

William F. Buckley Jr.

Critics of Richard Nixon

RICHARD NIXON is in for a very very rough time during the next period. He does things to people, causing even very decent folk to behave quite incomprehensibly.

Joe McCarthy had the same knack. I used to point out that I never knew anything McCarthy had said that could equal in vileness some of the things that were said about him.

TAKE, FOR INSTANCE, Mr. Allard Lowenstein. He is a civilized man, of incontinent idealism, who will be remembered as the person who launched the program to retire Lyndon Johnson in 1968 by fielding an opponent in the Democratic Primary in New Hampshire. Subsequently, he served a term in the House of Representatives, and now he is back on the road, organizing to beat Mr. Nixon in 1972.

He stopped by recently at the John F. Kennedy Center at Harvard, where he delivered a paean on the memory of Robert F. Kennedy. Then he announced his plans, making the remark that "Nixon is making Johnson look retroactively very credible, which is an extraordinary achievement when you think about it."

Now we are all used to the hurly burly of polemics, but when you stop to think of it, in what significant way has Mr. Nixon let the liberals down? Or, more exactly stated, in what significant way has he deceived them?

He never said that he would have American troops out of Vietnam within six months or 16 months of taking office. He said he would wind down the war, and he has done so. He said he would pull out of Cambodia by the end of June, and did; said that American foot soldiers would not fight in Laos, and they haven't.

Then there is the columnist and author Garry Wills who, did one not know that he is capable of making distinctions only Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead could follow, is beginning to sound like a slogan-writer for the John Birch Society.

For instance, there were those (myself included) who commented that Mr. Nixon's recent refusal to give a date when all American troops would be out of Vietnam was a sign of courage, given the clear in-

dications, that the overwhelming majority of the American people desire to be given such a date. Wills' comment? "I prefer heroes who are not 'brave' with other men's lives."

Mr. Wills, if he would permit himself to reflect on the matter, would recognize that we are called upon, in our lifetime, to be courageous in different ways. As soldiers, we are asked to show courage on the firing line, and it is reported that, when Mr. Nixon was a soldier, he did so. Later in life, courage is needed in many different situations, in facing personal, and public crises.

Is Mr. Wills saying that it is improper to consider the courage of Julius Caesar, or Alexander the Great, or Napoleon Bonaparte, or Winston Churchill, because more often than not they were engaged not in exposing their own lives to the enemies' weapons, but the lives of the soldiers whom destiny put them in command of?

Wills then takes offense at Billy Graham who, commenting on the fate of Lt. Calley, said "Perhaps it is a good time for each of us to re-evaluate our life. We have all had our My Lais in one way or another, perhaps not with guns, but we have hurt others with a thoughtless word, an arrogant act or a selfish deed." Observes Wills: "To equate My Lai . . . with a thoughtless word does not so much diminish My Lai's importance as destroy any claim Graham has to speak seriously about morality."

Really, it requires the Nixonization of the spleen, so to affect a critic's reasoning powers. Graham did not equate My Lai with "a thoughtless word." He observed merely that many men are tempted by special circumstances to quite hideous lengths.

SADISM, HYSTERIA, and thoughtlessness, in different mixes, are generically responsible for My Lai, and for some of the criticisms made of public figures. Garry Wills has written imploring me please to learn to distinguish between Fathers Daniel and Philip Berrigan, and I am writing back today promising to make the effort, in return for which I ask that he learn to distinguish between Nixon and Satan.