes: liberal intellectual Daniel Bell; conservative intellectual and “godfather of the New Right” William Buckley, Jr.; journalist Jack Newfield; the Left Wing Students for a Democratic Society; the Right Wing Young Americans for Freedom; counterculture enthusiast Charles Reich; and evangelist Billy Graham. That list does not include the fictional characters from the Hollywood films that are also central to this study.

This dissertation suggests the political consequences of the rise and fall of expertise. The cult of the expert, and the expertly-administered federal agency, are significant parallels that bring the politics of the Progressive Era to those of modern liberalism (Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal) and reached its zenith during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Progressivism and New Deal liberalism both argued that human mastery is possible and that the best-educated should run the organizations that exert mastery. Programs, agencies, and bureaus must, by their nature, precede any socioeconomic change that they effect. Bureaucratic

institutions are more real than their hoped-for outcomes. They come into being first, and then outlive what they were created to actualize. To think about government projects, we must consider the experts who run them. For instance, the Interstate Commerce Commission, the first federal regulatory body (1887), studied and publicized railroad rates. A key advocate of the Food and Drug Act (1906) was Harvey Wiley, Chief Chemist of the US Department of Agriculture's Division of Chemistry. John Carmody studied at four different colleges and universities before being hired as a private inspector of steel structures and eventually director of the New Deal's Rural Electrification Administration. The very concept of Lyndon Johnson's Child Nutrition Act (1966) presupposed nutritionists, social workers, commodities buyers, and lawyers to administer the program under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture. Expertise has, since the beginning of the concept of federal regulation, administration, and oversight, been foundational to the liberal state. Any decline of public esteem for experts weakens politically those who lobby for active government.

The gradual chipping away at the edifice of expertise by a diverse cast of skeptics is the story in this dissertation. Political conservatives and liberals, for different reasons, called into question the authority of educated elites who made policy in Washington. These two groups simultaneously wrote different sections of America's critique of expertise. Michael Flamm and David Steigerwald's *Debating the 1960s: Liberal, Conservative, and Radical Perspectives*, has shaped my thinking.⁷ The two halves of the book analyze the "liberal-radical debate" and the "liberal-conservative debate." We might add to these the liberal-liberal debate that grew from

⁷ Michael Flamm and David Steigerwald, *Debating the 1960s: Liberal, Conservative, and Radical Perspectives* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2008).

social unrest and the Vietnam War. We must examine, with these historians, how the radical and conservative criticisms dovetailed to undermine the idea of expertise upon which their liberal opponents stood. A civil war within liberalism further fueled a crisis in confidence of the professional, the specialist, and the expert. In addition to the political forces that attacked the liberal faith in impartial reason, two of the most significant and disruptive cultural forces of the era, the rise of counterculture and evangelicalism, further questioned Americans' allegiance to expertise and its faith in human mastery. For a generation of seekers, rationality itself became the enemy.

Reading about three different subjects at the same time was significant for the genesis of this project. Historian Rick Perlstein's biographies of New Right figures have been a fount of ideas. His writing demonstrates how the collapse of American liberalism, and the variety of American manias that contributed to the collapse, were in constant discourse with people who were involved in the early stages of the New Right.⁸ Perlstein's books describe what he calls "The Unmaking of American Consensus," and show that the decisions of liberal experts did as much to bring about that "unmaking" as the rhetoric of Barry Goldwater. Perlstein's description of the intellectual journey of Clarence Manion in *Before the Storm* remains a fascinating, pithy synopsis of a man whose evolution involved losing faith in the idea of expertise. Perlstein's discussion in *Nixonland* about the failures of civil rights legislation in 1966, despite "the responsible literature in the field," and his comical discussion of Nelson Rockefeller's attempt to reach the presidency by amassing an army of "disinterested experts" to produce numerous

⁸ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2001). Synopsis of Manion's early career, 6-10.

“Special Studies Projects” raised questions that helped suggest this project.⁹ That these two books included “unmaking” and “fracturing” in their titles demonstrates a breakdown in the late 20th century that historians have been trying to piece together since the first historiography about the 1960s.

At the same time that I studied Perlstein, I began researching a project about the culture of hippie child-rearing and how it contrasted to “normal” thinking about child development. Ann Hulbert’s *Raising America*, which discusses debate among pediatricians, psychologists, and best-selling authors, made me think about the frustration that can result when experts disagree.¹⁰ The often-juvenile public debates between those who claimed to know the most about the brain development and emotional needs of children baffled me, but ultimately, it left me thinking broadly about the construction of expertise and how Americans react to it. Finally, in Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969), an early section, about frantic reactions in England to predictions that the National Health Service (NHS) would euthanize patients whose quality of life was deemed insufficient caught my attention. The episode bore similarities to the passionate rhetoric of resistance to the Affordable Care Act (2010).¹¹ The common anxieties of 1960s hippies and the protestors of 2010, often called the Tea Party, about centralized control of health care – not to mention the generational affiliation of the majority of participants – led to a reading of a diverse body of rhetoric of American protest.

⁹ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 76-7, 143.

¹⁰ Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice about Children* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

¹¹ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995 [1968]), 19-22.

The first two chapters of this dissertation summarize the growth in a faith that some Progressives and liberals believed: that the world could be improved by proper utilization of human knowledge. Rhetorically, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson spoke with more optimism than any Presidents before or since about what expertise in the physical, medical, and social sciences might accomplish. The remaining four chapters of the dissertation examine political and cultural currents that eroded the edifice of expertise. The dissertation is more interested in “disbelief” than in “expertise.” Chapter 3 scrutinizes the beginning of the New Right in the 1950s and ‘60s and its conceptual relationship to populist anti-intellectualism displayed in two Henry Fonda films from 1964, *The Best Man* and *Fail-Safe*. In addition to Perlstein’s work on Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan, Lisa McGirr’s seminal *Suburban Warriors* demonstrates how the new breed of conservatives, numerous in Sunbelt suburbs such as Orange County, California, engaged the language of persecution by elites. She suggests, in the political coalition between the New Right and evangelicals, similar skepticism in the ability of humans to control their world through planning. Like the counterculture, McGirr noted, the growth of evangelicalism “at its heart, also represented a rejection of liberal secular pragmatism.”¹² Rebecca Klatch’s earlier work in this vein, which found similar themes in the sentiments of right-wing and left-wing college youth, is suggestive. Young Americans for Freedom and Students for a Democratic Society waged war on large social organizations, at their universities and in Washington, just as stridently as they opposed each other.¹³

¹² Lisa McGirr: *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the American New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 242.

¹³ Rebecca Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Chapter 4 surveys a selection of liberals – in professional journals, politics, journalism, and American film – whose faith in the rationalist foundation of liberalism collapsed in the '60s. Collections of essays and columns by Patrick Moynihan and Jack Newfield are integral sources. Much of the most “classic” historiography on the subject remains foundational. The book with which I have spent more time than any other is Allen Matusow’s *The Unraveling of America*. Again, the essential theme of '60s historiography is “unraveling.” A lapsed liberal who saw his monograph on politics and culture in the 1960s as a eulogy for the political values of his youth, Matusow reread the decade from Great Society programs to counterculture. He chronicled, but also embodied, the crisis of faith in mid-century liberalism. He demonstrated awareness that the demise of the American consensus related to deep doubts concerning the professional class, doubts about which experts themselves fretted. Of the War on Poverty, Matusow wrote: “Those who most directly benefited were the middle-class doctors, teachers, social workers, builders, and bankers who provided federally subsidized goods and services of sometimes suspect values.”¹⁴ Matusow wrote about what many Americans in the '60s sensed: experts were an economic group in the business of policy (and, some said, poverty). The failures of liberalism in the decade tarnished Americans’ attitudes toward experts, who seemed to be presiding over a fracturing society.

David Steigerwald emphasized culture even more. In *The Sixties and the End of Modern America*, Steigerwald integrates literature and the arts into a narrative invested in artifacts of high culture, and some mass culture. His discussion of the irrationalism in the works of

¹⁴ Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 240.

playwrights Kenneth Brown and Peter Weiss, novelists John Barth and Saul Bellow, and the psychiatrist R. D. Laing – all of whose work attracted many critics and highbrows – was inspirational.¹⁵ As for the best-known Leftists of the decade, James Miller’s and Todd Gitlin’s works on Students for a Democratic Society’s (SDS) remain the starting point. For a group whose greatest contribution was rhetoric, the extensive discussion of policies and speeches in Miller and Gitlin are essential.¹⁶ Online archives of SDS materials have also been most useful in providing access to speeches and memos, famous and forgotten.

Chapter 5 reviews the counterculture of the ‘60s and ‘70s, and the artifacts of “long-haired” mass culture, noting how drop-outs and mystics spoke about the reasonable society. The counterculture has been my starting point for every research project. The hippies were a minority in their time albeit a majority since. The tricks of memory have made many youth of the period into citizens of Woodstock Nation. In this section, the historiography I utilized most has been a collection of essays, *Imagine Nation*, and Terry Anderson’s energetic *The Movement and the Sixties*. In the essay anthology, David Farber’s clear narrative in “The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation” has been essential—together with Don Lattin’s *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*—to my understanding of the proliferation of, especially, psychedelics, from laboratory to university to concert festival. On the difficult-to-pin-down topic of overlap between the New Left and the counterculture, Doug Rossinow’s “The Revolution is about our Lives” is very good.¹⁷ Anderson’s chapter on counterculture marshals crucial sources, especially from

¹⁵ David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 164-8. The heading for the section about ‘60s artists mentioned above, is titled “The Critique of Rationality.”

¹⁶ James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987).

¹⁷ Farber and Rossinow in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, edited by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, (New York: Routledge, 2002). Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*:

underground newspapers, the meaning of which transcend his individual arguments. A brief section in this dissertation concerns “the cultural meaning of plastic,” though Anderson’s collection of critiques could fill an additional section about the same topic. His fascination with countercultural tangents is essential. Some writers, quoted by Anderson, called processed foods “chemical coated plastics in fancy boxes.”¹⁸ Further, Anderson articulates the visions of groups who worked for human mastery over life outside the context of official organization. Anderson’s sources remain the starting point for a close reading of what the “freaks” in America were trying to say.

The historiography about the 1970s and the growing body of literature on the evangelical age have influenced my thinking, especially concerning the central role that born-again Christianity has played in the lives of enormous numbers of Americans. Tom Wolfe coined the term “The Third Great Awakening” in 1976.¹⁹ Historian Bruce Schulman gave the phenomenon an excellent explication in his study of the decade: “An outpouring of enthusiasm and spiritual experimentation that ran the gamut of American religious life, from New Right Christians to New Age seekers, students of the Book of Revelation and the Torah, the Bhagavad Gita and the I Ching.”²⁰ I have been interested in the Jesus Movement often composed of former hippies and in the slightly later mainstream manifestation of born-again Christianity. The former movement is a meaningful bridge between countercultural ideas and American

How Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith, and Andrew Weil Killed the Fifties and Ushered in a New Age for America (New York: Harper, 2011).

¹⁸ Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in American from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 276.

¹⁹ Thomas Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York*, August 23, 1976.

²⁰ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002), 92-101. Sandbrook’s chapter “Soldiers of God” is also excellent. Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

Christianity. The latter is among the most important changes in the social, and often political, lives of Americans in the last half-century. Historian Steven Miller is persuasive regarding the significance of Christian enthusiasm in his new historiography on American religion in the mid-to-late 20th century.²¹ His consideration of Billy Graham has influenced my own approach.

A new body of literature about the relationship between Americans and educational and cultural elites is emerging. Perhaps scholars are puzzled by tenured historians who do not believe the consensus of climatologists, by the deep suspicion of some that the Congressional Budget Office is a partisan organization, or by our schizophrenic approach to soliciting, then rejecting, the advice of medical doctors. Or, perhaps, to the amusement of satirist Stephen Colbert, historians and other academics will study the concept of “truthiness” – the passionate belief in a claim that lacks factual support, or is disproven by facts.²² George Marsden’s *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* and Aaron Lecklider’s *Inventing the Egghead* have challenged me to consider expertise from new perspectives.²³

Starting with the first chapter, I employ a whimsical conceit, Henry Fonda as “the imaginary President of liberal America.” Fonda’s film work touched on many American myths, and in *Advise and Consent* (1962), *The Best Man* (1969), and *Fail-Safe* (1964), he spent his celluloid middle age pursuing, or governing from, federal office. Fonda embodied the ideal

²¹ Steven Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

²² In a 2012 psychological experiment, at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, lead investigator Eryn J. Newman and his team found that subjects were more likely to agree with statements that were accompanied by photographs than with statements that were factually accurate, accessed <http://www.springer.com/about+springer/media/springer+select?SGWID=0-11001-6-1385843-0>

²³ George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). Aaron Lecklider, *Inventing the Egghead: The Battle over Brainpower in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

balance between head and heart, reason and compassion. The unity of love and rationality has been one of the American liberal's most potent myths, especially in the mid-1960s when the rupture of consensus weakened American confidence. Fonda was the character Americans were most accustomed to seeing working behind the scenes in Washington. That his son produced and starred in the essential Hollywood meditation on the anti-rationalist counterculture, *Easy Rider* (1969), deepens the Fonda image by complicating its legacy with generational discord. The film theory of Richard Dyer makes a strong case that the practice among filmgoers of conflating stars with their roles is conceptually sound and makes for useful study. Like John Wayne, a key figure for Dyer, Henry Fonda was always "an already-signifying star image" in his films.²⁴

Expertise and Disbelief contributes to the historiography of "unmaking" and "unraveling" by analyzing how our cultural and intellectual life has changed our assumptions about what to expect from professionals, government, perhaps life itself. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson told Americans in his inaugural address: "Is a new world coming? We welcome it—and we will bend it to the hopes of man."²⁵ Twenty years later, Ronald Reagan shared, in his second inaugural address, his different interpretation: "We asked things of government that government was not equipped to give. We yielded authority to the National Government that properly belonged to States or to local governments or to the people themselves."²⁶ Such changes in American attitudes about public and private services – and about our very potential

²⁴ Richard Dyer in *Film Theory and Criticism*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 7th Edition, 2009), 480-5. Dyer's *Stars* was first published in 1979.

²⁵ Lyndon Johnson, "Inauguration Address," January 20, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26985>.

²⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Inauguration Address," January 21, 1985, accessed <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12185a.htm>

to solve problems collectively – are part of a more profound story. Fundamental beliefs derive from our conception of human ability. Our capacity to affect the world is inseparable from our convictions about the extent of human potential and the utility of that combination of education and experience that we call expertise. This is the larger issue my dissertation seeks to address.

Chapter 2. Proclaim The Progressive Promise of Expertise

“We can no longer treat life as something that has trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization, alter its tools, formulate its methods, educate and control it.”

Walter Lippmann,
Drift and Mastery, 1914

Before the idea of bureaucracy had become completely synonymous with labyrinthine dysfunction, the concept of mastering modern problems by planning the future held what, to us, must seem an almost incomprehensible promise. If administrations and regulatory bodies were armies, their soldiers were the accumulators of up-to-date knowledge, those who had spent their college days studying relevant matters. These soldiers, promised the optimists, would ensure that the 20th century would not be as chaotic as the late 19th. During the Progressive Era, the voices of modernity preached that science would fix the problems of an industrial society. The scientists, both those who studied physical phenomena, and the new sort who studied social problems, would solve any societal dilemma. The professors told their students how they envied being young at a unique moment in history. When twenty-five-year-old journalist Walter Lippmann jotted down proposed solutions for the problems of industrial capitalism, he returned with a manifesto about human potential. *Drift and Mastery* (1914) was a call for Americans to apply the scientific method to every aspect of their world. The promise of this process, although only faintly imagined, would usher in the best of all possible worlds.

Such proponents of expertise understood the conflict that arose between the authority that derived from knowledge, and the authority that derived from majority sentiment in a democratic society. Progressives analyzed the issue but were not overly concerned. The results would help win the people. Implementing the best ideas based on the best data would overwhelm skeptics, traditionalists, and mystics. As Lippmann put it, in the modern era, science *was* democracy. “When the impulse that overthrows kings and priests and unquestioned creeds becomes self-conscious we call it science,” he wrote.²⁷ “The scientific spirit is the discipline of democracy.” Anti-planning and religion were sure to wane because, while long-standing sentiments were hostile to the idea of human mastery, such outmoded systems could not match the results of the expert.

The Great Depression gave the Progressive planning new hope. Franklin Roosevelt, and his professorial counsel, the Brain Trust, began in 1932 the project of constructing a modern state staffed by the most qualified. Planning and problem-solving by newly trained experts were the essential bridges that linked Progressives to New Deal liberals. Even as policies and goals changed, the idea of fixing society through the efforts of the best and the brightest was codified. Critics of the Brain Trust perceived the experimental economists and social scientists of the Roosevelt Administration as distant persecutors, wrong-headed intellectuals better fit to a classroom than to the federal buildings where policy was made. The critics suggested that no set of facts or analysis that the experts might present would quell the conflict between popular will and specialized knowledge, though the five straight presidential victories of the Democratic

²⁷ Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978 [1914]), 151.

Party suggested that perhaps the brainy workers of the bureaus, agencies, and commissions commanded majority support.

Neither World War II nor the Cold War did anything to diminish American reliance on the college kids and the elites with advanced degrees. War and peace relied as much on ideas and administration as on time-honored, martial values.²⁸ President Harry Truman said it explicitly at mid-century. American victory in the Cold War, and the future of Western civilization, was in the hands of experts, America's best minds in technical and social matters. Many American essayists of the period wrote about the American consensus, about how Americans' values were settled. The United States was a land of plenty. Communism was evil. In the consensus was a place for the educational elites who staffed the public-private partnerships that created prosperity, solved social problems, and fueled the American Cold War.

The rhetoric that pitted experts against street smarts and intellectuals against common sense was, nonetheless, resilient during the period of mid-century consensus. These dynamics were especially alive in the movies. A doctor from the Public Health Service struggled to convince local authorities that a virus threatened the health of the country in *Panic in the Streets* (1950). An architect took on the wrath of a jury that was suspicious of a slow analysis of the facts in *12 Angry Men* (1957). In such movies, the educated men of reason and conscience

²⁸ Historian Richard Pell summarized World War II: "The military victory depended not so much on military ingenuity as on economic organization, industrial and scientific innovation, the skilled allocation of technological and human resources unprecedented in the nation's history." Richard Pell, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s & 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 6. John Byrne has noted that the transition of Harvard Business School into the Statistical Air Command, staffed by a young generation of management experts during the Second World War, increased Air Force efficiency immensely. John Byrne, *The Whiz Kids: The Founding Fathers of American Business—and the Legacy They Left Us* (New York: Currency, 1993).

won over their skeptics. Both films inflated the collegiate fantasy that, from a certain set of accepted facts, rational individuals would find practical solutions.

During the period of American liberalism and the era of expertise, a number of critics insisted that the promise of reasoned solutions had come up empty. Rationalization of life had created physical abundance but spiritual hollowness. The educated elites did not supply the kind of powerful authority that unified Americans. Protest against the culture of expertise began small but voiced concerns that never receded. From Beat Generation writers to Best Picture winner *The Apartment* (1960), challengers bemoaned the rationalist life and beat the drum for something more lively, spiritually nourishing, and transcendent.

Progressive Sermons

The committee charged in 1894 with determining what a school of social science at Columbia University should be wrote a report with vivid answers. “A sort of scientific Clearing House” on the problems of industrial society, the school of social science would enlist professors who embodied “competent scientific authority” and students who would leave as “experts in judging of the value of sociological evidence.”²⁹ The crises at the turn of the century that experts would have to resolve were unprecedented. Never before had poverty and crowding been a greater threat to social order. Never had labor been so militant, wealth so unequal, and immigrants so loathe to assimilate. Progressive intellectuals formulated ideas about what the expert – the modern intellectual who studied real-world problems and

²⁹ Quotations from “Report on a Department of Social Science at Columbia University” (1894), in John Louis Recchiuti, *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive-Era Reform in New York City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 31.

imagined solutions – had to be. The project had to begin with a well-conceived university, and with individuals who believed that the world of human relations could be mastered with the same exactitude as the world of inanimate matter. The school of social professionals, the report promised, “would diffuse accurate and sound knowledge of the problems demanding solution, and would train up a body of scientific and practical men for future leaders in those enterprises.” The scholar of the modern era would be a practical person of the world, straining to mimic in the social realm the breathtaking advances of the physical sciences in laboratories.

The rhetoric of Progressive hope in social science remained remarkably consistent throughout the Progressive Era. As Franklin Giddings wrote in 1909 to the *Journal of Sociology*: “We need men who will . . . give us *exact studies*, such as we get from the psychological laboratories, not to speak of the biological and physical sciences.”³⁰ The social science expert would take up “adding machine and logarithms,” for he was a creator and interpreter of data, like the physicists and chemists across campus. In case his readers did not understand him, Giddings lectured them plainly: “Sociology can be made an exact quantitative science.” The same energy that had made America the premier industrial producer, and was on its way to eradicating disease, was creating scientific spaces in universities to resolve the everyday problems of everyday people.

The study and amassing of data was the proper preparation for leadership. Perhaps the social scientists would advise or write policy; maybe they would run for office themselves. Once the facts were in, the experts would be an undeniable force. Some Progressive dreamers understood that in the American political system, responsible scholarship was not a guarantee

³⁰ Giddings in Recchiuti, *Civic Engagement*, 33.

of power.³¹ The majority might be outright hostile to work that they did not understand. How could they establish technocracy, run by the most capable and informed, while maintaining the American tradition of popular election? What historian John Louis Recchiuti has called “the paradox of democratic elitism” was a subject for contemplation.³² “Political democracy does not mean government by the uninformed, but by those best able to serve the people,” wrote psychologist James McKeen Cattell. “Representative and expert government is necessary.” Cattell suggested that experts could represent the people wisely without necessarily being chosen by the people they served.

Cattell’s vision of a harmonious resolution of democracy and expertise was not shared by all his peers. At the 1916 Columbia University matriculation ceremony, a Progressive economist told the freshmen, “The university spirit is jeopardized by democracy, no less than by autocracy. For democracy levels down as well as up, and is proverbially intolerant of the expert.”³³ Such democratic intolerance was another difficulty for educated elites to sort out. At different times and to different Progressives, democracy had various meanings. It could mean providing people with the most educated leaders, or it could mean giving voice to people. In their darker moments, some Progressives thought of democracy as mob rule by the ignorant.³⁴ The more optimistic fantasized about a better educated mass public, one that could appreciate, at the least, how experts made sense of the world.

³¹ Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81-6.

³² Recchiuti, *Civic Engagement*, 12.

³³ Quotations from Columbia faculty in Recchiuti, 14.

³⁴ For a good discussion of the difficulties of Progressive democracy, see Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 82.

When he published *Drift and Mastery* in 1914, Walter Lippmann, provided the best-remembered argument in favor of solving problems through the application of expertise to the social issues of the world. “Mastery” meant, for Lippmann, utilizing human potential to improve and steer society. It meant that the act of study, experimentation, and revision – the scientific method – held more authority than any concept based on faith. Optimism about this scientific approach to society burst from *Drift and Mastery’s* pages. The people of the twentieth century would “use the political state for interesting and important purposes,” the author insisted. As Lippmann wrote in a letter while writing *Drift*, he had lost interest in the ideas of utopian revolutionaries and was now consumed by something seemingly more prosaic: “interest in administrative problems.”³⁵ For starters, the technicians of industry could make work more satisfying: “You have to enlarge the scope and the vision of the efficiency expert so that he can begin to take out of industry the deadening effects of machine production.”³⁶ The possibility of making work more meaningful was just the beginning. The scientific management of business would inevitably translate to a scientific management of society. The efficiency experts – the scientific factory floor administrators and middle-management – were a new social type, one that would expand throughout society to meet all types of modern needs. Similar to the industry specialists who would make work more humane, an army of experts would be called forth to handle the social conditions of the society – market regulators, social workers,

³⁵ Lippmann quoted in Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 79.

³⁶ Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*, 174, 98.

psychologists, ecologists, sociologists.³⁷ Even consumers would become experts who demanded better products and fair practices from businesses.

Lippmann preached about secular solutions, excited about the entrance onto the public stage of the scientist, and the exit of the priest. Trusting human potential meant imagining organization that previous generations had feared was sacrilegious. “We can go about organizing the new structure of society,” Lippmann wrote, “laying down plans for wise uses of our natural resources, working wherever we happen to be, or wherever our abilities call us, on substitution of design for accident, human purposes for brute destiny.” These ideas lay atop a new faith in what rational persons could do, and in the fellowship of educated community. “We begin to recognize a vague spirit which may suggest a common purpose,” Lippmann wrote. “We live in a fellowship with scientists whose books we cannot read, with educators whose work we do not understand.”³⁸ How superior was the faith in expertise to the unproven mystical verities of the past. Lippmann was not shy about dismissing the vestiges of human superstition: “The Biblical scholars of the last hundred years, in spite of their so-called atheism, have, I believe, seen deeper into the basis of Christianity than the Church which has represented it.”³⁹ Getting the most out of something meant, for Lippmann, understanding rather than simply believing.

Triumphant as his tone often was, Lippmann understood that a number of significant problems dogged the dawning era of expertise. While Lippmann wrote in some passages that scientific management of society was itself “self-government,” he recognized the problem of

³⁷ Historian John Lusk summarized well Lippmann’s attraction to thinking of government as a science when he wrote, “Only by means of the common discipline of scientific method could men in conflict derive ‘from the same set of facts . . . the same set of conclusions.’” John Lusk, *Lippmann, Liberty and the Press* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 27.

³⁸ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*, 156.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

integrating experts and democracy: “The real problem of collectivism is that difficulty of combining popular control with administrative power,” he wrote. That the people would trust the best and brightest administrators was not a foregone conclusion. In addition, “drift,” as he called it, held an appeal. It represented a holy sanctity in life. “So we have come to call mysterious everything that counts and the more mysterious the better some of us pretend to think it is,” Lippmann wrote.⁴⁰ The desire for belief instead of proof ran throughout public attitudes toward social policy and history. Lippmann noted that those who loved the American Constitution best were loath to study the document’s origins for fear that they would find that the founders were not perfect beings who had created an irreproducible document in an incomparable time. Americanism too was a potentially hazardous faith. Furthermore, many were not at all sure that they trusted the experts to help them understand the world. The skeptics thought to themselves: “Science is the occupation of absent-minded professors, of difficult and unsociable persons, wise enough no doubt, but not altogether in their right minds.”⁴¹ Lippmann was convinced of what experts could do, but the public would need a great deal of persuasion.

During the Progressive presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, federal agencies were established to investigate railroad rates and to study the problems of poverty. But for every initiation of a Food and Drug Administration, or strengthening of the Interstate Commerce Commission, a dozen ideas for further expert control stalled. The First World War was a perfect foil to the claim that the educated specialists could

⁴⁰ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*, 147.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

show the way. The American people entered the 1920s with a terrible feeling after watching the failures of the largest centralized project that the United States government had yet undertaken – the administration of a war in Europe and the mobilization of the home front. The war had been a faith-shattering two years. University problem-solvers would not have another chance to remake the world until the collapse of the United States economy at the beginning of the Great Depression.

Do You Trust the Brain Trust?

In the spring of 1932, when he declared his intention to seek the Democratic nomination for the presidency, New York Governor Franklin Roosevelt knew that he would be out of his depth attempting to fathom the global economic meltdown which opened his path to the White House. Everyone seemed to be out of his depth. No career politicians, business leaders, or public servants had ever had to grapple with such an overwhelming economic crisis. Even when the Progressive reformers were at high tide almost two decades before, the federal government had not claimed responsibility for the economic welfare of its citizens. By the end of Roosevelt's New Deal, the government had taken on just that responsibility.⁴²

No one knew where the country, or a potential Roosevelt administration, might be headed during the 1932 election. Roosevelt himself did not know. The governor and soon-to-be Democratic nominee had public persona and tone, but not policies. He was more certain of the personality that he wanted to present to the public than he was of a precise prescription for

⁴² David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

economic restoration. To brainstorm solutions and a potential platform, Roosevelt's allies in the Democratic Party advised him to begin hammering out positions in the traditional way: meetings with captains of industry and finance – particularly party donors – and with Democratic Party stalwarts. Roosevelt began his pre-presidency by speaking with the same sorts of leaders that the Republicans did. Though the Democrats knew that a victory would rely on contrasting their economic vision with that of the Republicans, Roosevelt's initial team at the governor's mansion suggested that he begin by asking traditional questions of traditional sources. What did industry believe was causing the problem, and what did the bankers and brokers need?

The question did not find an answer. But the Depression had brought the *laissez faire* attitude of the last three Republican administrations into disrepute. Taking decisive and imaginative action was the only politically viable position. Party bosses knew how to project voting patterns, but they were not economists, and they were imaginative only as a last resort. Roosevelt, at first hesitant, agreed to seek out the counsel of university intellectuals. The era of Progressivism seemed an eternity ago, and though the gospel of scientifically-precise administrators had been a central dream in the Progressive days, a technocratic state had hardly come to fruition. Most campaign and government positions continued to be staffed by the politically loyal, appointments driven by the *Realpolitik* of favors rather than the professional's insistence on qualifications. The first steps toward change occurred when Roosevelt raided Columbia University for legal scholars and economic specialists to be his salon – to suggest ideas and programs for him to absorb, supply the data to underscore his positions, and write his policy statements. Unsure of the public's attitude toward the specialist during that

election year, Roosevelt kept the professors a secret until a couple of months before the election. By that time, the *New York Times* would begin to hint at the Roosevelt campaign's reliance on university expertise, dubbing his Columbia advisers the "Brains Trust," a term that developed, to the horror of some grammarians, into Brain Trust.

Though uncertain, as he campaigned in 1932, what the public perception of scholar-advisers would be, Governor Roosevelt acknowledged that it was time to consult new brains. If none of the capitalist heroes of the 1920s knew what to do, advisor Samuel Rosenman had asked him, "Why not go to the universities?" Probably not by coincidence, Columbia alumnus Rosenman and Columbia law professor Raymond Moley steered Roosevelt toward the school that had been a central laboratory of Progressive Era social sciences, where, presumably, experts had been biding their time before a return to drafting policy and taking their place in public debate. As Moley described it, Roosevelt needed "expert, professional advice on national issues."⁴³ Among others, Moley recruited Columbia economist Rexford Tugwell and Columbia law professor Adolf Berle.

In the shadow of unprecedented economic calamity, all three embraced various degrees of expert planning as the way out of a Depression that was due, in their minds, to lack of coordination and oversight. Like Progressive businessmen and academics before them, the three most essential members of the original Brain Trust believed that the twentieth-century curative was the scientific application of knowledge. As historian Elliot Rosen has argued, the entire life of the New Deal can be found in the position papers and memorandums circulated between Roosevelt and his Brain Trust during the '32 campaign. Moley worked most closely

⁴³ Raymond Moley, *After Seven Years* (New York: Harper, 1939).

with Roosevelt. He convinced Roosevelt of the need for federal oversight of waterpower resources and electrical utilities, and as Rosen put it, “the treatment of investment banking as a public utility requiring federal and state regulation.”⁴⁴ Regulation meant that civil servants, college professionals ostensibly accountable to the public rather than to shareholders, would oversee community resources such as electricity and water, and monitor market activity to ensure responsible investment rather than short-term speculation. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) were clearly articulated in Moley’s writings. At the core of Moley’s advice was the assumption that the Great Depression had been caused by nineteenth-century style, *ad hoc* business practice, and that the crisis would be solved by twentieth-century expertise. Moley’s storied memorandum from May 1932 called explicitly for “reasoned planning and expert persuasion.” In the same document, he criticized opponents in the Hoover administration for treating “economic laws” as though they were as fixed as the laws of physics and suggested instead that the Roosevelt team ponder if it was actually true “whether economic laws exist which cannot be controlled by the laws of men.”⁴⁵ The role of the economist was not simply to study the world as it was. The newly empowered professors of economics would make the world as it should be.

Tugwell, even more than his Brain Trust peers, believed in re-creating the world. He had written, as early as 1924, that the lack of economic recovery in the agrarian sector would eventually cause Roaring Twenties prosperity to collapse. Described as an advocate of “experimental economics and a theoretician,” Tugwell had advised the Democratic candidate in

⁴⁴ Elliot Rosen, *Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Brains Trust: From Depression to New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) 139, 143.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

1928, Al Smith, to propose a government board to act as “marketing agent for farmers.”

Tugwell asserted that agronomists and agrarian economists could “adjust the production to the consumption . . . a year ahead” and “guarantee farmers a price which was based on a ratio with an index of industrial prices.”⁴⁶ Al Smith dismissed the notion out of hand. The project, an inspiration to the New Deal’s Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), was too radical compared to conventional solutions to farmers’ hard times in the ‘20s.

The dismissal by Smith did nothing to mellow Tugwell’s enthusiasm for expert planning. In a 1931 letter to a colleague, Tugwell argued, “The old economics actually prevented us from seeing [institutions] as they really are. But to me even [imaginative description is] only a sort of springboard into a new economy which creative thought can project and bring into being.” Tugwell added, “It seems so entirely evident that the experience of work and of consuming could be made at least better – whatever one’s tests may be – that I cling to my pleading for experimentalism perhaps beyond all reason.”⁴⁷ Tugwell’s ideas were a *faith*, a scientist’s faith in hypothesis and testing. Experimentalism for Tugwell was a literal term, a scientific concept of inquiry. While he advised Roosevelt in the 1932 campaign, Tugwell remained, like academics of the Progressive Era, committed to the idea that the solutions to twentieth-century problems would have analytical tests and, eventually, scientific precision.

As President Roosevelt introduced the New Deal, the energy of experiment attracted ambitious youth to the new work of federal problem-solving. Colleges reported that students had far less interest in business courses than in the 1920s and wanted the kind of education

⁴⁶ Rosen, *Hoover, Roosevelt*, 152, 167.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

that would lead them into the Brain Trust. As historian Robert McElvaine later characterized the moment, “The concept that had begun to grow up during the Progressive era of a charismatic leader representing the desires of the people, setting a course of action, and surrounding himself with experts to carry out those actions was brought to fruition with the New Deal.”⁴⁸ College students in the 1930s sensed that they had their leader, that he was in tune with the times, and that well-trained technicians were needed to fulfill modern hopes.

The New Deal and its bureaucracies of experts did not seduce everyone. Some intellectuals considered what critics said about them: that professional thinkers were not practical policy makers. Years later, Brain Truster Adolf Berle asserted that the team assembled by Rosenman and Moley had succeeded because of the politician at its center: “No one understood better than [Roosevelt] the differences between ‘education’ – preparing possibilities for tomorrow – and political action – designed to achieve tangible results today.”⁴⁹ The Brain Trust alumnus separated the expert advice, the “dreams later to be achieved,” as he called them, from the pragmatic legislation for which the president pushed. Berle’s analysis suggests the misgivings of the administration’s detractors. It would not require a critic with much imagination to move beyond the Berle description, and call the dreams of the “educators” impractical nonsense. In addition to critiques of expertise as undemocratic, the cry that academics had their heads in the clouds and no practical understanding of the world found many in agreement.

⁴⁸ Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 145.

⁴⁹ Berle quoted in Rexford Tugwell, *The Brains Trust* (New York: Vikings Press, 1968), xxv.

Critics of the New Deal directed their wrath at the Trust's credentials. Even before Brain Trusters were crafting policy in the Roosevelt administration, President Herbert Hoover attacked the idea of specialized planning on the campaign trail. Hoover declared that the Roosevelt Brain Trust's planning "is not liberalism; it is tyranny. It is the regimentation of men under autocratic bureaucracy with all its extinction of liberty, of hope, and of opportunity." In his memoirs, Hoover reiterated the superiority of a single man of conviction and intellect creating policy as opposed to a group of academics. Whereas Hoover had crafted his own positions and written all of his speeches during the campaign, he claimed, the Brain Trust was composed of individuals "expert in semantics but grievously undernourished on truth."⁵⁰ Similar to Berle's suggestion that academics dream the future, but far more caustic, Hoover was telling the professors that they were oblivious to the real world. The critique gained momentum, not coincidentally, at the same moment as the intellectuals in Washington did.

In 1934, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a cartoon (below) that satirized the entire New Deal project, the common critique that Roosevelt and his advisers were leading the United States to communism. Roosevelt's advisers and cabinet shovel money from a cart, as Lenin and Stalin look on approvingly. Equally notable was the suspicion cast upon the scholars of the still recently remade American university system. The professor's politics were deemed suspicious, or possibly treacherous, as they were labeled "Young Pinkies from Columbia and Harvard." The criticism of the Brain Trust emphasized elite academicism. Three of the six men appear in cap and gown. One unidentified professor drinks from a bottle labeled "power."

⁵⁰ Hoover quoted in Rosen, *Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Brains Trust*, 297-98.

PLANNED ECONOMY OR PLANNED DESTRUCTION?

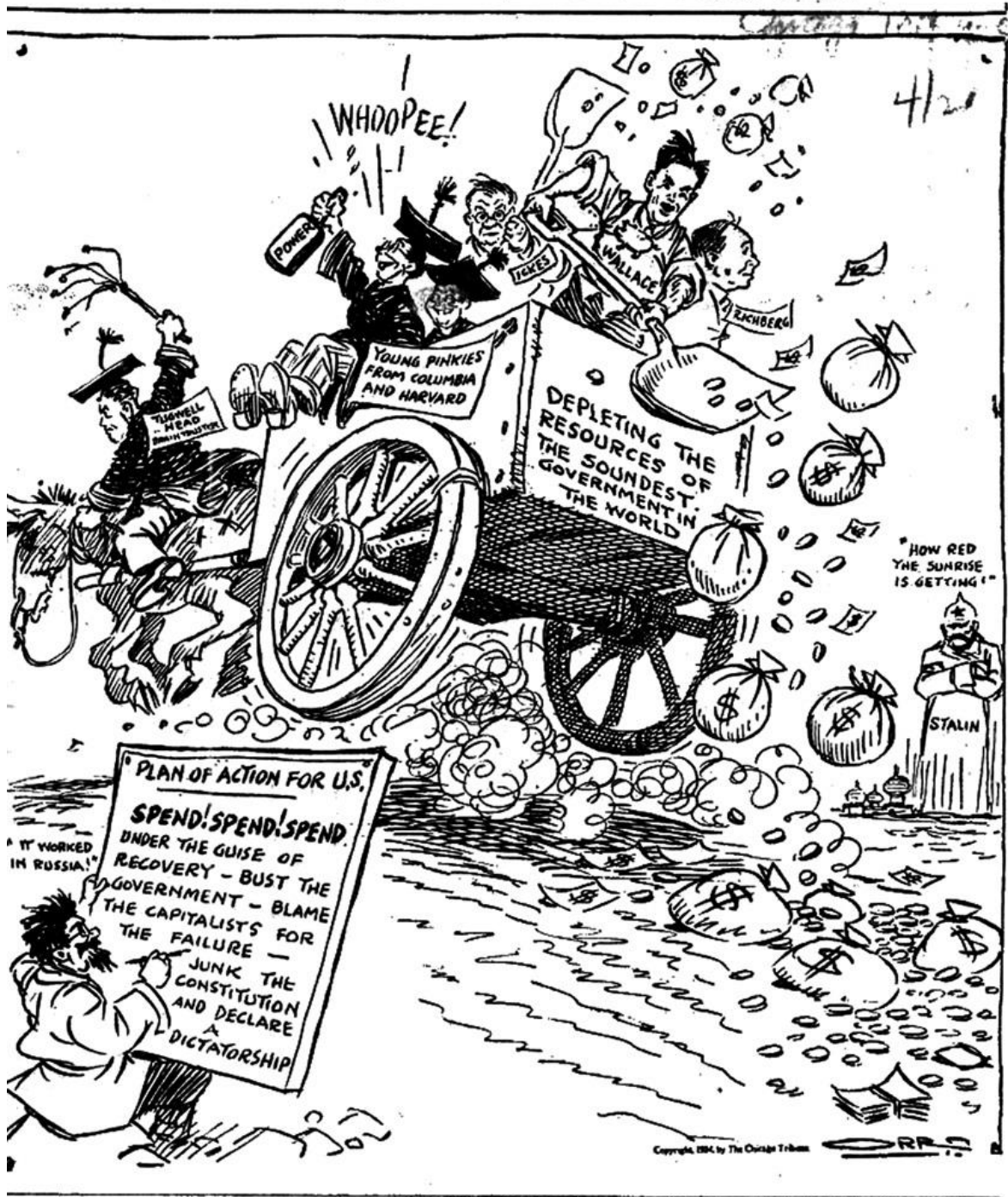


Figure 1. "Planned Economy or Planned Destruction?" *Chicago Tribune*, 1934.

The men who might have been harmless when they were cloistered in their Ivory Towers were dangerous in Washington. Giving power to men who lived their lives in books was a recipe for disaster.

The next group of Brain Trusters – version 1935 – helped persuade Roosevelt to push further than he had during the beginning of his administration. The administration had lost the support of most of the business community and traditional conservatives, so its best political bet was to take away ammunition from the many critics on the other end of the political spectrum, those who found the administration too timid. The Second New Deal, crafted just as extensively by professors as the first, was received warmly. The Social Security Act, grew largely from the research of the President’s Committee on Economic Security. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins was chairwoman of the committee that hammered out the details of old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and aid to dependent mothers. Perkins epitomized the empowered social scientist. She had received her master’s degree in political science, one of the new social sciences, from Columbia University, and went on to study economics. Furthermore, the National Labor Relations Act established a federal board to act as arbiter between business and organized labor, another sign that the New Deal was reliant on regulatory professionals.

Though Roosevelt’s popularity had stumbled by 1934 and some pundits had predicted a close election in 1936, the Second New Deal helped Roosevelt recover in time for his first re-election bid. He destroyed his Republican opponent. 46 of the 48 states voted to reelect the president, and his 25% margin of victory in the popular vote remains among the largest landslides in American political history. Roosevelt and the “bold, persistent action” favored by

the intellectuals in his cabinet had been returned to office in historic fashion. Neither the attacks against the president, nor the excoriation of his Brain Trust seemed to have made much of an impression on the majority of American voters.

How much of the country was on board for the bold leap into the experts' future? The exact number is unclear. Yet, the next decades would demonstrate that whether the mood of the country was boldly experimental and cautiously conservative, Americans turned increasingly to experts for explanations. No matter the topic, the American people became accustomed to asking for credentials. In the era of specialization, authority of knowledge dominated mainstream discussion. Detractors remained. They reworked the old critiques and reiterated their skepticism until the time was right for revolt against the expert. But at the halfway mark of the twentieth century, after Depression and the most immense war in the nation's history, Americans yearned for security that the experts assured they could provide.

Doctor Bureaucrat Saves the World from Plague

Centralization and appeals to the authority of expertise increased when World War II replaced the New Deal at the center of American life.⁵¹ By the time Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, was president and America had emerged as the most prosperous victor of the Second World War, experts were a staple of government and public life – from SEC regulators to child-rearing pamphlet writers, Pentagon war-gamers to public health officials. For instance, a typical thriller of the era, *Panic in the Streets* (1950) explicitly engaged the discourse between

⁵¹ One good discussion of expertise during the Second World War can be found in Byrne, *Whiz Kids*, 130-57.

educated experts and streetwise doubters.⁵² Well received by critics, the Elia Kazan film won the Oscar for Best Writing of a Motion Picture Story and a directing award for Kazan at the Venice Film Festival.⁵³ The movie chronicles the attempts of US Public Health Service officer and medical doctor Clinton Reed (Richard Widmark) and police Captain Tom Warren (Paul Douglas) to stop an epidemic from breaking out in New Orleans. Called in on his day off to examine a dead body with unusual symptoms, Reed diagnoses that the man had been carrying pneumonic plague, the pulmonary variety of the bubonic plague. Because the victim's immediate cause of death was gunshots, police question the diagnosis, wondering if Reed's talk of plague is the result of the public health officer's imagination or ambition. The doctor is undeterred. Believing that public officials have a maximum of two days to contain an outbreak, Reed demands an immediate audience with the mayor and the head of the police force. They are reluctant to accept his claims but grant him a few resources for the crusade.

Lieutenant Commander Reed is a typical federal specialist of his era. The Public Health Service (PHS) was a government organization that had existed since the late eighteenth century but which had, in 1944, been reorganized as the central agency in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, later to become Health and Human Services. The Center for Disease Control was founded in 1946, under the umbrella of PHS authority. When Reed meets with the mayor and other New Orleans officials, skeptical city fathers question Reed's claims and judgment, but his forceful description of the magnitude of the potential disaster of a plague outbreak causes them to begin some perfunctory efforts. Police begin the slow process of

⁵² *Panic in the Streets*, directed by Elia Kazan, produced and distributed by 20th Century Fox, 1950.

⁵³ "Best Story" was replaced by "Best Writing for an Original Screenplay" in 1957.

finding those last seen with the dead man who carried the peculiar microbes in his tissue and blood. Reed and his team inoculate the potentially exposed.

Police Captain Warren is put in charge of the law enforcement efforts. He is outspoken about his distrust of doctors. A misdiagnosis had resulted in the death of his wife years before, and leading a frantic investigation for what he believes to be another misdiagnosis irritates him.⁵⁴ The captain undercuts Reed's authority by emphasizing that it comes from Washington. He mocks Reed's military-style, civil servant's uniform. He wonders aloud if people with fancy degrees really know any more than the citizens they grandiosely claim to serve. The essential scene about the mid-century tensions between expert and skeptic occurs when the two men square off at a bar. The police officer smarts at the federal health agent's suggestions about how to alter the investigation. Eventually, Warren explodes, accusing Reed of throwing his doctoral authority around. Warren asks wryly if Reed wants to "get a couple more experts from Washington to help me out?" Reed tells Warren that his squad could use such expertise. The policeman dismisses the idea: "You'll never see the day!" Reed has the final retort: "I'm not going to wait until the facts penetrate that thick skull of yours. There just isn't that much time." Warren goes through the motions of investigation until more deaths from the outbreak finally convince the police captain of the PHS official's diagnosis.

The film reinforces Reed's competence and authority, the value of the medical doctor's expert eye. Without his diagnosis and quick action, the film implies, pneumonic plague might have broken out in the United States. Captain Warren demonstrates an archetypal character who continues to doubt the claims of expertise. That the film creates a good deal of its early

⁵⁴ *Panic in the Streets*, Kazan.

tension over the skepticism of expertise, demonstrates persistent skepticism about authority derived from university credentials and Washington's imprimatur. *Panic in the Streets* resolves by proving Reed correct and winning Warren to his side. The film's trope concerns how benighted skeptics are convinced by the correct predictions of men with advanced degrees.

Panic tells us more about the American mind at mid-century than we might expect from a "B" thriller. Americans craved the security of believing that the post-war prosperity would last, and that the United States would win the Cold War. By investing authority, real and psychological, in the academic elites who controlled business, military, university, and government, the American people received assurance. The country would not slip back into depression. The country would not give way to communists, or find itself on the receiving end of a nuclear attack. American experts would control a terrifying epidemic in time. The seeming triumph for the authority of knowledge sat atop a mountain of temporarily hidden skepticism: critiques of the previous fifty years did not abate. The list was already familiar. Experts were unresponsive to popular will. Specialists were led astray by hidden biases. Intellectuals dreamed up theories that did not apply to the real world.

By the late 1960s, these ideas and others would overwhelm and destroy the consensus of expertise forged during the Second World War – the consensus that was the foundation of large, active government and the liberal state. Until then, the currents of criticism would seem marginal, as critics honed their arguments. The 1950s and early '60s would be a time of deference to authority, not least to the professor. It was a time when "ordinary citizens" were expected to remain quiet when Ph.D.s were speaking. It was a moment closer to what the

Progressives at schools like Columbia University had been dreaming of than any other that was to come. For professor and scientist, the nation was a classroom and the world a laboratory.

President Truman Inaugurates the Experts

The president himself asked the technicians to right the world. Truman, the man who had stepped into the presidency upon Roosevelt's death, endorsed a hardline against communism at the dawn of the Cold War. The president issued the Truman Doctrine, promising aid to people resisting "attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures." He meant Stalin and the perceived Stalinists popping up around the world, ready to topple regimes vulnerable in the post-war chaos. Truman engaged in a difficult fight to hold together Roosevelt's New Deal coalition in the 1948 election; he bested his opponent and the pundits who predicted his loss.

In the Inaugural Address following that election, Truman spoke about one subject only: how the United States would resist and defeat communism. The reinvigorated president juxtaposed the two systems, attempting to demonstrate democracy's superiority at every turn. He laid out a four-point plan to overcome Soviet belligerence and to bring about "a major turning point in the long history of the human race." No small stakes, these. Truman was planning for final victory in the dialectics of history. The United States, Truman promised, would support the United Nations as a way to exert influence without war. America would extend enormous loans to European nations to rebuild the war-savaged continent. In Truman's vision, Europe was being prepared to emerge from the follies of totalitarianism as a trading partner and staunch ally, affluent enough to resist the pull of communism. Truman reiterated his

support for “freedom-loving” nations, reinforcing his commitment to the Truman Doctrine he had laid out two years before. The first three points of his program constituted eleven paragraphs of his speech. He emphasized point four, about how American expertise would reshape the world, with fifteen paragraphs.⁵⁵

About the weight that lay on the brains, Truman was explicit. American knowledge would overcome all of the quandaries of history. The president began with the problems: “More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.” Help was on the way. The United States would not just solve the problem of poverty domestically. It would end poverty in the world. “For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques.”⁵⁶

It was not simply that America could give its wealth to the rest of the world. It was the human capital, the brain power of American experts, that would accomplish the impossible. As Truman put it: “The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible.” Truman would emphasize that the key to “peace and prosperity” was “technical knowledge.” He used the phrase three times. And, of course, expert planning would keep a balance, as it had in the war, between private profit and public good:

⁵⁵ Harry Truman, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1949, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282>

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

“Such new economic developments must be devised and controlled to benefit the peoples of the areas in which they are established. Guarantees to the investor must be balanced by guarantees in the interest of the people whose resources and whose labor go into these developments.”⁵⁷ At mid-century, the faith in the storehouse of American expertise – scientific, industrial, technical, economic, and social – was the crux of the president’s plan to eradicate poverty and push back the Soviet menace. The knowledge had been hard-won, cultivated for at least half a century, but the potential was boundless. As the president himself put it, American knowledge was “constantly growing and inexhaustible.” The American Century would be ushered in by intellect.

The press mostly loved it.⁵⁸ The speech was known instantly as Point Four. Reporters hoped to improve the uninspiring name. “For lead purposes,” a reporter asked, “is there any other title we could give to point four?”⁵⁹ Truman saw no need for a better name. In this instance, Truman could not work against himself. The president, who disliked reading speeches to familiarize himself with the language beforehand, had the weight of historic international and domestic victories behind him. Speaking against communism and in favor of the wealth that would be the inevitable byproduct of American know-how was a winner. The first televised inaugural address, seen by the first quarter-million to own TVs, promised the potential of American knowledge, even implying it through the medium of its broadcast.

⁵⁷ Truman, “Inaugural Address.”

⁵⁸ Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁹ Halford Ryan, *Harry S. Truman: Presidential Rhetoric* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 123.

The Jury That Thought Too Much

By 1957, Henry Fonda was well on his way to becoming the imaginary president of liberal America. Two decades prior, he had played *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) as an idealistic lawyer who protected a man from being lynched and then proved him innocent in trial. Fonda then paid his dues as an itinerant victim of the Dust Bowl – the iconic *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) protagonist Tom Joad, who comes close to salvation in a government work camp and then leaves to become a union organizer, promising that “Wherever there’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there.” His level-headed Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine* (1946) pacified Tombstone. During World War II, Fonda served in the navy, and later, he portrayed an everyman sailor in *Mister Roberts* (1955). As if he had chosen roles to embody key American myths, the actor had portrayed honest, intelligent men to the hilt. Fonda personified the soft-hearted exonerator and the champion of justice, bearing too the measured tones and cerebral calm of the intellectual.⁶⁰ He was ready to be a modern professional.

The actor virtually began his imaginary presidency in *12 Angry Men* (1957). An adaptation of the teleplay of the same name, the Academy Award-nominee for Best Picture follows the deliberation of a jury in a murder trial. The first vote is 11 to 1, guilty. The lone dissenter is the Fonda character, identified not by name, but only his jury number and occupation – #8, architect. All of the characters in the jury room have professions rather than names. Many of the eleven jurors who originally vote to convict are overwhelmed by the evidence against the young Puerto Rican defendant: a unique murder weapon purchased by the

⁶⁰ *Young Mr. Lincoln*, directed by John Ford, produced and distributed by 20th Century Fox, 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath*, directed by John Ford, produced and distributed by 20th Century Fox, 1940. *Mister Roberts*, directed by John Ford, Mervyn LeRoy, Joshua Logan, produced and distributed by Warner Bros., 1955.

boy, a history of conflict with the murdered father, and two eyewitnesses. Piece by piece, Fonda questions the evidence, asking if, together, the flaws in the evidence leave room for reasonable doubt. In the film's terms, the Fonda character is heroic and, eventually persuasive, because he embodies the union of conscience and reason. He recruits jurors to his side, until the group reaches a unanimous verdict of "not guilty." In the end, the jury is uncertain if the defendant is guilty and therefore votes for acquittal. How infuriating the film must have been to viewers who wished for a hard line on law and order. In Fonda, called by other jurors at times a "bleeding heart liberal," the combination of empathy and analysis became, to the film's detractors, a caricature of the soft-on-crime mentality. For those who cherished the film, however, *12 Angry Men* was a vision into a future when reasoned debate would triumph over apathy, bigotry, and misdirected rage.⁶¹

The architect is neither crime scene investigator nor lawyer, but his education and intellectual honesty provide the tools to test evidence and persuade his peers. Script writers tie him to a tradition of Progressivism and modern liberalism by having him voice a sociological perspective early in the deliberation. In the Supreme Court case, *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), Louis Brandeis pioneered the use of medical and social scientific evidence, rather than legal precedent, to defend a labor law. Decades later, Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP utilized similar evidence to win a victory against segregated education in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Fonda's juror ties himself to this tradition of taking into account the defendant's socioeconomic background: "This boy's been hit so many times in his life that violence is

⁶¹ *12 Angry Men*, directed by Sidney Lumet, produced by Orion-Nova Productions, distributed by United Artists, 1957.

practically a normal state of affairs with him. I just can't see two slaps in the face provoking him into committing murder."⁶² Attempting to psychologize the defendant elsewhere, Fonda returns to the youth's "slum" upbringing, sometimes in an attempt to produce sympathy, sometimes to re-create the defendant's worldview. As it was for Progressive and civil rights jurists, social scientific context was essential to the beginning of Fonda's jury room work.

More essential was the means of testing and analyzing the evidence. Fonda convinces other jurors that they should disregard testimony that a witness heard the boy yell his murderous intentions because an elevated train passing outside the window would have obscured the sound. The prosecution presented a shopkeeper to testify that he had sold a unique switchblade knife to the defendant, which later became the murder weapon. Fonda produces an identical knife, telling the jurors that such switchblades are available throughout the defendant's neighborhood. The same went for the other evidence. The direction of the stab wound did not seem to match either the weapon or the relative height of the murdered father and accused son. Together, the jurors recall reasons to believe that one eyewitness had misinformed the jury about her need for glasses. Fonda reenacts the walk of the other eyewitness from bed to door to demonstrate that the prosecution's witness could not have opened his door in time to see the boy flee. In this test, another juror times him, turning the deliberating room into a testing laboratory. The distance is too far for the elderly witness to have reached his door, they surmise. Again and again, Fonda chips away at the prosecution's case through analysis, and even experiments. He sways the other eleven with reason and

⁶² *12 Angry Men*, Lumet.

empirical evidence. The movie works as powerful fantasy because it epitomizes a belief in the power of rational discussion to carry the day.

Insinuation, bigotry, and rage – powerful forces outside *12 Angry Men's* jury room – are all brought to heel, thanks to Fonda's persuasion. One juror personifies racist assumptions, telling the others how "they," the Puerto Ricans, are naturally violent. The defendant, for this juror, is assumed guilty by virtue of ethnicity. In the context of the film's fantasy, argumentation based on bigotry is impotent. All of the jurors leave the table as the man speaks and turn their backs on him. In the theatrically staged scene, the ostracism of bigotry is literal and physical. The juror spends the remainder of the film at a solitary seat away from the jury table, head in his hands. His irrational means of assumption have been relegated to the corner, rendered unfit for civil discourse. Another juror who insists on conviction holds a barely repressed rage against his own son. As he demonstrates to the other jurors that the suggestion of patricide elicits strong personal feelings, they begin to ignore his counsel. Emotions tied to personal experience have no place at the table of cool, rational discussion. At a pivotal moment, the camera catches ten of the jurors staring at the man as he rages about ungrateful children. The other jurors are embarrassed and disgusted that he is deciding the fate of the defendant in an out-of-control rage. Soon after, the majority of jurors begin to move toward the side of the calm, reasonable Fonda.

The rhetoric of the film brings to the surface the battle between anti-intellectualism and reason. Those jurors most insistent on a guilty verdict use *ad hominem* attacks against Fonda's juror. When the insults are not about his "bleeding heart," they concern his intellect, or the very idea of marshaling facts to make an argument. "You're a pretty smart fellow. What's he so

wise about?" remarks one of the jurors. Another complains that debating the merits of the case is just a bunch of "yakety-yak" that bores him. "You guys can talk the ears right off my head," says a juror disgusted by wasting time analyzing the case. When a naturalized immigrant who has voted to condemn the defendant questions some of the details of the case aloud, another juror is angered. "I do not feel that I have to be loyal to one side or the other. I am just asking questions," the analytical juror replies. When the bigoted juror insists on the defendant's guilt because of the kind of person that he is, the immigrant watchmaker insists, "I don't think the kind of boy he is has anything to do with it. Facts are supposed to determine the case." The bigot replies, "Don't give me that. I'm sick and tired of facts. You can twist them any way you like."

That was the rub. The film's protagonist believed that the facts would lead to the truth and would set all citizens free. The facts did set the defendant free. Yet the movie acknowledges that some have no interest in, or even an aversion to, making decisions by careful analysis. Nonetheless, the dominant sentiment of the film is that if rational, educated liberals could just sit down and talk with their political adversaries, they would triumph. At one point, a shrewd stock broker acknowledges that one scenario is, "possible, but not probable." Fonda chooses the possible over the probable, and so do the filmmakers. In the midst of the 1950s, when sociological data was being pitted against bigotry, when experts proliferated in every field, many Americans continued to trust folk wisdom or traditions of faith. *12 Angry Men* allowed itself to be carried away by a fantasy of a coming era of rationality, by a tremendous faith in reasoned persuasion. As of the late 1950s, the devotees of a rational millennium, the firm believers in the compassionate exercise of reason, had faith in the possible, in the

possibility of triumphing over the probabilities and precedents of the past. By the time of the 1960 presidential election, a glamorous politician from Harvard would arrive to focus their passions and dreams.

Voices of Dissent: Social Critics and the Beats

Some intellectuals were suspicious of the rational fantasy. In the 1956 essay, “Work and its Discontents,” Daniel Bell asserted that the lives of white collar employees had become just as mechanized as those of factory workers. “In offices the installation of rapid high-speed calculators, tabulators, and billing machines turn[ed] the white-collar workers into mechanically paced drones,” Bell insisted.⁶³ The same intellectual who had praised technical expertise as the source of social advancement in one essay bemoaned modern work itself as spiritually devastating. Bell’s readers could see ambivalence between faith in the power of expertly administered society, and despair at its results, in not only the same author but the same collection of essays. Another essayist in the journal *Dissent* declared that the combination of “huge organizations administered by distant impersonal authorities” and “highly routinized” work resulted in a life in which the technocrat had no “control by his own individual effort over anything necessary to . . . life, liberty, or pursuit of happiness.”⁶⁴ Bell was typical of many public intellectuals. As historian Richard Pell put it in his survey of the social critics of the 1950s, even the champions of liberal American consensus spent the decade worrying that the society they

⁶³ Daniel Bell, *Work and its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 34.

⁶⁴ Richard Pell, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 191.

were creating was sterile. “In its obsession with organization and efficiency, liberalism minimized the role of emotions and the play of imagination,” Pell wrote.⁶⁵

The more skeptical Dwight MacDonalD praised the expert-managed society less than his peers, and characterized the fate of professionals and specialists in even bleaker terms. The coordinated and organized society was so “rationalized and routinized” that it was almost an unlivable space for the human spirit. The machine of state and industry was “a mechanism which grinds on without human consciousness or control.” Worse, the professional man had refined his intellect and perfected a set of abilities only to surrender his will. The American citizen had “almost the same chance of determining his own fate as a hog dangling by one foot from the conveyor belt of a Chicago packing plant.”⁶⁶ Whereas leftist writers such as Upton Sinclair worried about the quality of life for those who labored in packing plants at the beginning of the twentieth-century, MacDonalD now saw Americans in the era of liberal expertise as more hopeless than in 1900, as the slaughtered animals themselves, inanimate objects messily processed through a revolting mill.

As if answering a call to revolt against the society that Bell and MacDonalD criticized, the writers of “the Beat Generation” arrived. Beats rejected every premise of calm and managed America: its worship of productivity and material wealth and its alienation from sensual and spiritual experience. The famed trio of Beat writers – Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs – did not simply reject social conformity. They crusaded against rationalism itself, against the use of reason to address problems, and against the conscious mind during the act of

⁶⁵ Pell, *The Liberal Mind*, 137.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

creation. The work and the methods of the Beats demonstrated fascination with the irrational and politicized anti-rationalism. Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs, and their admirers attempted an aesthetic revolution that would reposition the relationship between art and thinking itself.

In “Howl,” his most important poem, Allen Ginsberg’s fifth word is “minds.” The idea of wasted genius pervades the work, from its beginning, “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness” to the last hosanna of the footnote. Ginsberg’s protagonists are called insane. The poet dedicated the work to Carl Solomon, a man he befriended while in a mental hospital. The behavior Ginsberg describes among his cast of great minds – drug use, homosexuality, frantic travel in a desire to escape – would have been termed by mental health experts maladjusted and antisocial. Ginsberg responded that the creativity of the great minds in his poem had been squandered by a society so rationalized by reasonable men that civilization itself had become insane. Such a situation resulted in the great minds being “expelled from the academies for crazy,” perhaps because the universities were staffed by “the scholars of war.”⁶⁷ The scholars were soldiers of the Cold War, defense department-funded researchers, but they also waged war, Ginsberg argued, against the human imagination and the soul. The war was conducted with “the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors,” and sensitive humans were left “demanding instantaneous lobotomy.”⁶⁸ The society of rational expertise so dehumanized the cast of “Howl” that it created an uncomfortable relationship between Ginsberg’s “geniuses” and their own minds. Great minds had become insane because of what American society had done to routinize the imagination of the brain itself.

⁶⁷ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author*, edited by Barry Miles (New York: Harper, 2006 [1986]).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

In the second stanza, Ginsberg names the hellish civilization. Moloch “ate up their brains and imagination.” But the monstrous “sphinx of cement and aluminum” did so because of its exclusive concern with the brain and indifference to the soul. Ginsberg called the culture “Mental Moloch!” and “Moloch whose name is the Mind!” The denial of sentiment and spirit in American culture left Ginsberg with, as he perceived it, no option but to elevate instinct, impulse, and mystic intuition above the activity of the brain. In the third stanza of “Howl,” Ginsberg returns to the mental hospital to “accuse [the] doctors of insanity.” In the footnote that closes the poem, he is euphoric about visions and mysticism.⁶⁹ The word “Holy” appears more than seventy times in a single page. In 1955, “Howl” refused the quantified world that could be managed and explained. Ginsberg sought inexpressible mystery, a universe in which no part was considered fully understood, a universe that retained wonder. A space where every atom and person and place and action was a sacrament. Ginsberg was beyond conversing with the insane doctors and scientists and “intelligent editors.” Moloch’s name was Mind, and Ginsberg left it behind. When pressed to choose, he chose the spirit over the brain.

Kerouac and Burroughs pursued a similarly anti-rational course, theirs determined as much by methods as by the content of their art. Kerouac famously refused to edit his work under the assumption that revision was censorship by inhibition. The act of re-writing, even considering the work again, was the nefarious work of the mind crushing the spirit. In his explanation of spontaneous prose, Kerouac exhorted other writers, “Don’t think of words when you stop but to see picture better,” when they wrote “in tranced fixation dreaming upon object

⁶⁹ Ginsberg, “Howl.”

before you.”⁷⁰ Kerouac preached to remove the rational mind from the process of experience and expression. One should not think. “Write without consciousness in semitrance,” Kerouac declared in the “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose.” Such hallucinated outpouring, free of revision or “afterthink,” would communicate with readers, Kerouac promised, by “telepathic shock.”

William Burroughs pursued his own method of producing literature without conscious thought, to put words on paper while somehow circumventing the brain. In his “cut-up” method of writing, Burroughs assembled words randomly from paper that had been snipped to bits. The art had been created randomly, as if without author. The writer became notorious for writing about heroin and “deviant” sexuality or, as Burroughs described it, “the most horrible things I could think of.” But decades removed from the conservative culture that Burroughs shocked, what remains remarkable is how he pursued his aesthetic. His work, he hoped, would enable him to “shit out [his] educated Midwest background once and for all.”⁷¹ In Burroughs’ declaration, we perceive the political stance underlying the aesthetic experiments. The Beats’ endeavors to eliminate the work of the mind from processing and describing experience had the potential to become a way of living, a cult of spontaneity that was suspicious of education and rational thinking. The Beats anticipated a culture that would prize the intuitive and mystic above the clearly reasoned. They did more than widen the space for moral and cultural freedom. They were prophets who preached suspicion of the mind itself, who launched

⁷⁰ Jack Kerouac, “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” (1953) in *The Portable Beat Reader* edited by Ann Charters, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), 57-8.

⁷¹ William Burroughs quoted in *The Portable Beat Reader*, 103.

jeremiads against doctors, scientists, editors, and universities. It was not only the conservatives who loathed the expert-oriented society. It was radicalized university dropouts themselves.

A Consolidated Life Punched Full of Square Holes

The winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1960 was *The Apartment*. One can hardly imagine a film better suited to demonstrate how much American culture had internalized the antimodernist notions of the social critics and cultural dissidents. The protagonist, C.C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon), seems to have been culled from the descriptions of social critics such as David Riesman and Daniel Bell. He is the organization man, the conformist and the group player, eternally cheerful even when he feels dead inside. More significant, he suffers at the hands of routinized and rationalized society. Baxter floats in a sea of bodies at his insurance company. His employers invade his privacy so thoroughly that he wanders around the city at night while they use his apartment to spend time with their mistresses. When he falls in love with the elevator operator, Fran Kubelik (Shirley MacLaine), Baxter finds that she is company property of a sort too. She is the mistress of the director of personnel.⁷²

What is astonishing is that Baxter can end up alienated and isolated by his job when his disposition suggests that he would like the work. He loves numbers. His favorite leisure activity is playing gin rummy. "I was reading some figures from the sickness and actuary division," he mentions off-handedly. Statistics and number-crunching seem a genuine fascination for the man. Despite what the social critics said of modern office work, Baxter takes pride, perhaps even joy, in his ability to statistically analyze risk. Baxter seeks an identity in his ability with

⁷² *The Apartment*, directed by Billy Wilder, produced by the Mirisch Company, distributed by United Artists, 1960.

numbers. Though he loves to play with the figures, he is not comfortable becoming a mere number himself. The fact that the organization for which he works, Consolidated Life, has made him into a unit in its apparatus, a unit to be utilized for the pleasure of higher executives, is too dehumanizing for Baxter to stand.⁷³

Consolidated. "Joined together into one whole." Baxter's identity, as well as those of the others who work at his organization, have been subsumed into the organization for which he works. In fact, the translation of people into quantifiable units occurs in the first words of the film, a monologue spoken by Baxter while the audience views a panorama of Manhattan, then a close-up of the office building, and eventually the interior of the office.



Figure 2. Baxter's work space in *The Apartment*

In the first shot within the Consolidated Life office building, the camera places Lemmon's character in the center of the frame, symmetrically set off from equal numbers of desks, lights, people, and columns on every side. The audience is acutely aware that only the positioning of

⁷³ *The Apartment*, Wilder.

the camera gives Baxter identity, putting him at the center of our view. In this room, he is a cog of Consolidated Life. Notice the layout of the desk, how the people are in their place just as identically as are the typewriter, adding machine, blank paper, rolodex, and pen holder.

In the opening monologue, Baxter informs us that if the inhabitants of New York City, at an estimated average height, were stacked head to foot, they would extend to Pakistan. The residents of the city are not the only people turned into measuring units. The protagonist declares:

Our home office has 31,259 employees, which is more than the entire population of Natchez Mississippi," the protagonist informs us. "I work on the 19th floor, ordinary policy department, premium accounting division, Section W, desk number eight hundred and sixty-one. . . . I've been with Consolidated for 3 years and 10 months and my take home pay is 94.70 a week. The hours in our department are 8:50 to 5:20.⁷⁴

Baxter appears satisfied, rather than dismayed, at such an analysis of his life and those of the other employees at the film's inception. The breakdown of people and their lives into a series of numerated abstractions appears usual. Even the rolodex on his desk that he makes use of to contact other people in other departments emphasizes the uniformity of every person in the office. They are, after all, reducible to an identically-sized piece of paper.

Despite Baxter's apparent contentment, he expresses dissatisfaction at the intrusion of work into home life. His schedule is full of executives who use his apartment for illicit trysts. Lemmon's character appears indifferent to the moral implications of adultery. The inability to get inside his house is an irritant. As he describes it, his home is cozy, but he "can't always get in when he wants to." Baxter cannot enter his own life. He lacks autonomy even in his own bed, being dragged out late one night at the whim of an executive. He fails when he attempts to

⁷⁴ *The Apartment*, Wilder.

assert autonomy in his own home, in what he longs to be a private space not measured in company time. When he is so ill that he must spend the night at his own house, Baxter must engage in a dramatic schedule rearrangement before he can go to bed. He must ask permission for access to his home. The company haunts him. When the executives at Consolidated agree to use his apartment on different days, Baxter ends by thanking them profusely, insisting they have done him “a great favor.”

Baxter is desk number 861. He is also a large cluster of papers called the “efficiency report.” In fact, his life consists of a number of inanimate objects that stand in for Baxter the person. Lemmon’s character awakens to his dehumanization slowly, prodded by the stirrings of life that he experiences when he falls in love with Ms. Kubelik. At an office party, after a few drinks, Baxter acknowledges a macabre fantasy and an invisible spiritual violence lurking beneath the banality of Consolidated Life. When Kubelik says the office workers appear friendly, Baxter jokes, “Don’t you believe it. After a while, there’ll be human sacrifices, white collar workers tossed into computing machines and punched full of those little square holes.”

The Apartment demonstrates that the spiritually impoverished environment of the modern company and the triumph of organization life were dilemmas understood by Americans other than the intellectuals. When he must choose between suppressing his desires or leaving the company, Baxter closes the books of personnel analysis, the shelves of notecards. It was not that he did not enjoy the figures. The problem was the soul-crushing environment of the Consolidated culture. When he triumphantly tells his boss that he must leave, he declares that he is leaving Consolidated Life to become “a human being.”

Just as the 1950s as a whole demonstrated tension between the hegemony of expertise and the rejection of rationality, the iconic films *12 Angry Men* and *The Apartment* demonstrated a tension even within the liberal imagination about where the heroic men in American culture were headed. Would reason combine with compassion to triumph over prejudice, poverty and irrational sadism, as it did in the jury room drama? Or would the feeling person simply have to quit and escape? Fonda and Lemmon personified two opposing predictions, one of a society approaching solutions, the other of a civilization that must be fled. What did the 1960s hold in store? *12 Angry Men* promised that the reasonable Fondas could triumph over the many forces of irrationality. *The Apartment* threatened that the disillusioned Lemmons would refuse obedience to their managers and stop manning the machines.

Chapter 3. Testify Kennedy, Johnson, and the Brains

“[Today’s government] needs hundreds of occasional and intermittent consultants and part-time experts to help deal with problems of increasing complexity.”

President John Kennedy, 1961

“Change has given us new weapons. Before this generation of Americans is finished, this enemy [shortcomings in medical care and education] will not only retreat—it will be conquered. . . . Is a new world coming? We welcome it—and we will bend it to the hopes of man.”

President Lyndon Johnson, 1965

“It seems the songs we're singing
Are all about tomorrow,
Tunes of promises that we can't keep. . . .
Our time was now or never
You promised me things that I need
And then the things behind it
Took away the chance forever
You're telling me lies in your sleep.”

Tim Hardin

“Don’t Make Promises” (1965)

As soon as Democrats were back in the White House at the beginning of the 1960s, President Kennedy raced to embrace intellectualism and expertise even more firmly than Truman had in Point Four. The Eisenhower years had kept the country in a holding pattern when it came to America’s relationship to knowledge. The Republican President oversaw two-terms as caretaker, but only the panic that followed the Soviets’ successful launch of the *Sputnik* satellite spurred the administration to take legislative action to grow American brainpower. The National Defense Education Act (1958) emphasized the same relationship between technical mastery and American victory in the Cold War that Truman had stressed and

that the '60s Democrats also would.⁷⁵ The name captured the way that expertise was essential to American foreign policy. Education was an indispensable form of defense.

What Kennedy and Johnson added to the conversation was the zeal of converts. Kennedy spoke about landing on the moon, and Johnson mused that he wished to live to the year 2000 just so he could see a world free of disease. In an era noted for its secular public life, the Democratic presidents of the 1960s infused the rhetoric of expertise with the language of spiritual rapture. Professor and textbook writer C.E. Ayres assured students that industrial society did indeed retain values. Modern society and the experts who built and ran it were vibrant humans, Ayres insisted, not the sterile automatons that some public intellectuals imagined. In 1962, Henry Fonda finally went to Washington, where one of his characters was nominated for Secretary of State. Fonda's intellectual policy analyst, matching the rapturous words of the Kennedy years, promised to "spread the pollen of eggheadedness wherever he went." The promise of expertise inflated, the deference given to knowledge simply expected. The '60s were set to be a coronation for the brains.

President Kennedy's Rocket Ship of Brains

Four American scientists won Nobel Prize Awards in 1961: a professor from the University of California for innovative discoveries in photosynthesis; a team from Stanford and the California Institute of Technology for work in atomic physics; and a biologist from Harvard who pioneered new work on the human inner ear. President Kennedy had the men for dinner on April 29, 1962. In fact, he invited all living Nobel laureates in the Western hemisphere, but

⁷⁵ Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981).

only the most recent winners could accompany him and the first lady for a tour and chat in private quarters. Kennedy had practically fetishized technical expertise and “new ideas” during his 1960 campaign and continued to do so throughout his presidency. He brought a large chunk of the faculty of his alma mater, Harvard University, down to apply their learnedness to the international and domestic problems debated in Washington. Unlike Franklin Roosevelt, who had introduced the academics in his circle cautiously to the public, Kennedy flaunted them, conflating youthfulness, American power, optimism in the future, and faith in the transcendent potency of knowledge.

The 1962 Nobel Dinner put Kennedy’s celebration of brains on full display. His speech at the dinner provided the famous line that only when Thomas Jefferson dined alone had there ever been so much intellect in the White House. That well-remembered line was hardly the only one worth noting. The gathering of Nobel laureates in arts, science, and the pursuit of peace was, for Kennedy, “the most significant dinner” held during his presidency. After paying lip service to Nobel’s non-nationalist purposes in creating the prize, the president could not help but trumpet the number of prize winners in the Western hemisphere, the Free World. The ability of Americans and their allies assured eventual victory, he insisted, in the titanic struggle with the Soviets for the future. Kennedy pushed beyond the idea that Western minds gave the United States an advantage. In fact, he did not distinguish between knowledge and peace itself. The Nobel award, which celebrated both achievements, gave Kennedy the opportunity to speak of the pursuit of one as the pursuit of the other, to explore how expertise meant peace. “I think the pursuit of knowledge,” he noted, “the pursuit of peace, are very basic drives and pressures in this life of ours--and this dinner is an attempt, in a sense, to recognize those great efforts, to

encourage young Americans and young people in this hemisphere to develop the same drive and deep desire for knowledge and peace.”⁷⁶ Drive for knowledge and desire for peace were inextricable. Brainiacs were the world’s best hope.⁷⁷ They were also the administration’s pride. Kennedy gleefully began the dinner by saying that one luminary at the dinner had “informed me that a Canadian newspaperman said yesterday that this is the President's ‘Easter egghead roll on the White House lawn.’ I want to deny that!” Kennedy enjoyed being teased for his egghead company.⁷⁸

The banter that evening stayed in line with the image Kennedy had cultivated of himself, his advisors, and his cabinet. In fact, with so many famous Harvard professors advising the president during his 1960 campaign, Kennedy’s team seemingly believed that the world revolved around Massachusetts schools of higher education. Only the fear of being criticized for Boston cronyism led to a freeze on additional Cambridge appointments. And with good reason. Harvard law professor Archibald Cox had been writing speeches for Kennedy since he was a senator in the mid-1950s. He would in due time be solicitor general. Fred Holborn, a behind-the-scenes go-for in the Kennedy campaign, was not only the son of a distinguished Yale historian, he was himself a Harvard political science professor. The directorship of the Office of Management and Budget went to a young teacher at Harvard’s Littauer School of Public Policy, David Bell.

⁷⁶John Kennedy, “Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Nobel Prize Winners of the Western Hemisphere,” April 29, 1962, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8623>

⁷⁷ One might consider throughout this chapter on liberal rhetoric and adoration of expertise the pitfalls of what Christopher Lasch referred to as “Educated Insularity” in Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: WW Norton and Co., 1991), 465.

⁷⁸ Kennedy, “Nobel Prize Winners.”

To appease Wall Street, Douglas Dillon was a compromise nomination for Secretary of the Treasury. He was a successful investor and veteran of the Eisenhower Administration. Dillon too was a Harvard alumnus. During his 1960s tenure in two Democratic administrations, he became a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, eventually ascending to the group's presidency after his years in the Johnson administration. Having compromised on Dillon for Treasury, the liberals in Kennedy's camp pushed rank-and-file Democrats for key positions on the Council of Economic Advisors. In the second-highest position on the council, the Kennedy transition team wanted economist James Tobin and were relieved that, though his doctorate came from Harvard, he taught at Yale, and in the words of Kennedy advisor and Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "was thus not subject to the Cambridge ban." Tobin was hesitant to take the position, insisting, "I am afraid that I am only an ivory-tower economist." The president assured him that a purely academic background was fine, declaring, in reply, "That is the best kind. I am only an ivory-tower president."⁷⁹

A new squad of policy brains, the Brookings Institution, officially opened two weeks after Kennedy's election. A euphoric *Washington Post* editorial declared that "men of learning and ideas have taken over our government again." *The Economist* referred to the new premier brain bank (the term "think tank" was still a couple years away) as Kennedy's "experts on tap."⁸⁰ The publications aptly captured the administration's spirit. For Kennedy, a modern presidency meant enlisting academic experts; his love of faculty from Harvard and such

⁷⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1965), 135-8.

⁸⁰ James Allen Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 130.

neighboring schools as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Williams College did not reflect mere regional chauvinism. The man who declared that “the human mind is our fundamental resource” acknowledged that some of the brightest might be at elite schools outside Massachusetts. Old culprits such as Columbia University gave the transition team a leader, political scientist Richard Neustadt. The proliferation of advanced degree programs throughout the country provided Kennedy good choices from the Midwest and Pacific coast. The directorship of the Council of Economic Advisors went to Walter Heller, a man who had received his doctorate in economics from the University of Wisconsin and was presently a professor at the University of Minnesota. George McGovern, who would direct a new initiative, the Food for Peace program, earned his history Ph.D. at Northwestern University, with a tome on the Colorado Coal Strike of 1913-14. Though sometimes criticized for political outspokenness, McGovern found a warm home at Dakota Wesleyan, where the students dedicated their yearbook to him. And Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, though plucked away from the presidency of the Ford Motor Company at the moment of his ascent to the position, had made his Washington reputation as the brightest of Tex Thornton’s Statistics Control, training officers in data analysis at Harvard before going into the field to ply the trade himself for the Army Air Force. The Kennedy transition team found McNamara endearing especially because, while most Ford executives lived in a lavish suburb outside Detroit, McNamara resided in the college town of Ann Arbor, where, he declared, he found the atmosphere surrounding the University of Michigan more stimulating. No wonder poet Robert Frost marveled at the scholars surrounding the president and declared Camelot a “new

Augustan Age.”⁸¹ Or, as Kennedy put it more simply for *Time* magazine, “There’s nothing like brains. You can’t beat brains.”⁸²

Given such single-mindedness, we might safely assume that President Kennedy was sincere when he spoke about the need for increasing the number of American specialists as a national priority. In a 1962 warning to Congress, Kennedy insisted that bolder education initiatives were necessary to ensure American global supremacy and to ensure permanent leadership in the Cold War. The president was especially insistent that America must grow more braniacs and train more experts for advanced degrees: “Too few, finally, are going on to graduate studies that modern society requires in increasing number. The total number of graduates receiving doctorate degrees has increased only about one-third in ten years; in 1960, they numbered less than 10,000, including only 3,000 in mathematics, physical sciences and engineering.”⁸³ For Kennedy, a lack of expertise among Americans was approaching crisis proportions.

Henry Fonda Ties at Roll Call

In such a milieu, it is not surprising that liberal America’s *pretend* leader was elevated to the role of Ivory Tower intellectual and nominated for Secretary of State, playing a character who had to combat the suspicion that intellect engendered among Washington politicians. In the 1962 film *Advise and Consent*, Henry Fonda’s character Robert Leffingwell defends, among

⁸¹ Joseph Kraft, *Profiles in Power* (New York: The New American Library, 1966), 63.

⁸² Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1984), 31.

⁸³ *Memorable Quotations of John F. Kennedy*, edited by Maxwell Meyersohn, (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1965), 214.

much intrigue, his reputation in senatorial subcommittee hearings.⁸⁴ That director Otto Preminger wrung compelling drama out of a federal government procedural is testament not only to his talent for story-telling but also to sense the zeitgeist. Leffingwell's flirtation with communist ideas as a young man, and his status as an ivory-tower intellectual, are at the heart of the Senate's suspicion of him. Although the president's party holds the majority in the Senate, audiences are assured from the beginning that the fight will be rancorous. The film does not disappoint. A surprise witness at the subcommittee hearings accuses him of closet communism. One senator blackmails a peer with evidence of homosexuality. One senator commits suicide.

Initially, the film's suspense comes from the Fonda character's aversion to playing politics. He always acts on his best judgment, based on years of study and writing. "Sure, he's great, but the man's got more enemies in Congress than anyone in government," declares an ally to the president who begs him to pick another nominee. Leffingwell, the policy wonk, has derailed bills from members of his own party if he found the legislation ill-advised. He has not exchanged favors, networked, or made the contacts that could smooth the confirmation. His champion in the Oval Office nominates him for just these reasons. Leffingwell does not get involved in trivial beltway concerns. The president is willing to stake his credibility on a nominee who is far from a sure thing: "I knew we were running a risk. But I want him. He can give us some creative statesmanship, and, God knows, we need it," the president declares firmly. In the dramatic final scene, senators and journalists try to ascertain the vote count before it is official. Will the Senate confirm the president's unconventional agency head, a former professor from

⁸⁴ *Advise and Consent*, directed by Otto Preminger, released by Columbia Pictures on June 6, 1962.

the University of Chicago? Was Hollywood still convinced that intellectualism was an impediment to success – even in the age of the expert?

Senators are already excoriating the nominee when the camera first moves into the Senate chamber. The speaker is predictably indignant: “The name Leffingwell is synonymous with arrogance and an egg-headed determination to ignore the wishes of this governing body.” *Egg-headed determination*. Leffingwell bears an expertise which seems to ignore democratic will, or, at the least, the self-importance of senators. When we meet Fonda’s Leffingwell character on the morning of his nomination, he lives up to many of the descriptions we have heard. He is not listening to radio pundits or television anchors discuss his chances, nor reading about his big moment in the paper, nor calling potential allies to gauge support. Instead, he sits at his typewriter, focused on cerebral work, presumably oblivious to the whirlwind that his nomination has caused down the street.

His hearing in front of the subcommittee demonstrates how the film rolls the idea of expertise, novel approaches to old issues, and the Kennedy mystique into one persona. Fonda does not have to feign a Massachusetts accent to mimic Kennedy. Leffingwell shadows the president rhetorically. When a member of his inquiring panels asks what he meant in a speech about “outmoded principles,” Leffingwell uses the declaration of another senator to make his point. “Mr. Cooley speaks about standing on his hind legs, fighting as if war were still some rousing charge up San Juan Hill with flags flying and bugles sounding. It’s this kind of 19th century notion I was talking about, this don’t tread on me, walk softly and carry a big stick, damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead state of mind,” the potential Secretary states. The audience in attendance responds with thunderous applause. The subcommittee chairman

responds: "I wonder if we can't become too equivocal; I wonder if we can't reason away, in the name of survival, all of the things worth surviving for." A viewer in 1962 need hardly have been imaginative to be reminded by this exchange in the film, of the gist of Kennedy's speeches: "Each believes that we have only two choices: appeasement or war, suicide of surrender, humiliation or holocaust, to be either Red or dead," Kennedy had preached on more than one occasion. But in the same way that Leffingwell was buttressed by the electorate's applause, Kennedy took faith in the judgment of the people: "In time the basic good sense and stability of the great American consensus has always prevailed." The Leffingwell character was preaching Kennedy's flexible response.⁸⁵

The nominee's greatest opponent in the Senate is South Carolina's Seabright Cooley (Charles Laughton in his final role). Cooley declares in his final speech before the vote, "His voice is not the voice I want to hear speak for America. It is to me an alien voice. Perhaps it's the new voice of my country, and these old ears are not attuned to these new sounds. I don't know. I don't understand much Mr. Leffingwell says." Laughton gives Cooley's dissent a quiet dignity. The majority leader of the Senate makes a final push for Leffingwell's nomination that is, if not as elegant as Cooley's, as assured and forceful: "I don't interpret Mr. Leffingwell in the same way. I don't hear an alien voice. To me, it sounds realistic." Could the ivory-tower professor be the realist?

The idea threatened some cultural assumptions. Earlier in the film, a subcommittee member had asked Fonda's character directly, "You're what they call an egghead, aren't you, Mr. Witness?" Leffingwell answers in the affirmative, and then some: "I'm not only an egghead,

⁸⁵ Meyersohn, 144-5.

I'm a premeditated egghead. I set out to be an egghead and at this moment I'm at full flower of eggheadedness. I hope to shed pollen wherever I go."⁸⁶ The stakes were clear. The senators must decide if they trust the former professor's judgment in situations that demand finesse and firmness, flexibility and forcefulness. During the final vote, a radio announcer declares that the senators have been released by their leaders from party obligations. They are "guided only by their own convictions." The senate is free to choose, without pressure and in good conscience, if they want the unconventional academic to be the face of American policy. The votes are finally tallied. It is a tie – 47 to 47, closer than Kennedy's 1960 presidential plurality. The decision goes to the Vice President, who sits in the Senate in order to break the tie. Men surround the chamber and whisper in his ear. The president has died. The vice president decides not to break the tie. He will "choose [his] own Secretary of State," he declares to a friend on his way out of the chamber. Viewers watch credits roll over the chamber as it empties of people, of the evenly split group of legislators, the Americans undecided about how far they trust the egghead. Fonda, the imaginary ideal of the liberal expert, stalled, even in Hollywood's dream factory.

Kennedy loved the eggheads and hoped to spread the pollen wherever he went too. Expertise and education were his abiding faith in the most general sense, especially rhetorically. The man who famously told Americans in his inaugural to think of their country in terms of giving rather than taking emphasized the value of the degree-holders. "The educated citizen

⁸⁶ *Advise and Consent*, Preminger.

has an obligation to serve the public,” the president told Vanderbilt graduates. “He may be a precinct worker or a President. . . . But he must be a participant and not a spectator.” It was not only civic duty of those with bachelor’s degrees. The hope of the nation lay in breakthroughs among specialists in every field. In his first State of the Union speech, Kennedy warned, “We lack the scientists, the engineers, and the teachers our world obligations require. We have neglected oceanography, saline water conversion, and the basic research that lies at the root of all technological progress.” Even Americans’ relationship to something as basic as water, he declared, was determined by the research of oceanographic specialists.⁸⁷

Without better expertise, the Soviets would take a commanding position. As Eisenhower had done when he signed the National Education Defense Act, Kennedy too spoke of increased expertise in terms of defense. In the last year of his presidency, the man from Harvard continued to urge more education-mindedness in Congress: “It requires skilled manpower and brainpower to match the power of totalitarian discipline. . . . Expansion of high quality graduate education and research in all fields is essential to national security and economic growth.” Not only was education at the heart of victory in the Cold War. It was a transcendent value. “In the new age of science and space, improved education is essential to give new meaning to our national purpose and power,” Kennedy exhorted Congress. And to graduates at Vanderbilt University, he urged, “If the pursuit of learning is not defended by the educated citizen, it will not be defended at all. For there will always be those who scoff at intellectuals, who cry out

⁸⁷ Kennedy in Meyersohn, 142, 218.

against research, who seek to limit our educational system.”⁸⁸ It may have been Kennedy’s most prophetic moment.

Professor Ayres’ Reasonable Prediction

Many of the educated were indeed speaking up in the Kennedy years. In the classrooms, professors explained the supreme good that rational scholarship provided to the nation and to the soul. One frequently assigned text at universities was *Toward a Reasonable Society*. In the book, Professor C.E. Ayres defended not only the nobility of education, but also the reasonable, affluent society from the social critics, who had declared it devoid of meaning. “Committed as we are to the life of reason, are we therefore, as both scientists and theologians seem to think, spiritually crippled?” Ayres asked. Quite the contrary, the economics professor insisted. In fact, the reasonable, affluent society produced its own spiritual answers. “The inherent dynamism of the technological process has more than economic significance,” Ayres told fellow scholars and students. “It is the answer, or the source from which we can seek answer, to the enigmas by which mankind is perpetually haunted.” The oldest theological questions were to be explained finally by the rationalists, the university men.⁸⁹

Could the majority of Americans ever accept this? Ayres danced around the idea of religious devotion, speaking so subtly about superstitions and tribal ritual that some students probably failed to connect the vague terms Ayres used to such “rituals” as their own church attendance. Never fear, the optimistic economist promised. “Ours is the most reasonable

⁸⁸ Kennedy in Meyersohn, 210-21, 213, 223.

⁸⁹ C.E. Ayres, *Towards a Reasonable Society: The Values of Industrial Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 5,9.

society mankind has ever known. . . . We have more knowledge, and knowledge counts for more today, than has been true of any previous generation or society.” The “irrational attitudes” still evident throughout the public in his day were waning remnants of ancient prejudices. “Superstition” still persists. . . . But we are beginning to know [it] for what [it is].” Ayres was certain that the American sensibility would grow more enamored of reason and less dependent on faith. In fact, in his estimation, such experts as anthropologists and psychiatrists had “scientifically established” that the craving for religious mystery and inexpressible feeling “derives from our cultural past.” The need for a higher power to make sense of and give value to the world resulted in “self- stultification.” The claims were certainly suspicious to those with profound religious devotion, or those who believed that the United States was imbued with an inextinguishable religiosity.

“Can genuine knowledge ever wholly supplant superstition, and can real values ever wholly supplant tribally perpetuated fancies?” Ayres conceded that few churches would simply drift away in gentle, rationalist breeze. But the process of Western history pushed unmistakably toward more rationality and less unfounded assumption: “The more knowledge we have, the less we are exposed to the wiles of superstition.” Ayres’s rationalist manifesto believed that technocratic society gave meaning to human life that transcended the mysteries of ancient religions: “It is all one process: science and freedom; technology and beauty.” Reason did not preclude ecstasy. It moved society closer to it. And the technocrats (Ayres called them “technicians”) could find satisfaction in their work. In response to critics such as Dwight MacDonald or films such as *The Apartment*, Ayres responded that the trope of the

dehumanized organization man was grossly exaggerated. “No person is devoid of feeling in his work,” he insisted. “Technicians are never as frigid as is commonly supposed.”⁹⁰

Indeed, far from frigid, the president’s imagination was on fire for what the large organizations, staffed by people with advanced degrees, could accomplish. If Kennedy was, as he insisted, a president who just happened to be Catholic, his faith in modern progress was at his core. The president’s transcendent enthusiasm arose when discussing technological potential. Sometimes Kennedy sounded as much the enthusiastic science geek as president. In 1962, when he announced at Rice University that the United States, in partnership with research institutions and the government scientists at NASA, would put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, one senses his excitement. “This generation does not intend to founder in the backwash,” the president told his Houston listeners. The brains in the government and at the universities would take the lead in space science because of the opportunities it provided: “Transit satellites are helping our ships at sea to steer a safer course,” he declared. “Tiros satellites have given us unprecedented warnings of hurricanes and storms, and will do the same for forest fires and icebergs.”⁹¹

Kennedy emphasized that the project was about more than immediate benefits, more than sea-farers who were safer because directed by satellite. The endeavor would “serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.” The project existed because it directed scientists toward a unified goal, a shared horizon; it gave form to a national desire to demonstrate how much mastery modern knowledge could exert over natural forces. When

⁹⁰ Ayres, *Reasonable Society*, 32-5, 152

⁹¹ Kennedy, “Moon Speech at Rice Stadium,” September 12, 1962, accessed <http://er.jsc.nasa.gov/seh/ricetalk.htm>

Kennedy spoke about faith, he was speaking more often about the potential of great minds than about higher powers or an ancient allegiance to theologians in Rome. “We have given this program a high national priority--even though I realize that this is in some measure an act of faith and vision, for we do not now know what benefits await us,” the president declared.

Kennedy had *faith* in the scientists. And he had more than a bit of boyish wonder:

We shall send to the moon, 240,000 miles away from the control station in Houston, a giant rocket more than 300 feet tall, the length of this football field, made of new metal alloys, some of which have not yet been invented, capable of standing heat and stresses several times more than have ever been experienced, fitted together with a precision better than the finest watch, carrying all the equipment needed for propulsion, guidance, control, communications, food and survival, on an untried mission, to an unknown celestial body, and then return it safely to earth, re-entering the atmosphere at speeds of over 25,000 miles per hour, causing heat about half that of the temperature of the sun.⁹²

Kennedy preached with the conviction that the world of expertise could still be one of wonder.

When people speak of God, they often, out of convention, point up. The sky and the celestial bodies have long suggested deity. At Rice University, the president declared that humans would penetrate that world and land on one of those celestial bodies. The enormous task would be accomplished with the computers, with the amassed knowledge of the ages, and with Americans with advanced degrees. The “right stuff” had as much to do with building on a background of expertise as it did with any astronaut’s physical or mental toughness.

⁹² Kennedy, “Moon Speech.”

Lyndon Johnson and the Most Hopeful Time

With Kennedy assassinated in the same state where he had promised that American scientists would put people on the moon, his successor Lyndon Johnson promised to accomplish the entire Kennedy agenda and then some. He shared many of Kennedy's political values. Yet, whereas Kennedy seemed to privilege the talents of advanced degrees and scientific breakthroughs for national prestige and global power, Johnson believed that the blessings of the specialists could be extended to every part of the American nation, even the most obscure and dirtiest corners. The Inheritor-in-Chief was sometimes awed by the ability of the best minds, sometimes envious of them and their East Coast Ivy pedigree. Yet the new president was conscious of the possibilities of modern knowledge in perfecting the country and the world. Johnson cautioned against excessive optimism while himself dreaming of utopia – and fantasizing that he would be the one to lead the nation to that utopia.

In the first years of his own administration, Johnson looked onto an American polity that was stunned at the consistent economic growth of the last quarter century. The fact of prosperity – coupled with the martyrdom of Kennedy – gave Johnson more leeway, initially, than any president in at least a generation. Still, restlessness pervaded the land. Americans wondered if the era of plenty could be yanked away from them as quickly as Kennedy had been taken from their midst. And what of the social critics of the affluent society – how widely was the distress over meaning and value felt in every city, suburb, and countryside? Johnson sought to assure Americans that he was tackling both problems. He emphasized the permanence of prosperity with the ambitiousness of his Great Society programs. The middle class need not fret, he insisted. Not only would their comfort and security increase; they would witness the

greatest improvement in the quality of life of the sick, poor, ignorant, and elderly that America had ever seen. Johnson's administration would even tackle the issues of meaning. "We do not intend to live in the midst of abundance, isolated from neighbors and nature, confined by blighted cities and bleak suburbs, stunted by a poverty of learning and an emptiness of leisure," the president declared in his 1965 State of the Union address. John Galbraith and Dwight MacDonald were to be answered resoundingly. Americans would not have to fret that their lives were plush but empty.⁹³

The Great Society promised that the persistent ills of ages past could be fixed by the knowledge of the modern world. The program sought to utilize technocratic know-how for more than just reaching the moon and directing sea vessels with satellites. No less than Kennedy's New Frontier, Johnson's Great Society relied upon managerial perfection and the unleashing of American scientific and academic knowledge to complete its agenda. Technocracy could feed the poor as surely as Nobel laureates could take the next step in atomic physics. In the sweep of his programs, President Johnson was guaranteeing more than continued prosperity and an increased sense of meaning. He was tackling every conceivable problem with all the best studies in tow.

Take the ailments that killed most Americans: cancer, heart disease and stroke. Johnson appointed a Committee on Heart Disease, Cancer and Strokes, gave it a typical federal program acronym, HDCS, and announced his confidence in medical expertise to the press corps. "One of the great and one of the exciting realities of our generation is that man is acquiring knowledge

⁹³ Lyndon Johnson, "State of the Union," January 4, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26907>.

and acquiring the tools to exercise control over his own destiny,” Johnson declared. “No other peoples who have ever lived have had the opportunities that we have to make the life on this earth better.” There was no stopping the medical specialists; they were cracking life’s code. The president told his country and the world that the three diseases that accounted for seventy percent of American deaths would be going the way of polio. Doctors were on “the threshold of a historic breakthrough. Heart disease, cancer, and stroke [can] be conquered – not in a millennium, not in a century, but in the next few onrushing years.” If he hoped to keep the national imagination racing at Kennedy’s fevered pitch, Johnson was certainly putting his shoulder to the wheel.⁹⁴

When speaking about federally-subsidized, scientific innovation, Kennedy had promised the moon. Johnson went further, promising heaven. The president spoke about the ripples that would carry the elimination of the three great illnesses beyond American borders to the rest of the world, cementing the allegiance of foreign peoples in a way that might one day make weapons of mass destruction superfluous. The answer always came back to the most efficient distribution of knowledge. “We will unite our Nation’s health resources. We will speed communication between the researcher and the student and the practicing physician,” Johnson insisted. “We will make the best use of existing medical personnel . . . and then we will start improving the training of other specialists.” Researchers and practitioners, institutes and physicians, armies of trained specialists. The Great Society, as the president laid out, was one in which eggheads pinpointed the problems and solved them for the glory of country and the

⁹⁴ “One of the great . . .” in Johnson’s “Remarks on Cancer Control,” April 1, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26857&st=&st1=>. “The threshold of historic breakthrough,” from Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 197.

well-being of each individual. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Johnson put so much faith in the medical community. Even in the presidential election of 1964, a survey of the nation's 12,000 psychiatrists revealed that fewer than seven hundred believed that Johnson's opponent, Barry Goldwater, was mentally fit to serve. In fact, more than a thousand diagnosed the Republican nominee as paranoid.⁹⁵ Even the electoral process could, seemingly, be rationalized by the medical experts.

The same held true for all of the intractable pitfalls of human life. Like a string of hosannas, Johnson told the press corps: "Deserts can be made to flower, and we are taking the salt out of the sea in order to make the deserts bloom again. . . . Illiteracy can be eliminated. . . . Hunger and poverty can be wiped from the face of the earth."⁹⁶ The president, regardless of the topic of a speech, seemed carried away by euphoric belief. "These are the most hopeful times since Christ was born in Bethlehem," he famously told one group. And unlike the hope that spread during Jesus' life, unprecedented human mastery of environment was now creating the vision.

The human organism perfected, Johnson's men could study the social organism. Expertise, of course, would extinguish the ancient problems of crime and pollution. In his 1965 State of the Union speech, Johnson emphasized that criminal activity and the despoiling of the earth were both problems for rational investigation. "To help control crime, we will recommend programs: to put the best techniques of modern science at [police] disposal; to discover the causes of crime and better ways to prevent it," the president exhorted. "I will soon assemble a

⁹⁵ Johnson speech on "Heart Disease, Cancer, and Strokes," October 6, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27298>. Goldwater's psychiatric appraisal in Dallek, 182.

⁹⁶ Johnson, "Remarks on Cancer Control," April 1, 1965.

panel of outstanding experts of this Nation to search out answers to the national problem of crime.” Like disease, the age-old problem of crime would submit to scientific study, through both the “science” of law enforcement and the study of crime’s cause. It could all be *discovered*, like new elements for the periodic table. “We will increase research to learn much more about the control of pollution,” he promised later.⁹⁷ Listening to Johnson, Americans could intuit how all problems would be solved. Everything could be made a science, or bent to the will of science, no matter how irrational the problem might seem.

Poverty and crime, liberal experts knew, were inextricable. Johnson’s education policy targeted individual at-risk youth with the student-by-student sum deemed necessary for an underperforming person’s redemption. Johnson smarted when his critics retreated to the Biblical truism: the poor will always be with us. Education and medical care, in the right doses, were going to accomplish what the ancients could not foresee. “Politics goes beyond the art of the possible,” Johnson would later write. “It is the art of making possible what seems impossible.”⁹⁸ When the president signed, late in his tenure, the bill that would establish Housing and Urban Development, an institution predicated on making home ownership available to the poor, he cited studies and statistics to show how another intractable issue was being overcome. Johnson continued to speak about the bills he signed as if they were the magic for which all had been waiting: “I believe history will mark this first day . . . as the time and the moment when farsighted people turned the clock ahead, setting the hands of progress to the

⁹⁷ Johnson, “State of the Union,” January 4, 1965.

⁹⁸ Johnson quoted in Bruce Schulman, *Lyndon Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (New York: Bedford Books, 1995), 81.

tempo of man's racing needs."⁹⁹ Problems studied, laws drafted, legislation signed. Here was Lyndon Johnson's abiding faith; and he said "alleluia" every time that he had the opportunity to sign his name again.

Since his years as a senator, Johnson loved quoting his own Bible passages. Reaching across political lines to pass the legislation he set his sights on, the president long identified himself with the declaration, "Come, Let Us Reason Together." The phrase came from the first chapter of Isaiah, in which the prophet tells the tribe of Judah that they practice meaningless sacrifices and rituals on the Sabbath and in the temple. They would be better served to spare the lambs and turn their attention to the suffering of the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widowed. The statement seemed an appropriate sentiment with which Johnson could be identified. It spoke to his compassion for those who suffered, but the chapter also emphasized reason and judiciousness in a spirit that matched Johnson's limitless aspirations and his ambitiousness for the solutions of modern means.

The Biblical overtones were appropriate also, as reason became a faith. The idea ran throughout Johnson's rhetoric. When he spoke of his hope for medical breakthroughs: "It has been written: 'Men who are occupied in the restoration of health to other men are above all the great of the earth. They even partake of divinity, since to preserve and renew is almost as noble as to create.'" He further declared, "[The] goal is simple: to speed the miracles of medical research from the laboratory to the bedside."¹⁰⁰ It all reminded listeners of the humanistic

⁹⁹ Lyndon Johnson, "Remarks upon Signing the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968," August 1, 1968, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29056>.

¹⁰⁰ Lyndon Johnson, October 6, 1965. *Public Papers of the President of the United States: Lyndon Johnson*, Google eBook. 550-551.

sentiments at the core of Johnson's approach. When he eulogized his assassinated predecessor, he said, Kennedy "was also a great builder of faith--faith in our fellow Americans . . . faith in the future of man." When it came to what Americans could accomplish, the liberal leaders of the sixties *believed*. Johnson and his wise men felt that the faith of the coming generation rested on their ability to come through. The president urged Americans to embark on the project of national perfection "not just for ourselves, but for all the little ones that look up with their trusting faces and expect us to do right by them."¹⁰¹ Johnson identified success in promoting federally-subsidized breakthroughs with the very confidence of the younger generation. *Divinity, miracles, faith, and trust*. These were the products of expertise. They were values entwined in study and science.

Drift and Mastery on the Radio

During Johnson's first two years in the White House, his rhetoric and popular culture seemed to be in sync. The commercial musical hits of the mid-60s were exuberant and confident. Their bursting energy spoke to a sense of possibility and mastery over the world. Just the titles of 1964 and '65 sound like a celebration replete with toasts and boasts. *She Loves You-I Get Around- It's Alright- I Feel Fine-He's So Fine-I Feel Good*. British Invasion and soul groups drove adolescent excitement to the top of the pop charts, and the sentiments ran together in exultation. "I know that I can do no wrong. I've got so much honey, the bees envy me. She's so glad, she's telling the whole world. I'm a real cool head, I'm making real good

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

bread. Have a good time, cause it's alright."¹⁰² The ebullience and optimism of youth absorbed the moment's boundless promise and pushed it further. Pop radio dovetailed with the national dialogue and the Johnson administration's confidence. Man's technical abilities gave mastery over nature, or, at the least, built great car engines. The tragedies of human existence – poverty, ignorance, hunger – could be undone by newly cultivated expertise, as surely as the next paycheck would be bigger and next year's car would be even better.

Yet pessimism lurked a little further down the charts. The early Beatles always worked a celebratory tone, but lurking within the melody of their number one single "Help!" were the lines "I'm not so self-assured . . . My independence seems to vanish in the haze . . . Every now and then I feel so insecure."¹⁰³ Not much further down the charts, Bob Dylan was becoming the king of protest, a description he'd spend the rest of his career running from. In "Masters of War," Dylan targeted the bureaucratic minds at the Pentagon in particular. The masters of war "hide behind desks" and "hide behind walls." He assured them that he was on to them: "I see through your eyes, and I see through your brain like I see through the water that runs down my drain."¹⁰⁴ The defense department's brains had been put on notice.

Though commercial protest and folk-rock experienced a vogue in 1965, Barry McGuire's number one hit was nonetheless unusual in its bleakness. Derivative of Dylan and lyrically less inspired than the tunes of most other folk artists, "Eve of Destruction" was nonetheless fascinating for its strident dissent, pessimism, and catch-all anxiety as it conquered America's

¹⁰² Mash-up of lyrics from, in order, James Brown, "I Feel Good," The Temptations, "My Girl," The Beatles, "I Feel Fine," The Beach Boys, "I Get Around," The Impressions, "It's Alright." All #1 songs on the Billboard pop charts in 1964 or 1965, except "It's Alright," which was #1 R&B in 1965.

¹⁰³ The Beatles, "Help!" released by Capitol, July 19, 1965, (Billboard single: 1)

¹⁰⁴ Bob Dylan, "Masters of War," released on LP *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* on Columbia Records, May 27, 1963. (Billboard Album: 22)

radios. In response to Kennedy's excitement about space missions, McGuire answered, "You may leave here for four days in space / But when you return it's the same old place."¹⁰⁵ The overnight sensation could match Biblical allusions with Johnson too, as present violence blurred with old Israel's darkest days: "Even the Jordan River has bodies floating." While Johnson told the nation not just to hope for the best, but to expect it, McGuire countered: "Can't you feel the fears I'm feeling today? . . . I can't twist the truth, it knows no regulation . . . This whole crazy world is just too frustrating . . . and you tell me . . . you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction?" It was as if Lyndon Johnson and Barry McGuire were taking the measurements of two different worlds.

Confidence in leadership, the direction that authority pursued, the hope in learned solutions to intractable problems – it all hung in a precarious balance. 47 to 47, one might say. Even during the heyday of the expert and the deliberately inflated expectations of the Great Society, the bursts of exuberance were followed by sober self-doubt. Sometimes, as in "Help!" both the exuberance and doubt poured out simultaneously, the emotions bundled, inextricable from each other. For the professors, NASA, the social workers, the Pentagon, medical doctors, economists, the federal government – the American Century, itself – the moment had arrived to put up or shut up.

¹⁰⁵ Barry McGuire, "The Eve of Destruction," released 1965 on Dunhill Records. (Billboard single: 1)

Chapter 4. Revolt The New Right and the Intellectual Oppressors

“What would happen if you had to make a quick decision in the White House and maybe all our lives depended on whether you could act fast and you just sat there, having a high old time with your divided conscience?”

Former President to Secretary of State Bill Russell (Henry Fonda)
The Best Man (1964)

Where progressive enthusiasts such as Kennedy and Johnson saw opportunity in new knowledge, the New Right sensed subversion. At mid-century, conservative voices were eager to rebuke the belief that government was a technical matter that could be adjusted to perfection by technicians. For conservatives, experts in government and universities were a plague. In the view of a rejuvenated right, professors spread insidious ideologies, teaching doctrines at odds with conventional wisdom, demanding tolerance even for those who would undermine the stability of the United States. Eggheads journeyed from university to Washington and demanded that their political opponents bow to their “facts and analysis.” Overthinking jeopardized the country. The experts’ heads were so full of theories that they refused to stand up to the threat of communism. Liberal brains reasoned and rationalized the United States into a position of inferiority.

The first of the indignant protestors, in 1950, was William F. Buckley, Jr., an aristocratically-inclined young man from Connecticut. A recent Yale graduate, Buckley mourned much of what he had been taught. From Buckley’s perspective, Yale took the brightest minds

from America's leading families and taught students to regret their privilege, and to criticize the traditions and institutions that built America. Yale University was, for Buckley, composed of a student body and alumni of Christian individualists who had, because of ridiculous deference to its professorship, allowed its students to be inculcated with the ideas of atheism and collectivism. It was high time, said Buckley, that the patrons of Yale – students and alumni – demand that the content of teaching reflect conservative views. The university's self-important experts should be brought to heel and reminded that the "consumers" of a Yale education had final oversight as to what was espoused in the lecture halls. Over the course of the next two decades, Buckley launched a journal, *The National Review*, to be the voice of a new conservatism, and he invited like-minded college students to form Young Americans for Freedom, an organization which declared that its political positions were "eternal truths," quasi-religious values beyond debate. Back in 1900, at the inauguration of Columbia University's School of Social Science, the professors had asserted that the experts would crack the code of social policy, but they might be at odds with the uneducated masses. Buckley suggested that even within the university itself, expert opinion could not find majority support among the university body.

The first of the new-style conservatives to capture a major party's nomination for president was Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate in 1964. Goldwater argued that Republicans should not tolerate the centralizing authority of federal power in Washington, as they had since the New Deal. They must roll it back, and turn out the know-it-all bureaucrats who thought that they could solve the problems of every city and state from the vantage point of Washington. One of Goldwater's converts was former actor Ronald Reagan, who joined the

conservative movement that dared to say “no” to the professors and eggheads. When he was elected governor of California two years later, Reagan rode a populist backlash. Universities had a duty, he insisted, to emphasize the virtues of Americanism and decency.

In 1964, when Barry Goldwater ran for president and Ronald Reagan switched parties to endorse him, Hollywood’s imaginary president, Henry Fonda, was having a difficult time on the silver screen. In two 1964 films, *The Best Man* and *Fail-Safe*, Fonda attempted first to win a party nomination to be a presidential candidate, and then, as president in the latter film, to deal with a nuclear weapons crisis. In the first film, Fonda blew his early convention lead and ceded his party’s nomination to a candidate about whom he knew virtually nothing. Playing another “intellectual” in *The Best Man*, Fonda agonized until he convinced himself to give up his pursuit of the presidency. Pulling defeat from the jaws of victory was just what conservatives expected eggheads and liberals to do in the fight against communism. Liberals were “undiscriminating fellows,” as Buckley described them.¹⁰⁶ In *Fail-Safe*, President Fonda had to deal with an accidentally launched nuclear missile. In the ensuing game of atomic chess, his best idea was to sacrifice New York City. Perhaps standing back for New York to be obliterated was a decisive action, but it was not a reassuring one. The last image in the film was the people in New York City, oblivious to the fact that they would be dead in a matter of seconds. The result of putting the liberal brains in charge of politics was prompt and utter destruction.

¹⁰⁶ William Buckley, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of Academic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1986 [1951]), 183.

The Imaginary President Reasons It Away

As *The Best Man* opens, viewers learn that William Russell (Henry Fonda) has arrived at his political party's convention as the clear leader in pledged delegates.¹⁰⁷ The Secretary of State will probably not secure the nomination on the first ballot, but if one or two states change their votes, he will cruise to the national contest where the poll numbers show him to have a comfortable lead.¹⁰⁸ While not quite a coronation, the convention is Russell's. His opponent, the candidate with the second-most pledged delegates, is Joe Cantwell (Cliff Robertson), single-minded in his eagerness to supplant Russell as nominee. Both campaigns have secrets about the other candidate in their files. The Cantwell people possess a report in which a psychologist who treated Russell for exhaustion found him to be unstable and suffering from neurosis, the signature ailment of the intellectual. The Russell team has evidence that Cantwell was court-martialed for homosexual activity. Cantwell threatens repeatedly to release the psychologist's report to delegates. Russell's team assures him that publicizing the court-martial papers, and trotting out one of the men who testified against him, will end Cantwell's career. Russell is one step away from the Oval Office.¹⁰⁹

Whether he will the trigger and take power despite his misgivings is the film's central tension. *The Best Man* reminds the viewer repeatedly that Russell is the egghead. At key moments, campaign signs in the background read "Russell: The Thinking Man." Secretary of State Russell is on familiar terms with popular ex-President Art Hockstader (Lee Tracy), whose

¹⁰⁷ Famously, in its original Broadway run, actor Melvyn Douglas was cast as William Russell over Ronald Reagan, who was considered by the play's producers not believably presidential.

¹⁰⁸ Though his, admittedly different, character in *Advise and Consent* failed to be confirmed Secretary of State by the Senate, Fonda's character Russell begins *The Best Man* having had years of experience in that cabinet position.

¹⁰⁹ *The Best Man*, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, screenplay by Gore Vidal, distributed by United Artists, 1964.

endorsement is one advantage that the Russell team believes could put its candidate over the top. The former president withholds endorsement, and the film's pace quickens with the private verbal sparring between Russell and Hockstader. The president begins with another acknowledgement of Secretary of State Russell's superior intellect. No one else in the field has got "your brains," Hockstader tells him. "You're a very superior man, the kind of man we don't often find in politics." The problem, the president tells him, is Russell's indecisiveness. As the juror in *12 Angry Men* had told Fonda's character, "You think too much, you get mixed up." Even when Hockstader decides that he prefers Russell as his candidate, he calls Russell "lily-livered" for refusing to throw mud at Cantwell. "Stay away from us," says Hockstader. "Be a saint on your own time. Because you ain't fit to lead anybody."¹¹⁰ Russell retorts, "Because I don't have that mindless reflex you confuse with strength?" The president is not convinced by the reply. To the competitive old politician and statesman, Fonda's character has just told the president that displays of strength at crucial moments are "mindless."¹¹¹ Hockstader replies to Russell: "You've got such a good mind that you get so busy thinking how complex everything is that sometimes important problems don't get solved." Experts see complexity, according to this line of reasoning, but struggle with action.

The film pushes its point repeatedly. When Russell still refuses to leak the politically devastating report, Hockstader explodes, "Why are you hesitating *this time*?" The president, an old associate of Russell, speaks like one who cannot take any more deliberation or soliloquies

¹¹⁰ In another scene, everyman President Hockstader refers to himself as "the last of the great hicks." Politics in the future, he implies, will only be for Ivy Leaguers, eggheads, and "rich boys."

¹¹¹ In Vidal's original stage play, Russell continues to speak and uses the phrase "animal reflex," which gives a slightly different shading to the concept that men of action are not only less thoughtful, but less evolved. "The Best Man," by Gore Vidal, published by Dramatists' Play Service, New York, 1960, 58.

about the excruciating complexity of action from a second-rate Hamlet. Hockstader collapses from exhaustion, perhaps a consequence of having to watch Russell make decisions. “Power is not a toy we give to good children,” Hockstader intones. “It is a weapon, and the strong man takes it and he uses it.” The statement is among the last bits of advice from the president before he dies. The leader of the Pennsylvania delegation arrives after Hockstader’s demise, only to hammer the familiar theme. He demands of Russell’s campaign that the court martial papers be released to the press. Russell still hesitates to use them. “He feels, he thinks, he sits. Keen, aggressive leadership,” the gentleman from Pennsylvania declares. Perhaps Kennedy, Johnson, and the ‘60s liberals strained to impress their audiences because they were, like Russell, split over their every decision, unsure about the direction that they wanted to lead.

Russell’s slowness to action is not his only sin. He demonstrates, in brief reflective moments throughout the movie, condescension toward popular opinion and the ignorance of the average voter. At one juncture, Russell mentions, almost to himself, “In the South, a sheriff once got elected by claiming his opponent’s wife was a thespian.”¹¹² Fonda smiles wryly, very pleased with his anecdote. His campaign manager guffaws. This type of thing amuses the supercilious intellectuals. When first hearing that Cantwell has a homosexual history, Fonda does not believe the accusation, remarking of Cantwell: “No man with that awful wife and those ugly children could be anything but normal.” The patronizing expert has a low opinion of common folk. In one exchange about relations between India and China, Russell tells President Hockstader, “That’s the kind of thing you and I understand.” Of his opponent, he declares, “Joe would check the latest Gallup poll.” Checking public opinion is strictly for demagogues. Most

¹¹² *The Best Man*, Schaffner.

unforgiveable, Russell is a humanist and atheist, who says that he does not believe in a transcendent power, just “us,” that is – humanity. When the Fonda character makes a joke about how teeth remind people of their “indecent” descent from beasts of prey, his campaign manager chides him, amusedly: “Steady. No Darwin. Before the Garden of Eden was the Word.” Russell and his campaign manager do not simply believe in evolutionary biology to the exclusion of Biblical revelation. They deride people of faith. On the screen, in literal black and white, fundamentalist viewers watch condescending know-it-alls roll their eyes at Biblical truisms. Such is the true egghead, behind closed doors.

Everything that Russell says in *The Best Man* reminds viewers of his erudition. The press asks Russell: “Do you think people mistrust intellectuals like you in politics?”¹¹³ To answer the question, he quotes his friend, philosopher Bertrand Russell: “‘People in a democracy tend to think they have less to fear from a stupid man than an intelligent one.’ I think it’s the other way around. I think the stupid man . . .” The secretary of state trails off into a lecture. Then he quotes Oliver Cromwell – just the kind of allusion intellectuals make. Afterward, William Russell assures the press corps that the man whom he quoted was fired, not “for being an incompetent philosopher,” but for “preaching free love.” Presumably, everyone with doubts about one Russell or the other was reassured. As the aspiring president begins to pontificate on Cromwell, Russell’s long-suffering campaign manager, in panic, escorts him out of the room.

Outside, a middle-aged woman takes Russell by the arm. Ms. Mabel (Eddie Adams) tells Russell why she supports him: “I love eggheads in politics. Yes, I really mean it. You professors

¹¹³ *The Best Man*, Schaffner.

give a tone to these conventions.”¹¹⁴ She has plenty of advice for the Secretary of State. The voting women of America do not like candidates to joke or be ironic. Mabel warns: “Just don’t try to be smart aleck and talk over our poor little heads.” Americans resent know-it-alls. Joe Cantwell certainly resents Russell. While reading the paper, Cantwell discovers that Walter Lippmann, an enthusiast of measured reason and expertise and a now a columnist in real life – and the film – endorses Russell. Typical, Cantwell thinks. He cannot connect with “those intellectuals.” Elites do not make a convincing case for their position, but they are a political constituency that sticks together. Ultimately, however, Russell is no more successful at being elected president than was Fonda’s Leffingwell at becoming Secretary of State in *Advise and Consent*. The idea that brainy eggheads cannot act with firmness plagues Russell until the end. During the film’s climax, Russell acts deliberately, if not cannily or cautiously. Eventually, he decides neither to smear Cantwell nor to concede to him. He throws his delegates behind a third candidate whom he dreams will be less demagogic than Cantwell.

Two distinct interpretations of *The Best Man* resonate. In one reading, Russell faces an extraordinary dilemma that makes him choose between protecting the country through behavior he found distasteful, or violating his conscience in order to preserve his own power. The man of conscience and reason has to choose between his judgment and his conscience. Because of his thoughtfulness and imagination, the former Secretary of State thinks of a third option, one which protects the country without violating his moral code. The intellectual alienates himself from power, but he has vanquishes Cantwell and saves the United States from a dangerous President. He acts decisively, despite the fears of former President Hockstader and

¹¹⁴ *The Best Man*, Schaffner.

the taunts of Cantwell. Though he loses the nomination at the convention, Russell remains the best man.

To a different set of eyes and ears, Cantwell had been correct when he told Russell that the egghead did not understand the country, its people, and its values. A man who was a few simple steps away from the presidency was too high-minded to take power and direct American policy. Experts like Russell were able to write books about what was to be done, but they could not get it done. Such individuals could not assert power at crucial moments and so could not really lead. The intellectual reasoned his way right out of the presidency. Russell may have been the best and the brightest, but he was only clever enough to lose elaborately. Perhaps the best men did see too many options to follow clear paths to victory. Maybe the best man, or the wisest or the smartest, was a born loser.

Buckley's Call to Reign in Experts

When William Buckley, Jr. published the expose of Yale University that brought him to national celebrity, he fired a shot against the professoriate and Ivy Tower intellectuals who, Buckley felt, served their country and students poorly. Itching for a fight, Buckley was an uncommon specimen, one who had "the outward and visible signs of a campus radical," as Dwight MacDonald put it, "and the inward and spiritual qualities of the radical's wealthy grandfather."¹¹⁵ He modeled both a line of reasoning and a personal style that young

¹¹⁵ Dwight MacDonald quoted in John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 15.

conservatives of his generation adored.¹¹⁶ Permanently miffed at the slights of erudite agnostics and atheists, Buckley protested the arrogance of intellectuals, while he simultaneously cultivated a condescending tone toward the non-believers and so-called experts whom he encountered in public life. In print and on television, he offered his readers and viewers the style of expertise, but with analysis almost always contrary to that of the liberal eggheads. The scion of an oil fortune, he enjoyed discomfiting the intellectuals who had made classes at Yale a test of his patience. Progressives who found Buckley's ideas retrograde and his tone imperious fueled his appetite for crusade. The wink of knowing money was the image that Buckley cultivated after his college days. He had inhabited the experts' playground but was seeking better things. No one understood more keenly than Buckley the conflict between democracy and expertise and its exploitability. The young man from Connecticut demanded respect for the opinions of the majority.

Buckley would have found both Secretary of State Bill Russell and Professor Bertrand Russell unfit for university tenure. Unlike their students and the populations they served, these men were atheists, searching for a moral system based on something other than received truth. They both found Americans distastefully militant and ignorant and felt at home only among a community of like-minded scholars. Worse was the relativism. There was no reason that knowledge need make men lose faith in absolute values and the coherent wholeness of heaven and earth. A real intellectual knew, Buckley felt, when to stop thinking and trust his intuition. "I see it as the historical role of the new conservatives not to abandon their traditional concerns,

¹¹⁶ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 70-6.

but to accept the necessity of gut affirmations respecting America's way of doing things," he wrote in his magazine, *The National Review*.¹¹⁷ Buckley was an intellectual for conservatives, a learned man who trusted his gut.

He landed a satisfying job at his professorial tormentors near the end of tenure at Yale. As editor of the Yale student newspaper, Buckley was expected to coordinate an end-of-year dinner. He billed it as a send-off for the retiring Yale President. Heads of other elite universities accepted invitations to attend. The President of Columbia University, Dwight Eisenhower, came to the gathering of educational elites, his interim job between generalship and presidency. All in attendance expected the outgoing student newspaper editor to eulogize the departing head of Yale. Instead, the administrators of institutions of higher education received a lecture about the fundamental flaws of universities in the United States. Buckley was offended by the chic relativism, the un-American skepticism, and the snotty atheism rampant among professors. Students trusted their learned instructors, but the professors purveyed shocking misinformation. "Here we can find men who will tell us that Jesus Christ was the greatest fraud that history has known," Buckley stated. "Here we can find men who will tell us that morality is an anachronistic conception, rendered obsolete by the advances of human thought."¹¹⁸ In the emphasis on tomorrow, experts were throwing away the spiritual foundations of moral order. Students could hardly believe that this was what their parents had sent them to learn. They left in a fog, Buckley told Eisenhower and the other guests: "Two and two make three, the shortest

¹¹⁷ Buckley quoted in George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006 [1976]), 485.

¹¹⁸ William Buckley, "Today We Are Educated Men," (1950) in *Landmark Speeches of the American Conservative Movement*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 16.

distance between two points is a crooked line.” Buckley loaded the speech with sardonic reproach against elders who had made a mess of American education: “From this morass we are to extract a workable, enlightened synthesis to govern our thoughts and our actions, for today we are educated men.” Arch rhetoric such as this we associate with the anti-war students of the sixties. It belonged to Buckley and his followers before it did to the anti-Vietnam crowd. Rebuking those who claimed authority based on their knowledge was already in vogue in some quarters.

The education Buckley described was, he believed, a form of tyranny. He could not fathom how the alumni, America’s leading citizens, accepted such balderdash. We can imagine just how Buckley might have spit out the phrase “the sacrosanct will of the enlightened minority.” The professors required students to study texts that violated their consciences. For instance, American historian Charles Beard was a crank whose outrageous thesis, that the authors of the United States Constitution were financially motivated landholders, was met upon its 1913 publication with appropriate scorn and dismissal. But now, comprehensive knowledge of the text was mandatory reading in order to acquire a doctoral degree in American history. Such requirements were anathema to the patriotic student, who was made to feel unsophisticated for believing in his country. The sociologists and philosophers told them to feel guilty about privilege. Students learned that their parents had achieved success in America through “dreadfully irresponsible” behavior. Again, Buckley’s tone became arch, telling those assembled that what an elite university bestowed on its successful students was the strength necessary to “withstand the barrage” against their convictions and, more personally, their family names. Experts told elite students that they must use the obscure knowledge bestowed

on them to change the world. The know-it-alls were ridiculous busybodies. Buckley described them as such: “A starry-eyed young man, nevertheless aggressive in his wisdom . . . approaches our neat, sturdy white house and tells us we must destroy it, rebuild it of crystallized cold cream, and paint it purple.”¹¹⁹ What America needed was more men who understood and rejected such false prophets.

The tyrannical minority vanquished, clear-eyed individuals could reestablish faith in eternal verities. The wisdom that the professoriate wanted to debunk was so clearly true that it was “self-evident that in the process of history certain immutable truths have been revealed and discovered and that their value is not subject to the limitations of time and space. The probing, the relentless debunking, has engendered a skepticism that threatens to pervade and atrophy all our values.” Experts thought that probing and debunking built the staircase to mastery, but Buckley insisted that the practice was dangerous to the body politic. It released the unhealthy pathogens of doubt and flaccidity. What Buckley believed in were values that resisted the scientist’s microscope and the intellectual’s analysis. The discontented Yale man closed his speech with a call to “punch the gasbag of cynicism and skepticism, and thank providence for what we have and must retain.”¹²⁰ Buckley proceeded to codify his way of thinking and its ramifications in a book that exposed the experts, rather than Jesus Christ, as the frauds.

The subtitle of *God and Man at Yale* was *The Superstitions of Academic Freedom*. Professors such as C.E. Ayres held themselves up as models of objectivity against superstition

¹¹⁹ Buckley, “Today We Are Educated Men,” 18.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-9.

and mysticism. Buckley hoped that he could embarrass the professors by demonstrating that their values masked indefensible assumptions, mindless reflex, and empty style. Academics were no more objective and no less prejudiced and superstitious than their detractors. The values of universities, Buckley insisted, had to be rethought. When he studied the content of the courses, he knew that someone had blundered, and the system was in need of a corrective.

The corrective was democracy, as Buckley saw it. The call to democratize what the professors taught was one form that disbelief of expertise took. When Buckley used the phrase “the marketplace of ideas,” he thought about that market literally. Who was paying for the thinkers to think and the teachers to teach? The answer was students, parents, and taxpayers. Therefore, intellectuals reported to these groups, their bosses. For Buckley, professors existed in a capitalist marketplace, and their employers should choose what the faculty taught. Experts simply did not have a right to teach the ideas and values of a small minority of intellectuals and thereby confuse vulnerable students. “The most esteemed values, if they are to triumph, must have a helping hand at the educational level,” he wrote.¹²¹ When universities boosted esteemed values by monitoring what lecturers taught, they pushed a “value orthodoxy” of which Buckley approved. Traditional and popular ideas did not limit professorial freedom, which was the original superstition. After all, colleges would not hire fascists. Therefore, they already policed thought. Instead of decreasing freedom, “value orthodoxy” restored freedom to students and alumni to control the universities from which they had a right to demand satisfaction. The line of thinking further held that reigning in the intellectuals was a

¹²¹ William F. Buckley, Jr. *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of Academic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1986 [1951]), 161.

responsibility of those who oversaw the school: “We have an inescapable duty to seek to inculcate others with these values.”¹²² Education was too important to be left to intellectuals. It was “wrong and improper,” Buckley wrote, “for the proverbial long-haired teacher” to assert “license in the classroom.”

In 1900, the speakers who christened the Columbia School of Social Science insisted that the research of scientific scholars would eventually take precedence over the ignorant whims of the majority. By mid-century, the professoriate believed that this rule had become accepted, at least within the university. Buckley launched a new wave of conservatism when he disagreed with the premise and explicitly undermined the assertion that knowledge should translate to power. “It is of the essence of freedom that citizens not be made to pay for what the majority does not want,” Buckley wrote. “There is no exception to this rule that does not entail a surrender of freedom and a substitution of minority for majority rule.”¹²³ Those who claimed to know the most about a subject had to learn that there were limits to what they could teach impressionable students. They needed to defer to the opinions of the majority, not attempt to tell that majority what to believe.

Buckley was still promoting activism among conservative college students a decade later when he invited a group of them to his home in Sharon, Connecticut to set a student agenda for the sixties. Buckley was delighted by a militant conservative spirit beginning to infect the country’s campuses. He gloried in a *National Review* editorial: “All over the land, dumbfounded professors are remarking [about] the extraordinary revival of hard conservative sentiment in

¹²² Buckley, *God and Man at Yale*, 156.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 185.

student bodies.”¹²⁴ The mix of libertarians, market capitalists, and religious traditionalists who met in Connecticut produced a concise statement of principles to which they could all commit themselves. The one-page statement offered big ideas, not specific policy. Most significant about the Sharon Statement was that it termed its political ideas “eternal truths.”¹²⁵ When the group that named themselves Young Americans for Freedom, over the course of the retreat, spoke about *laissez faire* economics and the impossibility of coexisting with communism, they were not leaving room for compromise or alteration by learned opponents. The Sharon Statement would end conversation more readily than begin it. YAF’s vision of economic policy had a religious quality. “It was a statement of faith, of conviction,” as historian of sixties conservatism John Andrew put it.¹²⁶ The promise of perfect knowledge in the future, the boldest expert’s promise, held no attraction for those who signed their names to a declaration of eternal truth in the here and now. YAF members were further unified by what they felt was persecution on campus. “There’s no talk about the terrible harassment that went on against college students and professors who were anti-Communists and anti-collectivists,” remembered YAFer Scott Stanley.¹²⁷ They yearned for more public figures around whom to coalesce. Stanley was, he said, “persecuted for his ideas” on campus. When a right wing candidate who had a chance to capture the nomination of the Republican Party finally emerged, the true believers joined the campaign activity as if they had been born again.

¹²⁴ Buckley quoted in John Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 58.

¹²⁵ “The Sharon Statement,” in entirety in Flamm and Steigerwald’s *Debating the Sixties*.

¹²⁶ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*.

¹²⁷ Rebecca Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 108.

Traditionalists, Individualists, Cowboys

Personal style was as essential to the public understanding of Barry Goldwater as it was to that of John Kennedy or William Buckley. The Arizona senator loved to spend time in the West, where the press photographed him with cowboy hat and rifle. Considering himself a quintessential Westerner, Goldwater liked his leisure activities and his politics to reflect an aura of freedom. One of the first things most readers learned about him was his love of aviation. Senator Goldwater seemed as restless to get to his plane as he was to spread the gospel of individualism and anti-statism. One hagiographic work about him bore the title *His Flight Plan is Freedom*.

In 1960, when Buckley was coordinating the founding of YAF, conservative booster Charles Manion convinced Goldwater to allow *National Review* contributor, and Buckley's brother-in-law, Brent Bozell to ghostwrite for the senator a short book about conservative principles.¹²⁸ Some conservatives sensed a turning point in the early 1960s, a spirit of rebellion against the liberal consensus and the bureaus of centralized power. When Bozell's compilation of Goldwater speeches, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, was published, its reception convinced optimists that their historical instincts were right. It was an actual best-seller – especially on college campuses.

“Liberals’ characteristic approach is to harness the society’s political and economic forces into a collective effort to *compel* progress,” Goldwater’s *Conscience* declared. “In this approach, I believe they fight against Nature.”¹²⁹ The New Deal’s faith in improving the world

¹²⁸ Robert Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 138-9.

¹²⁹ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (New York: Manor Books, 1975 [1960]), 11.

by assigning a group of brains to study problems and implement solutions was anathema to Goldwater in the book that bore his name. The experts overestimated their ability, “playing God” with the fates of ordinary lives. At one point, Bozell’s book described the sentiments of an ideal leader: “I have little interest in streamlining government or in making it more efficient, for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom. My aim is not to pass laws but to repeal them.”¹³⁰ In contrast to the optimism of Kennedy and Johnson rhetoric, Goldwater’s words made a radical break, insisting not on good government but less government. At heart, Goldwater conservatism said, “No!” to the idea that experts could work through government institutions to fix human problems. “Good government” had been a watchword since the Progressive Era; dismissing the very concept out of hand was radical conservatism. Few leaders on the national stage in 1960 told their constituents that they had no plan or desire to improve the nation’s welfare. To broker perfection was to defy nature, Goldwater thought. He took no comfort in knowing that those making decisions had been selected from among the best and the brightest.

The senator’s rejection of human perfectibility, and his assertion that remote eggheads messed where they did not belong found a ready audience among grassroots conservatives, young and old, both college-aged YAFers and what historian Lisa McGirr has called “the suburban warriors.” In a letter to the editor in hyper-conservative Orange County, one man remarked, “Is not our representative government, of, by, and for the people now being supplanted by a government run by sophisticated intellectuals who claim they know what is

¹³⁰ Goldwater, *Conscience*, 23.

best for us?”¹³¹ The proponents of the university-trained expert had always acknowledged that the chosen icon was controversial, but they were not prepared for phrases such as “the sophisticated intellectual” to become the foundation of a political revolt. This conservative stuff was for genuine rebels, Goldwater insisted. When he captured the Republican nomination in 1964, he promised in his acceptance speech that a vote for Goldwater was a vote against the spiritually-crippling routinization of life.

His supporters claimed that Goldwater represented the salvation of democracy and populism. The Arizona senator would take back power from federal bureaucrats and Eastern elites, who tried to make other regions of the country do what they felt best. Phyllis Schlafly learned that there was room for short, conservative manifestos other than just *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Her pithy book, *A Voice Not an Echo*, lifted Schlafly out of the ranks of mere politics. The Republican delegate from Indiana asserted that political elites opposed genuine conservatives whom voters loved. “Hidden kingmakers” troubled the woman from Indiana. Schlafly believed that elites – professors, and journalists – condescended to Goldwater because he favored direct and simple solutions. One-sentence solutions from decisive leaders would be a corrective to the liberal politicians who were giving the country away to the communists, the Henry Fondas who reflected so much about problems that they could merely deliberate endlessly. “According to this line of egghead reasoning,” Schlafly wrote, “present problems are so complex that we must have sophisticated—not simple—solutions.” Yet, simplicity remained a virtue, despite what the smarter-than-thou crowd said. In one pitch for Goldwater, Schlafly

¹³¹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 166.

wrote, he “is the man who can cut through the egghead complexities in Foggy Bottom and solve these problems for us.”¹³² The complexities that specialists were always discovering lay in a thick fog of inaction in the nation’s capital. The solution, Schlafly told her readers, was to embrace simplicity.

Goldwater’s candidacy made a political star of Ronald Reagan. The former New Deal enthusiast was reborn a conservative during the 1964 presidential contest. Even after Goldwater was soundly defeated, many California conservatives still spoke about what they considered the campaign’s most glorious moment, Reagan’s twenty-minute television address that made the case for Goldwater. “A Time for Choosing” became a classic of the New Right. Schlafly had called Goldwater “the man with the courage to give us simple solutions.”¹³³ Reagan loved that same thing about the Republican nominee. Intellectuals accused Goldwater’s followers of “‘offering simple answers to complex problems.’ Well perhaps there is a simple answer,” Reagan suggested.¹³⁴ Like Schlafly, Reagan insisted that complexity was a mischievous word that the experts used to dismiss those with common sense. Complex was a code-word elites used to steamroll Constitutional checks and balances while making common voters feel inadequate. “Complexity” was where liberal scare tactics began. “Our traditional system of individual freedom is incapable of solving the complex problems of the 20th century,” Reagan quoted one unidentified liberal as saying.¹³⁵

¹³²Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice Not an Echo* (Alton: Pere Marquette Press, 1964),25, 89-90.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹³⁴ Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” October 27, 1964, accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXBswFfh6AY>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

The former actor had lost the old faith: Walter Lippmann's ideas about mastering social problems through teams of experts, the Brain Trust promises; President Truman's claim that communism would be defeated by the knowledge of specialists; and now, President Johnson's promise of a Great Society on the foundation of cardiologists in hospitals, sociologists at welfare departments, and Keynesian economists in the White House. The promises of experts and planners were simply hot air. Reagan realized what a farce the whole project had been since the New Deal: "For three decades, we've sought to solve the problems of unemployment through government planning, and the more the plans fail, the more the planners plan." As it was for Goldwater, Schlafly, and members of YAF, the decision in the 1964 presidential election was between the airy promises of eggheads and the legacy of liberty. A nation committed to democracy must stop hoping for revelations from the knowledgeable that would solve problems. "This is the issue of this election," Reagan told his enthusiastic audience. "Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."¹³⁶ There were lovers of the republic, and there were those who put their faith in facile elite analysis.

When Reagan successfully ran for governor of California in 1966, he became as concerned with dictatorial professors at California universities as William Buckley had been a decade and a half before, when he wrote *God and Man at Yale*. Reagan defined the political choice for voters as between people of common sense and good will and exclusive highbrows: "We can control our own destiny, make our own plans, find the answers to our problems,

¹³⁶ Reagan, "A Time for Choosing."

without giving up our hard won freedom to some kind of an intellectual elite sitting in a distant capital who's decided to make all the decisions for us."¹³⁷ The campaign proved that resentment towards experts had populist traction. An even more effective issue for Reagan were politically outspoken students at the University of California at Berkeley and the professors who egged them on. In the months leading to his landslide victory, Reagan put the heat on what he called "the filthy speech movement." Professors inculcated students with questionable values, and the people needed to fight back.¹³⁸ "If scholars are to be recognized as having a right to press their particular value judgements," the candidate declared, "perhaps the time has come also for institutions of higher learning to assert themselves as positive forces in the battle for men's minds."¹³⁹ Buckley's seemingly quixotic thesis helped Reagan take a firm lead in polls. He warned California students and educators that his ideas had consequences. The state "might even call on [faculty] to be proponents of those ethical and moral standards demanded by the great majority of our society." In November, Reagan bested the brains at Berkeley with fifty-eight percent of the vote.

The Imaginary President Nukes New York

No matter how he had bungled his ascent to power in prior movies, Henry Fonda is the president in 1964's *Fail-Safe* at the most crucial moment in world history. The military system

¹³⁷ Reagan, speech at Pepperdine University, October 18, 1966, accessed <http://pepperdine.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15093coll4/id/12>.

¹³⁸ Historian Kim Phillips-Fein observed insightfully that bureaucrats and college students were a persuasive substitute for Franklin Roosevelt's "malefactors of wealth" because both brainy experts and wealthy financiers could be perceived as distant, privileged persecutors. Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W Norton, 2009), 147-49.

¹³⁹ "Ronald Reagan Denounces the Morality Gap at Berkeley," reprinted in *Major Problems in California History*, eds. Sucheng Chang and Spencer Olin, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 367.

malfunctions, and a bomber is sent unintentionally to obliterate Moscow. All attempts to recall or destroy the plane fail. In the end, to prevent global annihilation, Fonda's character agrees to use the American Air Force to blow up New York City as a trade for Moscow. Although his family is in New York City, his integrity tells him that he cannot warn them to escape because he must sacrifice just as much as everyone else. After two films about trying to bring new thinking to Washington, Fonda finally arrives. Then he kills his wife and children.

The most interesting aspect of *Fail-Safe* is how it uses the language of complexity that perturbed conservatives to critique the military-industrial complex. Most of *Fail-Safe* is a critique from the Left, but in much of the same language the Right was using to undermine the validity of experts. In one scene, a veteran Air Force pilot reminisces about the planes he used to fly, and complains that the Air Force and its equipment have become too complex. Now the planes fly the men. The pilot's mix of nostalgia and elderly wisdom takes an aw-shucks swipe at the modern military. He is unhappy that the same flight crews never fly together twice so that they have no personal relationship. His friend defends the new protocol because it "eliminates the personal factor. Everything is more complicated now. . . . You can't depend on people like you used to." Moments later, a presumably liberal congressman tours a nuclear missile control center but worries that no humans are capable of controlling the labyrinthine system in front of him: "It's too complicated. If you want to know, that's what really bothers me," says the congressman. "The only thing everyone can agree on is that no one's responsible."¹⁴⁰ Barry Goldwater also complained that the complexity of centralized bureaucracies obscured responsibility and turned people into automatons. However, Goldwater was a great supporter

¹⁴⁰ *Fail-Safe*, directed by Sidney Lumet, produced by Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1964.

of national defense. Conservatives and liberals shared the rhetoric of institutional dehumanization, but they did so in order to undermine different institutions.

The film also notes in detail that people are becoming machines. On this note, there was nothing as clever as the dialogue of Jack Lemmon's C.C. Baxter in *The Apartment*, though *Fail-Safe* imagined the secret nuclear headquarters through the prism of Floor 33 at Consolidated Life:



Figure 3. A missile defense command room in *Fail-Safe* (1964)

Just as in *The Apartment*, bureaucratic organization transforms individuals into interchangeable parts. Of the young generation, an old pilot says, "Look at those kids. Remember the crews you'd have on the 24s, Jews, Italians, all kinds. You could tell them apart. They were people. These kids, you open them up, you find they run on transistors."¹⁴¹ In its review of the film, *The*

¹⁴¹ *Fail-Safe*, Lumet.

National Review mocked the overwrought symbolism in *Fail-Safe*. Richard Hodgens dismissed the “Liberal science fiction” because it sought to impress “deluded intellectuals,” with man-machine talk and the complexity of modernity.¹⁴² He sniffed at the liberals who wrote this strained fiction for intellectuals.

A conservative critique also runs throughout *Fail-Safe*: the problem of the Fonda character. Perhaps the president is intended to be heroic when he sacrifices his family and legacy, and likely the ability to sleep at night, to prevent an escalation of nuclear war. But he was not heroic to the reviewer in William Buckley’s magazine. Hodgens wrote that “mad President Fonda” was “an appropriate hero; he got everything backwards.” The ending was “a complete disaster,” if the filmmakers had intended to do anything but persuade viewers not to vote Fonda, should he ever run. The reviewer summarized the film ironically: “It takes . . . our heroic President . . . to take care of New York.” President Fonda had, at best, a mixed legacy.

Fail-Safe exposed the problem of the expert class for subscribers to *The National Review*. If they were not persecuting decent people of faith by forcing on them their sophisticated values, the eggheads were leading Americans into disaster. “Mad President Fonda” is so brainy and broadly cultured and thinks himself such a citizen of the world, that he blows up his country’s most populous city to maintain the Cold War status quo. In their youth, somewhere in the depths of the universities, the elites must have learned to suppress their common sense. The repression of good judgment made them hungry to control how ordinary people lived their lives and to bring counterintuitive judgments to national defense. The times were complicated. The machines were complicated. Worst of all were the men sitting atop of

¹⁴² Richard Hodgens, “Like Novel, Like Movie,” *The National Review*, November 17, 1964, 1064.

civilization, their transistor innards malfunctioning, their lives given over to one bureaucratic solution, one more group of scientific experts.

Chapter 5. Catastrophize The Unreasonable Liberals

“Have we lost all professional control?”

Social worker in the film *A Thousand Clowns* (1965)

“There is madness in America and it is much worse than liberals are ready to believe.”

Jack Newfield

“No Taxation without De-escalation,”
Village Voice, 1967

“It is precisely that rational commitment to logic and consistency—of the kind that can lead from game theory at the RAND Corporation to the use of napalm in Vietnam—that these young persons abhor.”

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

“Nirvana Now,” 1967

The liberals had much to make good on. They needed to fend off criticism from the Right, while working to fulfill the promises of Kennedy and Johnson. It was difficult business to live up to their own expectations for what well-intentioned eggheads could accomplish. If euphoric hyperbole was the style for liberals in the early 1960s, deflation, finger-pointing, and penitence were the rules for liberals and former liberals by decade’s end. As it turned out, many on the Left had their own critiques of expertise. The premier objects of disgust were the Pentagon analysts, making a mess in Vietnam, wielding expertise like psychopaths in pursuit of maximum communist kills. Nothing shattered the old Kennedy confidence like the unceasing stream of bad news from Southeast Asia. Liberals from William Fulbright to Patrick Moynihan tried to salvage the concept of human mastery from the quagmire of the war. Others, such as

journalist Jack Newfield and the idealistic Students for Democratic Society, wrestled with the paradox of Vietnam and expertise until they utilized words such as “policy analyst” and “reasoned” only as pejoratives.

The domestic engineers of the Great Society were not immune from liberal criticism either. The social workers and medical doctors who were charged with the task of ushering in utopia collapsed amidst their professional hubris and the country’s impossible expectations. Hollywood too charted the humanist critique of expertise, most insightfully in *A Thousand Clowns* (1965) and *The Hospital* (1971). Within the body of the Left was a disease that pitted head against heart. When the disease had finished its work, liberals were an indefinable mess, so suspicious of brains that they could not define which institutions or projects represented their legacy. If liberalism had always been built implicitly on an edifice of expertise, the American center-left recoiled from the claims of academic and institutional authority, a post-60s sentiment without program.

Social Workers Building the Great Society

Social work provided the microcosm from which to observe the promise of perfectibility as well as the anxiety many liberals felt regarding inhumane expertise. Social work journals echoed the confidence of Kennedy speeches and Johnson bill-signings. Kennedy’s Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and former governor of Connecticut, Abraham Ribicoff, wrote to a leading journal in the field: “Social workers have been absent for too long.” As the experts on social problems, Ribicoff insisted, their voices should be loudest when ambitious liberal administrations sought to cure poverty simply with an equitable distribution of education and

health care. Flattering the professionals, Ribicoff insisted that the journal's readers had not "wielded their influence to anywhere near the degree their unique fund of knowledge" demanded that they should. The secretary laid out the mid-century expert's ideal that social workers embodied in their field: "An unsentimental, informed social work voice is needed as we in public welfare set out on a significant reorientation of our basic programs."¹⁴³ What was so wonderful about the highly-educated and experienced social workers, to Ribicoff, was that they brought knowledge, but not sentimentality, to the task of fixing problems. They were the scientists – disinterested experts – of social problems.

As President Johnson sent one piece of legislation after another through Congress to effect his Great Society, the president attempted to empower Ribicoff's social scientists. Teachers needed new teaching techniques. Children needed better nourishment. Poor youth were not receiving adequate dentistry. President Johnson sought to deliver it all, with a little help from his experts. When the president signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into law, he declared, "We reduce the terrible lag in bringing new teaching techniques into the nation's classrooms."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Johnson declared, when signing later amendments to the Education Act: "It has established 20 new regional laboratories for basic research in education: to explore the ways children learn and to improve the ways teachers teach." The scientists were at work in their research laboratories: the best education system in the world would get better each year. When Johnson signed Head Start into existence, he promised that the

¹⁴³Abraham Ribicoff, "Politics and Social Work" *Social Work*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April 1962, accessed <http://www.jstor.org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/discover/10.2307/23708285?sid=21105102378071&uid=2&uid=62&uid=28614&uid=67&uid=2134&uid=3739256&uid=70&uid=5911032&uid=8521032&uid=5911016&uid=3&uid=3739688>.

¹⁴⁴ Lyndon Johnson, "Remarks on Signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," April 11, 1965.

program would provide “medical and dental attention that [poor children] badly need, and parents will receive counseling on improving the home environment.”¹⁴⁵ In addition to providing doctors and dentists for disadvantaged areas, the poverty scientists were going to coach the poor out of their bad habits.

Feeding children properly worried Johnson. A Nutrition Act offered the solution. Johnson promised, in the bill’s signing, “to close the nutrition gap among schoolchildren in the next 5 years.”¹⁴⁶ Another problem. Another administrative agency. Another five-year plan. If an American child’s life were in question, Johnson sought to perfect the institutions that helped American children by ensuring that each organization was stocked with the country’s best and brightest professional minds. A presidential task force that explored how to implement such programs decided there would be need for 100,000 more social workers with graduate school training.¹⁴⁷ The universities that were creating social scientists would need to increase output tremendously.

A more severe problem than social worker shortages plagued the profession. The American ideal for those who worked with children clashed fundamentally with the social workers’ cerebral self-image. Ribicoff had praised the “unsentimental” approach of those who were experts in social problems.¹⁴⁸ Yet, American popular culture recoiled from media portrayals that were all brains and no heart. In an attempt at prestigious television, the young

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, “Remarks on Project Head Start,” May 18, 1965.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, “Remarks at the Signing of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966,” October 11, 1966, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27913>

¹⁴⁷ “Comments on the Manpower Report,” *Social Service Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 1966), 203.

¹⁴⁸ When Lyndon Johnson presented Walter Lippmann with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the president praised Lippmann, the “interpreter of his country,” for giving his readers “the power of measured reason and detached perspective.” Johnson, “Remarks at the Presentation of the 1964 Presidential Medal of Freedom Awards,” September 14, 1964, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26496>.

actor George C. Scott portrayed a New York City social worker in the program *East Side / West Side*. The TV show worked as a larger critique of social workers' "scientific" practice and of the liberals' brains-in-institutions solutions. The Scott character, Neil Brock, has his professional *bona fides* from one of the original social science laboratories, Columbia University. Yet, he is heroic in the program because he still gets emotional about his job. Politicians in the show saw this behavior as troubling, a failure of Brock to keep his professional distance. He simply was not the ideal unfeeling social scientist. "This man has no respect for figures," one of his critics in the show protested. "To him a statistic is a battle cry. A simple factual percentage is ammunition. He's a man to admire, perhaps respect. But I could not work with him."¹⁴⁹ Apparently, many social workers watching the program felt the same way. They wrote in to the TV show producers that social workers on the program were unprofessionally attached to their work. Letter-writing MSWs did not care for the portrayal.¹⁵⁰ The television program lionized the social worker for whom statistics but served a greater crusade. Social workers protested the lack of professionalism. The public did not want cold, unfeeling social scientists. Perhaps the experts and the culture were out of sync.

In professional journals and conferences, some social workers fretted over the separation that expertise caused between themselves and laypeople; others seemed intent on protecting the perquisites of exclusivity and esteem that they believed their professional status guaranteed. Eveline Burns, President of the National Conference on Social Welfare, worried that social workers were beginning to demonstrate condescension toward the non-

¹⁴⁹*East Side / West Side*: "Take Sides with the Sun," originally broadcast March 16, 1964, accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjLLC7S7TK8>

¹⁵⁰ Robert Lewis Shayon, "The Powerless Hero," *Saturday Review*, November 1963, 40.

professionals with whom they worked. Some seemed, in Burns's view, to betray an arrogance toward volunteers because of their unpaid status. She reminded her colleagues that social workers of the past "did not fear to operate outside their own expert or professionally like-minded group."¹⁵¹ Experts needed coalitions, Burns insisted. Yet, such inclusivity was at odds with the scientism of social work.

In her dissertation at Columbia University, Dorothy Becker attempted to parse out the discomfort that volunteers created for professional social workers. Becker acknowledged in a selection of her social work doctoral dissertation that the volunteer was a "controversial figure" and attempted to historicize and contextualize the difficult relationship between professionals and amateurs in aiding marginalized people. Sure, professionals were guarding their territory, but the "determined resistance of the social work profession to extending the use of direct-service volunteers" owed as much to social workers' historical memory as to professional arrogance. The days of volunteer-oriented social work, Becker wrote, were amateurish, paternalistic, and embarrassing, the stereotyped nosy "friendly visitor" to the poor, "a pre-professional period that is both painful and ludicrous."¹⁵² In other words, working with volunteers reminded social workers of the time before they were scientists, before social work had been, as Becker put it, "enriched by its conceptual borrowings from related sciences."

The professional journals demonstrated many critiques from those social work experts who believed Great Society programs to be full of people who were not professionally equipped to the task. In one article entitled "You Can Count Me Out," a social worker wrote

¹⁵¹ Burns quoted in Dorothy G. Becker "Exit Lady Bountiful: The Volunteer and the Professional Social Workers" *Social Service Review*, Vol. 38, No.1 (Mar, 1964), 57-72.

¹⁵² Becker, "Exit Lady Bountiful," 58.

that he was giving up on the Economic Opportunity Act because “none of the executives in the EOA programs wanted anything to do with social work, and we knew there were no social workers involved in the programs.”¹⁵³ The editors of the *Social Service Review* did not explicitly give up on EOA programs or any other facet of the War on Poverty, but they did worry that the many amateurs hired to work in the programs would be referred to as social workers, a badge of expertise that such non-professionals did not deserve. The editors insisted that the description not be thrown about “indiscriminately.” To drive the point home, they insisted, “Not everyone providing services to people in social welfare agencies need be called a social worker.”¹⁵⁴ Experts insisted on impartial and unsentimental relationships to their projects, but they evinced, if not an emotional, at least a stubborn insistence on the right to name and set rules for their profession. One contributor fretted about the plight of social workers when it came to performance reviews: “It is possible for the social worker to be hired, evaluated, promoted, and fired by a superior who is not qualified in social work.” One can imagine the knowing nods of MSWs and other experts evaluated by “superiors” who, truth be told, were beneath them professionally.

Unqualified associates were not the worst of it. A. D. Green, in a social work journal, wondered whether experts could ever fit comfortably into bureaucratic agencies. There were inherent conflicts, the author argued, between the values of a profession and the values of large organizations. Green noted the problem that experts were not always at the highest rungs of administration and could not dominate agencies. “The statutes under which the bureaucracy

¹⁵³ Robert Miller, “You’d Better Count Me Out,” *America: a Catholic Review of the Week* 590-593 vol. 116

¹⁵⁴ “Comments on the Manpower Report,” 202-3.

operates sets patterns which are not easily modified by ‘experts,’ who move into a structure that is already well noted,” he fretted.¹⁵⁵ The concept that experts were unable to exercise their abilities within the confines of bureaucracy was among the most troubling concerns of the era. What was to be done when a lion found his perfect lair, only to find himself impotent and starving? What was an expert without a university or an administrative agency? The question, in the sixties, had no easy answer.

While the definition of social workers and the debate about their relationship to institutions was argued in the professional magazines, popular culture continued to reanimate the stereotype of the heartless, expert automaton – the individual with book smarts but no heart, professional imperatives but no empathy. Professionals made themselves easy targets when they insisted on the scientific value of impartial and empirical distance. One journal contributor admitted – embarrassingly – that some social workers “overidentified with the clients.” Yet, the standards of social work remained scientific. The writer went on to insist that the profession was still rooted in “the tendency unique to social work of maintaining objective, impartial, socially distant relationships with clients and colleagues alike.”¹⁵⁶ The social work journal may have found comfort in this professional standard, but the public was not mollified by the experts’ sentiments. Perhaps they wanted nothing to do with Ribicoff’s “unsentimental” army of socially distant social workers.

¹⁵⁵ A. D. Green “The Professional Social Worker in the Bureaucracy” *Social Service Review* Vol. 40 , No. 1 (March 1966) 71-83.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Social Workers Kidnapping Children

In the mid-1960s, American cinema was unusually interested in child care as a dramatic motif. In '64 and '65, *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* led the pack in Oscar nominations. In '64, Julie Andrews' ideal nanny, a mixture of warmth and magic, took home Best Actress. In 1965, the story of a nun who leaves her convent to tend to a large brood of children took Best Picture. Perhaps both films reflected the significance of child-rearing in the midst of the Baby Boom. The movies showed that Americans enjoyed idealized visions of family, with music, romance, and eventually, golden statues for the attendants of well-adjusted children. But another Best Picture nominee in 1965 was interested in the reality of child care in the modern American city, urban spaces where imperfect guardians met with bureaucratic child-care institutions in a rivalry over who could best decide the welfare of a young person. *A Thousand Clowns* did not win in the Adapted Screenplay or Best Picture categories for which it was nominated, receiving just one Supporting Actor prize. Instead, the film offered an unromantic view of social workers invading and disrupting family life, demanding deference for their expertise and their definition of "a healthy emotional environment." The film offered a conservative critique of expertise when it depicted institutional specialists restricting the liberty of a child and his guardian. Yet the film's critique epitomized, even more, a sentiment that came from the Left, perhaps even from the inside of the institutions of expertise. The bureaucracies that were entrusted with protecting children were cold and impersonal – sick even – in their emotionless rationalism. In *A Thousand Clowns*, the experts were enemies, know-it-alls who, in their attempt to quantify familial warmth, had ended up far outside of their

appropriate professional terrain. The experts were using data where they needed feelings and were lost because of it.¹⁵⁷

If the mid-century liberal fancied himself some sort of Henry Fonda in the jury room, a level-headed humanist - or perhaps, to use Ribicoff's word – an “unsentimental” humanist, *A Thousand Clowns* insisted that the balance of head and heart was out of whack. The filmmakers argued that the experts had lost all empathy in the pursuit of precision and mastery. The movie captured an exact moment and a specific type of confusion. *Clowns* was the mid-60s' argument that the values of expertise were, at some basic level, at odds with humanism. The filmmakers echoed the criticisms of the Beats of the '50s while supplying a rhetoric for the criticism of impersonal bureaucracy that could live indefinitely into the future. The movie sought to dissect the liberal crisis of faith through three characters: a stubborn veteran social worker, a younger female social worker in the throes of self-doubt, and an unemployed writer and inflexible humanist who mocks the child welfare workers and refuses their criteria for guardianship of his nephew, a child named Nick Burns.

Nick tells his uncle Murray, in the film's first scene, that social workers have been watching him at school. The dialogue is the movie's first characterization of social workers: “They watch you and take notes and make reports, and they smile at you a lot. Murray, they're very nervous.” Nick has learned that the child experts will be making a home visit, after they review his file. Just as in *The Apartment*, the conflation of a person and data about that individual is a motif that undermines basic humanistic values. “Once they got my record out, they started to notice what they call significant data,” Nick tells his Uncle Murray at the

¹⁵⁷ *A Thousand Clowns*, directed by Fred Coe, produced by Harrell and distributed by United Artists, 1965.

beginning of the picture. "Turns out they've been keeping this file on me for a long time."¹⁵⁸

The film suggests that the file-keepers were foolishly trying to quantify emotional well-being. Such was the wrong-headed approach the experts used.

The character who personifies the cold social worker, Albert Admunson, fulfills audience expectations. When he and a colleague interrogate Murray and Nick, Albert learns that it is unclear who Nick's father is. "I was not aware that Nick was an OW. An out of wedlock child," the cold-as-ice social worker responds.¹⁵⁹ The sarcastic Murray retorts, "For a moment there, I thought you meant Prisoner of War. I think it's that natural warmth of yours, Albert that leads me to misunderstand." The statistics people are, of course, devoid of "natural warmth." During the visit, Albert's colleague, Sandra, becomes quite taken with Nick's humor and intelligence and the bond between the uncle and nephew. Social worker Albert ushers the new-to-the-field Sandra to the corner of the apartment, then chides her that she is not remaining professional. "Each case, you get much too emotionally involved. Now we are scientists here. You seem to lose sight of that fact."¹⁶⁰ There was the essential rhetoric again. Social workers were scientists and were therefore unfeeling. Albert's colleague, Sandra Markowitz, was remiss for being vulnerable, for being "emotionally involved."

The next day, Albert returns alone to tell Murray that Nick will be removed from his custody. He acknowledges that delivering the news is difficult for him because he detects

¹⁵⁸ The ironic criticism of excessive and creepy record-keeping would be echoed again two years later in Simon and Garfunkel's number 1 hit song, "Mrs. Robinson," when the singer assumes the character of a mental health expert: "We'd like to know a little bit about you for our files / We'd like to help you learn to help yourself / Look around you, all you see are sympathetic eyes," Simon and Garfunkel, "Mrs. Robinson," Columbia Records, April 1968.

¹⁵⁹ One is reminded during this exchange of Green's contention that "When the organization requires standards of eligibility for service, the client is automatically categorized." In Green, "The Professional Social Worker in the Bureaucracy."

¹⁶⁰ *A Thousand Clowns*, Coe.

warmth between Murray and the boy. “I admire you for your warmth, Mr. Burns. And for the affection that the child feels for you,” Albert admits. “I admire this because I am one for whom children do not easily feel affection. I am not one of the warm people.” By this point, the audience need not be told that Albert lacks warmth. (The idea that he envies warmth does intrigue). Experts are not warm people. Despite the emotional bond that Albert has detected, the affection is not enough. Nick’s environment is too unpredictable, too whimsical, lacking in the patterns that social workers and their academic colleagues have determined that children need. “But your feeling for the child does not mollify the genuinely dangerous emotional climate you have made for him,” Albert declares. The Writer’s Guild of America’s winner for Best Written Comedy of 1965 pitted the cold expert pitted against the warm humanist.

The organization for which Albert works provides a useful shield for the social worker to insulate himself from guilt over removing Nick. He insists to Murray that the previous day’s interview was not the essential reason for Nick being taken away. “The decision they’ve reached is based on three months of a thorough study. Our interview yesterday was only a small part of that . . . quite thorough. I want you to understand that I am not responsible personally for the decision they’ve reached,” Albert insists. The character’s use of pronouns is revealing. The decision has been made by an unseen “they,” an even more distant board of experts who have not spoken with Murray and Nick. They have ruled from a professional remove, a pedestal of expertise. Albert’s insistence that he is not “personally responsible” only demonstrates chinks in the armor of his unfeeling façade, and his rather pathetic need to exonerate himself to those who will be separated, in at least some small part, due to his work and his expertise, his greasing of gears in the Child Bureau’s decision machine.

Dr. Sandra Markowitz serves as a liminal figure between the worlds of bureaucratic expertise and feeling people. Fresh out of social work graduate school, her superiors are uncertain if she is seasoned enough to go out into the field. Perhaps they are right to worry because after meeting Murray and Nick, Sandra never again returns to the office. When her affection for Nick affects her thinking, Sandra internalizes her conflicted feelings as personal failure. “Some of the cases I love, and some of the cases I hate. And that’s all wrong for my work, but I can’t help it,” Sandra declares tearfully. Secretary Ribicoff might have dismissed her as sentimental. “But some of them I like too much, and I worry about them all day long. It is an obvious conflict against all professional standards.” Sandra is a trained professional who has remained too human, by the film’s logic, to act in an expert capacity. She loves children so cannot serve them in a professional way. Murray attempts to comfort her: “You’re a lover, Dr. Markowitz, and you are a lover of things and of people, so you took up work where you could get at as many of them as possible. And it just turned out that there were too many of them and too much that moved you. But, damn it, be glad it turned out you’re not reasonable and sensible.”¹⁶¹ That was rhetoric that the Writer’s Guild adored in the 1960s – art unafraid to decry the tyranny of reasonableness.

Murray is unapologetic, even celebratory, in his eccentricity, his (per the film’s dogma) very human need to undermine and circumvent social organization. “I never answer letters from large organizations,” he tells the social workers who tell him that he has never responded to inquiry. As the antithesis of Albert the social worker, Murray is defined by spontaneity and bursts of joy. He is always escaping, literally and figuratively. He ducks out of windows to fire

¹⁶¹ *A Thousand Clowns*, Coe.

escapes in mid-sentence. He averts difficult conversations by bursting into song. Visually, the film defines Murray by separateness. Every time he is outdoors, he is either utterly alone or crowded claustrophobically, forced into groups of people where he is miserable. In one scene, Murray rides a bike through rows of empty benches; viewers think that he is as close to a large organization as he will ever be, gliding among the ghosts in those rows of park benches. He disdains the lack of spontaneity of the squares around him. "You know, you speak like you write everything down before you say it," he tells Albert. Even Nick, the nephew he loves, is criticized for behavior that exhibits rational planning. Murray is disappointed when Nick tries to help him be successful at work, something the child has heard will help Murray to become his legal guardian. When Murray thinks about the difficulty of being separated from Nick, he worries most that his new family will turn him into a rational planner, a young expert-to-be. "If he doesn't watch out, he'll start making lists of what he's going to do next year and for the next ten years. . . . I didn't spend six years with him so he could turn into a list maker," Murray frets. "He'll learn to know everything before it happens. He'll learn how to plan. Learn how to be one of the nice, dead people." And here is the essential meaning of *A Thousand Clowns*. Those who plan, reason, and anticipate end up spiritually dead. The professionals inside the institutions attempting to apply abstract learning to actual life and end up robbing that life of its breath. The experts who took away children were the ultimate manifestation of the tendency that even Nick showed to translate life into bullet points. Expertise incarnate.

The film celebrates escape from rationalism and large organizations but fatalistically finds no alternative. To keep the child, Murray returns to the job he hates. At the end of the film, he begins a comic tirade. One such tirade opened the film with a shot of an empty street

and tenement walls. At the picture's end, Murray stops in the middle of his eccentric soliloquy. "I'd like to say right now . . . I can't think of anything to say." Never mind. What's the use? To survive intact, "real people" must submit to the orders of detached experts. Attempting to improve social situations through study simply birthed sick mathematics, in which people's numbers were crunched and fates determined, where OWs were POWs, and humanists had to prove that they were not sentimental. Those who sang the praises of *A Thousand Clowns* told Abraham Ribicoff, the National Association of Social Workers, and perhaps all the "best and brightest" in America, that they would rather live in a messy world of spontaneous and abundant life, than a well-ordered one of list-makers, planners, and cold-fish experts.

Vietnam and the Difficulties of Fact-Finding

Anxiety over the potential shortcomings of expertise and its operation inside large institutions grew among domestic warriors in the Great Society, but nothing slapped the triumphant smile off the face of the learned liberals like the Vietnam War. As the conflict in Southeast Asia came to dominate American public life from the mid-60s to the mid-70s, the public's loss of faith in US foreign policy had dramatic implications for American attitudes toward expertise itself. Old critiques combined with new ones among mainstream liberals until confidence in the knowledge of specialists took an irreversible hit.

Vietnam focused and magnified dissatisfaction with the concept of leaving public trust in the hands of the smart people. The war runners were overconfident, staking their credibility, and the credibility of expertise itself, on the eventual success of the war. They also approached the conflict, in the mind of much of the public, in a fashion that was quantitative and devoid of

human feeling. Some observers began to wonder if the tendency of the individual in the organization toward conformity to the institution's will always serve to corrupt the purity of expert analysis. Social workers and other professionals had fretted over the friction between bureaucratic and professional values, but Vietnam made the conflict a daily topic of analysis for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.¹⁶² No figure addressed the problems of pure expert analysis being stifled within bureaucratic institutions persuasively than Senator William J. Fulbright. The Arkansas senator, and other Vietnam skeptics in high places, further questioned if the full range of policy analysts' opinions were even reaching the public. By the early 1970s, elected officials complained that they were not receiving in good faith all the relevant information and expert analysis that they requested. They worried that presidential administrations and organizations such as the Pentagon and the State Department were willfully manipulating information so that the voices of the experts were reaching the public only piecemeal or in distorted fashion. By the time Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the American people, the idea that the best and the brightest could affect policy and speak to the public from their positions in large government organizations seemed nearly impossible.

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara became the supreme symbol of the arrogant technocrat and the inhumane analyst. When President Kennedy appointed him to lead the defense department, McNamara expressed his concern that his limited experience in the Air Force during World War II had hardly prepared him to manage the whole defense department. Kennedy told McNamara that the idea was nonsense, that the president needed outside,

¹⁶² As Green wrote about professionals in bureaucracy, "Recent observation indicates a tension between the organization's needs for expertise and the need of the social system for loyalty." Green, "The Professional Social Worker in the Bureaucracy," 72.

civilian eyes to oversee and rectify the tired thinking of defense department bureaucrats.

Kennedy insisted that a man who had increased the efficiency of the Air Force's bombing runs and who had turned around the Ford Motor Company and made the manufacturer a modern and profitable organization was more than qualified to run the defense department.

By the time that the Vietnam War was in full swing and McNamara was working for Lyndon Johnson, the defense secretary was the principal preacher of that Kennedy gospel. No one could better crunch the numbers that would win the war than McNamara. *Time* would describe him decades later as "The man of absolute certainties."¹⁶³ When one observer referred to McNamara as "IBM on legs," the description evoked a variety of images. It conjured McNamara as a numbers prodigy, as one who believed excessively in the power of data to solve all problems, and as a robotic machine.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, McNamara personified the concept of expertise as a cold calculus. He summarized the bloody war in bloodless terms, giving many Americans the impression that he tallied body counts without ever having seen a pile of bodies. As one classroom of Harvard business students was taught how the McNamara Defense Department measured their war of attrition by "people flow," which treated American and Viet Cong casualties with a model identical to business's "funds flow," many students were aghast at an analogy that treated capital and human lives identically. "There was this feeling of bewilderment that the lives of so many men should add up to no more than two simple columns," wrote one class member, Peter Cohen. When McNamara visited the Harvard campus himself in 1966, one protest

¹⁶³ Leslie H. Gelb, *Time*, July 20, 2009.

¹⁶⁴ John Byrne, *The Whiz Kids: The Founding Fathers of American Business—and the Legacy They Left Us* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1993) 439.

placard read, “McNamara Get Human.”¹⁶⁵ The sign encapsulated the feeling that a machine man had created a bloody policy out of numbers games. To those for whom the war was an evil madness, the reasonable people had reasoned their way to genocide. Eventually, as we will explore in detail below, the critics massed and smarted. National journalists and student war protesters would eventually decide that, if rationalism itself must be an enemy to get the US out of Vietnam and secure McNamara’s head, it was a fight worth having.

In 1966, mainstream opposition of the war was less fatalistic, focused instead on the idea that the better voices of American foreign policy expertise were not breaking through the twin barriers of institutional bureaucracy and American conformity. Senator William Fulbright indicated that these were his thoughts during Senate committee hearings and in his book that year, *The Arrogance of Power*. Fulbright was perhaps best at making the case that the folly of Vietnam policy was the result, not of too much reason, but of too little. “Past experience provides little basis for confidence,” Fulbright wrote, “that reason can prevail in an atmosphere of mounting war fever.”¹⁶⁶ It was not reason that had caused the war, in the senator’s estimation, but hysteria. But how could Fulbright make that argument when McNamara and the Pentagon made the case for war with charts and graphs and all of the other trappings of expertise? For the senator from Arkansas, it was the old American bogeyman of conformity, especially conformity within organizations, which suppressed the genuine and more peaceable consensus of the foreign policy specialists. “Federal bureaucracy,” he wrote, had a “congenital inhospitality to unorthodox ideas.” Experience taught the experts that their reports must

¹⁶⁵ Byrne, *Whiz Kids*, 449, 437.

¹⁶⁶ William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Random House, 1966), 35.

support the foregone conclusions of the institutions for which they worked. Their studies began with the end and worked backward. It was the corruption of the promise of American brains and ideals. "In most if not all government agencies originality . . . is regarded as a form of insolence." Fulbright wrote. He had encountered in the State Department many "conformists, individuals in whose minds the distinction between official policy and personal opinion has disappeared."¹⁶⁷ Something about the large institutions corrupted the purity of expert assessment. In federal bureaucracy, Fulbright wrote, the American specialist was converted "from dreamer to drone." The imagination stifled, the appropriate approach to foreign policy problems was forgotten.

As the war went on, and disapproval of the war became a majority sentiment, the frustration with the interminable Vietnam stasis turned war opponents yet more disillusioned and bitter. Fulbright continued to search for an explanation as to how such a flawed policy had continued to hold sway over American government, and why a majority of Americans had supported the catastrophe for years. By the early 1970s, his words, while presiding over the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, suggested that it was not merely a matter of policy experts' opinions having conformed to those of bureaucracies. Rather, the dissent of policy makers had been suppressed and hidden from the public so as to give Americans the impression that the specialists were of one mind. "There has grown up in this town a feeling that it is extremely difficult to get accurate information about the war,"¹⁶⁸ Fulbright declared in

¹⁶⁷ Fulbright, *Arrogance*, 28-9.

¹⁶⁸ Fulbright speaking before John Kerry's testimony, April 22, 1971, accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucY7JOfg6G4>

a 1971 hearing. How could the democratic process work, Fulbright asked, if essential information was hidden from the people's representatives?

The same year Fulbright fretted about inaccurate information, Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers. A secret report ordered by McNamara in 1968 to explain how the US had slipped into the morass of Vietnam, Ellsberg's leak demonstrated that many experts had been outspoken within federal agencies about the impossibility of winning the conflict. President Johnson and Secretary McNamara themselves had grave doubts about the war as early as 1966, but they suppressed their own doubts, as they suppressed reports of experts making the case for the withdrawal of US forces. The Papers demonstrated, again and again, that the war which had been justified for almost a decade with the caption "Experts believe," was actually thought by those same experts to be hopeless. The government had been lying not only about facts, but also about the conclusions that its own people and departments had drawn from classified information – creating new skepticism about public confidence in experts. The ideas of experts were misrepresented by the authorities that employed the eggheads in the first place.

The point needs elucidation. Ellsberg's revelations to the public have long been understood, by the news media and by Ellsberg himself, as proof that America's leaders misled the public about the origins of the war and the prospects of success. Such an understanding is correct. But the Pentagon Papers make another point about the very concept of specialists in government agencies making decisions on the best information. The information and analysis of experts may never reach the people. The best analyses can be suppressed or manipulated. The spokespeople for the American state, with full knowledge of expert analysis to the contrary, misrepresent consensus. Americans witnessed a moment in which the government

hired expert consultants and staffed the highest positions of government with the most qualified and thoughtful individuals that could be found. Then that same government ignored its experts and falsified that data. In such a reading of the Pentagon Papers, the American people hired the best and the brightest to weigh and manage the country's most vexing problems. The public did not hear the actual analyses of many of these policy analysts until the documents were leaked later.

Journalist David Halberstam's book sealed the connection between egghead technocrats and Vietnam. The ironic title, *The Best and the Brightest*, Halberstam's 1972 study of the inner-circle policy decisions that led to the Vietnam War, forever reminds its readers that Vietnam was the whiz kid's war. The term was no accident, utilized by Halberstam to stress, over the course of its more than 600 pages, that experts would never master the earth, with its improbabilities and contingencies. Sometimes, intellectuals blundered because they were untested and excessively esteemed by back-slapping colleagues. When the administration sent out National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy from the capital to the university to set straight the nascent anti-war movement, the debates went poorly for "the unchallenged political-intellectual of Washington."¹⁶⁹ As Halberstam put it, "Bundy finally seemed to be saying: We are we, we are here, we hold power and we know more about it than you do." Halberstam wrote about the smartest people with the best ideas arriving in Washington and getting to work. The book was detailed journalism, but it was also tragedy. For Halberstam, studying foreign policy in the age of the expert ended with several elegiac odes to human imperfection. When the best and brightest realized that the war, and the other side of the world where it was

¹⁶⁹ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), 620.

occurring, was bigger than they or their ideas were, the experts were forced to acknowledge that they were no more mighty or clever than those who had preceded them. President Johnson's self-conception was chief among the casualties. "In the late fall of 1965 Johnson learned the hard way that the slide rules and the computers did not work, that the projectors were all wrong," Halberstam wrote. "The reasonable had become unreasonable; the rational, irrational. The deeper we were in . . . the more Johnson hunkered down, isolated himself from reality."¹⁷⁰ At the beginning of the year, Johnson had assessed his mandate and the people and resources available to him and declared the era the most hopeful since Christ's birth in Bethlehem. By the fall, Johnson saw his foreign policy collapsing, along with his domestic policy.

The toll that Vietnam took on American faith cannot be overstated. Neither the executive branch nor the legislative branch has ever enjoyed long-term public trust since then. Another casualty of the war was public faith in experts. For at least the next generation, rationality and expertise became concepts inextricably intertwined with a painful war, and Americans rejected the authority of eggheads to decide policy in the future. Experts were McNamara, the cold computer, analyzing life and death in columns on a whiteboard. Experts were bureaucratic men, serving their organization at the expense of moral values. Even when they acted in good faith and judged prudently, their analyses were locked away from the eyes of the public, smothered by official administration policies.

¹⁷⁰ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 622-23.

Colonel Kurtz Reads *Time* Magazine

Before Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* won the 1979 Cannes Film Festival *Palme d'Or* and entered the canon of great American films, the director found himself in an editing room with more than five hours of footage to integrate into a film. Coppola cut several versions of the movie and debuted them to different audiences and groups of critics. He finally made his peace with a two-and-a-half hour version, the version most filmgoers have seen. When Coppola decided to revisit the film after two decades, he added almost an hour more footage. With *Apocalypse Now Redux*, filmgoers saw that what had ended up on the cutting room floor were the most explicitly political elements of the film.

The most essential restored footage involved Kurtz's brief discussion of Vietnam policy decisions, the public relations conducted by the Pentagon, and the tactics of the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Kurtz, the brutal colonel whom the US army wants assassinated for a barbaric style of warfare, reads to Captain Willard, the agent who has been sent to assassinate him, just two articles from *Time* magazine. In those two articles, Kurtz managed to imbed an entire critique of war policy and the means used to mollify the public. The articles remind viewers of the chasm evident in the Pentagon Papers between what was known and what was revealed. Yet, the scene accomplishes more. It demonstrates an evolution from distorting facts to sidestepping them altogether. The episode shows how presidential administrations and the news media trained Americans to react to sensual intuition rather than rational persuasion.

Because Willard has been sent to kill Kurtz, the audience Kurtz holds for his assassin has the feel of a trial that has been constructed by the accused himself. When Kurtz reads editions of *Time*, he recounts their date, page, and volume number, as though reading evidence into

testimony. If Kurtz is to be killed, he wants Willard to make the decision himself, not carry out the order of an impersonal chain of command, a distant bureaucracy. Kurtz first reads from a 1967 article that claims to have secret information about the war from an unreleased report of the Johnson administration. Kurtz reads:

The American people may find it hard to believe that the US is winning the war in Vietnam. Nevertheless, one of the most exhaustive inquiries into the status of the conflict yet compiled offers considerable evidence that the weight of US power, two and a half years after the big buildup began, is beginning to make itself felt. White House officials maintain the impact of that strength may bring the enemy to the point where he could simply be unable to continue fighting. Because Lyndon Johnson fears that the US public is in no mood to accept its optimistic conclusions, he may never permit the report to be released in full. Even so, he is sufficiently impressed with the findings and sufficiently anxious to make their conclusions known to permit experts who have been working on it to talk about it in general terms.¹⁷¹

Kurtz intends for the magazine story's inherent contradictions to make the case for why he had to break with official policy and conduct the war on his own terms. The passage itself, with no commentary by Kurtz, is ludicrous. If Johnson thought the public would not believe the optimistic report, why would he allow "experts" to speak about it generally? If the president were so solicitous for the public to know the conclusions, why then would he not release the report? Viewers can assume only that the report contained information giving ammunition to Johnson's antiwar critics, and so he is attempting to spin the report without actually revealing it. The president hoped to do so with the help of those experts who were committed to selling the war to the public. Filmgoers surely remember the Pentagon Papers and the disconnect between private and public information. But even more, we marvel at the contortions the Johnson administration made to fit the expert analysis to administration decisions. The

¹⁷¹ *Apocalypse Now Redux*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope, distributed by United Artists. Film released originally 1979. *Redux* released 2001.

president withheld the report in its entirety and leaked only certain portions or even characterizations of the report that might help persuade some in the public to support his position. In one paragraph from *Time*, Ellsberg's lessons about the misrepresentation of expert knowledge and the distortions of classified information by those in power are evident. What is equally evident is the great headache of censoring information for public consumption in order to advance a narrative. Johnson, believing that the meaning of a broad expert analysis must be steered in the direction of his policy, ties himself into knots attempting to *manage* what the best and brightest were saying about the war behind closed doors, an exhausting and doomed enterprise. Attempting to align expert consensus with administration policy – bad policy – required complete control of information and manipulation of that information. Leaders needed an easier way to justify and bolster their policies.

Kurtz reads on. He enters into the record comments from a general who spoke on behalf of the Nixon administration. The distinction between the two passages is enormous:

Sir Robert Thompson, who led the victory over communist guerillas in Malaysia, is now a RAND Corporation consultant, recently returned to Vietnam to sound out the situation for President Nixon. He told the President last week that things felt much better and smelled much better over there.¹⁷²

Kurtz finds both efforts at misrepresentation contemptible. Two presidents were defending an indefensible policy. But Kurtz demonstrates something more, something changing about the way that Americans were being persuaded. Johnson had declared, essentially, that secret information and understandings not available to the public proved to specialists that the war was turning toward American victory. Nixon's administration employed a completely different

¹⁷² *Apocalypse Now Redux*, Coppola.

course in the article that Kurtz selected. Its only attempts at persuasion were at an all-or-nothing gut level. There were no figures, no claims that comprehensive analysis favors American policy. There is only the feeling of one man that things were going better. Vietnam smelled better. Supporters of the war would find it comforting evidence. Critics would shrug it off and point to its meatless, ephemeral claims. Fence-sitters were likely to remain so. Thompson, most likely with no intention of doing so, was a pioneer of persuasion for a post-expert age. His formula was a simple one: Declare that something felt right. Throw red meat to the believers and kiss off the critics with the kind of statement that could not be rebutted. Sensual intuition could supplant rational persuasion in American public life. It was certainly a most useful tactic when the facts were not in official favor.

Liberals in the Wilderness

The war was filling many liberals with panic. Vietnam combined with shortcomings in the Great Society and continued racial strife to produce as much hand-wringing as there had been exaltation earlier. As the mid-60s evolved into the late '60s, there was talk everywhere about needing to redefine principal values and about finding where the ambitious projects of the decade had gone wrong. Often, the most disillusioned and the youngest blamed those who had always cautioned, "Reason!" Terms like rationalism and expert were soon thrown around as pejoratives by the young and angry would-be liberals. Secretary of State Dean Rusk's son told the press that the flaw in the Civil Rights Movement had been "too much reasonableness."¹⁷³ Reasonableness was akin to gradualism, and the heirs to liberalism wanted none of it.

¹⁷³ Rusk quoted in Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*.

Old guard liberals were worried by their children's haughty disdain for the bedrock rationalist values. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who had brought esteem to the Kennedy White House, warned that emotionalism was outpacing rationalism. At the 1966 Smith College graduation, Schlesinger told the students that current hysteria was worse than it had been during McCarthyism because "fifteen years ago, liberals were determined to maintain rational discussion."¹⁷⁴ But no longer. When he published his Pulitzer-prize and National Book Award-winning memoir of the Kennedy administration, Schlesinger saw Kennedy's virtue in contrast to what he saw around him just a few years later: "President Kennedy's hope was that it might be possible to keep the country and the world moving fast enough to prevent unreason from rending the skin of civility."¹⁷⁵ But unreason was outrunning any liberal's grasp and rending as it liked.

At the *Village Voice*, reporter Jack Newfield began to argue that if irrationality were in vogue, Kennedy and Johnson liberals were to blame. Too much had been promised by expertise. Too many bad decisions had been made by the professors and the technocrats. For Newfield, it began with policy experts who were unresponsive to democratic will. "We have permitted political power in America to pass from the people to a technological elite," Newfield wrote. "Representational democracy has broken down."¹⁷⁶ Newfield sounded that alarm often in his newspaper writings. In the introduction to a 1972 book, he attempted to summarize liberalism's derailing:

During the Kennedy years, an eerie infatuation with management techniques and budgeting expertise—exemplified by Robert McNamara—became the new fashion.

¹⁷⁴ Schlesinger quoted in *New York Times*, June 6, 1966.

¹⁷⁵ Schlesinger, *1000 Days*

¹⁷⁶ Newfield in Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 219.

Increasingly divorced with a concern for programs, liberals turned these technocratic means into ends, ultimately chaining us by default to a set of distorted policies.¹⁷⁷

The focus on management and expertise during this era brought hostility towards the professional and suspicion to the ideas of rationalism and reasonableness. According to Newfield, the technocratic eggheads had never gotten much right, even domestically. “The Ivy League experts who fed the computers never learned how ordinary working people lived out their days,” he wrote. He approvingly quoted, in 1970, Congresswoman Edith Green: ““Since 1965, the government has spent almost \$500 million on studies by experts . . . Most of the antipoverty money never gets in the hands of the poor.”¹⁷⁸ In response to Kennedy’s declaration that nothing beat brains, Newfield insisted that brains had beat the Democrats, and more importantly, economic populism. The Democratic Party’s faith in the expert’s ability to solve everything had bankrupted the principles of the party, frustrated those that the party had set out to help, and rationalized the Vietnam War. The “eerie fascination,” as he called it, with expertise had brought Americans to the point of rejecting such sturdy Western concepts as rational discourse and careful study.

By the early 1970s, Newfield’s solution to the faith in expertise was a mild form of socialism. The only way to improve American life and give the Democrats a real mission was to stop spending millions on expert studies and put that money directly into people’s pockets. “Populism would turn liberalism . . . back toward local participation and decentralization and away from the impersonal, centralized bureaucracy of the last thirty years,” Newfield wrote. “It

¹⁷⁷Jack Newfield and Jeff Greenfield, *A Populist Manifesto: The Making of a New Majority* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1972), 13.

¹⁷⁸ Jack Newfield, *Bread and Roses Too: Reporting About America* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1971), 25.

would also help reclaim liberalism from the technocrats and computers, and help restore its shriveled humanity.”¹⁷⁹ There was the critique once more from the bleeding hearts, from the humanistic tendency in liberalism, from the conscience in that old Henry Fonda archetype – the man of reason and conscience. Liberalism’s belief in expert staffs and administrative agencies had made the creed as sterile as the offices of *The Apartment’s* Consolidated Life. Liberals were furious at liberals because, along the way, they had obsessed over brains and lost their souls. The revolt against experts, even against reason itself, was actually a healthy attempt, in Newfield’s estimation, to “restore shriveled humanity.”

Daniel Patrick Moynihan studied the unreason that panicked Schlesinger, and the hubris of expertise that infuriated Newfield, and attempted to explain and, he hoped, stem the tide of irrationalism. The future ambassador to the United Nations and four-time Democratic senator from New York began to embody in the late 1960s the idea of liberalism humbled.¹⁸⁰ The scholar-liberals, himself included, had made terrible mistakes, he admitted. The only way to escape the predicament was to admit those mistakes, teach the experts humility, and stand firm against the rising tide of unreason. First, Moynihan conceded that the dissatisfied radicals of the Left made valid points. The students and hippie drop-outs claimed that the culture of expertise created an emotional deadness that made space for moral obscenities like segregation and Vietnam. Moynihan believed that there was truth to the accusation. In a speech to the Harvard University’s Phi Beta Kappa chapter, Moynihan conceded: “As the life of the educated elite in America becomes more rational, more dogged of inquiry and fearless of

¹⁷⁹ Newfield, *Bread and Roses Too*, 32.

¹⁸⁰ Greg Weiner, *American Burke: The Uncommon Liberalism of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015).

result, the wellsprings of emotion *do* dry up.”¹⁸¹ Yes, rationalists lost touch with their emotions, Moynihan admitted. Such lack of sentiment was what made irrationalism, mysticism, and revolution attractive to the would-be liberal inheritors. The youth of the New Left were “anti-ideological, even anti-intellectual,” by Moynihan’s reckoning because their liberal elders had embraced a disquieting shriveled humanity. Such failure led youth to those condemnations of reason that were “the first heresies of liberalism.”¹⁸²

Ultimately, Moynihan declared that the radical students had powerful insights but extreme, bone-headed conclusions. He saw in their views a sentimental mania that was a typical reaction to societies of rational organization and lukewarm values. The appearance of moral crisis produced the anti-rationalism of the time. “Can there be any mistaking that the New Left speaks to the rational, tolerant, reasonable society of the present with the same irrationality, intolerance, and unreasonableness, but possibly also the same truth with which the absurd Christians spoke to Imperial Rome?”¹⁸³ The truth they possessed was that liberalism had condoned an indefensible system of racial oppression and had produced the moral horror of the Vietnam War. Despite their insight, radical abandonment of reason as society’s organizing principle, Moynihan believed, left no real program for the future.

He returned to the problem again and again. In 1970, Moynihan spoke to the American Jewish Committee about “Liberalism and Knowledge.” The title expressed what Moynihan considered an essential truth often assumed if not explicitly stated. Liberalism was, at its core, a

¹⁸¹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Nirvana Now!” in *Coping: Essays on the Practice of Government* (New York: Random House, 1973), 129.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 122.

belief that human potential could improve human destiny through rational analysis, testing, and disciplined implementation. It was government as science, or at least, government working toward science's ideal of reproducible evidence. The experts and the social scientists needed to admit, Moynihan argued, that while science was a model for social science, the experts of social programs and the experts of foreign policy always acted with an incomplete and partially-ignorant view. Those in charge of policy required an appropriate humility.

The Columbia University social science experts in 1900 had been right, as best as Moynihan could tell. Expertise had a difficult, if not impossible, relationship with democracy. ““Social-science knowledge, like scientific knowledge, poses problems for democracy,” Moynihan declared. “What then to do with the popular will? Concentrated knowledge is a form of concentrated power and creates, simply, the elite condition.”¹⁸⁴ If problems were too complicated for non-specialists to understand, the masses of non-specialists, that is to say the people of the democratic society, exercised no real control over important questions about their destiny. No wonder there was populist backlash, not just among radical students, but in American society at large. Moynihan sensed a palpable fear of experts, even of the physical scientists. “People don't like what happens when science is applied, through technology, to the human environment,” Moynihan declared. “The methods [of science] are, correctly, declared to be elitist in the extreme, and consequently capable of being manipulated only by elites, from which it is said to follow that they will also be manipulated only for the advantages of elites.”¹⁸⁵ This was more troubling than John Birchers who declared fluorinated water to be a Communist

¹⁸⁴ Moynihan, “Liberalism and Knowledge,” in *Coping: Essays on the Practice of Government* (New York: Random House, 1973), 268.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

conspiracy. Most people found those thoughts outlandish. But it was not outlandish to fear a less explicit sort of conspiracy. Scientists had the power to act upon the world and represent their actions to the public however they chose. There was no way, then, that the American people could hold scientific experts accountable. The public would need one hundred million Ph.D.s to do that.

Moynihan believed that restoring confidence in the relationship between experts and masses was essential, though a difficult and long-term project. The first thing that experts must do was admit how much they did not know and how often they had gotten it wrong. Sacrificing the pride of expertise and admitting that the current generation's legacy was mixed was a small price to pay for restoring rationality and reason to their proper place as bedrock values.

Moynihan thought too that humility would save American experts from bloated expectations and foreign policy debacles in the future. "If you think you know all there is you need to know," Moynihan told his audience, "you are likely to make considerably more serious mistakes than would occur if you accept the fact that you don't know very much and aren't going to." He attempted to model the behavior for which he was calling. Just a few years before, Moynihan had promised ever-increasing success in American society, a stairway to utopia, constructed by the degree-holders from America's best universities. No reasonable person could still harbor this naïve faith in 1970. So, Moynihan declared, "'I have been guilty of optimism about the use of social-science knowledge in the management of public affairs. The time is at hand to acknowledge my wrongdoing," the Ph.D. declared. "It is some years since the article [optimistic about how social science can direct policy] was written, and as I say, I think I was wrong. In all

seriousness, hopelessly wrong.”¹⁸⁶ Here was reason’s optimist, fighting for the Enlightenment virtues by admitting he had been hopelessly wrong just five years earlier. Moynihan was insightful in his analysis of Americans’ plummeting belief in reason and in reasonableness. He found himself in the awkward position, however, of defending the value of expertise by listing the experts’ many failures, by taking responsibility essentially for a society in chaos.

“We Cure Nothing!”

Moynihan was humbled, but George C. Scott was about to jump out the window of a high-rise Manhattan hospital. The actor who portrayed the 1964 social worker Brock was now playing the hospital administrator Dr. Bock of 1971, and Scott’s new character had lost more than a letter in his name. He had lost all faith in his expertise. If the expert personified by Albert in *A Thousand Clowns* had been stubbornly arrogant, George Scott’s administrative doctor in *The Hospital* was having a suicidal crisis of confidence. Unlike *Clowns* six years earlier, the desperate bleakness of *The Hospital* was enough in tune with the mood of its time that the film won the golden Oscar statue for Best Screenplay, as well as the BAFTA, Writer’s Guild and Golden Globe awards for best writing.¹⁸⁷ Jack Newfield had declared that “apocalypse and paranoia are suddenly symptoms of sanity.”¹⁸⁸ *The Hospital* agreed, adding self-destructive impulses to the list of sanity’s symptoms. Harvard faculty member Martin Peretz declared: “These are times of moral enormity, when cool reasonableness is a more pathological and

¹⁸⁶ Moynihan, “Liberalism and Knowledge,” 260.

¹⁸⁷ The film was entered into the National Registry by the Library of Congress in 1995.

¹⁸⁸ Newfield, “The Silent Resignation of Decent Americans,” February 1968 in *Bread and Roses Too*.

unrealistic state than hysteria.”¹⁸⁹ Scott’s Dr. Bock attempted to suppress the tempest inside him with a façade of cool reasonableness. Underneath, he was morose, hopeless, and yes – hysterical.

How desperately Dr. Bock clashed with the Johnson rhetoric of a few years before, when the president signed major health care legislation as part of his Great Society package. After his election in 1964, Johnson had declared in a special message to Congress: “Our first concern must be to assure that the advance of medical knowledge leaves none behind. We can—and we must—strive now to assure the availability of and accessibility to the best health care for all Americans, regardless of age or geography or economic status.”¹⁹⁰ The distribution of scientific breakthroughs was woven into Great Society ideology as thoroughly as the breakthroughs themselves had been the DNA of Kennedy’s New Frontier. And Johnson succeeded with bill after bill. More access, more doctors, more investment. In a typical signing statement, the president said: “This bill symbolizes our national investment in the health and active life of every citizen—an investment which pays rich dividends in our people’s productivity and happiness.”¹⁹¹ One of the most promising signs of Johnson’s bold era was the promise of universal health care for the nation, and especially, ample coverage for the poor. When Paddy Chayefsky wrote the script for *The Hospital*, the screenplay reflected the anger of those promises unfulfilled.

¹⁸⁹ Peretz in Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 508.

¹⁹⁰ Lyndon Johnson, “Special Message to Congress: Advancing the Nation’s Health,” January 7, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27240&st=Lyndon+B.+Johnson&st1>.

¹⁹¹ Lyndon Johnson, “Statement by the President upon Signing the Health Professions Educational Assistance Amendments,” October 22, 1965, accessed <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27328>.

Dr. Bock appears for the first time in *The Hospital* slouched drunk and unconscious in a chair, having spent another night contemplating suicide. He arrives at his hospital the next day to hear a litany of patients poorly served, dead or near death, thanks to incompetence, negligence and managerial mishaps. As Bock confesses to a resident, his belief in the good work of the medical profession is all that keeps him from killing himself. But the sustaining myth is growing thin. “You come to me with this gothic horror story in which the entire machinery of modern medicine has apparently conspired to destroy one lousy patient,” Bock declares. “Now how am I to sustain my feeling of meaningfulness in the face of this?”¹⁹² He is unable to sustain any feelings of worth through the day. Ready to kill himself again that night, Bock shouts in wonder about the chasm between medical advances and the ability of doctors to serve a community:

Transplants, antibodies. We manufacture genes. We can produce birth ecto-genetically. We can practically clone people like carrots. And half the kids in this ghetto haven’t even been inoculated for polio. We have established the most enormous medical . . . entity ever conceived, and people are sicker than ever. We cure nothing. We heal nothing. The whole goddamned world strangulating right in front of our eyes.

Bock’s histrionic meltdown speaks to a widespread crisis of confidence about and among modern experts. They reach new heights and innovations, but the organizations that disperse the benefits of the breakthroughs fail to serve people.¹⁹³

Bock has good reason to be morose about the hospital’s ability to meet patient needs. During the two-day period that film viewers witness, we see four preventable deaths and

¹⁹² *The Hospital*, directed by Arthur Hill, a Simcha Production, distributed by United Artists, 1971.

¹⁹³ “A rat done bit my sister Nell / With Whitey on the moon / Her face and arms began to swell / And Whitey’s on the moon / I can’t pay no doctor bills / but Whitey’s on the moon,” as Gil Scott Heron put it the year before on the album *Small Talk at 125th and Lennox*, released on Flying Dutchman records, 1970.

numerous other near-fatal mistakes. With a little help from a disturbed patient, the fatalities pile up because of mistaken identity. An unconscious doctor is given treatment that kills him. A young nurse is mistaken for a fifty-year old patient and dies on the operating table. “I thought she looked different without her dentures,” says one of the surgeons, bemusedly. The hospital simply cannot interact personally with people or recognize their humanity. The organization struggles to process its human units, and because of that, the health factory is bad at what it does. Outside the building, protesters circle the hospital at all times with signs that read, “People yes, Doctors no.” Up with humans and down with experts, say those whom the medical institution claims to serve.

Wrapped in the tensions of its era, *The Hospital* pits medical science and mysticism against each other. Patient Drummond is an elite doctor who has left Western society to be a religious missionary in Mexico. Yet he seems to have been converted more than he converts. Drummond’s daughter brings a Navajo mystic into his room to perform a dance and chant for his healing. The ex-expert, now an agent of God as he sees it, receives divine visions to punish the impersonal hospital. Drummond is an instrument of God’s wrath. By switching a chart and tampering with the position of a bed, he is able to make the doctors and nurses “become patients in their own hospital.” Tampering is always fatal. As a divinely appointed angel of death, Drummond terms the unfortunate doctors and nurses “ritual victims of their own institutions.” As Drummond gives the fate of one doctor, “An intern took his history. And then he was promptly, simply, forgotten to death.” Of another dead patient, Drummond wryly notes, “He was relentlessly subjected to the benefits of modern medicine and died at 7:30 that

evening.” The former doctor has proven a dark truism: when experts are on the receiving end of what they dish out, they perish. No one should trust these persons of goodwill or ability.

If Only the Students Ran the School,
They Wouldn't Have to Burn it Down

For Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), American society was Dr. Bock's hospital *writ large*. The university, the corporation, and the Central Intelligence Agency promoted the same impersonal and dehumanizing mentality as that hospital. Combined, American institutions were a malevolent matrix of the best and brightest doing their worst. The students discovered with dismay that the center of the system was their home turf, the colleges full of professors and experts in the making. Here was ground zero for what Jack Newfield called the experts' "shriveled humanity."

The organization remembered as the premier student anti-war apparatus was founded before Vietnam had captured American attention. Organizing around the evil specters of American racism, poverty, and militarization, SDS sensed from its beginnings in the early 1960s that the expert-manufacturing university was a key source of problems and of potential change. The organization's 1962 manifesto, *The Port Huron Statement*, obsessed over the ways that education separated the privileged from the rest of society, and how it dehumanized the learners. The students desperately wanted to learn how they could change society in order to improve it, but *Port Huron* claimed that they were taught only that such issues "are not thought to be questions of a 'fruitful, empirical nature,' and thus are brushed aside."¹⁹⁴ Indeed,

¹⁹⁴ *The Port Huron Statement* in appendix to James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 331.

passionate students themselves were suspect, as “passion is called unscholastic.” The university produced specialists who could perform the tasks for which they were trained but who had all sense of transcendent moral purpose drained from them. As *Port Huron* put it, “All around us there is astute grasp of method, technique—the committee, the ad hoc group, the lobbyist, the hard and soft sell, the make, the projected image—but, if pressed critically, such expertise is incompetent to explain its implicit ideals.”¹⁹⁵ For SDS, university might as well have been a term for “shriveled humanity.”

It was also a term for minority rule. The institutions that gave experts their credentials also reserved for the older former graduates in administration and faculty all the perquisites of expertise mastered. According to the SDS manifesto, schools were training grounds where the children of the middle class were taught to accept the declarations of pompous know-it-alls: “With administrators ordering the institution, and faculty the curriculum, the student learns by his isolation to accept later forms of minority control.”¹⁹⁶ Democratic society, the students believed, meant democratizing the knowledge of the specialists, providing it to the people whose lives were affected by policy. Access to “relevant knowledge,” SDS was sure, was limited by elites in an effort to secure the privileges of experts. Thus, equipped with the knowledge that was kept from them, the masses could make every individual decision that affected their lives, and students could control the universities.

SDS leaders became increasingly focused on how education perverted natural and healthy emotions. For Tom Hayden, one of the chief authors of *Port Huron* and much SDS

¹⁹⁵ *Port Huron*, 331.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 335.

rhetoric, education plus station equaled insulation plus inurement. In 1964, Hayden wrote an essay about how liberals at a national level should respond to Southern racism and the stubborn persistence of segregation. "Liberal Analysis and Federal Power." Hayden argued that "federal power" was not used to maximum effect to safeguard the citizenship rights of African-Americans because of an excess of "liberal analysis." The liberals had pondered and over-analyzed until they had talked themselves out of action. This was all too typical of the liberal mind, for Hayden, and a flaw of intellectualism itself. "Intellectuals are placed at vantage points which, described as seats of reason, actually function to immunize the senses," Hayden wrote.¹⁹⁷ The remove from which experts studied problems led to poor analysis and lifeless rationalizations. When it came to the marginalization of minorities, liberals and experts always erred on the side of too much caution: "Facts are not weighted with passion, and reason tends to shy when its thrust points toward the need for drastic action." Passionless facts. Shy reason. It all added up to the intellectual's shriveled humanity.

This important equation was already in place when SDS turned its attention to the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965. Students, shocked at every turn by their own naiveté, struggled to make sense of the fact that the richest and most powerful country in history was waging war on an unindustrialized backwater. It was inconceivable. How could rationalists behave this barbarically? To explain the rational barbaric, President Paul Potter delivered arguably SDS's most iconic speech, "This Incredible War," known more widely as "Name the System." The speech's proper title captured the confusion SDS never overcame, that the war was incomprehensible. Potter linked the intellectual distance between analyst and actor to the

¹⁹⁷ Tom Hayden, "Liberal Analysis and Federal Power," (SDS: New York, 1964).

way that the Pentagon and its civilian leadership operated. “The war depends on the construction of a system of premises and thinking that insulates the President and his advisors thoroughly and completely from the human consequences of the decisions they make,” Potter proclaimed.¹⁹⁸ The McNamaras had strategized themselves out of reality and into a hypothetical world like the theoretical physicist’s, where all objects were frictionless. The war was a game to them, a game of strategy to be played with science, statistics, and rationality, and only secondarily with bombs and blood and severed limbs. “Vietnam, we may say, is a laboratory run by a new breed of gamblers who approach war as a kind of rational exercise in international power politics,” Potter declared. Vietnam was a laboratory of rationalism. Somehow, this severing of decision-making and results allowed experts to be blithely unaware barbarians. The idea of the expert as savage beast appeared also in youth culture. As rock band Red Crayola wrote, performing with the genuine aesthetic and lyrical freedom of an underground act: “Expert men not knowing what they meant / They all eat babies for nourishment.”¹⁹⁹ Vivid words – experts who act without understanding the implications of their decisions, sustained by a system so terrible that it recalled Goya’s painting of Saturn eating his child. Potter emphasized, with a subtext that recalled Hannah Arendt’s portrayal of Adolf Eichmann, “If asked to throw napalm on the back of a ten year old child [the men in charge of the war] would shrink in horror, but their decisions have led to mutilation and death of thousands and thousands of people.”²⁰⁰ *They all eat babies for nourishment.*

¹⁹⁸ Paul Potter, “This Incredible War,” delivered April 17, 1965, accessed http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds_wuo/sds_documents/paul_potter.html.

¹⁹⁹ The Red Crayola, “Transparent Radiation,” from the album *The Parable of Arable Land*, produced and released by International Artists, March 1967.

²⁰⁰ Potter, “This Incredible War.”

The institutions, bureaucracy, and expertise that isolated policy-makers and allowed them to give barbaric orders had to be reimagined on a fundamental level. Refusing to mimic organizational systems that somehow had the Vietnam debacle embedded in their DNA, SDS demonstrated distrust of organized action and hierarchy altogether. By 1965, the SDS headquarters in Chicago attempted to run the group without leaders or positions of authority. It was a difficult task for an organization whose membership requests were exploding by the thousands. Titles floated around, but no one could demand that another office member do anything. No experience or knowledge bequeathed authority in the organization. It was, for its proponents, a glorious “experiment in office democracy.” For many at the time, the experiment was more important than the result. The mid-decade moment of explosive growth would have stretched the abilities of any shoestring student group to capacity. Coupled with the coup against organized activity, the moment became high farce. As one historian and chronicler of SDS put it, “In an effort to root out ‘elitism,’ it had been agreed that all staffers would share responsibility for processing the mail; the person who sent the last copy of a document would be responsible for mimeographing, collating and stapling another batch. Nobody liked to stuff envelopes. Consequently, nobody did these things. Elitism was routed—but virtually no mail was processed.”²⁰¹ SDS was imagining and effecting a world without hierarchy or organization, but like the war-gamers, they were theorizing themselves into irrelevance.

None of the problems at the national office weakened the SDS conviction that students must take over their schools. Vice President Carl Davidson put it bluntly when he addressed the

²⁰¹ James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 244.

student's convention in the summer of 1966. "I cannot repeat this often enough, the issue for us is student control. . . . What we do want is a union of students in which the students themselves decide what kind of rules they want or don't want. Or whether they need rules at all."²⁰² When young people took over the institutions in which they studied and lived, they could search for a way to rework the system that linked education to dehumanization. Those were high stakes. Obtaining student control was a war to control what an expert was and what purpose the expert served. "This can be viewed as an attempt on our part to sabotage the knowledge factory machinery that produces the managers and the managed of 1984," Davidson said. The problem of the unaccountable expert was so out of hand that sabotage was required.

A new university, Davidson believed, would erase the corruptions of modern America by creating new kinds of professionals, ones that would never submit to the oppressive systems that currently existed. "Who are the dehumanizers and oppressors?" Davidson asked. "In a word, our past, present and future alumni: the finished product of our knowledge factories. How did they become what they are? They were shaped on an assembly line that starts with children entering junior high school and ends with junior bureaucrats in commencement robes."²⁰³ The identical units of knowledge factories must be redesigned or the factory would be exploded. The junior bureaucrats had no sustaining values. *Expert men not knowing what they meant*. Only the products of universities, Davidson insisted, "could create, sustain, tolerate, or ignore situations like Watts, Mississippi and Vietnam." Somehow the

²⁰² Carl Davidson, "Toward a Student Syndicalist Movement, Or University Reform Revisited," August 1966, accessed http://www.sds-1960s.org/sds_wuo/sds_documents/student_syndicalism.html.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

educational process, the knowledge imbued in the classrooms of universities, created the moral evils of American society.

Because all experts must be trained in the schools, Davidson's critique of the university declared that every aspect of American society was reinforced in each university department. "Its elite is trained in our colleges of business administration. Its defenders are trained in our law schools," he intoned. "Its apologists can be found in the political science departments. The colleges of social sciences produce its manipulators. For propagandists, it relies on the school of journalism." *They all eat babies for nourishment.* Davidson's vision was total. Every echelon of the university participated in the perpetuation of elite rule. The university even had divisions dedicated to making wary students accept it all as normal. "It insures its own future growth in the colleges of education. If some of us don't quite fit in, we are brainwashed in the divisions of counseling." Universities, then, were brainwashing factories where experts were trained to run the system and forced to like it. SDS had a split mind. The organization believed that students could be a radical solution, while simultaneously believing that universities and students were the root of the problems. It was disheartening, disorienting, infuriating. Radical action was the only hope of fixing the problems. Again, Davidson articulated that what he called for "amounts to sabotage." Indeed, sabotage defined the student left going forward.

At the turn of the decade, the Weatherman faction of SDS issued a "Declaration of War" on the American system, threatening to bomb symbols of American injustice, a promise on which it made good several times. Meanwhile, radicalized student groups across the country launched guerilla campaigns against symbols of injustice and oppression on university campuses.

Epilogue 2003: Robert McNamara in the Wilderness

In the first years of the 21st century, documentary filmmaker Errol Morris and former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, sat down to record McNamara's life lessons. Their efforts won the Academy Award for Best Documentary of 2003.

Morris edited McNamara's ruminations into 11 morals. 4 of them captured the ambivalence toward brains, expertise, and rationality at the beginning of the new century. On one hand, McNamara, the former Harvard professor, offered advice that he had probably told his students since the 1930s: *maximize efficiency* and *get the data*.²⁰⁴ These lessons, numbers 4 and 6, derive from McNamara successes – his role in guiding the Allied bombing of Japan during the Second World War, and his achievements in turning around the financial fortunes of Ford Motor and increasing the safety of cars. As an aside, McNamara tells Morris that he was shocked to find how many Ford executives lacked a college education when he arrived.

Lessons 2 and 7 were as bleak as the others had seemed comforting and pat.

Lesson 2 declared, "Rationality will not save us." Lesson 7 declared, "Belief and seeing are often both wrong." Lesson 2 was McNamara's takeaway from the Cuban Missile Crisis. The avoidance of nuclear annihilation was, in the former defense secretary's view, "lucky." Lesson 7 attempted to explain the confusion in the Gulf of Tonkin which led to America's headlong jump into Vietnam.

In two pairs of seemingly contradictory aphorisms, McNamara shared the collected wisdom of his unique life. The first two lessons speak to the intellectual who had come of age a

²⁰⁴ *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara*, directed by Errol Morris, distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, 2003.

generation after the Progressives, during the years of Roosevelt's brain trust, and who reached maturity and the apex of his professional success during the age of the expert, in the middle of the 20th century. The latter two lessons, observed from his center seat at Cold War conflicts of the 1960s, indicate a mistrust of the earlier wisdom. *The Fog of War* shows the chastening not just of a man but of a mentality. Maximize efficiency, but remember that rationality won't save you. Get the data, but don't forget to doubt what you see. Perhaps the compromise of the American mind has been to accept these contradictions. To parcel beliefs in brain compartments that will not meet and spar with each other. Or perhaps it is something else, a resigned humility that declares, "We think we might know but will readily admit that we do not." Moynihan liberalism.

We can imagine Walter Lippmann insisting that we must get the data – that the best and the brightest, in charge of humanity's mastery over society, must have the best information in hand. We can almost imagine C.E. Ayres' lectures at the University of Texas: *maximize efficiency! Society grows more reasonable when it becomes more methodical*. It is just as easy to imagine Kennedy and Johnson staffers declaring that they had overestimated human mastery, that no amount of preparation and analysis will lead us quite right, that rationality, the Western Enlightenment's cornerstone, would save no one. After all, we cannot even believe what we see.

Such dichotomous advice from Robert McNamara, a man in his '80s, an American who had lived most of the 20th century, demonstrates the trajectory of American confidence in specialized knowledge. There are times when the adages from the mid-twentieth century, the era of the expert, still make sense to him. Simultaneously, as the personal confidence of the

man whom congressional critics dubbed “Mr. I Have All the Answers” has waned, so has his belief in the old faith of the college man. McNamara has become a person who believed in efficiency without retaining much faith in the redemptive power of reason.

Put the most educated and accomplished in charge, he might tell us, because they have the best chance to get it right. Of course, the specialists might be such prisoners of their training that their insights are no better than those of the dunces. We can wonder if McNamara - the numbers man - would put odds on the proposition.

Chapter 6. Exit The Irrational Counterculture

Democracy has rapidly lost ground as power is increasingly captured by giant managerial institutions and corporations, and decisions are made by experts, specialists, and professionals safely insulated from the feelings of the people. . . . Bureaucratic discretion has taken the place of the rule of law.

The Greening of America (1970)
Charles Reich

Nothing less is required than the subversion of the scientific world view, with its entrenched commitment to an egocentric and cerebral mode of consciousness.

The Making of a Counter Culture (1969)
Theodore Roszak

I opened my heart to the whole universe and found it was loving
And I saw the great blunders my teachers had made
Scientific delirium madness

The Byrds
"5D [Fifth Dimension]" (1966)

Not nuclear madness, or military madness, or policy madness. *Scientific* delirium madness. What a shock it was for the word "scientific" to pop out pejoratively from AM radio in the summer of 1966, a time lodged halfway between Kennedy's most effusive proclamations and the moon landing itself. Even more curious that it came from The Byrds, a group that had exploded into the pop star stratosphere the year before as the most convincing American rivals to the Beatles. The Byrds, and particularly their singer and songwriter Roger McGuinn, had a reputation as science geek. Certainly, McGuinn was among the most enthusiastic fans of aeronautics, radio waves, and other science available to be studied by the affluent United States teenager at mid-century. During the same 1966 sessions that produced "Fifth

Dimension” single, the band cut a song that encouraged listeners to “Ride a Leer Jet!” At decade’s end, the Byrds would record rock’s most literal commemoration of the moon-landing. But at the dawn of psychedelic music, when radio stations were banning the Byrds for the seemingly subversive content of “Eight Miles High” and “Fifth Dimension,” America’s science geek rock star went ahead and said it. Science was at the root of a civilizational madness.²⁰⁵

McGuinn insisted in interviews that the song was about the near-religious feeling he had when he studied the work of Einstein. Perhaps. But beaming from radio signals around the world, the literal words that wound into listeners’ heads, providing resolution to the chorus melody: “Scientific delirium madness.” Whether McGuinn regretted not having shunned misunderstood pop stardom to become an astrophysicist was beside the point. The Byrds’ song, and full-length album of the same name, shared in the same spirit as the rest of the burgeoning psychedelic culture. Before long, believers in Lysergic Acid Diethylamide –LSD—rejected the laboratory from which the substance had derived. America’s hallucinogenic moment – with some notable exceptions – would be ecstatic with visions and suspicious of computers, consumed by abstract sermons and feverishly repulsed by hard data. Meaningful understanding was inexpressible, a sensory rather than cerebral experience, the “head” knew. The cult of sensation could be heard in another Byrds lyric from the same song, “Just be quiet and feel it around you.” Counterculture was a revolution in support of intuition.

That much was evident from the book *The Psychedelic Experience*, written by two Harvard faculty members who championed the potentials of hallucinogens. When John Lennon of the Beatles stumbled across the Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert text in a bookstore,

²⁰⁵ The Byrds, “5D [Fifth Dimension],” Columbia Records single released June 1966. (Billboard single: 44).

Lennon discovered the lyrics for a new and bizarre psychedelic statement of intentions,

“Tomorrow Never Knows.” (1966)

Turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream.
It is not dying, it is not dying.

Lay down all thoughts. Surrender to the void.
It is shining, it is shining.²⁰⁶

In 1965-66, LSD use was a mysterious revelation known to relatively few. It was for young celebrities on the cutting edge of culture holed up for mystical experiences in rented homes. That was the case when the Beatles, the Byrds, and Peter Fonda, spent an evening together in Spain, tripping and buzzing and swerving between euphoria and panic. A terrifying conversation among Fonda, Lennon, and George Harrison later morphed into the Beatles song “She Said, She Said.” The chemically-induced confusion was often frightful but always thrilling. For some who partook, the experience ushered in a new faith in transcendent understanding, in turning off your mind, surrendering, floating downstream, being quiet and feeling it around you. If not through these means, how else could one escape the scientific delirium madness?

Chemistry and Magic and Harvard and Motorcycles

The Fonda-Byrds friendship lasted. When Peter finally figured out the kind of film he wanted to make in 1969, the Byrds were there to create the movie’s soundtrack, McGuinn the composer of the film’s theme song. It was five years after Peter’s father, Henry, abnegated his office as liberal America’s imaginary president and stopped playing the roles of the professor-

²⁰⁶ The Beatles, “Tomorrow Never Knows,” from LP *Revolver* released by Parlophone in the UK and Capitol in the US. #1 record the world over, spending six weeks at the top of the US Billboard Charts. Declared by *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2003 the greatest ever rock record.

politician, that Peter Fonda produced, co-wrote, and starred in the film that announced a new Hollywood. *Easy Rider* mixed rock anthems, images of counterculture, and a little editing from the European avant-garde to become the sleeper blockbuster that closed out the sixties. The film was nominated for Best Picture. It was termed the “defining film of a generation” by much of the press. Fonda and co-star / director Dennis Hopper simply spent the next decade as icons, piddling about in little-seen films. In *Easy Rider*, they had told all the story that they had to tell.²⁰⁷

The film could not have revolted more overtly against the egg-headed image of father Henry Fonda. Peter Fonda’s character Captain America throws away his watch to demonstrate that he rejects the idea of organized time, and he smokes marijuana perpetually, an icon of a dreamy, quiet, and fairly inarticulate cast. *Easy Rider* is quiet. It privileges images and music above dialogue. Audiences may remember the character’s words because so little is said. While his father’s films of the early 1960s sat atop a mountain of words, Peter’s picture preferred to insinuate. If Henry wrestled again and again with the decisions of conscience that plague the man of reason and integrity, Peter pursued unspeaking sensation: the throttle of his bike, the zonked fantasies of the stoned, and the splash of water in a desert swimming hole with some nude friends. He seeks to answer some deep, internal disquiet. To do so, he plans to ride across the country to the New Orleans Mardi Gras celebration and hallucinate his way to truth.

When Peter Fonda, as Captain America, and Dennis Hopper, as Billy the Kid, reach their destination during the film’s climax, they and some prostitutes end up in one of the city’s

²⁰⁷ *Easy Rider*, directed by Dennis Hopper, produced by Columbia Pictures, released in the US July 14, 1969. On a budget of \$360,000, the film made \$60 million.

famed cemeteries, where they imbibe LSD. Someone recites the Nicene Creed as the film's heroes trip. It's a spooky scene that utilizes rapid cuts and nonsense rambling to heighten viewer anxiety.²⁰⁸ Hallucinating to revelation in the graveyard is not a pleasant pursuit, but for Fonda's America, though the unsettling events go awry, they remain an earnest pursuit of transcendent knowledge. Disappointed after the pilgrimage to the nation's capital of licentiousness, Fonda famously utters, "We blew it." Insight and peace have eluded him. Yet, Fonda has failed earnestly. To viewers who believed that the Christian overtones had been intended only as a ploy, Fonda insisted in interviews that no, he intended the dispensing of the LSD to be a form of the Eucharist. The panic in the graveyard, though terrifying, remained, for Fonda, *Easy Rider's* sacramental moment.

Such mystic sincerity was missed as *Easy Rider* became a principal exhibit in the culture wars between traditionalists and the hippies. The two groups seemed to disagree about everything: sexual mores, the value of drug use, hygiene, the necessity of work for salvation, and the familiarity that a human can have with the divine. Yet, the debate between two cultures, the God-fearing Americans and the freaks, the tent revivalists and the easy riders, obscured the two groups' great commonality. For many in both tribes, the answers to life's difficult questions – the root of meaning itself – lay in vision, awe, and nameless wonder. Irrational intensity and religious ecstasy were the link between old America and new.²⁰⁹ According to *Easy Rider's* tea leaves, which few read clearly in 1969, the distance from the psychedelic graveyard back to the parish church might be remarkably short. The church itself,

²⁰⁸ *Easy Rider*, Hopper.

²⁰⁹ Fonda and Hopper go to great lengths to demonstrate also that the new culture grew out of old American myths such as individualism, property, and Western heroes.

iconographically founded by long-haired mystics, would have an easy time incorporating the new outsiders.

The hippies of *Easy Rider* put a lot of stock in faith. When Captain America and Billy the Kid visit a commune, they find runaway city kids sowing seeds in arid ground. Billy the nihilistic pragmatist sees the futility, "Ain't nothing but sand, man. They ain't gonna make it. They ain't going to grow anything here." Henry Fonda's son, America, knows better. With a euphoric glimmer in his eye and a smile of certainty, Captain America insists, "They're gonna make it." Peter [Captain America] Fonda puts his faith in the good intentions of those who want to live off the land, even if they know nothing about the land. The experiment is beautiful, the hearts are pure. Farming wisdom be damned. Billy asks the man who has brought them to the commune if they ever get rain. The man responds, jokingly, "I guess we're gonna have to dance for that." How much is their belief in this appropriation of Indian spirituality a joke? The characters do not know. Hope and faith will sustain them, as it would to all the righteous communes facing insurmountable odds. The American dream for these youth means that good guys win, regardless of preparation or attention to problem-solving. In a near-final moment at the commune, Fonda and Hopper make the decision to emphasize the link between the youth movement and traditional American values with a long prayer, the hippies gathered in a circle in a scene seemingly intended to invoke Thanksgiving.

The moment ties up the film's mythology. Americans seek freedom. Americans escape urban pollutants with restorative departures for the country. Americans beat the odds. Americans live on faith.

Neither *Easy Rider* nor the rock 'n roll anthems of the era grew solely from artistic imagination, of course. Beyond the fictive worlds of film and song, millions of young people of the 1960s and 1970s did seek “better living through chemistry” (a slogan ironically appropriated from DOW chemical) and headed back to the land in search of authentic experience, sometimes leaving themselves in the hands of providence.

The psychedelic era began in the most unlikely of places, a pharmaceutical company in Switzerland. Sandoz Pharmaceuticals staffed its laboratories with scientists in the remedy business; and one chemist, Albert Hofmann, attempted a cure for migraines, only to come up with a different head medicine altogether. Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) was not the elixir for debilitating head pain that Hofmann had hoped for, but as he biked home, bursting with strange ideas and visions, the chemist decided that his discovery would be useful to the booming field of psychiatry. In the wake of the Second World War, the numbers of professional head doctors prescribing Thorazine and tranquilizers was quickly expanding, especially in the United States. LSD, the Sandoz Pharmaceutical Company believed, offered more promise than any mix of sedatives.

In the midst of this psychological milieu, Harvard University was expanding its own department of mind studies. The premier institution of higher education in the United States hired a promising young behavioral scientist, Timothy Leary, for what promised to be a stellar career. Leary was as ambitious and driven as his colleagues, but he began to tire of the incremental steps involved in honing personality profiles. After ingesting psilocybin (the psychoactive agent in “magic mushrooms” of traditional Mexican Indian ceremonies), Dr. Leary sought a new objective: mind research that not only explained, but allowed humans to increase

their awareness, energy, and empathy. He felt confident that he could help design engineer better people, beginning with himself and his closest friends. At just that moment, an associate of Leary directed him to the LSD that Sandoz Pharmaceutical was manufacturing. The psychedelic moment was at hand.

Leary and his colleague, Richard Alpert, believed that their newly discovered psychotropic brain machine would introduce the most radical breakthroughs American science had ever witnessed. Whether rewiring the criminally disposed to lay aside their antisocial habits, or pushing the well-adjusted toward the next stage of human evolution, Leary and Alpert wrestled with how to conduct research on the human mind and spirit within the confines of conventional scientific methods. They were scientists with a medicine so potent, so world-altering, that the old scientific ways would not quite work anymore. The doctors were at the nexus of science and spirituality, and soon they were splitting their time between reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

In their last years as Harvard professors, before their dismissal, Leary and Alpert struggled to reconcile traditional science with the lysergically-inspired spiritualism that they were having trouble explaining. As they were attempting to perfect the sacramental and ritualistic aspects of the LSD experience by studying Buddhism and American Indian beliefs, Leary and Alpert were also claiming, in the *Harvard Review*, that their research into “consciousness expansion” frightened some traditionalists in the same way that the first automobiles scared the lovers of horse and buggy. For the two increasingly infamous Harvard psychologists, they were involved in a process of earth-shaking invention similar to that of the first car manufacturers, with the caveat that, as Leary put it, “the automobile is external child’s

play as compared to the unleashing of cortical energy.” Like the harbingers of industrialism, Leary and Alpert were telling the world to get ready to be turned upside down once again, this time more so.²¹⁰

They were fired. Even if their research had been quantifiable in the traditional ways, it was not the kind of science that Harvard researchers did. What is striking is how neatly the line between scholarship and chemically-induced mysticism was drawn by the Harvard administration in 1963. When they were playing with criminals’ brains to make antisocial types normal, Leary and associates were doing science. When they ingested the same pharmaceuticals because they believed they would develop a superhuman consciousness, they had become alchemists, not chemists, witches rather than Ivy League experts. As historian David Farber phrased it: “All of these efforts pointed LSD use away from the behaviorists’ emphasis on clinical control and rational mediation and toward a far more pointed search for spiritual awareness.” Having evolved from the rational to the spiritual, Leary had no place to go in the academy. “By 1963, he was . . . out of Harvard, and searching for a new set of categories to fit the LSD experience within, be it secular spirituality, inner space, expanding consciousness, or ‘renewal by the discoveries of new mysteries.’”²¹¹ The former Harvard researchers were as interested in relishing the mystery as in cracking it. A new fault line emerged between science and faith, this time a faith explored through chemistry. By the late 1960s, Leary was gleefully

²¹⁰ David Farber, “The Intoxicated State / Illegal Nation: Drugs in Sixties Counterculture,” in *Imagine Nation*, 23-4.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

embracing the ironies of psychedelic research: “It becomes necessary to go out of our minds in order to use our heads.”²¹²

As LSD-imbibing enclaves sprouted in other regions of the United States, a tense relationship with conventional institutions and the concept of rationality appeared. When an underground chemist made the Bay Area of San Francisco and Berkeley as saturated with LSD as it was with fog, psychedelic Northern Californians dove directly into the language of mysticism. LSD parties were “magic, far out, beautiful magic,” the Grateful Dead’s guitarist said. Psychedelic newspaper *The San Francisco Oracle* put out a regular rag, considering the “blown mind,” from every vantage point, wondering in many issues if LSD was man’s way of recovering what pre-industrial society knew intuitively, what had been lost in the factory chimneys’ billowing clouds of soot and grime. Perhaps most telling, Peter Coyote, the ‘60s countercultural mainstay of such underground institutions as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Diggers, declared that the purpose of acid was to “de-school yourself, to continually transcend limits when you discover them.”²¹³ Counterculture was amorphous, but for many who started at the origin moments of the mid-sixties, it was largely about unlearning what seemed known, about rediscovering a less cerebral and more direct route to sensual experience and an openness to nonlinear thinking.²¹⁴

²¹² Leary in Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 263.

²¹³ Farber, 26-30.

²¹⁴ Canonical historiography on the 1960s has observed this, if only in passing. Historian Allen Matusow observed, “LSD became chiefly a means to pierce the false rationality of the bourgeois world.” A decade later historians Michael Kazin and Maurice Isserman noted, “[I]f LSD open a portal to the extraordinary, it also screened out the rational.” See Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 303. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 162.

“It’s So Good Living on the Farm”

Where better to recapture the past than in the pastoral? The back-to-the-country movement reached its peak between the 1960s and early 1980s. “Get a breath of that country air. Breathe the beauty of it everywhere,” the Beach Boys proclaimed. The Quicksilver Messenger Service, never big sellers, managed to chart a single by treating an outdoor experience as a recreational drug. “Have another hit . . . of Fresh Air!” the song intoned. Canned Heat had a monster single with Going Up the Country, which declared, “I’m gonna leave this city, got to get away.” Simply spending days in an urban park was not enough anymore. “San Francisco is dead / In LA no one’s on the street / Let’s go off on our own in the country / All of our friends will be there / No one will give us a hard time,” sang a candid California group in 1968. The best-selling representatives of San Francisco, Jefferson Airplane, mixed the bucolic and psychedelic to come up with “Bought myself a farm way out in the country, took to growing lettuce, milking cows and honey. . . . Well, I got to get back to work now and clear away some logs / The sun is shining westwards / Think I’ll saddle up my frog and get out of here.”²¹⁵ Simultaneously, the boom in acoustic music gave the illusion that the bards had turned their backs on electricity. The likes of James Taylor and John Denver captured album covers and gave interviews from favorite rural retreats. Even innumerable still-electrified rockers chose forest and farm for their promotional material.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ The Beach Boys, “Country Air,” *Wild Honey*, released December 1967, Capitol Records (Billboard album: 24). Quicksilver Messenger Service, “Fresh Air,” *Just for Love*, released August 1970, Capitol Records (Billboard performance: album 27, single 49). Canned Heat, “Goin’ Up the Country,” single released November 22, 1968, on the Liberty label. (Billboard single: 11). Jefferson Airplane, “The Farm,” released on *Volunteers* by RCA Victor, November 1969. (Billboard album: 13).

²¹⁶ Two exemplary images of pastoral longhair fantasy, Figure 4: James Taylor, *One Man Dog*, released November 1972 by Warner Bros. Records. (Billboard album: 4). Figure 5, The Allman Brothers, *Brothers and Sisters*, released on Capricorn, August 1973 (Billboard album: 1).



Figure 4. James Taylor's album cover for *One Man Dog* (1972)



Figure 5. Promotional photograph for The Allman Brothers' *Brothers and Sisters* (1973).

The Real Agrarians

Easy Rider and popular music were responding to culture as much as they were creating it. The 1960s and '70s saw an explosion in communal living in both urban and rural regions. Modern scholars estimate hundreds of thousands – perhaps a million – individuals participated in some ten thousand communes and intentional communities. Many communal groups remained in the cities where their originators already lived, but large numbers headed for the country. Rather than combat the excessively routinized, materialistic, technological and conformist society they loathed, rural communards believed they could simply begin anew,

fashioning the society of their imaginations. As a founder of the Morning Star commune outside San Francisco phrased it, the ranch was for people drawn to “voluntary primitism.”

The imagination of the agrarian communitarian rejected as much as it embraced. To leave behind city and suburbs, first and foremost, meant finally living out the fantasy of saying goodbye to large organizations and their hierarchical organization. As the Canyon Collective explained: “Why did we start collectives? Because we didn’t dig being bossed around by bureaucrats whether on the job or in ‘the movement.’”²¹⁷ Take this job and shove it.

Let the cities burn. A prayer that every floor of Consolidated Life become a wind-whipped ghost town, papers scattered across the floor, bunched in piles without meaning. To assess the day’s duration by watching the sun move across the sky was to throw one’s watch in a desk drawer, as Todd Gitlin put it famously in his memoir of the ‘60s.²¹⁸ Moving to the farm, careless as it seemed, was also a way that a drop out could prove how worthless his advanced degree and university background was.

Escaping the world of clocks and plans and specialization was not always a cheerful experience. What some scholars have called “leaderless consensus” could demonstrate the pitfalls of democracy ruling over knowledge. “Usually the people who knew the least about something would be the pushiest in getting their way,” remembers one member of the Tolstoy Farm. “We’d have to do it their way to get their consensus; therefore the project was half doomed to start with if it required any expertise.”²¹⁹ Was it satisfying to abandon technocracy

²¹⁷ Anderson, 269, 253.

²¹⁸ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 249. Gitlin called removing his watch a gesture that anticipated Peter Fonda’s act in *Easy Rider* by more than a year.

²¹⁹ Timothy Miller, “The Sixties-Era Communes,” in *Imagine Nation*, 342.

only to defer to an ignorant longhair? Educated hippies struggled with the question because communes were conducive to fanatical egalitarianism. On other occasions, the agrarians embraced traditions of minimal technology. The most populous American commune, as large as fifteen hundred people at one time, The Farm in Tennessee, contained members who delighted in learning from nearby Amish communities. Some members dubbed themselves, with purposeful paradox, the “Technicolor Amish.” The settlers at New Buffalo in Taos, New Mexico hoped to live lives imbued with the wisdom of nearby Indian populations. Only in this region of the Southwest could the New Buffaloans find the legitimate spirit guides they craved to lead them through peyote dreams.

Other communes thrived by utilizing small-scale, low-impact technologies. At Drop City, near Trinidad, Colorado, communards built a solar collector to heat their main building. The residents at California’s Black Bear Ranch constructed a small hydro-electric system for power.²²⁰ Such technophiles too, represented in print media by *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, also participated in the simple-living pilgrimage to rural land. *Whole Earth* publisher Stewart Brand believed that the future belonged to those who embraced the democratization of technology and technological knowledge. Winner of the 1972 National Book Award, *Whole Earth* suggested that know-how could be liberated from expertise, rescued from universities, re-conceptualized, and sprinkled across longhaired intentional communities. Readers of Brand’s catalogue could see the tension between technophobia and appropriate, alternative technology in constant dialogue. As historian Andrew Kirk summarized aptly, “Alternative technology represented a move away from the Progressive faith in expertise and professionalization and

²²⁰ Miller, “Communes.”

toward an environmental philosophy predicated on self-education and individual experience.”²²¹ Such was Brand’s uneasy balance in the widely read catalogue. Technology would save people and planet if it was the right kind of technology, used well, and by the right people. “Alternative technologies could be used to create more self-sufficient lifestyles,” Kirk put it, “and new social structures based on democratic control of innovation and communitarian anarchism.” A delicate balance. Technophobia was never held completely at bay, even in the optimistic pages of *Whole Earth*. Technology in communes had to adhere to members’ notions of natural living. As commune historian Timothy Miller has written, “One important countercultural theme from the late 1960s onward, that of eschewing the plastic and artificial in favor of the organic and natural, was heavily present in the communes.”²²² The right kind of technology, utilized democratically by people who rejected the hierarchy of expertise, was permissible in certain controlled situations. Yet certain materials seemed inherently tainted, the vulgarity bound inextricably in the material in the same way that some four-letter words held the kernels of obscenity in some inherent lingual timbre of repulsion. Foremost among such materials was plastic.

²²¹ Andrew G Kirk. *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalogue and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 29-31.

²²² *Ibid.*, 345.

A Note on the Cultural Meanings of Plastic

“White-collared conservative flashing down the street
Pointing their plastic finger at me”²²³

Jimi Hendrix Experience
“If 6 Was 9,” 1967

The 1960s were not the beginning of chemical corporations creating new plastics, but the decade did mark an explosion in plastic consciousness. As far back as the mid-nineteenth century, the 1851 Great International Exposition in London honored the individual who synthesized the first man-made plastic. The twentieth century could notch breakthroughs each decade: polyvinyl chloride in the 1920s, Teflon in the ‘30s, and Tupperware in the ‘40s. Boomers during their formative decade, the 1950s, saw the rollout of Saran wrap, Styrofoam, the first plastic-bodied automobile, Legos, and the plastic child’s doll, Barbie. Plastics became nearly synonymous with consumer novelty. By the end of the decade, Neil Armstrong had planted a nylon (a form of plastic) flag on the moon. By 1976, the malleable synthetic had become the most utilized material in the world.

While ‘76 marks a milestone in material history, the ‘60s were the years of plastic as metaphor.²²⁴ Consider the most iconic line in the film, *The Graduate*. Of the American Film Institute’s 100 most memorable movie quotes, only two are single words – one the name of Citizen Kane’s sled, the other a word of advice to the protagonist of *The Graduate*, Ben Braddock. At the young man’s graduation party, a middle-aged man addresses Braddock with

²²³The Jimi Hendrix Experience, “If 6 Was 9,” from *Axis: Bold as Love* released by Polydor on December 1967. (Billboard album: 3).

²²⁴ Contrasting the examples above, Walter Lippmann used the word “plastic” in 1914 to describe the wonderful malleability of “creative imagination” and of a world “ready to be molded by him who understand it.” Lippmann, *Drift and Master*, 173.

great solemnity, as if ready to impart life's wisdom. The man wants the accomplished college boy to meditate on one word, one idea – plastics. "There's a great future in plastics," he insists.²²⁵ The satirical prognostication proved true. Plastics would be the future.

The line resonates more than four decades later. Why do audiences remember? Where does the humor lie? Do the filmmakers intend that we laugh because sagacious advice from elders should transcend mere investment strategies or career choices? Are we to understand that those who invest in synthetics have a synthetic existence? Is it existential irony that while Hoffman's character wrestles with the Big Questions of Identity and Existence, the last thing on his mind is how breakthroughs in laboratories at DuPont and Dow could one day pay for him to have an even nicer house and swimming pool than his parents? Something remained elusive about the comedy's best-remembered joke.

Phoniness. Materialism. Spiritual emptiness. Plastic was all of these things. The malleable material that was now forming the bottles that held pharmaceutical prescriptions and reinforcing astronauts' rockets made an impression on the collective imagination. One hippie even explained that awakening to the evil reality of plastic was the reason his generation needed drugs: "Get every creature so stoned they can't stand the plastic shit of American culture."²²⁶ When the hip and experimental rocker Frank Zappa and his band, the Mothers of Invention, released their second album, they opened with the tune "Plastic People." If it had not been already, one of the counterculture's essential pejoratives was officially introduced. Who was plastic was not always clear. The Mothers suggested that the record's listeners might

²²⁵ *The Graduate*, directed by Mike Nichols, produced and distributed by MGM, released December 1967.

²²⁶ Anderson, 259.

be the object of ridicule. The descriptions of the plastic people were uniformly unattractive. "I'm sure that love will never be a product of plasticity," Zappa sang. How could it be? Plastic was "a drag," the chorus went, and a sure sign of disposable humans. "A fine little girl / She waits for me / She's as plastic / As she can be / She paints her face / With plastic goo / And wrecks her hair / With some shampoo."²²⁷ The word went forth. The band enjoyed its groupies but could never take them seriously. They were plastic and therefore fake, inhuman.

Further up the California coast, psychedelic missionaries Jefferson Airplane ended their blockbuster record *Surrealistic Pillow* with the track "Plastic Fantastic Lover." With tongue probably in cheek, the group - given to sci-fi flights of fancy - celebrated some kind of robotic paramour, a "cosmetic baby plugged into me."²²⁸ Later in the decade, the Airplane would celebrate agrarian communes and escaping society on *wooden* ships, but at their first moment of cultural cache, they envisioned a future in which companionship and sexual satisfaction sprang from the laboratory. Whether the daydream was more enticing or repelling was for the listener to decide.

On the East Coast, plastic was not ingratiating itself to rock musicians with greater success. Merely purchasing and utilizing plastic products demonstrated moral failing and false consciousness. "Plastic raincoat means you've got a plastic mind / Hung up earrings means you're hung up inside," intoned the Ultimate Spinach, leaders in Boston's hip rock scene.²²⁹

²²⁷ The Mothers of Invention, "Plastic People," *Absolutely Free*, released on Verve, May 1967. (Billboard album: 41).

²²⁸ Jefferson Airplane, "Plastic Fantastic Lover," *Surrealistic Pillow*, released on RCA Victor, February 1967. (Billboard: album 3).

²²⁹ Ultimate Spinach, "Plastic Raincoats/Hung Up Minds," self-titled album, released on MGM, 1968.

Across the Atlantic, British rockers, the Kinks, needed to get back on the charts and singer/songwriter Ray Davies thought the plastic-as-pejorative bit was surefire. The Kinks went all in for their condemnation of the “Plastic Man.”

A man lives at the corner of the street,
And his neighbors think he's helpful and he's sweet,
'Cause he never swears and he always shakes you by the hand,
But no one knows he really is a plastic man.

He's got plastic heart, plastic teeth and toes,
(Yeah, he's plastic man)
He's got plastic knees and a perfect plastic nose.
(Yeah, he's plastic man)
He's got plastic lips that hide his plastic teeth and gums,
And plastic legs that reach up to his plastic bum.

Plastic man got no brain,
Plastic man don't feel no pain,
Plastic people look the same,
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kick his shin or tread on his face,
Pull his nose all over the place,
He can't disfigure, or disgrace,
Plastic man.

He's got plastic flowers growing up the walls,
He eats plastic food with a plastic knife and fork,
He likes plastic cups and saucers 'cause they never break,
And he likes to lick his gravy off a plastic plate.

He's got a plastic wife who wears a plastic mac,
(Yeah, he's plastic man)
And his children wanna be plastic like their dad,
(Yeah, he's plastic man)
He's got a phony smile that makes you think he understands,
But no one ever gets the truth from plastic man²³⁰

²³⁰ The Kinks, “Plastic Man,” released on the Pye label, March 1969.

Unfortunately for the Kinks' fortunes in 1969, the BBC found the lyric "plastic legs that reach up to his plastic bum" a bit too rude or graphic, refused the song airplay, and the single stalled at number 30 in the UK (and without charting in the US). Despite the song's middling success, the Kinks provided popular music's most thorough critique of plastic personhood. As was the case for the Mothers' "Plastic People," the Kinks' plastic man was disingenuous and unfeeling, a human form with nothing inside. He associated with or produced a plastic family. More curious is his need to consume even his daily bread through plastic plates and forks, demonstrating that all that the Plastic Midas touched was artificial. Davies seemed particularly appalled that the man lacked the taste to recognize the superiority of good china.

The meaning of such wrath against plastic or people with plastic properties was simultaneously obvious and elusive. Plasticity in a person was unattractive because the trait suggested a malleability of character, a fraudulent soul. But at root, there was something about plastic's synthetic nature, something about its connection to chemists' laboratories that made the concept of plastic suspect. Scientists had synthesized and manufactured something not found naturally. Because plastic was unnatural, it was flawed, perhaps even repellant. Certainly, there was no crime in preferring a steel car, a face without makeup, or a good sturdy fork, but making the terms "repulsive" and "plastic" synonymous exhibited the mid-twentieth century panic at a drastic change in the material world. Underlying the obsession was the idea that humans could tinker at improving what already existed or fit it to their ends – carving a sculpture or a canoe out of a tree, for instance – but should not seek to materialize something that did not spring forth from a natural seed. Of course, these tunes and all the other plastic-as-pejorative songs were pressed and heard via the medium of a largely synthetic plastic: vinyl.

Apparently, plastic was an ideal conduit for the art of sound but a shameful term to be associated with humans.

Inconsistency be damned, even the teeny-bopper, bubblegum icon Tommy Roe got around to bashing the artificiality of the “Plastic World.” “People are so phony. . . . It’s a plastic world we live in / artificial flowers never kiss the April showers.”²³¹ If the plastic manufacturers thought that the flower children were going to put fabricated flora in their hair, they had another thing coming.

Someone over Thirty Understands

By the end of the 1960s, parents of the dissenters and dropouts were frantic for an explanation of wayward youth. Why the rejection of traditional morality and Western religion? Why the long hair, the distrust of authority and “wise old men,” the indignant condemnation of materialism, the contempt for the universities so many of them attended? Would Western civilization withstand the blow? Would they come back home? Were the kids alright?

Mr. Jones longed for one of his own, a serious adult, to articulate what was happening. The second half of the 1960s saw a competition among journalists to explain children to parents. All print media flocked to Haight-Ashbury, Berkeley, the Lower East Side, and Woodstock, in the race to understand the non-racers. *Time* saw a problem: “Trouble in Hippieland.” Local newspapers sniffed out local communities with varying degrees of condemnation or praise. *Esquire*, still embracing the youth cult of the Kennedys, assured readers that it all made sense. Joan Didion, in a reflective and personal piece in *The Saturday*

²³¹ Tommy Roe, “Plastic People,” *Phantasies*, released on ABC Records, 1967.

Evening Post, described the experiment in hippie utopia as a desperate reaction to the alienation the intellectuals had been fretting over since at least the 1950s.²³²

Into the crowded field stepped a historian from Princeton University, a man a bit younger than most parents and a bit older than most longhairs. Theodore Roszak promised that he had the answer, an understanding immersed in historical context and a life of letters. The widely read intellectual was sympathetic, even giddy, about what the counterculture portended. Roszak argued that the younger generation was moving past a love of material things, beyond conformity, beyond conventional pieties, disregarding the supposedly objective world of the university, the experts, and yes, science. The full title of his book was *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*. According to the professor, rebellious youth understood that the calm assurances of specialists and the certainties of laboratory-tested science were the big lie. And it was only really this lie that all the freaks were leaving behind.

Rozsak understood because he agreed. He had all the youth's misgivings. "The distinctive feature of the regime of experts," he wrote, "lies in the fact that, while possessing ample power to coerce, it prefers to charm conformity from us by exploiting our deep-seated commitment to the scientific worldview." The scientific worldview, then, held a tyranny over the mind. Molotov cocktails thrown into laboratories embodied more meaning than simply a rejection of military research. The labs imprisoned the mind. But what were Americans to do? Reject expertise, science, the prerogatives of the highly educated? "Are we, at this late stage of

²³² Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux), 1968.

the game,” Roszak asked, “to relinquish our trust in science, in reason, in the technical intelligence that built the system in the first place?”²³³

Absolutely yes was his answer. The counterculture, a term Roszak played a large part in popularizing, could be on the verge of a change in values that rivaled the scientific revolution. They were the stage after. Post-Enlightenment consciousness, one might say. The kids had imbibed scientific objectivity until they were sick, and they were looking for new forms of living, of creating community, of defining meaning. Perhaps the old spiritual mythologies that had sustained societies East and West for millennia were superior to what Roszak called “the myth of objective consciousness,” the idea that science and scientists were not weighed down by the baggage of their assumptions and corroded by the amorality of experiments whose compulsion was to know, to alter, and to invent.

Rozzak, who had also taught at Stanford, encouraged readers to join with youth in their project not to popularize or democratize knowledge, as some on the Left had encouraged, but to “debunk” it. Expertise needed debunking. Science needed debunking. Freedom meant never having to concede to the credentialed. Experts had made the sick society, and those who dropped out and dreamed of a different society would restore the human being to health. More radical than voting for the political extreme, more militant than throwing bombs into the Pentagon, showing no deference to the highly educated was a step away from the brink of annihilation. Underlying the argument were Roszak’s credentials. Trust me, he suggested. I’m a professor. I’ve lived among the experts and the objectivists. They are wrong.

²³³ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995 [1969]), 9, 21-2.

The counterculture held the hope of restoring humanity's soul. Longhairs demonstrated "moral doubt" and "traditional wisdom," concepts that "distract[ed] from the bright, hard, monomaniacal focus that [paid] off for the expert," but were essential to the human. "Science deracinates the experience of sacredness wherever it abides, and does so unapologetically, if not with fanatic fervor." To be anti-science, then, was not ignorant or troglodytic, and certainly not antisocial. Such a stance was the only assurance of a future with passion, intensity, and wisdom. The counterculture stood at the portal of a great historical moment. Join the young in breaking through to a better, simpler world.

In the case of the counterculture, then, we have a movement which has turned from objective consciousness as if from a place inhabited by plague—and in the moment of that turning, one can just begin to see an entire episode of our cultural history, the great age of science and technology which began with the Enlightenment, standing revealed in all its quaintly arbitrary, often absurd, and all too painfully unbalanced aspects.²³⁴

The hippies had thrown away their stethoscopes, their sociological analyses, their copies of *Principia*. The future would have more to do with the distant past than the recent. The kids were alright. But the MDs, MSWs, PhDs, JDs, and MBAs were a dying breed.

In Their Own Write²³⁵

The participants in American counterculture were often self-conscious themselves. We hardly need to guess at their attitudes toward knowledge authority based on their migration to communes, the music that claimed to represent them, or Roszak's academic dissection. Hippies

²³⁴ Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*, 271-3, 215.

²³⁵ *In His Own Write* was John Lennon's first book of free associative writing, and a minor youth-culture sensation.

wrote, reflected, and sloganeered and, in the process, gave literal feedback to ivory towers and the specialists within them.

The underground press of the 1960s was sometimes the most straightforward medium through which long-haired youth and their older sympathizers could attack sacred cows. Saul Heller, writing in the ground-breaking *The Realist*, one of the first and, by the mid-1960s, most widely distributed subversive papers, understood that the knowledge-keepers were at the center of American contradictions. And they were inescapable. “Since few men are brave enough to wander over the expert’s turf without getting his guidance and paying him toll, he flourishes and proliferates,” noted Heller. In his front-page piece, “Experts and other Problems,” Heller laid out at least two reasons to mistrust the most highly educated, whether in medical science, art appreciation, or any other field. For one thing, the doctors and professors eviscerated one another regularly, some MDs calling others “irresponsible,” while their fellow MDs across town retorted that his opponent was “incompetent.” Historians wrote that their professorial colleagues misunderstood the principal lessons of history. “The contempt one expert demonstrates for another must be taken seriously, considering how eminently qualified the expert is to form an opinion on the matter, and how poorly equipped the laymen is to question it,” noted Heller sardonically.²³⁶

Specialists agreed that only they had the background and credentials to teach and interpret, but they could never seem to get their story straight. The competence of the coronated was further questioned when, in blind tests, fine arts specialists preferred forgeries to authentic paintings from the masters and, more significantly, military scientists falsely

²³⁶ Saul Heller, “Experts and other Problems,” *The Realist*, Issue 61, August 1965, 1.

assured that no radiation would remain in the atmosphere after nuclear testing.²³⁷ Despite the pleasure Heller took in public embarrassment of the best and brightest, he dwelled on the inter-fraternal disagreements most. They befuddled. “When the dust has settled the only fact that has been established beyond question is that doctors consider each other less than competent,” Heller wrote. “It would be nice . . . to have a referee around to tell the baffled laymen who won.”²³⁸ The squabbles made average observers reject the very concept of expertise and retreat to the assumption that their own predilections and prejudices must give them anchor.

This other point, beyond the noted experts’ public disagreements and failures, was more distressing. The average American learned everything from the experts, so when the knowledge holders disagreed, “laymen” were in a terrible position to do anything but fret anxiously. It was all the more troubling when one stopped to consider how the man on the street had imbibed almost everything that he knew. “When we contemplate the teeming masses of teachers who get their opinions . . . neatly wrapped and be-ribboned from the scholars, and force-feed them to students who still haven’t dropped out, the picture becomes slightly startling,” Heller wrote. “Think of it: a transmission line of . . . stupidity, moving endlessly through space and time, subsidized by taxpayers.” Heller’s dissection made for a depressing analysis: experts disagreed about everything, and the public was losing trust in them, yet they continued to control the dissemination of knowledge.

²³⁷ *F for Fake*, directed by Orson Welles, produced by Janus Films, distributed in the United States by Specialty Films, 1977.

²³⁸ Heller, “Experts and Other Problems.”

One of the late '60's most visible dissenters – and for a short time, a media darling – Abbie Hoffman had little love for those who supposedly knew best. A long-haired freak who sought to link the world of the hippies with that of the militant anti-war activists, Hoffman believed that the fusion of cultural and political rebellion would sweep America toward a youthful far left. Hoffman spoke of the potential of Yippies, a joking name for his imagined politicized freaks, to change the course of history. The hyperbolic protestor shouted the idea at rallies, playfully promoted it when guesting on radio and television, and tried explaining it in three hastily-written books. His books lay out his thoughts on every topic from rock music, to lust, to living off the fat of the land. Hostility toward all institutions and forms of authority was as much subtext as overt rhetoric. He wrote from within a longhair bubble that assumed defiance to know-it-alls as a virtue. As rock star Graham Nash declared about a community that believed it could recognize itself, “If they had long hair, you knew how they thought . . . that they probably hated the government.”²³⁹ The reasons for hating decision-makers were self-evident, not tied necessarily to the historical moment. Anti-authoritarianism was a way of being that could outlast specific eras or issues.

For Hoffman, it almost went without saying that the universities should be free of charge. In fact, radicals should not only be making schools free but liberating the universities from their own suffocating sickness. Hoffman encouraged his readers to work in the free universities that were popping up next to conventional campuses in part because, as he wrote, “Anybody can teach any course. . . . Free Universities offer courses ranging from Astrology to

²³⁹ Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 261.

the Use of Firearms. The teaching is usually excellent of quality [*sic*].”²⁴⁰ Here was a vision for the democratization of knowledge. The only liberated education, the only authentically American education, Hoffman asserted, existed when the *bona fides* of content and instructor alike required simply the assent of students that the topic was viable and that the teacher was qualified. Only attend a conventional university, Hoffman asserted, “to destroy it.” The destruction was neither nihilistic nor hostile to the idea of education, for Hoffman, but a means of transforming an American education into an authentic experience. Others reveled in more visceral anti-intellectualism. One flyer distributed near the University of California at Berkeley insisted that the young “must destroy the senile dictatorship of adult teachers and bureaucrats.”²⁴¹ Hoffman’s partner-in-protest Jerry Rubin, cofounder of the Yippies, expressed his own disgust at slavish deference to university authorities and their systems of knowledge. “We are often told that we are not being rational,” Rubin told one enthusiastic group of college students. “I don’t want to be rational. The Vietnam War is rational.”²⁴² Forget how he felt about professors. Rubin was unsure that he would continue to practice deductive reasoning. Perhaps most memorably, one commentator attempted to sum up his and the counterculture’s attitude toward all planning and the organizations that attempted it: “Institutions-schools, hospitals, courts-not only do not do what they have been set up to do, but the opposite. They have become the ghouls, vampires, werewolves of our culture, the Frankensteins of our way of life.”²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Abbie Hoffman, *The Best of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1989), 231-2.

²⁴¹ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 359.

²⁴² *Growing Up in America* directed by Morley Markson. Like their straighter colleagues in Students for Democratic Society, Yippies found that most issues wound back to Vietnam. For a generation, expertise would always be a concept compromised by the Vietnam War. See Chapter 4, “Vietnam and the Difficulties of Fact-Finding.”

²⁴³ Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 256.

Some of the eggheads beat a path from their university chalkboards into “the field” to research the long-haired freak phenomenon. Just like the professors whom Heller chronicled, the psychologists and sociologists could not agree on whether the hippie phenomenon was a healthy one. Some found the starry-eyed Aquarians models of pacifistic adjustment to a world of nuclear weapons. Others saw the erosion of all Western values which had been developed and refined for millennia. The disagreement could not have been starker.

One Ph.D. candidate in education at the University of Washington decided to measure if hippies were good parents. He brought his knowledge of the latest in child-rearing literature and his numerical tables – PARI scales, they were called – to quantify just how good or bad of parents Washington communards were. Marsden Scott Blois distributed his quizzes and short answer forms to all hippies who would participate, deciding to assess the freaks with one of time’s oldest measuring sticks: “how will their kids turn out?” In his 1970 dissertation, Blois seemed to find long-haired children to be on a pretty good path. He even adopted a bit of his subjects’ phrases. The hippie “insists on less child repression, inhibition and control,” he wrote. “The child is treated like a human first, a child second.” Blois went on to write, “Evidence from the rapport scales supports expectations that hippies characteristically combine tolerance with warmth and acceptance.” The educator expressed optimism about the children of hippies, though with an academic’s caveat: “While it is not possible to say at what point a score on the PARI becomes sufficiently high to be pathogenic, the data does suggest the hippies hold very healthy child-rearing attitudes.” And, of course, more study would be needed to dispel another expert’s claim “that actual hippie parenting is more frequently abusive, pathological, and

inconsistent.” Suggesting additional observation was, for such experts, always a safe conclusion.²⁴⁴

To a large extent, Blois rebuffed colleagues who had used data to argue hippie’s paternal incompetence. Perhaps the academic would be welcome at the next love-in? Hardly. Before his research was concluded, the doctoral candidate’s subjects gave him a dressing down. Hostility against academic claims to expertise and the experts’ rigorous “shoulds” and ideals poured out in the spaces where hippies could write rather than just circle “strongly agree / somewhat agree, etc.” Many long-haired respondents, especially mothers, found the expert’s questions and scales riddled with assumptions and sexism. When asked how parents should discipline a child, one mother (identified as a hippie) protested that she did not believe there was a “should” for parents. She could only know her own sensibility. Another remarked, “There is a possibility that whoever made up the questions is obsessed with an unrealistic view of the feminine hunger for power.” Many of Blois’ subjects had to leave questions unanswered. The response that some hoped to give could not fit within the specialist’s narrow field of choices. “I find it impossible to answer most of the questions with a definite agree or disagree,” wrote one subject. “Most of your questions dealing with how women should run the home and their child’s life, and how much mommy suffers, is crazy.”²⁴⁵

The counterculture was establishing its own spaces outside of straight society, and as often as not, that straight society meant academia. When the experts from the universities came to call on hippies for a quick pop-in analysis, those who participated, perhaps a minority

²⁴⁴ Marsden Scott Blois, “Child-rearing Attitudes of Hippie Adults,” unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 85-8, 103.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 92-3.

of the minority, refused their deferential genuflection. They refused, as *Realist* writer Heller put it, “to bow our heads and lick the dust.” If there was any hope for humanity, it was not at the brain factories that reinforced cultural norms and built more destructive weapons for more wars. Maybe Free Universities, where everyone was an expert by virtue of being someone with a life of experience, would be better. For millions who passed through the high tide of American counterculture, the admonition “experts agree” was unlikely to produce anything but a snicker or a shudder.

Apollo in the Heavens and Zager and Evans on the Radio

Kennedy’s fanboy science fantasy achieved its consummation in the summer of 1969. Apollo 11 put men on the moon. The success of the mission briefly blurred the cults of science and spiritualism. The proof of human potential inspired an awe usually reserved for religious revelation and psychedelic experience. Broadcasters took a break from reporting on the race problem in cities and the war – and the war over the war – to wax poetic. What Americans witnessed right on their televisions July 20, 1969 was what generations of the future would remember. Not the sex, drugs, rock, or hair. Not the policy slide into the fevered morass of Southeast Asian swamps. Rather the materialized human potential to solve a scientific and engineering conundrum. The ability of the best and the brightest to achieve the unimaginable was proved. Experts of all disciplines need not panic. The NASA rocket scientists and astro-geologists had answered the doubters.

Topping the singles charts on July 20, 1969, was Zager and Evans' "In the Year 2525." The song did not intentionally reference the space program. Neither did the tune focus on nuclear calamity, though one might assume that the undercurrent was there in the constant refrain, "If man is still alive." Still, the folk-pop duo's frenetic paranoia was not focused on weapons systems run amok. Rather, the song demonized every contact between science and the human body. In their appearance, tellingly, the duo were a meeting place between the hip and straight world. Zager had shaggy hair, a goatee and silk scarf. Evans bore thin sideburns and short well-trimmed hair. They wore matching gray-blue suits.

As the astronauts took their space vitamins, drank their nutritionist-concocted Tang, and utilized radar and magnification to watch and understand the new world where they had arrived, the six-week chart-toppers sang about the future morosely: "You ain't gonna need your teeth, won't need your eyes, you won't find a thing to chew." Had the astronauts benefitted from any pharmaceutical preparation and enhancement? Zager and Evans were on to that. "Everything you think, do, and say is in the pill you took today." Did moon carts transport the astronauts? Mechanical arms gather moon rocks? "Your arms hanging limp by your sides, your legs got nothing to do / Some machine's doing that for you." Rejoice not, human achievers building a path into the sky. For those who attempted to construct Babel, only dystopia and confusion awaited. It would not be long, Zager and Evans promised, before babies would be coming from laboratories, not the womb.

Man was on the moon, but God was at hand. He was, as usual, disappointed and enraged.

In the year 7510, if God's coming, he ought to make it by then
Guess he'll look around and say, "Guess it's time for the judgment day."

In the year 8510, God is going to shake his mighty head
He'll either say, "I'm pleased where man has been"
Or tear it down and start again²⁴⁶

Machines, pills, gadgets, travelling to the moon, scientific manipulation of procreation: the singers were haunted, but perhaps reassured too, to know that invisible omniscience would punish. "Exordium et Terminus" as the song's subtitle went. Beginning and end. First came humanity. Then science. Then the judgment.

On that July night in '69, one could sense from the voices of NASA and the astronauts' unbridled joy that a loop of frenetic adrenaline bounced back and forth between Houston and the moon. All involved were flying on Kennedy levels of jet-propulsion testosterone. But their pragmatism remained. Astronaut Michael Collins provided the simplest way to understand the success: the astronauts had been sent to the moon by "an incredibly complicated piece of machinery, every piece of which worked flawlessly." Scientists had turned physical materials to their own purposes, had bent them to their will. Their mastery was simply astounding.

In August of that summer, half a million young people shut down a portion of New York State as they poured into the Woodstock music festival. It was, in the parlance of the times, "a gathering of tribes." Such language showed more of the counterculture's preindustrial romanticism. They invited an Indian mystic to preach to the unprecedentedly large crowd. "America is helping everybody in the material field, but the time has come for America to help

²⁴⁶ Zager and Evans, "In the Year 2525," released by RCA in 1969. (Billboard single: 1)

the whole world with spirituality also,” the Indian guru Sri Swami Satchidananda told the masses assembled. What did such a bold proclamation mean? Did spiritual advancement require any rejection of the material field, or of the culture of science and expertise that had done much to create the material abundance that the swami referenced?

When Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young and Matthews Southern Comfort sang about the festival in their number 11 (US) and number 1 (UK) hit “Woodstock,” the rock stars claimed their generation was getting itself “back to the garden.” Was it necessary to go to the moon when people themselves were golden stardust? Inner space held more mystery than outer space. The hippies were escaping militancy and machines. “I dreamed I saw the bomber death planes riding shotgun in the sky / turning into butterflies above our nation.”²⁴⁷ Certainly it would be only a matter of time before space technology was weaponized. Better to leave the natural world untouched, grooving googly-eyed in a pre-Linnaean ecstasy.

How many of the kids at Woodstock struck up conversations about landing on the moon? Surely the first landing must have left an indelible, era-defining impression on some of them, as it did on the public. An estimated 600 million people watched the live broadcast from the moon, one fifth of the population on earth. Americans who watched the broadcasts were treated to an entertainment and contextualization extravaganza. James Earl Jones and Julie Harris read letters from an earlier age of exploration. Duke Ellington played and sang “Moon Maiden.”²⁴⁸ Though several notables had protested the cost of the space program, the moment

²⁴⁷ Crosby Stills, Nash, and Young, Matthews Southern Comfort, “Woodstock,” music and lyrics by Joni Mitchell.

²⁴⁸ William E. Burrows, *The New Ocean: The Story of the First Space Age* (New York: Random House, 1998), 429.

of the landing communicated celebration, grandiosity, and epochal change. The boys at mission control and the boys in the rockets had accomplished what one commentator declared had been man's mission since the first time a person had looked into the sky. For one euphoric moment, anyone could be forgiven for believing that the coming age would blanket and obscure the critics of science with moon dust.

"That could not really have been a broadcast from outer space," said the woman from Macon, Georgia in a 1970 article in the *Atlanta Constitution*. "My TV cannot even pick up New York stations." After the Apollo missions, folk wisdom that denied the landings did not take long to sprout. The story in the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that a Knight Newspapers poll found pockets of doubt, of varying sizes, around the country. The idea that Neil Armstrong had actually walked on a soundstage in a Western state appeared in the article, though not for the first time. *The New York Times* had reported the circulation of the conspiracy theory at the end of 1969.

The moon landing became a perfect moment for Luddite strains within the counterculture to dovetail with technophobic anxiety and conspiratorial thinking in mass culture. Hare Krishna disciples, a group which began in New York in 1966 and spread to San Francisco in 1967 – during the moment of that city's hippie boom – believed that travelling in space was a theological impossibility. Other deniers, such as one black preacher who spoke to *Newsweek*, contended that it had been necessary for the government to stage the moon landings in order to distract the nation from the problems of urban poverty and the Vietnam War. For some, pent-up skepticism with the government led to contempt for NASA's putative

success. When the first published pamphlet, *We Never Went to the Moon*, made the rounds in 1974, author Bill Kaysing asserted that NASA could never master the technical aspects of the landing and therefore had to fabricate it. The chance of commanding such expertise, Kaysing claimed, was 0.017, a strikingly specific number for a paper that lacked much evidence of calculation.²⁴⁹

Other conspiracists simply felt that *2001: A Space Odyssey* had predicted the real lunar situation before the landing. Dedicated *2001* truthers believed that astronauts had discovered alien intelligence that could not be revealed to the public.

For so many deniers, the vivid ideas that floated into their imaginations felt more real than explanations from scientists and television broadcasts.

When the second moon landing, Apollo 12, occurred on November 19, 1969, Pete Conrad landed the module at the exact spot intended, a feat that even the Apollo 11 crew had not managed. The technicians at NASA were engineering an ever more precise science of space flight and landing. Of course, improvement was not always linear. Apollo 13 had some trouble with a plastic. Damaged Teflon led to a short circuit and explosion in an oxygen tank. The three astronauts in 13 returned safely but would not walk on the moon.

The idea that the most primitive technology was better than the cutting-edge stuff ran throughout popular culture just as the NASA astronauts strutted through the heavens. Elton

²⁴⁹ Roger Launius, "Denying the Apollo Moon Landings," presented at Smithsonian conference 2009, accessed <http://www.smithsonianconference.org/apollo/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Denying-the-Apollo-Moon-Landings.pdf>

John had his first major success in the autumn of 1970 with a concept album about the American West, *Tumbleweed Connection*, which relished the unspoiled and simple. One of the record's protagonist even rejected the efficiency of new farm equipment, circa 1900: "That ain't natural, so old Clay would say / You see, he's a horse-drawn man until his dying day."²⁵⁰ This was the stuff of popular albums at the turn of the decade. The people who were buying records and listening to radio – in other words, those who had not dropped out and gone back to the land but stayed in the city and purchased commodities in great quantities - had nonetheless had their imaginations captured by the fear of scientific dystopia and the cult of a simple past. *Tumbleweed Connection* was certified Gold in March 1971.

Bestsellers: Are You with Toffler or Reich?

With men on the moon and hippies in orbit, Professor Roszak was far from the last writer who tried to make sense of the expert-science-longhair conundrum. In 1970, Alvin Toffler published his massively popular *Future Shock*, which sold more than six million copies, was translated into numerous languages, and adapted into an unpersuasive documentary narrated by Orson Welles. Activists and public intellectuals fell over themselves to praise the work. No book was more comprehensive and essential, insisted feminist author Betty Friedan, media theorist Marshall McLuhan, and designer Buckminster Fuller. Newspapers from England to America asserted that the book would reshape public discussion more profoundly than such social dilemma classics as *The Lonely Crowd*, *The Affluent Society*, and *The Other America*.

²⁵⁰ Elton John, "Country Comfort," *Tumbleweed Connection*, released by Uni, October 1970. (Billboard album: 5)

Aside from its title, which proliferated in increasingly campy variations, Toffler's book did not stay on the classic shelf with that company. Yet, some of the book's thinking was so prescient that it can be appreciated fully only in the 21st century. The *Fortune* magazine editor and sometime visiting professor told readers, for instance, that a principal role of computers in the future would be to amass individualized data on every consumer and personalize the entire marketplace to that consumer's tastes. All news, music, films, books, clothing, and food could, with enough information, be assessed and filtered to target every person individually and eventually even forecast and make their consumption decisions for them.

A more controversial idea related to the consumer-computer paradigm. Toffler told readers that the age of conformity was already over, never to return. The threat had perhaps been overblown in the last quarter century and was now irrelevant. Because of his background in business, Toffler believed that individuality grew from consumer choices. Because of the proliferation of fashion, film, literature (one thousand books published each day), and all other creative commodities, no one need fear a future of automatons in gray flannel suits. Indeed, the issue of the future, Toffler wrote from his mid-century vantage point, was that the thinking and interests of consumers would grow so diverse, that communication between subcultures of knowledge would become strained if not impossible. Physics geeks, car and motorcycle enthusiasts, historians, and drug addicts would know only the small terrain of knowledge within their spheres. Diversification of knowledge would be so exponential that academics and thrill seekers would not be able to translate experience that existed outside of a small specialization. Forget conformity. The future promised to be one in which no one even knew what knowledge-culture products another referenced. Agreement would not matter. Just sharing a knowledge of

any commonality would bind micro-communities. Surfeit culture would drown monoculture in a tidal wave of excessive knowledge production. Film critics would not be able to watch every film made in a year, even in their own countries. The concept of what was essential to know would be replaced by the idea that individuals would try to share the most interesting portions of their specialized realm of consuming.

Toffler devoted the final chapter of his 500-page opus to expertise. He argued that there should be not fewer specialists, but more of them. Alternately referring to the group as experts, specialists, and technocrats, Toffler claimed that the anxiety of the age came from too narrow and too little planning, both in capitalist and socialist societies. Experts planned with only economies in mind, when they planned at all. The future must belong, instead, to those who believed in the human potential to improve experience, not those dimly muttering about laissez faire policies, like the resurgent free-market writers, or that it was more truly human to go along with the flow, like the hippies. To remedy the excessive focus on economics, the president should consult a Council of Social Advisors every bit as esteemed as the Council of Economic Advisors. When quality of life was quantified, when the social workers and psychologists were funded and followed with the same enthusiasm as the economists, most modern problems would disappear. Planning simply had to become better, not be disregarded. The problems with experts – their imperfect prognostication, bias, undemocratic assumptions, the lot – could be overcome if experts took opinion, broad and local, into account, while the public simultaneously threw their full support behind the planning of specialists, what Toffler called “Social Futurism.”

The risk at the crucial moment in 1970 was that the public might start listening to the bizarre voices Toffler was hearing from “a strange coalition of right wingers and New Leftists.” Without expanding on the nature of that coalition, Toffler had spotted the shared space in the Venn diagram of polarized radicals. The author went on to lay out, fairly succinctly, the problem of society’s technicians and the greater problem of eradicating them:

When critics charge that technocratic planning is anti-human, in the sense that it neglects social, cultural, and psychological values in its headlong rush to maximize economic gain, they are usually right. When they charge that it is shortsighted and undemocratic, they are usually right. When they charge that it is inept, they are usually right.

But when they plunge backward into irrationality, anti-scientific attitudes, a kind of sick nostalgia, and an exaltation of now-ness, they are not only wrong but dangerous. . . .

We need not a reversion to the irrationalisms of the past, not a passive acceptance of change, not despair or nihilism. We need, instead, a strong new strategy.²⁵¹

The futurist threw down his gauntlet. The experts had stumbled, but they remained humanity’s best hope. When the belief in human education and potential was shaken, redouble efforts. Renew the faith. Pause for a moment. Remain rational.

After his time as editor-in-chief of the *Yale Law Review* and clerking for Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, Charles Reich settled in at Yale Law School for fifteen years, beginning in 1960. It seemed that he would spend his remaining working years there, a nationally respected legal scholar. Reich published on property law, on judicial oversight of bureaucracy, and on the balance between civil liberties and social welfare. Short of being a Supreme Court justice himself, the legal scholar was at the top of his profession.

²⁵¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), 419.

Yet, Reich's students, especially beginning in the mid-1960s, drew his attention away from abstract legal issues. Those who passed through his classes in this era, such as Hillary Rodham and Bill Clinton, were more passionate than any other people he could remember. (As Reich recalls, Hillary was the rare student that professors live for. Bill, he claims, missed an awful lot of class). His students gave the impression that the stakes were higher and that the consciousness of the Western world was changing rapidly. Reich sat down at his typewriter to explore his fascination with a curious generation. He needed to explain his students to himself.

The result was arguably the most debated book of the early 1970s. Not only did *The Greening of America* run through more than ten editions in its first two years, selling millions of copies, but the book inspired the publication of an entire book of response essays, *The Con III Controversy*. Public debate split. Justice William Douglas, *The Washington Post*, and soon-to-be Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern asserted that the book demystified the strange behavior of young people in the eyes of their parents. Indeed, some editions of the book included letters from mothers who claimed Reich had explained their children and their world to them. On the other hand, *The New York Times* found the book "simplistic" and "misleading," prophesizing that it would do harm because it "obscured the truth."

Based on sales alone, *The Greening of America* would remain an essential summation of the counterculture to many Americans trying to make sense of their times. Reich, eschewing nuance and uncertainty, explained why the worldview of hippies was superior to what had come before. The former law review editor explained that Americans had become divided into three types of consciousness, mindsets that were all prevalent in 1970, each of a specific historical era. "Consciousness I" derived from nineteenth-century capitalism. It venerated

individualism, competition, and free markets. The circumstances that created such consciousness had been destroyed by corporate monopolies, Reich claimed, but the ideals remained prevalent, especially among political conservatives.

“Consciousness II” related to reform politics and the bureaucratic state. Having roots in Populism and Progressivism, Reich argued that the second worldview came of age during the New Deal of the 1930s. Such people tended to see themselves as liberals. They were as thoroughly immersed in the bureaucracy of business and government which, for Reich, had merged into a single Corporate State during the New Deal and Second World War. Above all, this mindset believed in the regulatory agency and reform, and the special knowledge required for successful administration. This species of American honored, as Reich put it, “the most expert” and “professional” applications of reason to solve problems with “scientific precision.” Of the program of liberal reform and the consciousness it produced, Reich wrote, “Ultimately it believed in reason.”²⁵²

Faith in reason defined the consciousness of the professionals and professor, the lawyers and bureaucrats, the technicians of the liberal state. “Believing that the best and most hopeful part of man is his gift of reason,” Reich declared, “Consciousness II seeks to design a world in which reason will prevail.” If the men and women of this mindset were optimistic, it was for human potential and conscious action. Because faith lay so deeply in reasonable professionals assembled into groups, “Consciousness II believes . . . more in the decisions of an institution than in the feelings of an individual.” Here was the potentially insidious side of the

²⁵² Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 49, 51-3.

experts. They were not open to human feeling. Only reason. That is where the mistakes were made.²⁵³

The counterculture understood that slavish dedication to logic meant dehumanized workers, urban ghettos, and Vietnam. Here, Reich insisted, was the meaning of drop-outs, longhairs, rock music, and psychedelics – the very essence of counterculture. Of course, the longhairs represented the most modern and appropriate mindset for their times, “Consciousness III.” The wayward youth were experimenting in order to “escape patterns of thought.” As Reich put it, “Consciousness III is deeply suspicious of logic, rationality, analysis, and principles. . . . It believes that ‘reason’ tends to leave out too many factors and values. It believes that thought can be ‘non-linear,’ spontaneous, disconnected. It thinks rational conversation has been overdone as a means of communication between people.”

If the hippies won, according to Reich, it would be a triumph of subjectivism. Every person an expert or no one an expert. Every opinion valued. No hierarchies based on ability. Those with the most “accurate” grasp of problems would have the same say as those who had “failed” the test by the old objective, factual standards. Democracy could be restored only when no one much cared what a so-called expert had to say.

²⁵³ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 70-1.

Chapter 7. Let Go Evangelicals and the Mastery of God

“Christ or Hitler. Christ or Vorster.
Christ or all the Caesars to come.
That’s the choice. Sooner or later,
That’s the choice you’re going to have to make.”

Bill Fay
“Pictures of Adolf Again” (1971)

“Many Christians’ thinking is tainted by materialism and rationalism. . . . We must make room for growth in practices like divine healing in the modern church. Divine healing was undeniably a part of Christ’s ministry and something that he expected the church to experience.”

John Wimber
Power Healing (1987)

The counterculture’s spiritualism led many from their crash pads into the bold, new Christian churches appearing on the West coast. The long-haired Jesus proselytizers of California proclaimed their gospel to be an all-consuming faith. It left no room for the square or rational world, any more than the countercultural trinity of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll had. Such rapturous Christianity characterized not only the “Jesus Freaks,” but also more mainstream evangelical groups that grew immensely throughout the 1970s and ‘80s. Converters of the long-haired youth, such as preacher Arthur Blessitt, emphasized the revelatory aspects of Christianity, telling hippies that Jesus was as unfathomable, and as radical as an LSD trip, but more substantial. Cultural phenomena such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Christian popular music showed the converted how Jesus was the original drop-out, a man who refused to worry about here-and-now concerns, sustaining himself instead through dialogue with his heavenly

father. Mainstream evangelists, such as Billy Graham and John Wimber, preached against Western rationalism's overreliance on thinking. Like Blessitt, they told their followers that the most important knowledge came through visions. Both groups agreed that the end of the world was imminent, and the only terrestrial effort that mattered was preparing for End Times.

In light of the imminent end of the world, the pretenses of expertise and human mastery were blasphemous. Talk about increasing human wisdom or perfecting the world was a sign of the end. Beginning with the Jesus People, and moving through the evangelical movement, the new Christians declared that they could not compartmentalize their faith. They could not keep the overwhelming spiritual facts of their life outside their politics or any consideration of policy. For the new Christians, positively exploding with zeal, the only true authority was other-worldly. Experts must step aside.

Jesus on the Strip

Arthur Blessitt knew that when a person had become born again in Jesus Christ, that person had *enthusiasm*. The young pastor never had much time for deliberators, the fussy theologians who parse the word of God in order to "split hairs." The important thing was to bring the sentiment, "Jesus Christ come and rule my life," into the hearts of the lost. Seminary chafed Blessitt, during both his undergraduate years in Mississippi and his short-lived tenure as a theological graduate student in San Francisco. He had to get moving. By the late 1960s, there were so many strung-out, despairing long-hairs hungry for spiritual rebirth. Blessitt understood them because he himself had dropped the "Establishment" religious experts. He weighed understanding of the Bible against soul-winning and never looked back: "The focus [of

seminary] was on making scholars out of the students. But I decided I would rather be ignorant and on fire than be a scholar and be spiritually dead.” The sentiment was not Blessitt’s creed alone. It would resonate, he believed, with the uncounted hip wanderers, a generation that valued burning passion over desiccated knowledge. By the time the Jesus Movement of the 1970s gained the attention of the mainstream, several evangelists had already come to believe that a hippie was simply an evangelical still searching for Jesus.²⁵⁴

As he related in his memoir, written and published during the Jesus Movement’s peak years, Blessitt began counselling street bohemians of Los Angeles and discovered that his vision was correct. Only a missionary who was zealous for Jesus Christ could bring any hope to the youth stranded along the sidewalks of big cities and hip enclaves that looked out over the Pacific shore. For Blessitt, the failures of the so-called specialists exposed the lie of humanism, of people who believed that they could rely on intelligence and careful planning to fix the problems of their age. The children were lost, he insisted, because their parents were the so-called experts. The young pastor chronicled numerous examples of the hypocrisy of expertise.²⁵⁵ One middle-aged mother came searching for her son who had run away from a state mental institution. The psychiatrists there, she said, were out of ideas and suggested that she find a minister. One night, Blessitt tried to guide a zonked drooler, loaded on PCP, out of a dark psychic place that, the pastor believed, would wreck his mind. In the morning, the preacher drove him back to campus. He was a UCLA graduate student in mathematics. Another reformed speed addict, who became an assistant to Blessitt at his ministry, had been driven to

²⁵⁴ Arthur Blessitt, with Walter Wagner, *Turned on to Jesus* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1971), 75.

²⁵⁵ Blessitt was ordained by Mississippi Baptists though he did not finish his undergraduate degree.

drugs by his verbally abusive mother. Not surprising to the pastor who had become hip to the world's big lie, she was a social worker – as Blessitt put it, “a social counselor paid to advise the parents of young lawbreakers after they were released from Juvenile Hall!”²⁵⁶

It was enough to make a man feel that he was crying in the wilderness. The children had open hearts, but their parents' generation was fixated on cautiously reasoning their way out of every dilemma. The children demonstrated the need for a solution of the soul. “Millions of dollars are being spent to eradicate the use of drugs in America,” Blessitt wrote. “I have heard solutions offered by supposedly learned men and so-called experts who say that the way to cope with the problem is to legalize pot, dry up the sources of drugs, hire thousands of additional policemen and narcotics agents, build hospitals and clinics and expensive rehabilitation facilities for drug addicts.” Blessitt could only shake his head at such expertise. “I have heard every solution except the only one that is lastingly effective – the spiritual regeneration of the user!”²⁵⁷ These were times for people who heard the voice of God.

Fortunately for the freaks, Jesus was working miracles in Southern California to rescue a generation from the hubris of their square, learn-it-in-a-book parents. As Blessitt told it, at least twenty or thirty lost teenagers and young adults found Jesus every night at his Sunset Strip sanctuary, His Place. The young were *seeing* God again, feeling him. Hearing his voice. The proud rationalists and liberals – especially the liberals of the Christian church – were dumbstruck to see the miracles of the New Testament manifest again. They had put their faith in man instead of God. Considered, skeptical liberalism had infested the church and its training

²⁵⁶ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 118, 164, 136.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

centers. As Blessitt wrote, while feeling spiritually inhibited in a California seminary, “Only one or two of the professors were evangelical-minded and believed as I did that the Bible commanded men to spread the Gospel.” The students were even worse. “The majority were arch-liberals in their interpretation of the Scriptures. They questioned, philosophized, and expressed doubt about much in the Holy Book instead of simply accepting it as the Inspired Word of the Lord.” In opposition, Blessitt lived as though his life were a Bible story, ecstatic and miraculous. When called by God from seminary to Sunset Strip, “[My wife and I] didn’t stop to analyze the wellspring of our inspiration.”²⁵⁸ The Blessitts were ideal emissaries to the hippies.

In abandoning the intellectuals for rapturous spiritualism along the Pacific coast, Blessitt was not alone. Many evangelists were beginning to realize how much they had in common with the long-haired freaks: suspicion of worldly authority, yearning for transcendence, and most importantly, a belief that the people who lived in the Machine, as many longhairs called it, or the World, as evangelicals labeled it, had lost touch with something basic in their humanity. They had a hole that education could not fill. As Linda Meissner, the leader of Seattle’s Jesus People Army, put it, college was “general blah For the hardcore Jesus People we say it is a waste of time. It is man’s wisdom.” One convert of the more numerous Jesus Movement commune, the Children of God, put it more bluntly: “Education is all just shit.”²⁵⁹ Human potential shriveled and trembled at the foot of the divine. This is why, at their own mission

²⁵⁸ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 74-5.

²⁵⁹ Enroth, Ronald, Edward Ericson, Jr., C. Breckinridge Peters, *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 168.

outside Los Angeles, the Jesus People of the Tony and Susan Alamo Foundation repeated the mantra, “The Lord loves a broken spirit.”²⁶⁰ The humiliation of the wise man preceded rebirth.

One chronicler noted that a favorite Bible verse of almost all the various tribes of Jesus Freaks was 1 Corinthians 1:20: “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”²⁶¹ What a profound old truth that was in the face of the Vietnam War, the rejection of technocracy by the young, the very existence of the nuclear bomb. Colleges perpetuated problems that only Spirit-filled people could comprehend. Even in daily life, one could apprehend the miraculous behind the façade of human ability. When *Rolling Stone* magazine caught up with Wayne Cochran, “The White Knight of Soul,” to ask him about his decision to incorporate preaching into his live musical performances, Cochran enthused about being born again. God had saved him from cancer. The surgery had merely been the vessel for God’s healing touch. “In my belief, God cures everybody,” Cochran said. “Even if he uses a doctor to do it.”²⁶²

Like the counterculture from which many converts came, the Jesus Movement sensed that the structure and institutions of society were collapsing. The best estimates of the wise men were often wrong. The reasons that rationalists utilized were not like the solid rock of divine faith. They changed. How could those who had believed in older systems feel but confused and embarrassed? No wonder then, that, as the Christian sociologist Ronald Enroth investigated the Jesus People, he continually heard them quote a verse from Colossians: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” At their “colonies,” the Children of God

²⁶⁰ Tim Cahill, “Infiltrating the Jesus Army,” *Rolling Stone*, June, 21, 1973, 51.

²⁶¹ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 167.

²⁶² Mike Bourne, “Wayne Cochran, White Knight, Jesus Freak,” *Rolling Stone*, June 7, 1973, 18.

forbid the reading of any book other than the Bible. The Alamos allowed very few books at their foundation, and converts could only read what Tony first read and approved.²⁶³ As his wife Susan told a reporter, if Tony did not censor the worldly texts and reject most of them, the group would be mired in the pornographic and satanic.²⁶⁴ Increasingly, the wisdom of the physical world was all so much obscenity, the devil's cunning maneuvers.

In place of the collected philosophies of mankind, Jesus People had visions. Tuned out from the devil's airwaves and texts, they tuned in to the voice of God and the physical manifestation of Christ. Arthur Blessitt's memoir testified to the presence of the divine in the world on every page. But even the bold Blessitt felt the need to preface his description of the time he saw Christ appear: "The agnostic will dismiss it as hallucination, the psychiatrist as autosuggestion, the lip-service Christian will perhaps question my sanity." Sensing the skepticism of secularists, Blessitt hunkered down to demonstrate that he literally meant what he said. "These few words of prelude are merely in recognition of the fact that in an age of nuclear weapons and space exploration," the pastor wrote, "whatever cannot be tested in a wind tunnel or laboratory or formulated on an engineer's drawing board is generally treated with cynicism."²⁶⁵ But no Christian worth his salt, in Blessitt's estimation, hesitated to confess a God-given vision. While praying with a friend one night before beginning to minister at His Place, Blessitt and a friend saw Jesus walking across the water in front of them. Blessitt fell to the ground, declaring his unworthiness to touch the hem of Christ's garment. Not only did

²⁶³ The Children of God and the Alamos preferred "colony" and "foundation" to "commune," a word they believed had connotations of sexual immorality.

²⁶⁴ Cahill, "Infiltrating," 56.

²⁶⁵ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 91.

Blessitt have a fellow witness, but when the two men returned to their wives, the women screamed in fright because the men were glowing. “You’ve been with Jesus,” his wife Sherry exclaimed, the moment she saw him.²⁶⁶ The God of Transfiguration had jumped out of the New Testament and into the Blessitts’ lives. Whenever he doubted that his inspirations came from God, Blessitt consoled himself with Scripture, Joel 2:28. He was a young man, and he was seeing visions. As he exclaimed after one bout of skepticism, “No I wasn’t hallucinating—the vision was real.”²⁶⁷

The man who bussed the lost children from Los Angeles to a tract of land out in Saugus, Tony Alamo explained, in the tracts that his followers handed out on the street, how a vision had led to his conversion. A swinging publicity agent in mid-60s Los Angeles, Alamo had not spent much time thinking about God before his epiphany, instead hyping hippie musical talents like Bobby Jameson. During a business meeting one day, Alamo went deaf to the voices of the other people in the room and heard the voice of God command him to tell the other businessmen that God’s return was imminent. When Tony at first resisted, God began to extract his soul from his body, so that Alamo could feel the process of death. He relented.²⁶⁸

Wife and ministerial partner Susan Alamo had seen Jesus manifest himself earlier. She described the good news when she was just five to a reporter. The images that she remembered were traditional. Christ had flowing hair and a robe. What stood out from Susan’s story was her description of Jesus’ unforgettable eyes, “very big . . . and very black.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 94.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶⁸ Cahill, “Infiltrating,” 54.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Together, the Alamos were a team who had physically experienced Jesus separately and then come together to share their visions and interpretation of the Bible. The children who converted and looked to them for daily Bible instruction at Saugus spoke about them as prophets. The Alamos were older than the hippies but had received revelation to minister to this lost generation. As Alamo's tract claimed, the Jesus Movement had not begun with psychedelics but with a converted businessman and his bride heading to Hollywood Boulevard because God had called them.

Lonnie Frisbee might have disagreed about the psychedelics. The young longhair was a pivotal figure in the development of both the original Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa and, later, the Vineyard Movement, two of the most influential theological centers for modern American evangelicalism. Frisbee's conversion, or series of conversions, became legendary. Retreating into the canyon with LSD, art supplies, a Bible, and sometimes togas, the teenage seeker imbibed the hallucinogenic and painted religious imagery on the walls of canyons. He read the Bible aloud, whether alone or with friends. During one trip, after reading about John the Baptist aloud with his canyon compatriots, Frisbee baptized his friends in a nearby stream. On another instance, alone, Frisbee challenged God to reveal himself. "One afternoon, the whole atmosphere of this canyon that I was in started to tingle and get light and started to change," he recalled. He became fearful but ended the day as a convert with a *vision*. Frisbee saw the Pacific Ocean emptied of water and "a sea of humanity crying out to the Lord."²⁷⁰ Indeed, when Frisbee teamed with the preacher Chuck Smith to use Calvary Chapel to preach to young

²⁷⁰ *Frisbee: The Life and Times of a Hippie Preacher*, directed by David di Sabatino, produced and distributed by Passion River, 2005, "The Vision."

people, the most iconic images of the church, perhaps of the whole Jesus Movement, were of Smith and Frisbee waist deep in the waters at Corona del Mar, baptizing hundreds. Those attuned to the voice of the Lord knew that such success was foreordained. When Smith's wife, Kate, first met Lonnie, she "received a prophecy" that Lonnie would shake the earth. "Because of your praise and adoration before my throne tonight, I'm going to bless the whole coast of California," she had heard God say.²⁷¹

Frisbee's yearning for Christ and the Holy Spirit to manifest whenever believers gathered was central to the conversion of the young generation. Some balked at his claims of a divine interaction. Others swelled the congregations where he preached, sometimes collapsing on the floor spasmodically, speaking a strange language, "slayed" in the Spirit. After years of reflection, a son of the Calvary Chapel co-founder and sometimes pastor, Chuck Smith, Jr. summarized Frisbee's gifts and explained how Christianity became appealing to a large portion of the counterculture and its fellow travelers: "The Bible was written in a cultural context that was much more supernatural than ours. It was a much more spiritualistic worldview. And I think that the drug culture mediated a way back to that worldview. Frisbee was an exemplar."²⁷²

Healings followed visions. Frisbee cured a friend's mother of "black lesions on her tongue and the roof of her mouth and all on her gums" by demanding "you foul spirit, in the name of Jesus, I command you to come out of that woman!" He restored sight to a blind man, simply by inciting the name Christ.²⁷³ Even more than the stories about Frisbee, Blessitt's memoir teemed with miraculous healing. Doctors told one man to expect no sensation below

²⁷¹ *Frisbee*, di Sabatino.

²⁷² *Frisbee* DVD bonus features, "Planner of Experiences."

²⁷³ *Frisbee*, di Sabatino.

his waist. After a healing prayer, “sensation came coursing into his legs.”²⁷⁴ The doctors were “amazed.” On another occasion, Blessitt encountered a biker named “Buddha,” unable to speak because of laryngitis. After praying that he be healed, Blessitt directed Buddha to pray. “In a perfectly clear voice, its clarity surprising even him, Buddha said his prayer aloud.” Perhaps most amazing, the talismanic power of the Bible stopped a hostile revolutionary from throwing his Molotov cocktail into Blessitt’s church. Merely a touch was all it took. “Touching the Bible is touching God,” the preacher told the seemingly implacable man. It worked. He dropped the bomb. “A hand ha[d] touched him; the merciful gentle hand of the Lord,” Blessitt reported.²⁷⁵

Seeking a vision, miracle, or conversation with God could also become a mundane daily ritual. When journalist Tony Cahill “infiltrated” the Alamo Foundation to check out rumors of “brainwashing,” Cahill found that no one hypnotized him. They merely gathered into small rooms after worship services in order to be slayed in the spirit, to speak in tongues. It took three and a half hours of rocking back and forth, chanting for the Spirit to descend, but Cahill and his mentor Christians eventually spoke, in a trance-like monotone, foreign words and unrecognizable sounds. After the speaking in tongues had begun, Cahill’s coaches marked the hours spent chanting and channeling the spirit on a prayer time sheet as if they were statisticians or managers.²⁷⁶ Cahill similarly found that his mentor Christian woke him as if a “human alarm clock,” chanting beside his head after only a few hours’ sleep, “Thank you, Jesus. Praise you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Praise you, Jesus.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 90.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 190, 153.

²⁷⁶ Cahill, “Infiltrating,” 48.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

The manifestation of divinity in their lives helped the Jesus People remain steadfast in spite of mounting persecution all around them. Because they had made the decision to say “no” to the world, the world was out to get them. For Arthur Blessitt’s ministry, the persecutors were the Sunset Boulevard gin mills and topless clubs that were going out of business thanks to the witness of the preacher. The rotten legal system was on their side, as the courts were also tainted human institutions. Before the Minister of the Sunset Strip lost the rights to His Place due to contract legalese, he reflected, “Unfortunately, Blackstone, not the Bible, would decide the case.” After losing in court, Blessitt strapped himself to a cross in front of the property from which he was evicted. “His Place *must* find a new permanent home, this time with a lease in my name, a lease that couldn’t be broken by the Supreme Court,” the preacher insisted.²⁷⁸ The young Christians at the Alamo Foundation would not have been surprised at Blessitt’s persecution. They fully expected conflict with government and parents. But they were ready. One young woman declared that, “If her own mother tried to stop her from serving the Lord, she would gouge her eyes out with her high heels.”²⁷⁹

A sense of persecution could be found beyond Los Angeles and its surrounding areas. In San Francisco’s hippie district, a member of the Jesus commune, the House of Ebenezer, told researchers that he had seen signs popping up on Haight Street urging the killing of all Christians. A Christian underground newspaper, *Truth*, told readers that followers of Jesus were not safe in the United States: “We simply want the people everywhere to wake up to the fact that Christians are being persecuted right here in our town with increasing frequency. . . .

²⁷⁸ Blessitt, *Turned on to Jesus*, 6-11.

²⁷⁹ Cahill, “Infiltrating,” 48.

Several weeks ago a brother's face was slashed with a knife because he said Praise the Lord around the wrong people."²⁸⁰ Just like the Leftist revolutionaries of the period, the Jesus Freaks had to make a choice. Following God in 1970s America required absolute commitment. They would likely be thrown to the lions.

No artist captured the persecution experienced by long-haired converts like the pioneering Christian musician, Larry Norman. In his song "Right Here in America" (1969), he foresaw a United States in which atheism was required, as it was in the communist countries:

There are Christians in Russia, they meet underground
In China they're killed when they're found
And in Cuba the Christians live up in the hills
Because it's not safe in the towns.

And to think it might happen right here in America,
I know you think it's not true,
But it's happening to Christians right here in America,
Wait 'til it happens to you.

Norman foretold of a new Christian fervor spreading across the U.S. After salvation would come a time of terror. "And we are passing out leaflets and underground pamphlets from Buffalo to Monterey," Norman sang. "And we're talkin' 'bout Jesus and all of a sudden, we're arrested and taken away."²⁸¹ Christians anticipated abduction. The forces of the world, shed of façade, could be seen in communist nations and totalitarian states. Still, those without the eyes to see could not fathom the camps that were being built, out of sight.

Despite the persecution, or perhaps because of it, the Jesus Freaks sensed the end of the world approaching. It would happen in their lifetimes. As one longhair announced to

²⁸⁰ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 181.

²⁸¹ Larry Norman, "Right Here in America," *Street Level*, released on One Way Records, 1970.

passersby on Hollywood Boulevard, "It is the season of His coming." When prospective Christians gave him their attention, the young proselytizer announced, "When the armies of the world were amassed around Jerusalem," Jesus was on his way. At the moment, in 1973, Israel had just fought the Six Days War. The sidewalk preacher went on. "The waters will become as bitter as wormwood . . . that's pollution." Again, the prophecy was contemporary. "The Bible says that Christ is at hand when the cities are enclosed in a smoking haze," the believer explained, as he traced the skyline of thick, brown Los Angeles air.²⁸²

In Seattle, Linda Meissner taught her group, the Jesus People's Army, that the end was near. "We believe this is the last generation," Meissner told researchers in the early '70s. "If you ask people in the Jesus People Movement, they would say three to twenty years. That's not very long, when you think that it's our job to fulfill the Great Commission in this generation."²⁸³ There were revelations to experience and ears that must be told the good news before Christ would part the smoggy skies and descend to congratulate his children for withstanding their difficult times. That heavenly descent was all they could look forward to as they labored for the Lord. Experts, of course, had their heads in the sand. "Right now there are terrible plagues that are coming in different countries all over the earth, and the scientists are scared," Meissner reported. As the Jesus People saw it, no slide rules, annual averages, or climatology were going to make sense of God's plan. Better one studied the Book of Revelation.

There was little use in adapting to society, planning for the future, or honing any skill other than survival techniques. God was upending the best-laid plans. Enroth, the evangelical

²⁸² Tony Cahill, "True Believers and the Guises of the Weasel," *Rolling Stone*, June 7, 1973, 42.

²⁸³ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 180.

academic, fretted beginning each day wondering if it were the last limited the lives of people in the Jesus Movement. “There is no time left for the luxury of going to college, no time for the long, slow process of infiltrating into the social institutions and bearing a Christian witness through involvement in them,” Enroth and his team wrote. “There is only time for the preaching of the gospel of repentance, for saving souls from the coming wreckage. And there is barely enough time for that.”²⁸⁴ The Jesus People reminded each other not to become attached to the world. They were not a part of it.

This went not only for attitudes toward universities, but even to the basic relationships of life and to the vestiges of culture. The Children of God lived communally because only fervent believers constituted their family. In their parlance, they must “forsake” the physical world and “hate” their parents.²⁸⁵ A Jesus Freak journalist, Jack Sparks, translated Bible passages into the hip speak of his times. As one verse went, “Dig it! This whole plastic bag is exactly what Jesus liberated us from.”²⁸⁶ The whole heap of Western civilization was plastic. One convert at the Alamo Foundation, Richard, a former songwriter and lover of poetry, told a reporter that, after reading nothing but the Bible for months, he realized that his previous favorite writer, Dylan Thomas, was “trash.” “Anything outside the Word of God is a lie and it’s a waste of time to listen to lies.”²⁸⁷ Commitment to God meant understanding the superficial attraction of all art, all knowledge, and all the world’s wisdom.

²⁸⁴ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 181.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 30

²⁸⁶ Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 136.

²⁸⁷ Cahill, “Infiltrating,” 51.

The rejection of the world was an absolute creed for zealous converts. Enroth's team was intrigued to find that the favorite theology of Jesus Freaks, if they read anything other than the Bible, was found in the last published work of Chinese theologian Watchman Nee. Nee had credibility. He spent the last twenty years of his life in Chinese communist prison for his beliefs. In his last published work, *Love Not the World* (1968), the old theologian advised Christians against putting one foot of faith in Jesus and leaving one foot of faith among men. He implored Christians to "acknowledge that Satan is today the prince of education and science and culture and the arts, and that they, with him are doomed." Nee went on to be sure that he included everyone: "Suppose you are in engineering, or farming, or publishing. Take heed, for these too are things of the world."²⁸⁸ Technology had come into the world only after the fall of Eden, Nee noted, and tools and music were both part of the legacy of the family of Cain. It was no use bothering about the world, when Christ would soon return to end the sin, the studies, the whole plastic scene. One could be sure only that devotion to Jesus would always be the wise choice. As singer Larry Norman put it, "Let's stop marching for peace, and start marching for Jesus, and peace will take care of itself."²⁸⁹

Hi-Fidelity Jesus

Norman was not the only songwriter making sense of Jesus for the modern age. The explosion of Christian spirituality expanded into popular culture. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice, began its life as a rock opera record (in

²⁸⁸ Enroth, *The Jesus People*, 169-70.

²⁸⁹ Norman, "Right Here in America."

the tradition of The Who's *Tommy*), became a hit Broadway play, and then, in 1973, a successful film. The reimagining of Jesus' life as a modern parable practically wrote itself. The Pharisees – Biblical experts of their day – were so similar to the wise men who had proudly and wrongly defended the Vietnam War repeatedly. Jesus, as imagined by Rice, was their antithesis. All faith. All waiting for direction from the Father. When Jesus Christ first sings in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, he becomes a mouthpiece for the people Alvin Toffler termed “anti-planners.”²⁹⁰ In the album, play, and film, when concerned followers demand to know the next step, Jesus tells them that they are better left ignorant: “Why should you want to know? Don't you mind about the future / Don't you try to think ahead / Save tomorrow for tomorrow / Think about today instead.” The advice left his followers more desperate for answers. But Jesus was not someone of the expert class, either the Pharisees of his time or the data-obsessed of the 1970s. “I could give you facts and figures,” Jesus tells them. “Even give you plans and forecasts. Even tell you where I'm going.” The future that was ordained could not be escaped. His followers should make peace with inevitability. “Why should you want to know [what's happening]?” Jesus wonders. “Why are you obsessed with fighting times and fates you can't defy?”²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ In *Future Shock*, Toffler discussed anti-planning chic: “Spontaneity, the personal equivalent of social planlessness, is elevated into a cardinal psychological virtue. . . . Thus, we hear increasing calls for anti-planning or non-planning, sometimes euphemized as ‘organic growth.’ . . . Not only is it regarded as unnecessary or unwise to make long-range plans for the future of the institutions or society they wish to overturn, it is sometimes even regarded as poor taste to plan the next hour and a half of a meeting. Planlessness is glorified.” 451

²⁹¹ “What's the Buzz / Strange Thing Mystifying,” *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Decca Records LP, May 1971.

Bill Fay was a British folk-rocker, newly devoted to Christ at the turn of the decade. He released an album in 1971 that embodied virtually all of the significant strands of Jesus Movement thought.

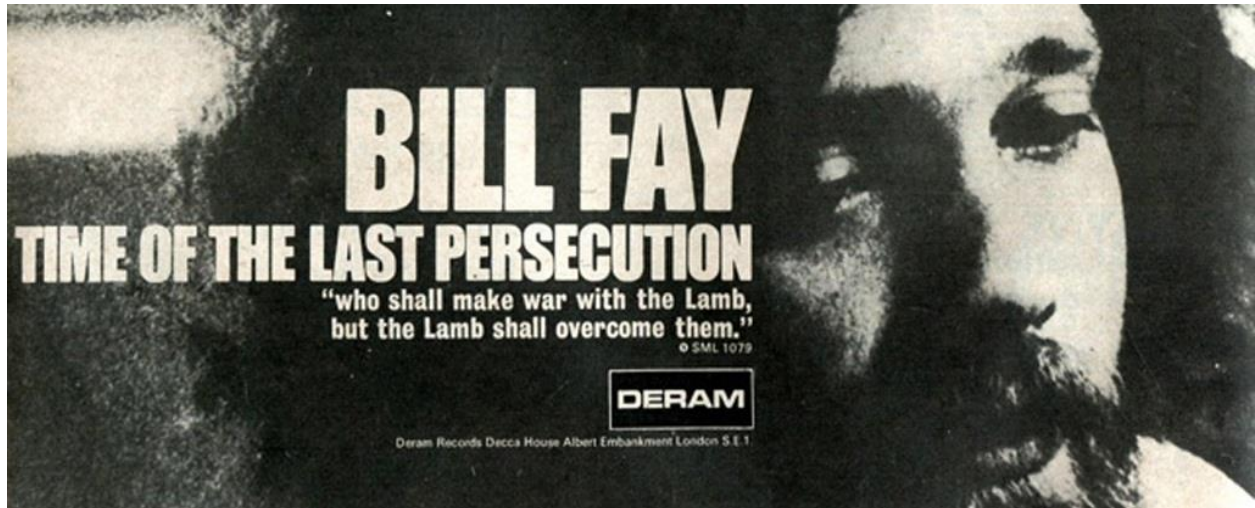


Figure 6. Advertisement for Bill Fay's *Time of the Last Persecution* (1971).

Fay's *Time of the Last Persecution* (1971) chose not so much to mimic the "folkie as poet" as to embody a new version of the singer-songwriter as prophet. Dylan had sometimes been called a prophet, but Fay's style veered more literally toward prophecy. His songs were sounds and words from someone who understood the Book and explaining it to his listeners.

As much as any of the Jesus Freaks on the street, Fay knew that the transience of the world demonstrated the futility of fighting God's plan. Things were going to get bad. Human effort could try to alter or obstruct the End Times, but people were fairly pathetic wretches whose most notable trait was their ability to fool themselves. Ultimately, everyone who committed themselves to work in the world would end up serving the anti-Christ, an evil figure

who would rule just before Jesus's return. Better to gird oneself spiritually to withstand the persecution.

Well, now soon plan D
Will be released and the sea shall rise
And the skies open²⁹²

No need to fret. Such events were moving Christians closer to Heaven. We must be ready to let go of the world and all earthly attachments. "There will come a day /
When nations will not prevail / No nation will prevail," Fay sang.²⁹³ The nations of the world would adore the anti-Christ. They would rally together around his earthly authority. He was going to be evil incarnate. Evil only a couple of precedents could suggest:

In the papers, on the TV screens
Pictures of Adolf again
As sure as I sit here there will appear
Pictures of Adolf again.²⁹⁴

Adolf – the man obsessed with complete control. The man who built the camps. Who coordinated extermination with his engineers. That was earthly authority for you. But never mind how governments tried to erase Christ, tried to avoid "the fates you can't defy," as the Superstar put it. The sea would rise. The skies shall open.

"Are you trying to build a spire that blocks out the sky?"²⁹⁵

Man could erect no wall that would keep Christ from bringing his kingdom to supplant the world's. Prepare. Keep your eyes to the skies. Suspect the world, its schemes, its attempts to project authority:

²⁹² Bill Fay, "Plan D," *Time of the Last Persecution*, Deram Records, 1971.

²⁹³ Fay, "Come a Day."

²⁹⁴ Fay, "Pictures of Adolf Again."

²⁹⁵ Fay, "Plan D."

It is the time of the last persecution
And Caesar shall be raised
He will ask for his feet to be kissed by your sister
And your children will fear at his name.²⁹⁶

The new Caesar would be a redoubtable man. Believers striving to be Biblical patriarchs for their families would have to see their women pledge allegiance to the anti-Christ. They would not be able to protect their children. Do not fear. Prepare. Live as though Christ's return has begun. Keep your allegiance to God above that to any nation or any human endeavor. More spectacular than any film you could imagine. First, hide, like Corey ten Boom did from the Nazis:

It is the time of the Anti-Christ, know what I say.
Make for your own special place.
And others will join you there
And you wait for the ships in the air.

The moment that would try men's souls. The anti-Christ and his know-it-alls would come looking. Stand fast. Hunker down. The end would be glorious.

And you wait for a sign like a trumpet sounding
And you go out and walk to the Christ.

Triumphs of the Pulpit

Pollster George Gallup detected tremors in America. People's eyes looked heavenward. Not because of NASA, but in spite of such rationalist organizations. 1976, Gallup declared, was the "Year of the Evangelical." Religious historian Steven Miller has persuasively argued that the

²⁹⁶ Fay, "Time of the Last Persecution."

entire last quarter of the twentieth century was an “age of evangelicalism” for the United States, not a religious subculture but “the very center of recent American history.”²⁹⁷

For America’s most famous pastor, Billy Graham, the hyper-spirituality of the 1970s was a long-awaited deliverance from the secular wilderness. Since he rose to fame in the late 1940s, Graham was renowned for massive crusades which preached the “old-time” religion, and led hundreds of thousands of converts, if not more, to Christ. Graham had contended during the period with the secular expert, sometimes having to contort himself to seem both a sensible man and America’s face of faith. Graham found a way to thrive in the secular middle of the 20th century, but it was the end of the century that actually vindicated his life’s work.

Preaching in Seattle at the end of the 1970s, Graham agreed that America was coming back to God. The True Believers were becoming so numerous that many social commenters felt the whole nation was “born again.” As Graham explained in Seattle, “We’re hearing a great deal about evangelical Christians. In fact, there was an article in one of the papers that the three frontrunners, so-called, in the primaries [for the 1980 presidential election] call themselves evangelical Christians and two of them say that they’re born-again Christians.” Graham marveled at the sea change: “This is the first time, to my knowledge, that this has happened in a presidential race in the history of the United States.”²⁹⁸

“America’s preacher,” as the press liked to call him, remembered the old days. Americans had dallied with secularism, trusting human knowledge to secure their world. The nation had come to its senses. The percentage of people who felt that God was a person with

²⁹⁷ Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

²⁹⁸ Billy Graham, “Born Again,” 1979 sermon, Seattle, accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9fE5GZvBGk>.

whom they interacted in daily life, Graham told the Washington state crowd, was more than 90%. “That’s much higher than it was 25 years ago. And among scientists, when I went to college many years ago, only a minority of scientists said that they believed in God,” Graham preached. “Today a vast majority of scientists say that they believe in God.”²⁹⁹

The renewal of spiritual values suited Graham well. He felt that his preaching had meaning, that his work manifested itself across the country. He gloried in the polls: “Americans want more than anything else in their president the spiritual quality,” he told the vast stadium. By the end of the service, he made the familiar call to listeners to commit to Jesus. “God said, ‘Just do what I tell you even though it’s foolish,’” Graham said. “I’m asking you to come tonight to Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior, even though you can’t understand it all intellectually and even though it may look foolish to you.” The “humility of foolishness” had more traction than it used to. Graham had insisted that people submit their reason to faith for years. By 1980, the people were more receptive than ever.

For much of the preacher’s life, the idea had been a hard sell. In 1962, Graham lectured at Harvard University on “Evangelism and the Intellectual.” At the height of Kennedy’s expert-boosting, Graham was in Cambridge, humbling himself before its religious studies department. He did not have the mind for ethics or theology that the professors who surrounded him had, he was compelled to admit. But he testified nonetheless.³⁰⁰ Graham compared his speaking to Harvard faculty and students to a labor union leader addressing industrialists and business-owners. He assumed antagonism. He hoped that the strength of his convictions would make up

²⁹⁹ Graham, “Born Again.”

³⁰⁰ By coincidence, 1962 was the only year that Graham did not finish in the top 10 of America’s most admired people during an amazing four-decade run.

for his “unfashionable” beliefs. His opening sentences disarmed his critics: “I am not a professor. I’m not an intellectual. I hope I have some intelligence. And I’m not a theologian. I’m an evangelist.”³⁰¹

Graham warned the academics against smugness. Their salvation too would come, not because of their learnedness, but in spite of it. “Jesus said to us grownups: Be like children. Come as a little child. Not as a doctor of philosophy. Not as a doctor of law. But come as a simple human being to the cross,” he noted. “If you wait until you have all the answers, and there’s a perfect intellectual panacea, you will never come.” Intellectualism taught people that they could reason their way out of any dilemma, solve any problem if they applied enough insight. Not so. “I cannot prove to you the existence of God,” Graham insisted. By extension, the professors could not analyze their way to truth. “I could not put God in a test-tube or wrap him up in a package and say, ‘There is God.’”³⁰² Like Arthur Blessitt would write a few years after Graham’s sermon, religious epiphany was an affront to the engineer’s drawing table, the symbol of the age.

That was evangelism’s strength. Education could not solve the important problems. Pure reason – the arrogance of expertise – always seemed to end, in the American imagination, at the gates of Auschwitz. ““I see a country like Germany that can produce in one generation an Albert Schweitzer and an Eichmann, and I say there must be something basically wrong,” taught America’s pastor. “How can Joseph Goebbels, who can go and get his doctoral degree at Heidelberg University, come out and be the man he was?” The answer was that people had evil

³⁰¹ Graham, “Evangelism and the Intellectual,” Harvard University, 1962.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

and wrongness bound up in their very being. Striving to fix the world's problems with learnedness was bound to go astray. It was a sucker who put his faith in human potential. Such a person would get burned every time. "Our way lies not in human ingenuity, but in a return to God," the evangelist proclaimed.³⁰³

The most striking segment of "Evangelism and the Intellectual" involved a series of analogies smack in the middle of the sermon. Graham declared:

It sounds a bit intolerant. It sounds a bit narrow. And it is. Jesus said, "The gate to the kingdom of Heaven is narrow." But we are narrow in mathematics. We are narrow in chemistry. If we weren't narrow in chemistry, we'd be blowing the place up. We have to be narrow. We are narrow when we are flying a plane. I'm glad pilots aren't too broad-minded and just come in any way they want to. And why shouldn't we be narrow when it comes to spiritual dimensions and moral laws?³⁰⁴

When it came to expertise, Graham liked to have it both ways. The precision of the specialists reinforced the validity of his beliefs. The narrowness of academic disciplines lent credibility, he believed, to the self-proclaimed "narrowness" of Graham's spiritual vision. At the same time, the imperfections of science, particularly its amoral nature, demonstrated the necessity of Christian faith. When he addressed the intelligentsia on the topic of intellectualism, Graham utilized both his belief's similarities to and differences from the academic approach, in a way that attempted to show Christian spirituality as superior in all cases.

Graham published *World Aflame* in 1965. The book coincided with the apogee of President Johnson's promise of a Great Society. Despite a close relationship with the president, Graham saw only disappointment in trusting the doctors and experts whom Johnson praised. "The psychiatrists are so busy that they themselves have nervous breakdowns as they try

³⁰³ *The Quotable Billy Graham*, ed. Cort Flint (South Carolina: Droke House Publishers, 1966), 169.

³⁰⁴ Graham, "Evangelism and the Intellectual."

frantically to patch up our jangled nerves,” wrote America’s preacher.³⁰⁵ Graham could hardly emphasize enough the shortcomings of the wise men Americans foolishly trusted. “All across the nation hundreds of educators, counselors, psychiatrists and philosophers are finding out they don’t have the answers and they are throwing up their hands and crying for help.”³⁰⁶ They would make no headway until they taught Americans to trust the gospel of Christ before the scientific method. The social sciences drowned in what Graham called “pseudoscientific sentimentality.”³⁰⁷ “Likewise, the salvation of society in the reordering of man’s social institutions, consistent with the abolition of social injustice, war, poverty, and disease, will be taken out of man’s hands,” he wrote. “It will not be achieved by education, evolution, politics, technology, military power, or science.” Not even churches which petitioned for legislation would make the difference. Only the direct intervention of God could improve man’s lot.

Graham emphasized that the apocalyptic return of Christ to earth was real, and the country needed to prepare for it. ““Those who believe in the inevitability of human progress find it hard to believe in the return of Christ. If we believe that man is going ahead by himself, we will never accept the promise of Christ that He will return and bring an end to sin itself.”³⁰⁸ Conversely, those who believed in the inevitability of Jesus’ return would be uninterested in human effort at social improvement. Nothing very significant, save for the conversion of souls, would occur before Christ’s return. The only relevant issues, when the veneer of the earth’s importance was stripped away, were salvation and damnation. Not only was the final judgment

³⁰⁵ Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (New York: Double Day & Company, 1965), 217.

³⁰⁶ Flint, *The Quotable Billy Graham*, 147.

³⁰⁷ Graham, *World Aflame*, 139.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

the sole significant event upon which to focus attention, but efforts at humanistic reform actually prepared the way for Christ's enemies. Pastor Graham was explicit that the anti-Christ would be a real person, and the signs of his arrival would be evident. In the United Nations' attempts to improve international harmony, the preacher saw intimations of the end. "It is obvious that the world's acceptance of one-man rule must be preceded by a period of preparation," Graham wrote. "At a recent peace conference in Washington, speaker after speaker referred to the necessity and the possibility of a world government." The conflation of UN efforts and the impending arrival of the anti-Christ was a theme that Graham and other evangelicals would repeat for decades to come. "[The Anti-Christ] will dominate the world scene with a cleverness the world has never known. He will temporarily put down war that has been devastating the earth. Prosperity will return, money will be plentiful everywhere, and the fear that has gripped every part of the world will give way to hope," Graham told readers about the end times.³⁰⁹ Beware prosperity, popular public figures, and international harmony. That way lay the anti-Christ.

The multi-tiered message that humans would fail, spiritualism must be valued above scientism, and the United Nations was a preparatory agency for the anti-Christ, came continually from America's best-loved pastor. As youth began growing their hair longer and condemning "the system," Graham saw signs of spiritual renewal. To Baby Boomers in general, and the Jesus Freaks specifically, the preacher wrote his 1971 paean, *The Jesus Generation*. Graham confessed to the young that he, like they, had no faith in those over-thirty experts attempting to engineer harmony and arrange cease-fires. "As I look at the United Nations, at

³⁰⁹ Graham, *World Aflame*, 226-8.

America, at Russia, at China, at Great Britain, or even at the human race, I find little reason for hope,” Graham admitted. “But my hope does not rest in the affairs of this world.” Of course, his rested in the next. Nothing good was coming from the experts, the specialists, or any government. And especially not that body of governments called the UN. Graham told his readers that their alienation came from their secular education. “You swallowed whole bits and pieces of the cant offered to you in university classrooms by radical intellectuals masquerading as college professors.”³¹⁰ The passage demonstrated Graham’s ambivalent relationship to scholarship. He conceded the impressive abilities of the professors. But when professors failed to acknowledge the essential role of Christian faith, they became “so-called” intellectuals, charlatans, pretend scholars in the costume of learnedness.

Graham found much to celebrate about the generation that rejected such charlatan cant. The evangelist was heartened by Theodore Roszak’s analysis of rebellious youth. What they rebelled against suggested a return to God rather than a rejection. Reverend Graham approvingly quoted Roszak in *Jesus Generation*: “It is my conviction that those who open themselves in this way and who allow what is ‘out there’ to enter them and to shake them to their very foundations are not apt to finish by placing a particularly high value on scientific or technical progress,” Roszak had written. Graham built the bridge from Roszak’s description to his own vision: “Surely he is talking about (from a psychological point of view) what Jesus called conversion.”³¹¹ The hippies were Christians on their way to a home that they did not know they

³¹⁰ Billy Graham, *Jesus Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 177, 25.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140-41.

had lost. To a liberated spirit. A personal relationship with a God who talked and listened. To Eden.

Graham was ready to equate the love of knowledge with the love of things. Intellectualism shared the pitfalls of materialism, impeding the seeker's way to God. To a crowd in Nova Scotia, Graham emphasized the limitations of both wealth and intellectual endeavors: "Jesus said suppose you have all the oil of the middle East, all the gold of South Africa, all the diamonds of Holland, all the wealth of the whole world . . . all the music, all the culture, all the philosophy, all the psychology in the world-and lost your soul. It wouldn't be worth it."³¹² The pursuit of knowing might prove as vainglorious and corrupting as money-grubbing. In an essay in the Kansas State University newspaper, Graham warned students that the domestic and international crises that weighed on Americans in the era of malaise would not be found in their classrooms. "Science has brought us close to a material paradise but we also stand on the precipice of hell itself," he wrote. "The answer, therefore, could never be politics or economics."³¹³ Reforms treated symptoms. A humble surrender to Jesus, a flood of Christ's grace, was the only hope for a culture hoping to survive to the next century.

Graham became increasingly convinced that the answers to America's problems were metaphysical. Only prayer that unleashed the power of angels would rescue America from the brink. He sat down at his typewriter and explained the mechanisms of angelic agency in 1975. In *Angels: God's Secret Agents*, Graham suggested that angels had rescued whole civilizations in

³¹² Graham, "A Warning Against Idolatry" – Nova Scotia, 1979, accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79EEEVpkGlg>

³¹³ Graham, "A Spiritual Awakening: A Purpose and Meaning in Your Life," March 4, 1974, accessed <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=04f5fcba-2daf-4895-bc75-d9dc923c2004%40sessionmgr111&hid=102>

the past and had destroyed others. Israel had thrived when its people were in tune with angels. Nazism collapsed because the agents of the Lord found the ideology odious. Graham encouraged readers to circle back centuries and heed the wisdom of Puritan theologian Increase Mather: “Angels . . . have a greater influence on this world than men are generally aware of.” The evangelist rejoiced that times had changed so much since the secular mid-60s that he could share this truth with Americans without fear of mockery. “Just a few years ago such ideas would have been scorned by most educated people,” Graham wrote. “Science was king, and science was tuned in to believe only what could be seen or measured. The idea of supernatural beings was thought to be nonsense, the ravings of the lunatic fringe.”³¹⁴ The bad old days had ended. Americans were ready to hear how invisible spirits delivered God’s preferred people from catastrophe and how it could happen again. During the Battle of Britain, when England fought for its life against Nazi invasion, Graham told readers, British commanders had witnessed planes with dead pilots being piloted by angels.³¹⁵ God’s emissaries were waiting to save America again, if the people would understand to rely on their prayers rather than themselves.

Americans were listening and reading. In the first week of its release, *Angels* sold more than a million copies.³¹⁶ *The New York Times* marveled at sales that suddenly towered above most of the secular market. Henry Kissinger asked Graham how to move so many books. The evangelist explained that he merely spoke to Americans where they lived: “I told [Kissinger]

³¹⁴ Graham, *Angels: God’s Secret Agents* Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 5.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163-4.

³¹⁶ Harvey, Paul and Philip Goff, eds. *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 339.

that I doubt if you could find [my books] for sale in the New York area, but [they're] sold at K'Marts, Penney's, grocery stores and everywhere else."³¹⁷

Wimber's Wonder

After he saw the hippie preacher Lonnie Frisbee slay a congregation in the Spirit, all the formerly "button-downed types" convulsing on the floor in rapture, Pastor John Wimber began thinking about a new type of theology. Christians were hungry for the miraculous. They were tired of a reasonable, earthbound faith. It was time to map precisely how to bring miracles into daily life, to jolt conversion with heavenly electricity. Graham began speaking and writing about "Signs and Wonders" in daily life. Up sprang a church network, Vineyard, sometimes called not just a way of thinking but a movement. Today, one thousand five hundred Vineyard churches across the world attest to the power of Wimber's vision. The Vineyard founder took the evangelical world by storm with *Power Evangelism* in 1985. Wimber urged Christians to debate whether supernatural miracles were present – even necessary – in modern churches. By the end of the century, *Christianity Today* decided that it was the twelfth-most influential book on modern Christianity published since the Second World War.³¹⁸

By the time Wimber synthesized what he had been travelling the country preaching throughout the early 1980s, he felt no need to genuflect to the scientists, eggheads and know-it-alls. Such experts were the major problem with American Christianity. Evangelicals were timid, he believed, hesitant to testify that what was happening in the world was the result of

³¹⁷ Edwin McDowell, "Billy Graham a Best Seller, Too," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1978.

³¹⁸ Discussion of Christian nonfiction accessed <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/october/23.51.html>

the direct and daily intervention of God and the Devil. “The assumption of secular minds is that we live in a universe closed off from divine intervention, in which truth is arrived at through empirical means and rational thought,” Wimber wrote.³¹⁹ Christians, to the preacher’s thinking, were afraid to confront the fact that they did not have secular minds, that they needed to speak up to the secular minds, risking the sideways glances of an ostracizing world. “In Western culture, because of the influence of materialism, we do not believe or live as though the spirit world can affect the material world.” He was talking about Christians. No more apologies. Wimber was telling his flock that they should be thinking and acting in a way that demonstrated that they knew there was an invisible spiritual war underway.

Wimber recognized that Westerners struggled with metaphysical truth. Ultimately, the pastor equated being a Christian belief in miracles: calling for miracles; expecting them. The preacher declared that Christianity did not require blind faith because “supernatural demonstrations” in the modern world “undergirded” faith. This activity was neither rational, nor irrational, but what he called “transrational.”³²⁰ The miracles of the New Testament were proved by miracles in the modern world. Speaking in tongues. Visions. Healings. It was all happening – now.

Non-Westerners understood. Evangelism flourished, Wimber explained, “in non-technological countries.”³²¹ Without the scourge of scientific thinking, without the pride of people who wanted to understand the processes of the world, and without the amenities that

³¹⁹ John Wimber with Kevin Springer. *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1985), 77.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

connected people more to the material world than that world's creator, the inhabitants of more "primitive" regions embraced the miraculous God. They expected their prophets to heal. There was a mentality that American Christians could learn from, Wimber thought. To know Jesus was to leave much of the corrupting influence of Western empiricism behind. "In the final analysis, materialism and rationalism are big lies, incapable of providing plausible explanations for meaning in life." Wimber's readers had a choice. They could accept a tradition of reason that had been dominant in the West since the Enlightenment, or they could know God. There was no having it both ways.

Wimber's theology was based on personal experience with the miraculous. He expected doubters. "Because angels, demons, God, and spiritual gifts like tongues or prophecy cannot be scientifically measured, secularists employ rationalism to explain away the supernatural," he wrote. But rationalists dismissed and explained away at their own peril. Demons existed. One of the preacher's earliest experiences with supernatural activity occurred when he performed an exorcism. The fantastic experience was reminiscent of *The Exorcist* (1973), the notorious film about possession. A young, petite girl thrashed about, and the demon inside her challenged Wimber to drive it out. "During this time, I had to endure putrid odors, eyes rolling back, profuse perspiration, blasphemy, and wild physical activity," wrote the preacher.³²² It was a battle of wills, and with God's strength, Wimber held out longer. The power of Christ forced the demon out. It was a sensational moment when the invisible spiritual warfare that was always present manifested itself. "Because secularists believe in a closed universe of material cause and effect," Wimber wrote, "they cannot accept supernatural intervention. Christians who are

³²² Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 28.

influenced by this aspect of Western worldview find healing, especially when the cause for illness is an evil spirit, difficult to understand or accept.”³²³ The evil spirits of illness were being driven out in great numbers, and those open to belief would see it. For those open to it, the miracles were pouring in. “Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in Vineyard Christian Fellowship services. . . . The blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing.”³²⁴ Faith-healing was an old practice, but it seemed, according to Wimber, that it had only stopped working because Christians’ belief had grown faint.

Wimber had other unusual experiences. On an airplane, he saw the word “adultery” written across a man’s face. The preacher knew it was a vision from God, and though he would have preferred to spend the flight sleeping, he wrote, he had to confront the man. The name of the man’s mistress came into Wimber’s head, and when he revealed what he knew to the adulterer whose presence was visible only to Wimber, the man was aghast. He begged Wimber for guidance. How could he make his life right again? Wimber was dealing with the supernatural every day. His message was clear. When Christians in the technocracy of late twentieth-century America opened themselves to the awesome God of vision and miracle, the results were akin to modern day Bible stories.

On rare occasions, even the secularists witnessed the miraculous. Usually, of course, earthbound minds operated with characteristic condescension. Unsolicited secular fundraisers periodically contacted Wimber to offer to raise money for his church. “For many, the church is an ineffective institution in need of expert advice – for a fee, of course.”³²⁵ The motif of experts

³²³ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 83.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

humbled before God appeared in Wimber's work, as it had in the work of evangelicals before him. When they witnessed what Wimber did on a nearly daily basis, they were astonished, as the witnesses to Jesus had been. In a typical story, the wife of a church elder learned that she was terminally ill. She was not to live through the night. A group of reluctant, timid church men prayed over her and anointed her with oil. But God answered prayers even, on occasion, from those who do not expect that he would. The woman made a full and almost instantaneous recovery. As Wimber relished reporting, "The doctors called it 'a miracle.'"³²⁶

Real Christians could tap into the power, but there was a price to be paid. They had to give up the idea that they could live comfortably in a Western secularist society while also being true born-again. Something was more powerful and more real than empirical, rational human potential, and it was time Christians shouted it from the rooftops. "Christians cannot be philosophical materialists and retain a Christian worldview," Wimber noted.³²⁷ The scientific method closed off believers from the profundity of the universe, apparent to all but the most arrogant humanists. "Could it be that many Western evangelicals have subconsciously developed a theology that excludes the possibility of supernaturally inspired dreams and visions, harmonizing 'Christian doctrine' with Western rationalism?" he wondered.³²⁸ For the founder of the Vineyard Movement, the rhetorical question was the crux of the matter. There was no harmony to be had between faith and rationalism. American Christianity suffered from a game of pretend.

³²⁶ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 95.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

Where were his readers to go from this revelation? The first step was to wait. If Christians acted without hearing the voice of God, they might well be setting off in the wrong direction, trusting their common sense, a typical Western pitfall, instead of divine revelation. The Christian, for Wimber, should not be deciding on the appropriate course without divine guidance. Western rationalist folly. Christians cultivated patience and waited for God to move in their hearts, “always yielding our right to control whatever situation we are in.”³²⁹ It was a difficult proposition, Wimber admitted, for “action orientated” Westerners to wait patiently to hear the voice of God. Yet, such behavior opened Christians to the truth from which the empiricists and experts were closed off. In a choice between the potential for human improvement and the passive acceptance of God’s infinite superiority, Wimber contended, Christians should pause. They must react to the mad scurrying of the planners with a calm and knowing smile.

The Biggest Little Film

Evangelical organizations understood that winning the minds of American youth meant adopting the forms of modern entertainment. A group of aspiring Christian filmmakers at Mark IV Productions raised \$60,000 and began a new industry in 1972. The result, *A Thief in the Night*, was a movie whose acting and production betrayed its limited budget and novice talents. Nonetheless, its impact overcame its limitations.

Thief’s principal theme is how conversion grows out of modern life’s confusion and the imminence of End Times. Christianity’s renewed ascendance grew out of the failure of humans

³²⁹ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 150.

to give satisfactory meaning and explanation to the world. When the men of Mark IV set out to make their small motion picture, these were the pressing messages, they believed, that Christian youth groups needed to hear. Time was short. One should make no plans except reliance on Christ. That was how to be ready.

The film modeled Christ-like versus secular behavior. The young man in the movie who models the conversion experience is bitten by a snake and barely survives. In suspense-building cuts, a doctor with the knowledge to save him flies by plane to the hospital. Just in the nick of time. The young man makes a full recovery. The film makes it clear that the doctor was merely God's instrument. Prayer was the real force that had saved the injured man.

The survivor has a hard time understanding this, but he knows there must be meaning to his experiences. It was not the doctors, the hospital, or the plane that brought the doctor to him. It was the band of Christians who showed up to pray for him. He attends their church trying to embrace invisible spiritual warfare that he has been in the midst of. "I don't know exactly why I'm here either. Except that I was told that you prayed for me," the man tells a group in the church foyer. "I can't explain it. And I don't really understand what's happening." This attitude of confusion and humility leads the young man to conversion. The church-goers tell him that he has come to the right place to have his questions answered. A jump-cut to the preacher's sermon brings readers quickly into a discussion of the Rapture that will save Christians before the world goes to hell. The pastor tells his flock that the anti-Christ is on the earth already. All of the Biblical signs are coming true. While the world trudges on blindly, they must prepare for an imminent ascent to heaven. "It's altogether possible that this man [the anti-Christ] is active in government this very day," he warns his congregation. "We can conclude

that we are now living in the End Times. The days in which we live are seeing many prophecies fulfilled that we have never seen fulfilled before.”³³⁰ Beware those who speak of peace, prosperity, and molding the world into a better place. It is already too late.

Sure enough, the true believers disappear *en masse* from the world. As Billy Graham had predicted a few years before, the sinister United Nations tries to explain the disappearance of hundreds of millions of people. The emergency, the organization insists, requires that the world pull together to deal with the unprecedented catastrophe. The experts investigate every possibility. That Christians have been raptured is dismissed by the best minds. As one officer puts it, they know that Biblical prophecy is not the answer because such a scenario was “explored by a computer” and discounted.³³¹ Even as the world unravels, the experts have a blind spot about supernatural intervention.

The United Nations begins to bureaucratize the problem. “Panels, methods, procedures,” those old favorites of the experts, are the comforting words UN leaders offer. The organization creates the Imperium, a “special committee” for the emergency. “The Imperium is made up of leaders from ten major world powers, consisting of 6 committees from within those countries of six members each,” says a UN diplomat on television. Most interesting, the UN experts insist on no ideology or exact plan, only that the people pull together and acknowledge that emergency specialists are the world’s best hope. The people who remain must report to nearby UN centers so that those who have disappeared and those who remain might be assessed. The survivors will receive an identification scan in the form of a barcode.

³³⁰ *A Thief in the Night*, directed by Donald W. Thompson, produced and distributed by Mark IV Pictures, 1972.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

The few who understand that the Rapture has occurred but remain on earth know that the bar code is a satanic marking: the anti-Christ's 666. They try to hide but cannot avoid the reach of the UN's world managers. The end game of human mastery, of the strivings for control of the world through rational processes, reaches its fruition. People of faith run away from the strict secularists and are rounded up. UN eggheads cloak their intentions in the Orwellian language of moderation and reasonableness. "The Imperium in no way wishes to infringe upon the rights of the citizens of the world. It is just a simple necessity that each of us identify with UNITE (United Nations Imperium of Total Emergency) and fully support its progress and strategies. Before the emergencies, we were at each other's throats. Let unity be the positive result of our common dilemma," the face of UN policy insists.

As some wise people had suspected all along, the progress, the strategies, and the organizations of the educated elite were part of a long game, not to address the problems of the world, but to persecute the faithful. Despite its limited production values, *A Thief in the Night* remained a staple of many evangelical retreats, study sessions, and youth nights at churches worldwide. By last count, approximately 300 million people had seen and studied the film.

The dominant mood in American Christianity in the late 20th century insisted that believers could not invest their lives in worldly concerns. Earth was a transient training ground, a springboard either to heaven or hell. Secular eggheads were agents of the devil if they tried to convince Christians that study and experiment could teach people how to improve their lives.

Sociologists, social workers, academics—they would all learn more if they would stop thinking so hard and fall to their knees.

Instead of learning to exert control over the world, the rapturously-saved knew everything they could hope to know from careful study of their Holy Book and the sermons of preachers. If any experts were needed to make sense of what was happening in the here and now, it was the evangelists. Only they knew that invisible spiritual warfare behind the everyday scenes of life explained the mysterious happenings of the age. The Jesus People knew that the actual intentions of the best and the brightest were to rob the world of its deeper, spiritual meaning and sequester the true believers to camps. Attuned to history as God had ordered it, Billy Graham could explain to his followers how angels had won World War II for the Allies. John Wimber told Christians that if they were in a spiritually-healthy church, they would experience miracles in their daily lives. The attempts of trained specialists to build a better world were not merely blasphemous, but boring. No one, the believers argued, could care about the insights gained from worldly knowledge when the profound truth of the universe was accessible only through prayer. Expertise had nothing to reveal. It masked the ancient sin of pride; the only way to reach heaven's gates was to relinquish human effort and trust God to take care of it.

Conclusion

Politically and culturally, the Left and the Right have spent the last fifty years in a “culture war,” criticizing each other for naiveté and libertinism, or rigidity and bigotry. More interesting, from the perspective of this dissertation, is how the hippies and the evangelicals, who found so little in common when it came to sex and drugs, spoke a similar language when it came to ideas of rationalism and human mastery. Conservatives and liberals castigated each other for cold-heartedness and profligacy, respectively, when they debated topics of social improvement, but neither praised bureaucrats or organizational specialists. Expertise and human mastery, by the early 21st century, were in disrepute.

This phenomenon is due in no small part to some essential agreements and shared assumptions among political and cultural nemeses. For the followers of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, bureaucracy could do nothing right because of the impossibility of planning the future and the inescapable incompetence of government. Only self-interest could properly organize people and promote liberty. Bureaucrats were not beloved by Democrats either. Whether patronizing welfare workers, or Pentagon war planners, federal experts proved to be a problem. They were perhaps a necessary evil for the new programs that liberals, by their nature, hoped to enact, or for the resuscitation of failing programs. The experts, however, were not the leaders of a political constituency. Similarly, born-again Christians could never trust someone who had a vision of human mastery over earth, and hippies considered projects to improve social conditions an establishment dream.

The roots of such attitudes toward large organizations and their professionals emerged at nearly the same moment. Barry Goldwater, or at least the manifesto that bore his name, warned that bureaucracy created automatons. The liberal social critics of the 1950s spoke of spiritual impoverishment for those in organizations. Students for a Democratic Society asserted in the 1960s that the bureaucracies and the “multiversities” blunted the senses and eroded idealism. For evangelicals of the 1970s, the maze of a bureaucracy was an impediment to life’s genuine meaning: the simple union of believer with Christ. Allen Ginsberg’s heroes in “Howl” had been committed to asylums for insanity in 1950s America. Ginsberg believed it was the experts who should have been locked up. By the end of the century, many different kinds of Americans would have pointed at the doctors and social scientists, along with Ginsberg, accusing them of insanity, or at least, inhumanity.

Hollywood films about organizations tell a similar story. *The Apartment* ends with the long-suffering Baxter escaping Consolidated Life. He has become a drop-out, and the film’s final scene is a triumphant escape. Dr. Bock, in *The Hospital*, stays on at the research center in the midst of a riot, and continues his decline toward dubiety as a medical doctor and administrator. Staying in the bureaucratic hospital is absurd. The exuberant humanists of *A Thousand Clowns* suffer at the hands of the experts from Child Services. The few Christians who must remain in and brave the world after Rapture in *Thief in the Night* must deal with implacable UN experts whose computers have ruled out Rapture as an impossibility. In each of the films, big organizations that try to deal with big problems are good for nothing. Characters in these films all know that fulfillment, if it is to be had, will be found outside the initiatives of planners or the promises of rationalism.

William Buckley, Jr., and SDS, both began their careers with harangues against American universities and the experts who staffed them. Both thought that the university was not responsive to the constituencies it served. That Buckley was concerned about wealthy, religious alumni and SDS about the poor and the victims of American imperialism were not the most important aspects of their visions. More essential, both considered the word “democracy” a rebuke of contemporary experts. That is what commands attention. On both ends of the political spectrum, college students were radicalized against the university while in the university.

So too, the expert in terrestrial concerns was less appealing to many Americans than the celestial seeker. When Roszak eulogized the counterculture, he first followed those who traveled to Southeast Asia in search of drugs or gurus. When he turned his attention to the more numerous who remained in the United States, he found that their virtues were similar: they rejected Western technocracy. These young people discovered a humane exit from the sterile land of expertise. John Wimber believed similar things when he spoke on behalf of the practice of faith-healing, and the expectation that miracles should occur in communities of believers. Like Roszak, Wimber praised the faith of the rapturously spiritual in Asia. They had the wrong name for God, and grave misunderstandings about theology, Wimber believed, but they were not the victims of doubt and rationalism as were American Christians. Rationalism and material well-being corrupted the hippies and the Christians and those “Jesus Freaks” who were, at some point, both. For spiritual seekers, Western society was a problem to be reimagined or escaped, or – perhaps – “transcended.”

Often striking was the religious language of rationalists, a rhetoric that suggested that they knew, like those journalists who wanted a better name for Truman's Point Four, that mastery through human intellect was not an inspiring project. C.E. Ayres promised that the experts were not so desiccated, but other mid-century prophets of reason went further. The hosannas rang out from those who promised big things from reasonable people. If Kennedy's legacy was the moon-landing, it is appropriate. NASA was his temple. Johnson declared that the times were more hopeful than any since Christ had been on earth – all because new teaching methods were coming to classrooms and doctors foresaw a time when heart disease would be eradicated. Whether genuine or manufactured, the words of reasonable liberals remain striking because they spoke about social management as a spiritual quest.

The acting career of Henry Fonda evolved with the times. By the late 1960s, Fonda was no longer making valiant, egg-headed efforts for the future of Western civilization. In Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) – a “spaghetti Western” which emphasized gleefully the amorality of the American West – Fonda's character was an assassin for a railroad conglomerate. A tool of the 19th century's quintessential industrial corporation, Fonda kills those who make quixotic stands for conscience or independence or any other traditionally “Western” values of the John Ford school, values that Fonda's Wyatt Earp would have understood. He dies in the film's epic last standoff, assassinated by a young man whose parents the Fonda character had killed.

Sometimes a Great Notion (1970) found Fonda a curmudgeonly logger who resists modernity by fighting against a labor strike in timber country. The promotional campaign for the film emphasized the Fonda character's slogan: “Never give them an inch!” No longer was

the measured and cerebral juror in the jury room. As the anti-union landowner, Fonda loathes organizations that might limit his freedom and is indifferent to the fates of other loggers and their families. When Fonda threw his delegates to another candidate in *The Best Man*, he had abdicated his role in the political fantasies of American liberals. Never again would the actor utter anything about “spreading egghead pollen wherever he goes.” He portrays crusty, old men who scoff at efforts for collective improvement. One might detect an irony – Fonda’s later characters still resemble the experts, but after they had lost their faith.

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