

## “Bustin’ Loose”

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**Harvard Hates America: The Odyssey of a Born-Again American**, by John LeBoutillier, *South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions, Ltd., 1978. 161 pp. \$7.95.*

“No, I could not recommend your society in its present state as an ideal for the transformation of ours.”

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

JOHN LEBOUTILLIER'S BOOK, if small in size and length, is intense and angry in tone, and filled with significance. In its immediate contexts it is an indictment of Harvard University, where he studied for four years (1972-1976) and where he now continues his education at the Business School. Mr. LeBoutillier's remarks about the Harvard faculty, curriculum, and students are disquieting and should raise questions and doubts not only about educational conditions at Harvard but also about the educational situation on a national level. LeBoutillier is still a very young man, but he possesses a moral seriousness that many of his contemporaries and teachers lack. A discriminating, judging mind is much at work in this book, which is essentially a long essay. It is heartening to see how a student, who can respond to and be impelled by the intrinsic idea of value, scrutinizes educational problems, as well as related social and political issues. The diagnostic dimension of this book is especially pertinent since it forces one to confront matters of urgent importance that are often ignored or not

stressed. The plain fact is that LeBoutillier does not have pleasant things to say about his sense of the way things are going. Unlike the contemporary *Kulturträger* or the apostle of a new enlightenment, he does not make any grand promises. When so much that is mindless characterizes so much in American education, and culture, what LeBoutillier observes, in terms of consequences and concomitants, demands diligent attention. It is the central strength of this book, then, to remind us that mindlessness is now a representative quality of life; that we are unable any longer to locate a center of values; that, in the absence of a positive critical and cultural tradition, we seem more and more to be torn between anarchy and nihilism.

That educators and educational leaders themselves are much at fault for the decline of higher learning in America is one of LeBoutillier's implicit charges. Of course, this is hardly an original observation, and any number of eminent commentators can be cited for their prophetic delineation of educational desuetude in the twentieth century, including Irving Babbitt, Gordon Keith Chalmers, Lionel Trilling, Arthur Bestor, Russell Kirk. The fact remains that educational decline has been a steady one since 1918, accelerating with the end of World War II and becoming especially alarming since the 1960's, with the flagrant radicalization of the curriculum, the deterioration of standards, and the further exaggeration of the absolutes of liberty and equality in all sectors of life. What LeBoutillier does in the special contexts of his

book is to supply additional, updated confirmation of the disastrous directions of American education. He substantiates, with a timely relevance and with a fearsome concreteness, Chalmers' warning uttered over a quarter of a century ago in *The Republic and the Person*: "Years ago it hardly seemed to matter that American thinking was sentimental. Now, it is clear that such thinking will throw in jeopardy the world, our self-respect, and our safety. We can no longer afford leaders, thinkers, and voters in any large number who delude themselves or think irresponsibly." LeBoutillier re-creates precisely the contemporary modes of the sentimentality that now transform into delusion and, worse, into an irresponsibility that signifies the total collapse of educational values. Reading LeBoutillier's book reminds one of just how complete and inescapable, how inclusive is the breakdown and how it finally submerges ethical and moral life.

*Harvard Hates America* objectifies educational disintegration: a process of disintegration that, in its portents and symptoms, is even obscene. Nowhere is this obscenity more effectively seen than in LeBoutillier's trenchant recollection of his experiences in his Harvard classrooms. His first and longest chapter, "Enter to Grow in Wisdom," should be required reading for those who cling to the idea that the mission of the university consists mainly of the pursuit of wisdom as the center of humanistic, liberal education. Anyone who reads *this* chapter, who reads it disinterestedly, should feel the same kind of nausea that LeBoutillier felt, and still feels. The educationists will refuse to accept what is pictured here, the monster that they, in fact, have helped to create and have allowed to have been created. Cowardice and irresponsibility are far too often habits of mind to educators who join with the barbarians in destroying foundations. It is an alliance of subversion almost too overwhelming to comprehend. When LeBoutillier recalls some of his teachers and what transpired in their lectures, the picture that he conveys is almost incredible. Is this, one asks again and again, what the educational function has come to? Is it possible to believe that the teaching process, as a discipline of mind, has deteriorated to

such a low point? One would, to be sure, prefer not to believe that there is such a disintegration in educational methods and aims. LeBoutillier, however, does not permit the comforts of illusion to prevail: he recreates a teaching situation that, for those who want to see and understand, who are willing to forgo the luxury of illusion, is shocking. In higher education obscenity is now in the very nature of things. We have gone over the edge!

To speak in such apocalyptic language and tones may seem extreme. LeBoutillier, nonetheless, does paint an extreme picture in this book, and for those who in any way hold to the humanist values of education it is an incontrovertible picture. Decorum, to say the least, is non-existent at all levels of the educational scene. Often one's teacher is no better, perhaps worse, than the student himself. Sloppiness, ever an adversary of discipline, prevails to the degree that LeBoutillier indicates in his vignette of his history tutor: "He was wearing a long, shaggy beard which almost hid his face. He was bald on the top of his head, and what hair he did have was tied into a pony tail with a red Indian ribbon. He was wearing a light green tee shirt and scruffy, torn blue jeans. He wore no socks. . . ." LeBoutillier goes on to render the physical details here minutely and graphically, but the abbreviated quotation is enough to stress the measure of his dismay (*and ours*): "It would not be the last time I would be amazed about what went on inside the classroom at Harvard," he demurs. These ugly outer features of educational breakdown serve to mirror inner chaos: the absence of any integral values; the loss of standards; the scuttling of absolutes. To be sure, aesthetic refinement or beauty can sometimes hide an inner diabolism. "Nevsky Prospect," Nicolai Gogol's memorable story about an artist's worship of a beautiful woman from afar, followed by his breakdown upon his learning that she was a St. Petersburg prostitute, is pertinent here, and does occasion cause for warning and qualification. That is, the aesthetic dimension of any human or cultural phenomenon is not to be seen as a conclusive or final criterion of judgment; that it can even be faulty.

But there is really no need here to

philosophize aesthetic nuances. LeBoutillier shows, clearly and congruously, the quality of sloppiness in appearance *and* in reality. One gets the feeling that LeBoutillier's teachers and classmates delight in smashing the civilizing reticences, the principles of order, of decorum—of controlling excellence. A cheap contemporaneity, as Babbitt labeled it, is what we now manufacture in the educational world. LeBoutillier's incisive picture, too, of the personal lives and psyches of his generation can hardly resist one's concluding that the university today is a systolic amalgam of an "adventure in learning" (as promised by some college catalogues) by day and an "animal house" by night! Disease and debility become the attendant qualities of mind and character, or better of mind without character. LeBoutillier provides us with the "case history" of this hypostatic phenomenon in American education. If, in an old and great university, rotting conditions abound, then what is it like in much less affluent colleges and universities, and in the state institutions? One almost dares not to answer such a question: the answer might well be too frightening to contemplate, let alone to enunciate. It will take courage for one—and fortunately one does have young LeBoutillier's fine example here—to recognize that "the idea of a university" is being dismantled at a rate of speed and change that may even be (one hopes) baffling to some of the radical reformers within the educational ranks. It is one of the additional values of this book to alert us to the consequences of the continuing radical attack on and transformation of what must constitute the basic principle of humane education:—the discipline of intelligence and sensibility, in principle and practice.

Yet to speak of, or to invoke, the moral values that form mind and character, as well as self and society, particularly amid the material pressures, the dehumanizing complications, and the proliferating irreverences of the modern world, is bound to leave one with some uneasy reflections. (Solzhenitsyn's public verbalizing of these reflections, it should be recalled, brought down on him the full wrath of the liberal establishment, whether from the leader-writers of *The New York Times* or from

an obviously discomfited Walter Cronkite on television.) One must increasingly face the bleak possibility that even the language, no less than the values, of humanism (moral, ethical, or both) is no longer understood by many people, whatever their certified literacy. The crisis of humanistic values is now so deep and irreversible, that it is difficult to address one's self to a solution either diagnostically or prescriptively. What Julien Benda, in the twenties, spoke of as *la trahison des clercs* and José Ortega y Gasset, in the thirties, as *la Rebelión de las Masas* are, in the present extreme circumstances of civilization, mere preludes to a deteriorating situation. It is a situation that may, for all purposes, be called *meta-modern*, *meta-historical*, or *meta-prophetic*: the Greek prepositional prefix *meta* capturing here the full finality of change beyond change. To say that what we are now living consists of an impasse, or a dilemma, or a predicament is to be indulgent. We can take no comfort in any form of existential lyricism. Indeed, it is no longer a matter of delineating the contours of a "waste land" or chasing the shadow of the "outsider." If, in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, "the experience of literature," as prose or poetry, assuaged the modern human condition, somehow answering human remorse with the hope of some form of redemption, we are now living in an apocalyptic hour, of which pressing symptoms, quantitative and visual, are everywhere to be encountered. LeBoutillier's picture of higher education, under the circumstances, should contain no real surprise for us. He simply defines and deepens even more clearly the surrealistic images of education (and culture) at an ultimate stage, underlining more than ever Señor Ortega's contention that in modern "intellectual life, which of its essence requires and presupposes qualification, one can note the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual, unqualified, unqualifiable, and by their very mental texture, disqualified."

Profundity is not the informing aim or trait of this book. What LeBoutillier does is to take the reader on tour of a college campus, there to glance at faculty and students and peek into the classroom. Neither the tour nor the view is a

happy one. (The picture of Harvard Square is no less dismaying than that of Hell's Kitchen.) Disenchantment is a major, inevitable note heard as one repeatedly meets a permeating slovenliness of mind and thought and topography in the supposedly sacred realm of education. The critical and creative spirit is seen floundering in an Orwellian situation in which the Big Three—Marx, Mao, Marcuse—are the assigned “major texts.” LeBoutillier's history tutor, with Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* in hand, cries out to his students, “This is the Bible, man, the Bible . . . this is what it's all about.” No more grotesque or sickening picture of a history teacher and his students could be found than in *Harvard Hates America!* Where in the past it has been the relativistic ethos that has been liberally preached, and propagated, it is now one of absolute fragmentation and negation. What, one must ask with LeBoutillier, has happened to the critical intelligence? to the transmission of culture? to excellence? to the real mission of the university? The symptoms of the ailment that one finds here are not at all hopeful, and even terminal in nature: American higher education is now fixed at its zero hour; the conditions of learning are obviously no better than at the University of Heidelberg, or at some of the universities in South America . . . in Turkey . . . in Iran . . . in all those frenzied places where education has turned into a “no man's land.” Principles of humane education are now replaced by a tropical underbrush of unprincipled studies (the most recent highlight of which is a degree-credit course now being given at Harvard University under the rubric, “Fundamentals of Multiflex Offense.” According to one description, it is a course for men and women in which “football strategy lends itself to scholarship as easily as ‘Introduction to Philosophy.’” This course is being taught by Harvard's quarterback for the last two seasons, a senior who hopes to enter professional baseball as a pitcher!)

Just how unprincipled things are is revealed in LeBoutillier's final chapter, “Back at Harvard.” In this chapter LeBoutillier describes his transition from Harvard College to the Harvard Business School. All the previous defects,

misdirections, delusions, and illusions now burst forth to crystallize into one fearfully revealing sentence, uttered during LeBoutillier's first week at the Business School by one of his classmates: “There is no such thing as ethics or morality—there's just getting what you want.” No less than the “Liberal Mentality” dominating Harvard College, LeBoutillier declares, the “Big Business Mentality” at Harvard Business School underlines the phenomenon of an ethically and morally corrupt environment; it is the decadence of not only an educational but also, by necessity, a social-political system that comes into view. Among teachers and learners alike there is one registering *ethos*: “everybody does it so it's all right.” Here, it seems, the utilitarian absurdity of Charles W. Eliot's educational theory of “training for service and power”—promulgated during his long presidency of Harvard (1869-1909)—reaches a dissimulating apex. Utilitarian educational theory has now come of age: the will to power, *not* the will to service, is what triumphs in the wake of reckless educational expansiveness. “I can't worry about anything but making a profit,” another of LeBoutillier's classmates screams, accenting an attitude that defines the psychology of an educational system that has nurtured him and his nastiness. When LeBoutillier observes that “Harvard has moved towards the production of well-trained technocrats long on ability, but woefully short on conscience,” he shows that higher education is not supplying the proper correctives.

One cannot expect the majoritarian response to this book, or to one's reflections on this book, to be sympathetic. Jerry Rubin, the co-founder of the Yippee movement in the sixties, who now claims that he has grown up at thirty-seven, says of *Harvard Hates America*: “I may have mellowed, but not so much as to like *this* book.” At the same time, as becomes sadly more evident, one cannot expect much in the form of a discriminating response from the professoriate insofar as, now more than ever, we lack a pedagogy of the university. From even the most thoughtful members of the educational community willing to respond to the issues that LeBoutillier poses, the stress will be generally on a qualifying delineation of unprof-

itable subtleties. One can easily conjure up the academic tone and pattern of critical discourse, with its academic *jeux d'esprit*—its blankness: “Yes, it is probably true that we are drifting toward the full secularizing of education. But ‘standards’ and ‘values’ have not really passed out of society. No society, after all, lives without standards and values, and what has passed away, really, is some special conception of standards and values. Yes, it is also true that our society seems to be rushing towards egalitarianism, but egalitarianism doesn’t really mean vulgarization. The fact is that the drift toward relativity of values, or egalitarianism, or secularization entails the loss of certain consciousness and certain sensibilities and yet the creation of other kinds of consciousness and sensibilities.” One could go on with our professor’s intoning “broad-mindedness,” but it is all so predictable, so recognizable, so confused and cowardly. One needs only to read a few chapters in *Harvard Hates America* to identify this politic voice of authority—of enlightenment—and to understand why the discipline of letters has become the game of letters; why higher education has sunk to rock bottom.

The subtitle of LeBoutillier’s book, “the odyssey of a born-again American,” relates to his political evaluations, or re-valuations, as these complement or emerge from some of his educational experiences. Continuing with the criticism that he aims against higher learning, he castigates the Republican party (to the higher values, ideals, and traditions of which he ascribes) for failing to separate profits from people. LeBoutillier describes himself as a political conservative, fundamentally compassionate and idealistic—and, it seems, idealistic to the point of being simplistic, to judge by the political theories and reforms that he propounds in these pages. This part of the book is much less impressive, which is perhaps to be explained by the fact that we have come to grow rather tired of and bored by young men’s miraculous solutions to national and international problems. The memory of young President Kennedy’s plans for exploring “the new frontier” are too recent and too disappointing (whatever rabietic myth-makers like Arthur

Meier Schlesinger and James MacGregor Burns have to say to us) to convince us that new young men will be any more successful or any more committed than young men of old. LeBoutillier’s political aspirations,—for he has, he tells us, his own future political plans (and programs),—as he discloses them are no doubt desirable and obviously sincere. Yet one wants to cry out at this point: Who will save us from the “fair deals” and “great societies” that ambitious politicians are endlessly spawning? LeBoutillier’s affirmation of qualities of integrity will need to be tested under fire in the political arena. Hence, this theorizing part of his book remains politically tenuous, as well as tedious, though one can at least be hopeful that LeBoutillier will turn out better than so many of the promising young politicians who become hucksters. However caring and concerned LeBoutillier’s principles are in relation to his vision of a reborn Republican party, only time will be able to assess. At any rate, he sees himself as a member of a Republican party in search of its soul, for which, in a period of base compromises and disasters, much can be said.

Still, one must not quibble with the substance of LeBoutillier’s diagnoses and prescriptions, impelled as these are by an ascetic insistence that “the moral quality of America is a direct reflection of the moral quality of her leaders.” We live in an age in which the existence of the moral act is continuously threatened, and moral meaning derided and discredited; the order of humanism is now under savage attack. That LeBoutillier is aware of this sad situation is to his credit. His little book helps to remind those who are still capable of being reminded of our predicament. Immersed in mediocrity and immured in vulgarity, we are now also immobilized by roguery. LeBoutillier’s concern with the health, destiny, and dignity not only of the individual but also of the higher educational institutions is an estimable one. And it is one that, in its ramifications, is conveniently ignored by so many of our higher journalists and commentators, our educators and administrators, our liberation theologians and sociologists, our political theorists and leaders; by the cultural fantasists who rejoice in leading us through Bob Dylan’s

"Gates of Eden," inside which, as he tells us in his famous song, ". . . there are no kings/. . . there are no sins/. . . there are no trials." LeBoutillier belongs to that minority that refuses to be taken in by promises of a secular eden. His book sees things as they are, and as they are not seen by our "interleckchuls" (to use Flannery O'Connor's mocking misspelling). Inevitably the educational and the political institutions described in *Harvard Hates America* reflect the collapse and decay of a "botched civilization." The disease of modern life that Ezra Pound identified with that telling phrase does not abate, as the double abdication of responsibility and moral imperative continues to take a heavy toll of our cultural life.

Current happenings verify the symptoms and portents of upheaval that LeBoutillier notices. The blizzard that hit the greater Washington-Baltimore area in late February is a case in point. Exploiting this natural disaster to the full, bands of looters ravaged, with clockwork orange precision, stores and shopping centers, now suddenly cut off from police protection. Adults and children could be seen with refrigerators and televisions strapped to their backs, and jewelry and liquor bottles stuffed in their pockets, sometimes advancing *en masse* on a lone officer. (Since then, most of the looters have been let off the hook with a kindly judicial smile!) Asked about his motives, one nineteen-year old looter replied: "If you can do it, you do it. . . . Everybody's out for himself . . . do what you have to do. . . . That's the way it is, man." Another looter, this one a fourteen-year old, replied: "Just like the song says, we was 'bustin' loose.'" Just how extensive is the craze for "bustin' loose" is a question of life or death that goes far beyond the words from the title of the pop song of Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers. Whether at Harvard University or at the Olde Towne Mall, whether in the teaching of John LeBoutillier's Harvard tutor or in the actions of a Baltimore looter (there being a very fine line separating the radical ideologue from the *agent provocateur*), the commanding words of "bustin' loose" are shouted and enacted in ways that, no matter what opiates our "bureaucrats of culture" offer, should appall us.

## Generalissimo

**American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964**, by William Manchester, *Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1978. xvii + 793 pp. \$15.00.*

WILLIAM MANCHESTER tends to the encyclopaedic whether he is occupied with Kennedy's death, the Krupp dynasty, or a popular history of America from 1932 to 1972. His life of General Douglas MacArthur is as massive as his earlier opera, almost eight-hundred solid pages. Is it justified? Over a dozen MacArthur biographies have already appeared, plus several incidental studies of the MacArthur campaigns.

MacArthur's reputation has suffered from admirers and detractors, both ill-informed. His incursions into American politics were unfortunate if incidental. His prose tended to be over-elaborate, fustian at times. Vanity and flamboyance were part of him. Yet, as Mr. Manchester emphasizes time and again, of all the generals of the second World War he was the supreme strategist, the general of generals. With inferior forces, with a minimal expenditure of men, he forced back and defeated the seemingly invincible Japanese by outflanking them. "The days of frontal attack should be over," the World War I brigadier general explained to President Roosevelt. "Modern infantry weapons are too deadly, and the frontal assault is only for the mediocre commanders. Good commanders do not turn in heavy losses."

There was nothing unique in MacArthur's strategic concepts of outflanking and envelopment. Yet only the greatest commanders from Hannibal to Napoleon have had the skill and daring to put such concepts into practice. Where the Japanese in their strongpoints awaited MacArthur's assault, he bypassed them, cut their lines of supply, and left them to rot or retire. At Anzio there were, in that direct assault, some seventy-two thousand American casualties. MacArthur in his whole campaign, from his Corregidor flight to his Phillippine