

Washington, D.C.

'A Bitter Town, a Place of Anguish!'

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Washington

ONE WENT TO CLEVELAND and Detroit in 1967 to see some of the people ripping up those towns. It was appalling, but not frightful, for, if the rioters were wild, the nation was strong. What is happening in Washington, D.C., now makes you hanker after those old safe days of local mayhem. Here, now, you look at the government amid peace marches, and you realize that the society is saner than its leaders, its soldiers more truthful and personally responsible than their civilian overlords.



Attorney General John N. Mitchell says the great threat to the United States is from within; domestic dissidents should be bugged. As sober, patient and judicious an old man as Rep. Emmanuel Celler (Dem-N.Y.) says that sounds to him like the beginning of a "police state." Hard words. Washington is a bitter town, a place of anguish. It is the rule of life: men will walk away from pain after a time; but what will happen if the people just walk away from Washington? That is the threat within.

How many marched Saturday? Vice President Agnew says it was only a small part of the population. Does he want to see the entire population in the streets? Do these rulers of ours know nothing of the history of revolutions? There are enough men in the streets now, sir.

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THE VIETNAM VETERANS brought many of them out, by what they did during the week. In this long war there have been more medals awarded than in any war we have fought, polished glory. But there have been atrocities, and valor seems a fraud to some. Among those flinging down medals last week were parents of some of the decorated dead. In dread moments men speak in gesture sometimes. What a gesture! Congress should cast from those medals a new handle for the door of the Capitol.

These thousand Vietnam veterans redress a balance among us that we lost in the furor over the trial of Lt. William Calley. What Calley was tried for was a provable individual violation of law; his trial was just. But the President, we hear now, told a congressional committee chairman on the day of the verdict that the judgment was too harsh.

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THE VETERANS CAME HERE not to deny responsibility, but to assume it, so to strengthen individual morality in war. They were only 1000 out of 2.5 million; but even the Administration knew their power. It did not enforce its injunction right. At the White House a spokesman said the United States might have been upset at "six minutes of film on television showing us arresting veterans."

That remark is the tone of this place. If the United States seems a nation of astonished men, the capital sometimes seems a kennel of biting dogs.

One finds it hard to believe that we are seeing such a broad disintegration of legitimate authority. The people who marched in Washington were so quiet, so orderly, so decent. It is such people who render governments inoperable when there is no other way. Those old riots a few years back — which panicked the government into all that paranoid snooping — were circuses, really. What is happening here now is no circus. It is history, the history that people make in rare moments.