

# Wolfe - Americans ignore realities

by Mary Ellis Gibson  
Staff Writer

Tom Wolfe, noted author and journalist, told a large audience at Memorial Hall Tuesday night it is time everybody started taking a good look at what is happening in America.

Wolfe spoke about what he termed "the really taboo subject of class and status." He sees the American people inventing all kinds of theories to gloss over the realities of class divisions and tensions.

Among these theories, Wolfe listed the idea of a generation gap and of a counter culture. The counter culture theory, Wolfe said, reaches its extreme in Charles Reich's book "The Greening of America," in which "youth becomes the collective Messiah come to save the U.S. from 200 years of cultural rigidity."

"It's a shame so many people are believing these easy, flip ways of explaining what's going on in America," Wolfe continued.

Instead of attributing all the new and interesting ideas in America to the counter culture, Wolfe said he feels the "latter-day adventures" of the middle class are some of the most exciting things happening in our culture.

There are at least two counter cultures in America, Wolfe continued. He sees American youth divided along class lines and tension developing between working class youth and the New Left.

Wolfe cited high school cliques as early examples of this class tension.

"The deep division between these groups was later to break out into something we need to work at today," he added.

Class tension, Wolfe said, is partly

caused by young hard hats' "resentment against what is seen as middle class snobbery among youth."

This resentment, he added, is not without justification. Wolfe also accused intellectuals of "tending to build up this kind of resentment" in their writing.

"We've got to start taking seriously this kind of class tension," the author continued.

Wolfe warned, "It's something all of us have to worry about when we can define intellectual according to matters of taste."

"All of us tend to be very conscious of snobbery in others; we don't tend to see it in ourselves," Wolfe admonished. "We've got to start being as candid with ourselves as we have been with others," he advised.

After his speech, Wolfe fielded questions from the audience. When asked

to describe his costume, which always consists of a white suit, he quipped, "This is kind of a 1954 Yale Brooks Brothers negative."

When questioned about his journalistic style, Wolfe commented, "Journalistic writing is still rank enough that the idea of immortality for the writer doesn't enter into it."

Wolfe, a native of Richmond, Va., received his Ph.D. in American studies from Yale. His books include "The Pump House Gang," "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test" and "The Radical Chic and Mau-mauing the Flak Catchers."

Wolfe's speech keynoted the 1971 Fine Arts Festival. The speech was partially funded by an Inter Fraternity Council donation of \$1,000 which was specifically designated for Wolfe's appearance.

Other events in the Festival include a concert by Mario Davidovsky and Robert Miller on Wednesday and a Poetry Fair sponsored by the North Carolina Arts Council on Thursday.

Poets Thad Stem, Sam Ragan and Heather Ross Miller will read at 3 p.m. in the Forest Theatre. They will be followed by William Harmon and Lew Lipsitz, two UNC poets, at 8 p.m. in Gerrard Hall.

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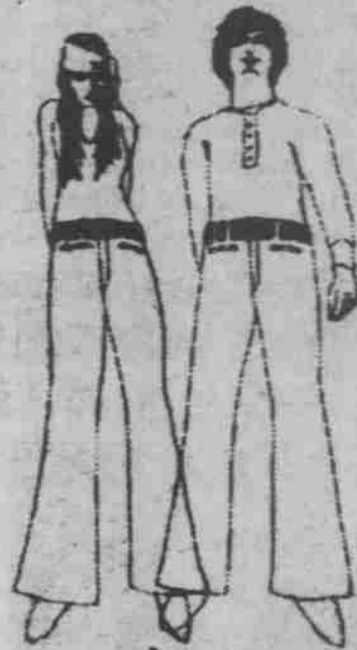
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