

Opinion

Skepticism, selfishness hallmarks of democracy?

Notebook in hand, I went to the Wiley Lecture Series last Tuesday night determined to dig out a column. And after that "Cotton Bowl" of the lecture circuit, so dubbed by George Will, had tooted its final fuzzy opinion of the evening, I experienced what I think the audience in mass experienced — a higher degree of intellectual confusion.



Cynthia Gay

For two hours we listened to two presidents and a historian discuss international interventionism. Their names on the marquis had drawn us in, and, when it was all over, they had bequeathed to us wrinkled brows and an unsettling feeling that Reagan was doing nothing right, and if we weren't skeptical, we should be.

After all, isn't that the hallmark of democracy — being skeptical of whoever's in power, look out for yourself, and then demand more?

This historic meeting of Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford revealed far more than their insights and opinions. It made painfully clear the inherent weakness of this political system of ours that's subject to the ebb and flow of our suspicions, doubts and fears.

Or, as George Will put it in an earlier seminar: "The problem with American government is that it is responsible to a fault. The government with that ethic is incapable of leadership, and leadership is getting people to do what they would rather not do."

We would rather not fight a war. We would rather not send troops to Nicaragua. We hate that innocent Americans are getting bombed out of airplanes, but we'd rather not bomb Libya. Furthermore, we'd rather not believe that the Soviet Union might want to destroy us some day.

Throughout the Wiley Lecture, former presidents Ford and Carter and Dr. Stephen Ambrose catered to every one of the above stated fears. They each had their own set of facts, disagreeing with our president's course in varying de-

grees. But the saddest moments of the evening came when the audience responded. The more the speakers condemned, the louder the claps. Yes, the men who've made a profession of reading the public's response had succeeded again.

But all these successful deceptions merely fortify our illusions, and we feel excused to forget it all for the time being. It's just so easy to say we don't believe the administration's tough talk because we don't trust Reagan. It's easy to imply that because he's the so-called "Great Communicator," he must be lying. And it's so much easier than saying we don't want to believe him because we are running scared.

Example: Nicaragua. Carter said Tuesday we should send troops only when the United States is directly threatened. Ford then agreed that Nicaragua was not a military threat to this country. Their assertions are devalued, however, in the light of the simple, available facts.

Nicaragua's location poses a threat. With coasts on the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the nation has access to sea lanes that carry one-half of the U.S. crude oil. Moreover, it's a mere half hour by jet to the Panama Canal. When we laughed at the notion of the Sandinistas in Harlingen, they laughed right along with us. Why should they advance north when they're in the catbird seat at home base? Nicaragua is a strategic hot spot that should be raising America's eyebrows right now, not after some potential, disastrous fact.

"In its foreign policy, Nicaragua today is indisputably aligned with Moscow," *Time* magazine recently reported. It may be indisputable, but lest we forget, that obvious truth was debated loud and long a few years ago by the same people now telling us that these communists mean us no harm.

In other words, ignore the fact that the Sandinistas have the largest army in the region (62,000 troops), that they are trained by more than 3,500 Cuban and Soviet military advisers, that they've received \$500 million in aid, (five times more than the Contra aid package our House of Representatives voted down) and most recently, 12 Mi-24 helicopter gunships.



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Carter proposed we negotiate. Ford said we should pressure the Sandinistas to reform. Many of our congressmen have expressed their heartfelt desire that "we actively pursue negotiations." Yawn. Each time they've ballyhooed to solve the situation at the conference table, Reagan has retorted that we already have tried 10 times.

In the midst of this verbal battery fire, Americans once again can choose to believe Reagan or claim he just hasn't tried hard enough to negotiate. Now mind you, the administration is dealing with a regime that's caused 250,000 Nicaraguans already to flee their homeland, a regime that was receiving U.S. aid in 1980 when it went behind our backs to Moscow, a regime that sends its students to Cuba and the Soviet Union to enrich themselves in the totality of communist propaganda.

Tried and untrue, the Sandinistas promised their people democracy, better living conditions, and a free press six

years ago, and the Nicaraguans are now worse off on all three counts. Daniel Ortega heads a nine-member directorate mirroring the Soviet Politburo and enforced by the DGSE, the Nicaraguan equivalent of the infamous KGB.

The people stand in lines waiting for basic staples and hoping to have enough to eat.

All television stations, radio stations and newspapers are controlled by the Sandinistas. Radio Catolica lost its voice Jan. 1 because it delayed Ortega's New Year's speech. The last independent newspaper, *La Prensa*, also was forced into government censorship. Four of *La Prensa's* reporters and one photographer have been jailed and five newspapermen live in exile.

"Only the public opinion of the Western world can save us," editor Roberto Cardenal Chamorro said. "For this reason, the international propaganda machinery of the Sandinistas aims to present us as traitors to the motherland who have sold out to Ronald Reagan

and as unprofessional journalists who are despised by the Nicaraguan people. Solidarity with the Free World is the oxygen necessary for our continued existence."

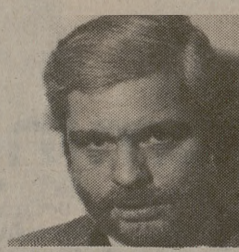
Chamorro apparently doesn't realize this American democracy is far from united. But then he didn't attend the Wiley Lecture Series and hear Americans applaud our speakers' suggestion to cast more olive branches at the Sandinistas. And he'd have trouble digesting Ambrose's view about communism: "They're sane, rational men... they want to enjoy life in peace."

Chamorro has faith that Americans can listen only so long as these men calm our fears before we wake up an increasingly dangerous set of realities. The only question is, how long is long?

Cynthia Gay is a junior journalist and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Buchanan a Washington oddity — honest and ideological

Letters to the editor have blasted him. Editorials have denounced him. Members of Congress have called for his resignation and George McGovern, indignant and eloquent, says he has "crossed a line." I am talking of Patrick Buchanan about whom, I promise, you should care not one whit. He punches the clock like you and me.



Richard Cohen

We are excused for not knowing that because Buchanan is being treated as if he were his own man — a loose cannon at the White House. Only a year ago, however, the papers were full of stories about how Buchanan was being ignored and, indicative of political impotence, given a windowless office. He himself

admitted that his influence was limited. He had wanted to put Jonas Savimbi in the hero's chair at the State of the Union message but had, alas, been overruled. The world lost yet another hero and I another column.

What was really lost was perspective. It was, of course, Buchanan who penned that now infamous op-ed piece for the *Washington Post*. In it, he enunciated the Buchanan Doctrine that holds that you either favor the president's mindless Nicaragua policy or you are, sorry if the shoe fits, a commie sympathizer. "With the vote on Contra aid the Democratic Party will reveal whether it stands with Ronald Reagan and the resistance — or Daniel Ortega and the communists." The choice is yours.

But there is another choice. And that is to recognize that Buchanan is the president's man. On this issue he has been told, or allowed, to red-bait. What this says about the vaunted character of

Ronald Reagan I leave to you. But it says plenty about the president's popularity and his amazing ability to be held harmless for what he does. Not only do his critics pretend that Buchanan is an independent operator but, in a telltale salute to Reagan's standing, they call upon him to resign. Perish the thought that they should demand that Reagan fire Buchanan: That would be holding the president responsible for being president.

But the president is the president. When it comes to Nicaragua, he has chosen a certain course and wants a certain outcome: the elimination of the Sandinista regime. The means to that end entails a liberal amount of 100-mule-team snake oil. A Contra aid program that once was (1) supposed to get the Cubans out of Nicaragua and then to (2) interdict the flow of arms to El Salvador is now (3) designed to prod the Sandinistas to the bargaining table so that they can (4) be persuaded to leave

office. The fact is that (5) the elimination of the communist regime has been the goal all along and the president (6) has been less than candid.

Reagan's intentions should come as no surprise. He is a fervent anti-communist and always has been. When it comes to the Sandinistas, his ideology holds they can not be trusted, they will enter into military agreements with the Soviet Union and, indeed, they are simply an outpost of the U.S.S.R. For these red pests only the Orkin man will suffice.

In the context of American politics, that is not an unorthodox view, and maybe there is something to it. But the president plays cute about what he wants. Other presidents — Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson — took hell for their lack of "candor." Not so for Reagan. He gets to hide his intentions under a bushel of terms that would make a Soviet propagandist blush — freedom

fighter, for one — and everyone else hosannas to his openness and honesty. Reagan's ultimate achievement as a politician is to be seen as something else.

Now the call is for Buchanan to lay down his sword for red-baiting. But Buchanan is that Washington oddity, an honest man, burning with ideological zeal, who wants to leave the world better for being in it. He gave up \$400,000 a year jiving and jabbing on television-writing columns and doing speeches (writing windows, though) for the \$75,100 a year of a presidential assistant. He did it because he knows that Ronald Reagan is his kind of president, that the two of them hold identical views on Nicaragua, communism and what history will tell about Democrats who, in their view, chose wrong.

The old lament of conservatives is let Reagan be Reagan. No need for Patrick Buchanan already is.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for *Washington Post Writers Group*.

Mail Call

Everyone guilty of prostitution

EDITOR:

Almost everybody in society is guilty of prostitution. If you want to persecute everybody that sells themselves then you'd see an empty world. From hooker to head of the board of directors of a major corporation, whether it's your body or mind, it's all the same. In fact, I respect hookers more than the businessman or engineers because it's not their minds that they're selling.

I get a little irritated when I read articles such as Loren Steffy's. People don't understand and can't accept the fact that there aren't any levels in this world. I think the church has the grab on this market of insecurity. Everyone is too ashamed or just doubt themselves and so they have to look outward and either acknowledge their powerless stature as a mere mortal, or they have to attack.

But more than too often people forget or don't realize that the repercussions of these attacks are more painful and only complete a part in a never ending cycle. It may be because of society's

insecurity and outlashes that negative self-images occur, and that they come back to haunt you.

Yes, I condone prostitution. I condone everything in life except for not enjoying everything that there is and for preventing others from doing the same.

Mark Padovani

Not leaving

EDITOR:

Tuesday evening, while driving down Texas Avenue to get to this illustrious institution, I was "fortunate" enough to have to stop at a red light next to a yellow station wagon filled with four male Aggies. As we turned on to Jersey Street, one of those wonderful, well-bred, open-minded Aggie gentlemen yelled out "Chink" at me.

Well guys, you probably know who you are. (Yes, you're the ones who turned into the golf course parking lot.) But, then, most likely, you can't read this anyway. With the ignorance that you demonstrated to me when you called me a "Chink," I'm sure reading is beyond your level of intelligence.

I'm disappointed. I'm supposed to be living in the best country in the whole world. Yet, I still encounter "Chink," and "Gook," here and there. What's even better is when people try to imitate Chinese. (Boy, when I plan to learn Chinese, I hope I can imitate the sounds as well as some of you can!)

I've been an American citizen for 14 years. I hate to tell you this folks, but I can't change the color of my skin nor my hair, nor have plastic surgery done to my face so I can look like a true American. But then, how many of you out there are true Americans?

I guess you're stuck with me and others who look like me. And no matter what some of you said or will say to me, I'm not leaving. Think about what I just wrote. If some of you can think!

Nguyen Hien Dung '87

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The Battalion (USPS 045 360) Member of Texas Press Association Southwest Journalism Conference

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The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$18.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year and \$55 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request. Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843.