



THE DAY OF THE YAHOO: Part One

It is the last day of July, 1970, as I write this, and I am sitting here, and it is nine minutes after midnight (which I guess makes it Saturday, August 1st, technically) and I want to capture the date and moment exactly because, so help me God, I have just witnessed the lowest possible point of bad taste possible to the species *homo sapiens*.

I am watching the Merv Griffin Show on CBS, and Jacqueline Susann has just finished talking about her reaction to the death of her dog, Josephine (the one about which she wrote her first book, before she discovered sex and drugs and gossip sold better than stories about canines), and she has compared the way she took the dog's death to the way Ethel Kennedy and the other Jackie reacted to the death of John F. Kennedy.

Let me make this perfectly clear: Jacqueline Susann, the authoress of *Valley of the Dolls* and *The Love Machine* has just compared the death of her dog with the death of JFK.

Were Merv Griffin something nobler than a simpering, posturing nitwit, more intent on hyping his round-the-corner-from-the-theatre pub, Pip's (named after Arthur Treacher, the usually potted truckler whose effete presence, grey eminence at best, can be found lounging beside Griffin every show), than in promulgating a little sanity on the enormous amount of air-time given to him, he would have shied back, appalled, poked her in the snout, and hurled her tackily-dressed body off the stage for grossness above and beyond the buoyancy of gorges.

(Perhaps I'm being unfair about Treacher. He's a thundering bore, to be sure; but at least he's more urbane than the lumpen Ed Mc Mahon, toady to Carson, or any of the other super-bland second bananas that have festooned talk show emcees since Morey Amsterdam or Jerry Lester of the old 1950's *Broadway Open House*. They serve, it seems to me, the purpose of producing in video terms the familial equivalent of the boring, but occasionally ridiculously amusing idiot uncle who comes to visit in August. Once a year, for ten days, it can be stomachied; but every night year-

in-and-year-out is considerably more than a bit much.)

Understand something: Mrs. Irving Mansfield was quite serious. It was not a put-on. She actually and literally equated the death of a pet with the death of a man who, for all his flaws, has become as close to a myth-figure as anything we've had in this country in many decades. It never occurred to her that she was in monstrous bad taste, gauche to the point of the bizarre. Nor, apparently, did it strike Griffin that way.

I can understand her not recognizing the nadir of misshapen values to which she had descended: her books are indicative of the un-beautiful way her mind works and the level of grossness on which she operates. (I find it troubling to speak so-of a lady who has commended my work; I was the first writer employed to bring that most illiterate of bestsellers, *Valley of the Dolls*, to the screen, and though my work was passed over for that of subsequent scenarists, Miss Susann confided to friends that had my screen treatment been used, the film would not have been the horrendous disaster so well-remembered and easily-forgotten. Nonetheless, my pride as a writer compels me to point out that it is this selfsame "writer" who, when being queried on the *David Frost Show*, was asked if she thought she was writing great literature, replied, "Do you consider the work of Irving Wallace or Leon Uris or Harold Robbins great? I write with the same sort of greatness." And since I consider that trio of slovenly hacks outright disgraces to the auctorial art, it tells me not only where Miss Susann keeps her head, but to what degree her personal debasement may be gauged. My heart dies in me a little bit, every time I see some slack-jawed straphanger, or salesgirl, or cement-worker, on a public conveyance, pawing a well-thumbed copy of some entry in the Susann canon. They dull their senses of what is graceful and meaningful by dumping the swill of brutalized fiction in their intellectual brainstreams, but if one has read Miss Susann, one can well understand that her comparison of the death of Josephine with that of Kennedy is in keeping. And so, it is not surprising that she was unaware of her grossness.)

Nor is it out-of-line to expect Griffin to be insensitive to the horror. Dealing as he does, for endless hours, with flash and filigree (as Terry Southern would term it), he encounters so much of the corrupt spirit that his sensitivities must be as well-honed as a stone axe.

What does surprise me is that apparently (from the sound, or lack of it) the audience found it quite in keeping. They listened with awe and delight to Miss Susann, Mrs. Mansfield, the personification of success in our times, the glamorous and glorious jetsetting manifestation of everything to which they aspire: wealth, position, acclaim, prestige. They paid dutiful, respectful attention to her mewling and distasteful parallel. It is surely destiny that ordained the basest utterance of modern man should emerge from Jacqueline Susann.

Which brings me to the Winston cigarette commercials and what they, along with Miss Susann's pronouncement, add up to in these declining days of the American Empire. The deification of the yahoo. The ennobling of anti-intellectualism. The aggrandizement of the gauche and the idolatry of ignorance.

There's a linkup, yes there is. Surely it hasn't escaped you?

Hee Haw, *Nashville Music*, *Petticoat Junction*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Mayberry RFD*, *Where's Huddles*, *Happy Days*, of course, George Putnam and his interpretation of the news . . . but most flagrantly, the Winston cigarette commercials, all of them personify a frightening trend toward anti-intellectualism that goes far beyond the rube, hick, yahoo fear of erudition that has haunted this country since its earliest days.

In his sheet, on his horse once more, the Common Man rides again!

As this is another of those nebulous yet very real trends—like McCarthyism or Reagan's police state-ism—it'll take two columns to really get into it, so for this week's tag I'll just remind you of the Winston commercials, refresh your memories, let you dwell on what they portend on this subject, start the fear tremors, and go away.

A young, longhaired, obviously snotnosed punk driving a sports car he can't afford (his Daddy probly bought it for him; you can tell that little bastard never did an honest day's labor with his hands) pulls up in front of a country store. Rocking back and forth, whittling on a stick, sits a front-porcher of venerable years, looking insular, looking canny, looking down his nose at the city kid. The little prick gets out of his car and points to a cig-

arette billboard declaring WINSTON TASTES GOOD LIKE A CIGARETTE SHOULD. "Hey, Pops," the kid says, in early *Blackboard Jungle* jargon, "don't you know that's bad grammar? It oughtta be, 'Winston tastes good as a cigarette should!'" At which point, from the woodwork possibly, leap half a dozen rural toughs, who bound about in a highly threatening manner, bleating the accusation, "Whuuuuduya want? Good grammar or good taste?" (As though the two had anything to do with one another or were incompatible.)

They chivvy and harass this model of what all rural folk despise and fear in urban life, and quickly show the upstart what they think of his high-falutin' ways. They dump his ass in a watering trough. He pops up after a minute, in a vain attempt to stave off lynching (which surely takes place as the commercial fades out), and recants, averring that, "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should!"

Again. A tall, thin, pince-nez'd gentleman, very likely a Professor of Linguistics or Philology, finds his way to a truck in a loading dock. There's that Winston sign, omnipresent on the side of the van. He says to the foreman in charge, in a shooty, nasal, smart-alecky way, "Bed gremmeh, don'ch know. That ought to be *as*, not *like*." And sure as hell, here come a horde of muscular troglodytes from the warehouse, and they threaten the bejeezus out of this old guy, and like the kid, he pulls a Galileo and renounces correct grammar to save his hide.

One more. An emaciated, bird-like dude with glasses wanders into a secretarial pool and pulls the same dumb number. Bad grammar. So the chicks attack him, slam his skinny tail into a typing chair and run around the pool till he begs off and joins the illiterates. (Well, no great loss; it's obvious from the stereotype that the guy couldn't fuck worth a damn anyhow, so why should all those leggy, made-up, sexy chicks treat him like a human being? He's an intellectual piss-head, we all know that, and we also know that that kind of creep never gets all those great, brainless mannequins hipped on Gregg and suchlike to fall down and Do It.)

Are we getting the message, friends?

The visigoths are with us. They are telling us that it's hardhat time, that Adlai Stevenson was a fag and Albert Einstein needed a haircut and if you want to read a book, try Jacqueline Susann.

And if you want to survive the pogrom, bookworms, go yahoo.

But whatever you do, don't come

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back here next week for the second and final, smashing concluding installment of *William Faulkner Meets Jerk Man*. You might learn something, and God knows these days that's a ticket to destruction.

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HARLAN ELLISON
THE DAY OF THE YAHOO:
 Part Two

My secretary, Hallie AKA Susan, points out to me that the anti-intellectual trend in America is even evident to those of you not concerned with the Glass Teat. She notes, for instance, that newspaper crossword puzzles now have the solutions published the same day, not the next or a week later. She'd offer me instances off the tube, but she doesn't have a television set. (She contends it's bad for the complexion and gives her "female troubles" three times a month. I thought I was in bad shape when Crazy June went on to other pastures. I didn't know when I was well off.)

Well, she doesn't need to bring such video vacuities to my attention. I see them all. Such as the raising to God status of lumpen proletariat like the football player-cum-college student who stood guard over the flagpole soon after the Kent State massacre, who refused to allow his fellow students to lower the flag to half-mast in memory. It's okay to half-mast Old Glory for Ev Dirksen, one of the more corrupt public officials to go to his much deserved judgment, but it's a patriotic no-no to weep for kids senselessly slain by *golem* in Reserve uniforms. That silly git, that muscle-brained pigskin patriot has received thousands of letters from similarly minded humanitarians, commending him for his defense of a scrap of cloth. It is a manifestation of the anti-intellectual attitude that property rights far outweigh human rights.

And, of course, Winston Cigarettes (emphysema in a cylinder), not to be outdone, has its rousing huzzah in favor of the proletariat in its never ending struggle with the aristocracy: a commercial break, friends.

The old lady with the lace collar and the lorgnette, makes the error of correcting one of her servants that Winston tastes good *as*, rather than *like*, a cigarette should. The minor altercation takes place in the old lady's stately rococo mansion, and *noblesse oblige* being what it is, not to mention *mon dieu et mon droit*, one would expect the scullery maid to fall to her knees and beg the *grande dame* not to buggy-whip her. But in appealing to the boob mentality, it is a foregone conclusion that the Common Man

is better than the aristocracy, simply because he has good down-to-earth common sense and none of that high-falutin' manner. (Images of the Duke and his men, riding their horses through the peasant's potato patch ... images of Madame DuFarge rocking and knitting as Marie Antoinette gets the original skinhead haircut ... images of Jim Fisk and other robber barons grinding the faces of the poor with their gold bootheels ... images of the stalwart country lads at Lexington, freezing their asses off ... lotta images reinforcing that arid Leninist doctrine that all workers are saints, all bosses are bastards.)

So instead of groveling—as a proper servant should—the arrogant serving-wench has the audacity to point her (remarkably well manicured for a servant) finger at the old woman, and out of the walls emerge other servants—butter, footman, cook, upstairs maid—and they begin to chivy and hector the old lady till it seems certain she'll have an occlusion right there before our horrified eyes. "Whuuuud-ya want, good flavor or good taste?" the staunch defenders of illiteracy demand. The old woman is shocked; the *servants* are revolting!

(Revolting, hell: they're downright disgusting!)

They drive her before them like the last remnants of the royal family, and finally pen her up in a sliding panel behind a bookcase, and take over the house, cavorting and rampaging like the groundlings in a castle. Finally, the panel slides back and the old woman, having learned her lesson (presumably, not to mess around with John L. Lewis or the Wobblies) mumbles in a cowed voice, "Winston tastes good *like* a cigarette should!"

End commercial.

Just what have we seen, gentle readers? What do the Winston commercials with their browbeaten and physically threatened college professors, pedants, city slickers, emasculated Ichabod Cranes and aristocratic septuagener shrikes say to us? They say, the day of the yahoo is on us. They say, the time of the booboisie is here. They say, the Common Man knows best. They say, there is only equality in nonintellectual views of the universe.

A statement echoed in the speeches of Spiro T. Aggrandizement when he attacks the Hatfield-Mc

Govern anti-war bill on grounds Nixon knows best and no one should argue with The Man.

Well, what of all this equality business? Take the ten-second pro/anti-intellectualism test: would you rather everyone was free or equal? One or the other. None of the above is not a responsive answer. Okay, made your decision? Then consider this quote from Will and Ariel Durant's *The Lessons of History*:

... freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies. Leave men free, and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically To check the growth of inequality, liberty must be sacrificed

Even when repressed, inequality grows; only the man who is below the average in economic ability desires equality; those who are conscious of superior ability desire freedom; and in the end superior ability has its way. (The italics are mine.)

The point being, of course, we must have equal opportunity for freedom. When every man is given free access to the reins of self-realization and power, we allow each man to do the best he can. *De facto* imprisonment by caste or economic ghettoization (which is what we now have) is a hype. It is lip-service to liberty. But actual, *real* unfettering of the total population being the answer, give me freedom over equality every time.

It is only Spiro and Winston who want everyone equal.

(It reminds me of the Johnny (please turn to page 15)

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Hart B.C. strip that had a bitter bite for male chauvinists. One of the cavemen was making fun of a prehistoric women's lib type. He gibes at her, as she walks past, "Hey, I hear you want to be my equal." She takes a long, pointed look at him, continues walking, and tosses over her shoulder, "Frankly, I had something a little loftier in mind.")

Which is the inherent horror of anti-intellectualism. It postulates that anyone who seeks to be *better* must be evil, must be—by inference—putting down the poor commoner. Well, that's malarkey. (You remember *malarkey*: a common word of the Thirties and Forties.) Smarter and quicker and more inventive is *better*, damnit, and we're wallowing through a world where slower and dumber and more compliant is dangerous. I did all this on the Common Man in my columns of 17 and 25 October, last year. You can find them

in my book, if you need reinforcement of what's coming down, as explicated last week and this week.

By serving to gap us once again, this time by IQ and intellectual pursuit, "they" reinforce their hold over the mass of us. Young against old, liberal against conservative, white against black, Jew against Arab, "they" will use any difference to keep us apart. One of these days we'll run a list of names, telling exactly who "they" are, so you can fit titles to your paranoias, but for the nonce it serves us here to name them as the Winston people and their amoral advertising agency which dreamed up the vicious eyesore commercials that pour hardener into the prejudices of the scuttlefish out there in the Great American Heartland who fear civil disobedience, student unrest, dissidence, change ... intellectualism.

You see, it's like this. The times are perilous. The government feels the tremors. There are too many people asking questions, too many people using their heads for the first time. Too many people suddenly saying, "Hold it a minute. I didn't know *that!* Is that what it's all about?" And when that happens, Spiro love, it means you get a plague of Hatfields and McGovern. And neither you nor Baby Dickie can handle it. You can drive people like Angela Davis and Abbie Hoffman mad as mudflies, so they do something brutal and stupid and self-destructive, but you can't cope with all the Hatfields and McGovern who operate on your level and won't bully under to that venomous bullshit of character assassination and slanted reportage.

The only way they can keep us quiescent, the only way they can make every man look askance at his fellows, is by keeping us dumb. And anti-intellectual pogroms are a strong weapon in the armory.

It's all around us. And the Common Man will go for it every time. History says so. The beware signs are up.

The question thus becomes: are we smart enough to drag the dummies up to a thinking level, to get them celebrating ... or do we allow ourselves to be slaughtered or driven off?

Think about it. Yeah, think.