JDW: Hinckle/Ramparts 12/21/74 HW

I'm hoping you'll have a brief period like I'm having, not long enough to do work requiring continuity of time, for a few minutes of recollection of the past. It is a subject that long has fascinated me that I'll come to while I'm catching my breath still and cooling off from carrying up a load of long limbs for cutting. By the time I finish this it will be mail time, and when I go out for it, back with another load. How's that for efficiency?

For such moments I accumulate unread clips, etc. I have just finished Geismar's review of Hinckle's book in UR 1/75. Geismar avoids what interests me most, and I think the reason is lack of comprehension. He also treats just plain dishonesties that approach if in fact they were not fraud as no more than principled "madness." Even the attempt to flimflam an emotionally ill patient through Fromm is "hilarious." This is to say that while what can be called Ramparts' accomplishments he reports faithfully, he also avoids some of the sinister, whether from ignorance of not I can't say.

My own documentation of the unprincipled and unethical you know. It is not new and it is as persisting a characteristic as muckraking. Brilliant Hinckle is. Also a common crook, with money and with the work of others.

Geismar finds "Ramparts' investigation of President Kennedy's assassination" to be fascinating; some "Hinckle has written only now."

Well, I know something about that, Hinckle's part in it, his deviousness and outright lying in recounting it, and it was a disaster that regardless of its intent could not have been a more perfect working of the Department of Dininformation, beginning with the most brilliant spoof I can remember.

If we ignore intent and consider what ends were or could have been served, deal with fact only, then on this and what I am really writing about, I think many other stories, a different Ramparts emerges.

My question boils down to this: can you recall any make Ramparts operation that you can honestly say did not serve some spook or spook faction interest - at the time it appeared? Even exposures of the CIA itself?

I believe it is possible to theorize that a faction of the CIA - perhaps even its top - wanted to end the dangerous NSA situation. The story then was that they didn t ever want to do it and did it only because nobody else was. This can be credible. And nobody was really hurt by it except a couple of reporters perhaps.

By the time they were exposing Vietnam, CIA policy and attitude had changed, as the Pentagon papers established. No big deal there and doing what was done through Ramparts was effective and least likely to be suspected as of spook inspiration.

Illustrations of this kind tend to make more conspicuous what Ramparts did where spook interest lay in the opposite direction. They were the major single drain on Garrison's funds, the major single misdirector of effort, such as he was capable of (and why then knew?), and without possibility of doubt conned him into a spook trap. They refused to print solid information and to the best of my recollection never once did, the closest I can recall being Lifton's rewrite job, carefully filtered and angled as it was.

So, reminded of this continuing doubt I have entertained since 1965 or 1966 and more than I could add, if you have time to think it through I'd appreciate your thoughts. I never did see it regularly and thus also there can be much of which I'm not aware.

Warren Hinckle

Hinckle's Ramparts: Memoirs of a Lunatic Decade

If You Have a Lemon, Make Lemonade: An Essential Memoir of a Lunatic Decade
Warren Hinckle
G.P. Putnam's Sons $8.95

By MAXWELL GEISMAR

It is no exaggeration to say that *Ramparts*, in the mid and late Sixties, was *the* New Left magazine. There were times in its sensational, gaudy, and invaluable career when you could have said *Ramparts* was the magazine of the Sixties; and it did indeed have a lasting effect on both the content and the format of contemporary American journalism. Within the space of some five or six years *Ramparts*, under the auspices of its boy-genius Warren Hinckle, carried more journalistic scoops of national significance than any other publication. *Ramparts* not only recorded history, it made history, with an unparalleled zip and vitality, scoop and range, bounce and color.

Hinckle's account of those years will remain the classic story of the magazine. I am not a "disinterested observer" or an impartial reviewer of this book; I was involved with *Ramparts* before Hinckle took over, I watched the whole thing take place directly before my eyes, and I read about it again in this book with even more pleasure.

Hinckle tells the story with candor, above all, with color and verve, and with great humor—perhaps at times too much humor. I consider Warren Hinckle III to be the greatest debunking journalist in our letters since Lincoln Steffens; but he sometimes debunks everything—the period, the personages, the magazine, and himself—a little too much. This is an essential memoir of the Sixties; but that period was not, despite all the madness and wildness which pervaded it (to my own great pleasure after the mindless and valueless and blank Fifties), a lunatic decade.

For all the aberrations we witnessed—the changing movements and personalities, the swift and fashionable emergence of New Left heroes and their sudden downfall, the series of instant hits and swift debacles, the rise and fall of the Movement, and perhaps the current feeling of failure and despair among former New Left leaders—the Sixties, as a whole, represents a period of great social excitement and color. The whole thing was a marvel, as I tell some of my gloomy New Left friends today, and history will confirm it.

Hinckle's view is more cynical than mine, and yet his book is so full of the crucial events of the period, that it is truly an indispensable chronicle of an epoch. Warren Hinckle III started out as a Catholic rebel at a Jesuit college where the college newspaper he edited took on the whole Catholic educational hierarchy. He was a wild-eyed rebel even then, and the more publicly obscene the battles were, the more he delighted in them. They threw the book at him spiritually; and he threw the book, or the newspaper, back at them literally. So it was that one of his first acts as the editor of *Ramparts* was to take on the reactionary Cardinal McIntyre of the San Francisco diocese; and one of his early and great coups on the magazine was to expose the links between Cardinal Spellman and the Catholic hierarchy in the United States and the Vietnam war and that earlier marvel of Asian "democracy," Ngo Dinh Diem.

If Hinckle's sense of farce and satire are dominant, his human values, his political judgements, and his literary taste are marvellously sound and true, and his mind is both encyclopedic and astute. He grew up on the *San Francisco Chronicle* as one of the last of the free-wheeling, free-thinking, swashbuckling journalists—a tradition which has almost ended—and it was this spirit which pervaded *Ramparts* after he took it over.

There is also a great deal of material in this book about the inner workings and the various palace revolts of the magazine. When Ed Keating—the previous owner of the magazine—was down to his last supermarket, Hinckle took it over and also began his fabulous and frenzied career as a money-raiser. In the course of this, as well as in the chaotic editorial policy of *Ramparts*, he left a lot of "dead bodies" behind him, as the advertising genius Howard Gossage, also prominent among the magazine's advisors, told him one day. Part of my own duties on the magazine was to inform opulent Westchester matrons that the jobs which Warren had promised them did not exist.

"'Ramparts' not only recorded history; it made history, with an unparalleled zip and vitality, scope and range, bounce and color."

But meanwhile Hinckle had put out that famous issue on the murder of the three young civil rights workers in Mississippi which might otherwise have gone unnoticed (as so many Black deaths did in the southern scene of the Sixties). And Hinckle was assembling one of the most brilliant editorial staffs of the period, or in the history of journalism. The only trouble, of course, was that most of the time Warren wasn't talking to his embattled staff, or wasn't paying attention to them, or, at the last minute, was ripping apart and completely re-doing an issue of the magazine on which they had worked so long and laboriously.

In perhaps his major scoop of the Sixties, Hinckle discovered the CIA funding of the National Student Association (which had been going on for over ten years and converting scores of the brightest American college students to CIA agents, accomplices, and dupes). And this in turn led to the revelation of a whole string of CIA "funds" and conduits which were financing some of the leading magazines of the period, outstanding publishing houses, and prestigious universities and schools.

What Hinckle accomplished was not only to uproot this central corruption in our society but to package it in such a way that nobody could miss it. Often he took his leads and sources from the more solemn publications of the left, or from the underground press;

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but once he had the lead, he followed it up come hell or highwater with the help of a staff of new left researchers; and once he published it, it was national news. Thus the *New York Times*—which had all the CIA material in its own files—was forced to follow up the *Ramparts* scoop with two weeks of its own "discoveries," which it already knew and did not want to know.

Hinckle bought full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to announce his scoops and scandals; and for a while, during those heady years, every issue of *Ramparts* was featured on the front page of the *New York Times*—even while that honorable organ of opinion, which also knew what news to suppress, was trying to find out the "foreign" sources of *Ramparts*' financing in Moscow or Peking. (Actually a lot of this "foreign" funding was done among the rich liberals of my own Westchester County who all wanted to have a hand in such an original publishing venture.) By this time, also, *Ramparts* had publicized the connection of Michigan State University with the CIA and with the Vietnam war in an issue which carried a busty portrait of Madame Nhu as a Michigan State cheerleader on its cover.

This chapter is one of the most fascinating in a book which abounds with fascinating and pertinent material on the Sixties. I would guess that most people in the American political, cultural, and literary establishment today are either ignorant or want to be ignorant of this material. How can they admit it? They were part of the deal, from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to all of David Halberstam's "Best and Brightest"—and to Halberstam himself, as Hinckle tells us in a brilliant critique of that best-seller. Such magazines as the English-based *Encounter*—which set the tone for the Cold War demonology which pervaded our literary-cultural-academic establishment and our centers of learning then, and still perhaps now—and the New York "socialist" *New Leader* were part of the same CIA network.

There is another fascinating chapter on the *Ramparts* investigation of President Kennedy's assassination, some of which was featured in the magazine, and some of which Hinckle has written only now. The last great *Ramparts* scoop was the publication of Che Guevara's *Diary*, as a Christmas present in July from Fidel Castro himself; a marvelous saga of politics and diplomacy told here in complete detail. *Ramparts* also sent down the well-known French journalist Michele Ray to discover the real—and utterly horrifying—details of Che's capture and death. And there is a kind of postscript to the book, called "Curtains for the Sixties," where the whole *Ramparts* staff attempts to persuade the great "liberal" psychologist Erich Fromm to allow a patient of his to invest another small fortune in the magazine. They did not succeed of course; but the description of the solemn and pretentious Fromm trying to cope with all those brilliant and wild New Left talents is a hilarious episode in a book filled with important and remarkable events which occurred in a momentous period of our history. □

Three First Novels

The Last Western
Thomas S. Klise
Argus Communications $7.95

The Meekness of Isaac
William O'Rourke
Thomas Y. Crowell $5.95

Winter in the Blood
James Welch
Harper & Row $6.95

By DAVID SIFF

"What matters in 'Winter in the Blood' is the precise, unsentimental, poetic evocation of an everyday life caught between the open spaces and honky-tonk bars and brothels of Montana's towns."

All three of these first novels are, to some degree, works of social awareness. *The Last Western* is an anti-utopian fantasy which places at its center the struggle between a Christ-like hero and a world dominated by imperialism, in which racism and poverty have reached satanic proportions; *The Meekness of Isaac* is a Vietnam-era novel of experience set in New York City; *Winter in the Blood* is a remarkable narrative about a young man's life on a Montana Indian reservation.

The quality of the books, of course, is not consistent. The most ambitious of the three, *The Last Western*, is overlong and, at times, cloying. The story is set in the last decade of the twentieth century when Japan, Europe, Russia, China, and the U.S. have formed an alliance called JERCUS whose aim is to continue systematic exploitation of the Third World by the Super Powers. The hero of the book, Willie Brother, is a Black-Indian-Mexican-Chinese, from the barrios of the Southwest. He is an enchanted child, mistaken for a slow-witted fool in school, incapable of returning anger for anger or hatred for hatred in the world of racism and class bias in which he lives. Somewhere along the way, he discovers that he can throw baseball. No, not like Vida Blue, but more like God if He decided to take a crack at the Majors. It seems that [illegible] is the possessor of [illegible] which comes toward [illegible] as though striking [illegible] straight up. His mastery leads him, along with Clio, his friend from the barrio who has learned to catch the pitch, to the major league New York Hawks and through a string of perfect games in which he strikes out every batter he faces. The owner of the Hawks—a character named Bob Regent, who combines the worst of Charley Finley and Robert Vesco—settles over the world of the book, a symbol of pervasive evil.

You guessed it: *The Last Western* is yet another Christ parable, this one brim-full with the urgent political questions of our time. The exploits of Willie and Clio soon drive them from baseball because perfection will not be tolerated in a greed-crazed society. In the face of a surrealistic police massacre which wipes out their families (and half the City of Houston), Willie joins a monastery and Clio emigrates to Brazil where he becomes a revolutionary. As Clio gains success as a guerilla fighter, Willie, exploited by corrupt civil and church authorities, uses his genuinely miraculous powers to talk people out of rioting, eventually convincing even the battle-hardened Clio to pause—in the name of love and non-violence—and thereby lose his life. Ultimately, Willie is elected Pope, and, set up by one of his closest aides, is murdered in a spectacular final meeting with Bob Regent.

The sheer frenzy of plot action indicates some of the book's problems. It is as though Robert Heinlein and Kurt Vonnegut got into the bloodstream of a half-mad emigre from the Catholic Worker movement. The desire to keep things mad and at top speed through almost 600 pages finally becomes exhausting. One searches for more flesh on the characters and less flash in the story line. And as for the book's soul: an epic struggle to restore the world through love and non-violence, which must finally fail? With all other means hopelessly tainted, Klise seems to be acknowledging, in this defeat, the final defeat of life itself. It has been snidely said about revolutionaries that politics is their religion. It might be said about Klise that religion is his politics.

The Meekness of Isaac, despite its title, is not a religious work. Set in New York City during 1968, it is the story of a young graduate student from the midwest who faces the draft. Inevitably, the book calls to mind Bellow's early novel, *The Dangling Man*, though O'Rourke's book suffers more unforgivably from the same kind of conceptual timidity that marred Bellow's work. For it is not World War II but Vietnam that O'Rourke is evoking in these pages; the upper West Side is haunted not by the spectors of people sitting in dingy cafeterias but by street crime and Columbia University blowing sky-high. Yet the book's protagonist, Brian Kilpatrick, who attends Columbia, relates only dimly to these events. You never know what he thinks about Vietnam and he never indicates that anything out of the ordinary ever happened while he was at school. "Who am I struggling against? The State? Where is the enemy? What monuments are to be toppled? If I go for any throat, it is my own," says Brian. His meekness before the sacrificial terror of war—the meekness of Isaac—is that of an unknowing victim, rather than of a conscious participant, and O'Rourke's novel is more a cheerless moodpiece than the tragic drama its author intended it to be.

The wars of *Winter in the Blood* were fought in another century, the losses tragically perceived in the present. The action, involving several people from Montana's Blackfeet and Gros Ventr tribes, traces the wanderings of a 32-year-old native American man in search of his runaway wife. But the outcome of his search is really not important. What matters is the precise, unsentimental, poetic evocation of an everyday life caught between the open spaces and the honky-tonk bars and brothels of Montana's towns. The buttes and ravines, the fields of alfalfa and bluejoint stubble, the gumbo flats and cutbanks form a kind of tragic counterpoint to the culture of death that has usurped the old way of the tribes. Death is everywhere in this novel. The opening lines of the book describe an old log cabin on the reservation—the Earthboy place—that has been deserted twenty years. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist's mind works backwards to the deaths of his father, First Raise, and his brother Mose. The book ends with the death of his grandmother, the ancient bride of Standing Bear, who was chief of the Blackfeet when the cavalry came.

But *Winter in the Blood*, quite remarkably, is a celebration and a renewal of life at the same time that it is a lament for the dead. Talking at the time of his grandmother's death to Yellow Calf, an old, blind friend of the family, the hero of the book perceives that he is talking to his own grandfather, who long ago had devoted himself to his grandmother when the rest of the Blackfoot tribe had blamed something in her spirit for the death of Standing Bear and then deserted her. In these same days, surrounding the grandmother's funeral, a cow is rescued from drowning in mud and, during the rescue effort, the family's ancient cow horse dies. Both these episodes are related in the spare, underplayed prose which marks the entire narrative. The sense of redemption and celebration is rooted, then, not in the events themselves, but in the way they infiltrate the hero's consciousness. *Winter in the Blood* is a small gem of a novel, a triumph of art and of the human spirit. □

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