

Exorcising the power of death

by sharon deck

Despite the great moral conscience of young people, they are betraying the past and future by turning inward rather than outward toward the world. And, although it seems that there is little action that can be effective in the "outside" world, something must be done to prevent the United States from developing a totalitarian government within 30 years.

Whether and how young people can face the challenges of modern living were the questions that two noted speakers discussed at the seventh annual University Forum on Friday.

Philosopher Abraham Kaplan likened the youth of this era to the romantics of the nineteenth century. "The distinctive ways of meeting the challenges of today," he said, "hark back to what is charmingly old-fashioned. There is something Byronic about the attitudes of today. We have enlarged the range of experience we find significant. In an era in which we have penetrated the atom and outer space, it is not the outer world but the world within that captures the imagination and commitment of the young."

Subjectivism, the turning inward to discover "true" reality, gives us no

sense of the reality of time and of history, he said. "If we have no sense of the past, we can have no sense of the future," he asserted.

The Now Generation, the generation that values the "eternal moment," is right in that only the present is the locus of meaning, Kaplan argued. But, he said, the present acquires depth of meaning and value only when all of the past and the future are brought into the present.

The force behind this turning away from the past and future is the anti-intellectualism of this age. Anti-intellectualism is not new with this generation, nor is it the sole province of the young. But in turning our backs on reason, he said, we are betraying the values that have been central to civilized man for many centuries.

"Over and over we rise above brutishness by reason and human intelligence. But today, we are falling away from our responsibility for man's mind and its works," Kaplan said.

Kaplan holds the artists partially responsible for the negation of reason and creativity. "Art is a species of prophecy. It provides new perspectives, new challenges, new vistas of the

future in which our lives can find meaning and value.

"But artists today are in complicity with the attack on creativity, just as professors are in complicity with the attack on reason, and students and faculty attack learning."

Youth today has both a deep, abiding moral conscience and a self-destructiveness caused by its rejection of the outer world in favor of inner experience, Kaplan concluded.

William Stringfellow would agree that we carry the seeds of our own destruction. But our greatest shortcoming, and the thing that will lead us into totalitarianism, is "hardness of heart," a moral impoverishment, polarized conscience, a literal demoralization of society.

Stringfellow used the book of Revelation in the Bible as the basis for his speech. "I am trying to understand America biblically, and not trying to understand the Bible Americanly." He used the parable of the destruction of Babylon, which caused rejoicing in heaven, as an example of what may happen in the United States.

It is the people in power — the affluent, the middle-aged, the whites,

and the government officials — whose moral poverty is greatest, Stringfellow said.

Evidence of this moral incapacity is all around, he said. We denounce reason and violate our conscience by naming escalation as a way to peace. We support ecology and at the same time support unlimited industrial expansion. We praise the law and defame the Bill of Rights by persecuting those who stand up for their constitutional rights.

Stringfellow painted a gloomy picture of a moral wasteland ruled by a government and institutions whose only power is the power of death.

But there may be hope for America, Stringfellow says, that involves a commitment to the power of life over

death. And, in a more specific sense, getting Richard Nixon out of the White House would be the first positive step in re-asserting the power of life.

"It may not work, but if we do not try, we are abdicating completely. And even if we lose, we will have spent our energies on something worthwhile," he said. Unless Richard Nixon is defeated, Stringfellow asserted, the next thirty years will see more totalitarianism — more wars, more persecution of political prisoners, more contempt for human life.

It may be too late. Although Stringfellow and Kaplan do not see the situation as hopeless, they gave the impression that the time is short, and growing shorter yet.

Mixed feelings on Jordan case

a journal survey

When the odds are long,
And the game goes wrong,
Does your joie de vivre diminish?
Have you little delight
In an uphill fight?
Do you wince at a Garrison finish?
Then here's my hand, my trusty
partner.
I've always wanted a good
disheartener.
Oh, things are frequently what they
seem
And this is wisdom's crown:
Only the game fish swims upstream,
But the sensible fish swims down.
Ogden Nash

by charles autrey

After the Administration had its day at the chariot races, the rolling heads of the fallen ten have careened crazily about the campus, leaving a blood-splattered trail almost impossible for our fellow automatons to keep themselves from getting a little red. One head that seems to keep popping up, that of Dr. Leonard Jordan seems to have bounced a bit more than the others and actually stirred up some reaction, if no really genuine concern, among the students at UNCC.

When asked about Dr. Jordan and the rest, most of the student body, surprisingly enough, seemed to know what was happening though few ventured to guess why. Student feeling (one could hardly call it opinion) is remarkably consistent. After summarily reading the newspaper coverage and other info handouts, 98% of the student body has the same basic feeling — the sacking of Jordan and the other members of the unwashed ten is really a bloody shame, but legally they haven't a head to stand on. Yes, it seems the average student (not a totally inaccurate term at UNCC—there is a veritable sea of mediocrity) has finally found a cause he can stand up for — as long as he can do it sitting down.

Although nearly all of our beloved student body wanted Jordan to stay, the reasons given were somewhat varied. Most of the people questioned did not know Jordan personally but felt that all views should be represented to the student in a balanced diet of social theory: Ergo Jordan, or someone like him, must be on the faculty.

Some did not particularly object to Jordan's (or anyone else's) non-renewal, but were miffed at the fact that none of them were given reasons for their decapitations. A few of those questioned knew Dr. Jordan personally and rapidly came to his defence. It is generally granted that Dr. Jordan is extremely competent in his field of study and is a facile lecturer. "Why must he go?" they howl. Even if the majority really doesn't care, does that mean that the students in a certain curriculum should have to bow to the dictates of an uniformed upper crust?

One coed interviewed wanted Jordan to stay because she thought he was "cute."

Aside from the decidedly anti-Administration "I-really-think-it's-rotten-but-what-in-hell-can-I-do-about-it," weighted apathy, there were a few sound arguments from several widely-differing campus.

At least two of those interviewed were glad to see Jordan go for one reason or another. Possibly, they considered him disloyal to the Stars and Bars, and other American traditions.

One fellow interviewed, said "I really don't see what Jordan's gripe is." He brought out that the non-renewal-without-reason provision was written into the contract beforehand, and that Jordan (or any of the others) had no legal grounds for recourse. He did not, however, think that the no-reason provision was a good one.

Of the same genus but of a different species, was a veteran student who commented that he was completely unsurprised and unmoved at the situation. He was used to such things, he said. In fact, he thinks the whole bit is rather funny.

Faculty members, as a group, were pretty uncommunicative about the subject. It's understandable, though. Three-fourths of them have the same kind of arbitrary non-renewal clause written into their contracts.

Blacks did not seem to differ much from the general drift of student feeling, though they tended to be a bit more vocal in their responses. Some students seem to think that Jordan is using all the free publicity toward his own evil ends, manipulating the student body just to keep his job. This, however, does seem a bit farfetched as it would seem that a man of Jordan's talents would have more viable alternatives than staying here.

To an interested observer, the student attitudes toward the dismissal of Jordan and the rest might seem to parallel the attitudes of the Roman citizenry at the Circus. Some liked the blood; others were revolted by its barbarity; still others were so callused that they thought the whole matter was screamingly funny.

But the tradition went on unchallenged for centuries because, however they might be revolted by the practice, they kept silent with the knowledge that they might be the next victim if they spoke.

"Off with his head!" cried mighty Caesar.

"Whoopie," yawned the crowd.

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