

The Embattled Mr. Nixon

Nixon Agonistes; The Crisis of the Self-Made Man, by Garry Wills, *Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970.* 617 pp. \$10.00.

One Man Alone: Richard Nixon, by Ralph de Toledano, *New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969.* 386 pp. \$6.95.

IT HAS BEEN SAID that any person with the divine fire of style can take the third-rate ideas of anybody else and make a million. Apparently this is the course to be followed by Garry Wills, now that he has repudiated his connections with conservatism. There is nothing unusual in this book in the epithets hurled against middle America, or almost all America with the exception of the long-haired revolutionaries, "the Kids." The denigrative names Mr. Nixon is called arise from a well-educated vocabulary, with "the four-letter words" omitted. Toward the end of the book Nixon is called a sanctimonious con man, consorting with "golf-course apocalypses of Billy Graham."

Some might say there are elements of freshness in Wills' treatment of the liberalism of the progressive and post-progressive eras, however his position is basically the same throughout: "The whole American myth . . . is a cruel hoax." One trouble with such a savage treatment of the American tradition is that the discussion of almost any individual is bound to be distorted. For example, he fails to mention the fact that Adam Smith believed in individual competition under just laws. He ignores the meaning of the American constitutional tradition. Even most liberals would be willing to admit the truth of the ideal of the constitutional community in America, the communal side of life under the law. But if I mistake not there is just no insight into our constitutional tradition. This is nothing unusual in the revolutionary mind. The revolutionaries simply do not under-

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stand the civilizing necessity of power in a government according to law.

Ralph de Toledano's book is a piece of honest journalism. Obviously, we never quite get through evaluating presidents, and especially the one that is currently with us. If Mr. Nixon is, in Wills' mind, an absurd caricature of a human being, he is with Toledano a courageous, honest leader trying to live up to the obligations of his office. For me, considering the troubles of our world and the voluminous prophecies of doom we hear, the question is rather how far can we transcend failure. No politics succeeds very well, and we have the happy faculty of ignoring the disasters of yesterday. Wills ridicules the Quaker virtues which Nixon learned in his home in his youth, but Toledano shows respect for his character. It is such a training from his youth that will help to carry him through in the end to greatness or near greatness as a President.

For Wills, politics is a parade of absurd cartoons (except for the revolutionary, Marcusean, semi-anarchist Kids), while in Toledano one can sense the imaginative perception of the anguish of the struggles of those who rise in politics. It was, indeed, a historical moment when Nixon told the New York Republicans (that is, Thomas E. Dewey) that he would not resign from the national ticket unless Eisenhower publicly asked him to withdraw. Mr. Nixon said to the American people "Wire the National Committee" (because it was their authority to make a change), and then he proceeded to fulfill his campaign engagements. The Eastern Republicans have never forgiven him, nor will they; nor will the liberals, because it was Nixon who revealed the perjury of Alger Hiss. A conservative might say that the liberals and leftists (e.g., as in *The New York Review of Books* and *Washington Post* cartoons) have no monopoly of ridicule. To reply to such absurdities is not divisive or polarizing, but rather it is laying the groundwork for a future cessation of insult and the restoration of national consensus. Political dynamiting is a

two-way, polluted race course. Of Nixon, Toledano would say that he not only knows his way around in the anonymous letter and the "Venetian intrigues of Washington," but he also did his homework, like Senator Robert Taft, and though his judgment might be human his knowledge of the facts was accurate.

Toledano's book is a species of biography in which the political crises (Nixon himself wrote about them) play the larger part. In this sense Toledano's book illustrates one of the charges against the President: he is too much the leader of the party, the campaigner, and the debater making points. But this is the way he has got votes; both the political leader and the statesman who stand above the party may get their votes in their own manners of being political personalities. Toledano's work is political journalism, just as are the tirades of Garry Wills. However, this age of crisis is surely a subject for future evaluation. There will be controversial writing about Nixon long after Nixon himself has passed from the political scene. A knowledgeable former diplomat has suggested that Nixon tries to do too much. He should be more the statesman and less the political leader, campaigner, and critic of his opponents. Toledano argues that Nixon did not understand the television media at the time of his debates with Kennedy, but I would suggest that he understood it well when he campaigned in 1968. We might also remember that Marshall McLuhan has believed that television is a medium we barely understand and that it is one that can make or break politicians. McLuhan once said that Roosevelt, while effective on the radio, would have been destroyed by television. Nixon and the mass media—the media which themselves shape the message—will be a subject of future professional evaluation.

The trouble with Wills is that as a "Manhattan-type intellectual" he does not understand that governments, including Congressional committees, have power. It is only over the very long pull that govern-

ment has to pay attention to our intellectuals. I have seen "scientists" try to be condescending to Congressional committees, usually with quite disagreeable results to the intellectual. Of course, the answer to Wills, as Vice-President Agnew has formulated it, is something that cannot be accepted by the intellectuals. The politician is not supposed to be clever enough to answer an intellectual, and trying to associate with "the learned ideologists" too much can be disastrous, as President Johnson found out. When the politician does reply with some effect, he is charged with dividing the country. To criticize the "professional intellectual" is to be anti-intellectual. However, Wills' revolutionary stance, his love of the Marcusian Kids, leads him to criticize the liberals of recent years without defending the conservatives. In fact, one has the feeling at times that Wills is not too sure about his own position; but it is certain that he dislikes most of the American people.

One of the larger aspects of Wills' argument concerns his discussions of American liberalism, and more particularly the foreign and domestic politics of Woodrow Wilson. Nixon is really a Wilson moralizer, says Wills, and he is making the same mistakes and will be subject to the same failures. If the rationalistic and moralistic diplomacy of Woodrow Wilson and Nixon are both in error then much of our interventionism in other parts of the world through two generations in this century has been futile and wrong. Wills' own position seems clearest on p. 480:

The state should not take any position toward other states except from "reasons of state." It is immoral—not reasonable—for the state to act as something other than what it is. Presidents are not elected, as Wilson thought he was, to create a new world in the American image, but to administer the country's resources in the country's interest.

Just so, but the words "interest" and "morality" do not define themselves! In upshot,

the markets America has celebrated, the free economic market, the free political market, the free academic market, or the free moral market, just have not worked; they have been myths that we may take with us to our doom.

Reviewed by FRANCIS G. WILSON

The Ill-destined Voyage

A Matter of Accountability: The True Story of the Pueblo Affair, by Trevor Armbrister, *New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970. vii+408 pp. \$7.95.*

Bucher: My Story, by Commander Lloyd Bucher, USN (with Mark Rascovich), *Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970. viii+438 pp. Appendices, glossary. \$7.95.*

The Pueblo Incident, by Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, USN Ret, *Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970. x+174 pp. Appendices. \$5.95.*

WHEN THE NAVY reconnaissance ship U.S. S. *Pueblo* was seized by communist forces off the coast of North Korea in January 1968, the event touched off a controversy whose effects continue to reverberate in the highest councils of the American military. Well they might, for the capture of the *Pueblo*—and the events surrounding it—raise questions of the most serious kind about the capacity of the United States to fulfill effectively its assumed global responsibilities under contemporary international conditions.

The lengthy study by Trevor Armbrister focuses on the nation's foreign policy decision-making system, and the way in which