

## THE INDIGNANT FALL

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"The task is to bind up our wounds and to make this nation whole."

This statement might easily be ascribed to Abraham Lincoln as he surveyed the situation at the end of the Civil War. But, these are not Lincoln's words. This comes from President Johnson following a landslide election victory.

The wounds the President speaks of are painfully real, and perhaps we can compare them to the bite of the venomous snake. Our wounds, for they were inflicted on us the people, festered in the aftermath of one of the most vicious and senseless campaigns in modern political history.

Political smears and slurs are nothing new. Some of the word lashings of Lincoln and Cleveland were as virulent as anything said of Goldwater or Johnson. Al Smith, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1928, was smeared with his Catholic religion. A widely circulated photograph showed Smith standing at the entrance to the Holland Tunnel, with the explanation that this was to be the basement to the Vatican when "President Smith" brought the Pope to America.

But never before has an entire campaign attempted to paralyze the public mind and obstruct clear thinking. In the words of Bruce Felknor, executive director of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee, "This has been the most bitter and vicious campaign that I have ever observed."

We might call the months of September, October, and early November the "Indignant Fall". No matter what the outcome might have been, this campaign was an insult to the office of the Presidency. President Johnson was referred to as a "demagogue", a "prince in search of a crown" or a "Fascist who is soft on Communism". Barry Goldwater was labeled a "liar", "trigger-happy", "Irresponsible" and "senseless". The Democratic party was called the "party of the fast buck and the slow investigation, while the Republicans were accused of being composed of people who wanted to arrest our progress and "turn back the gains of four years."

The tragedy is that while the campaign charges may be soon forgotten, the respect for the office of the Presidency may well have been lessened in the hearts of many Americans. Last year we lost our President; this year there was an attempt to destroy the image of the Presidency -- and, tragically, most of us were not even concerned!

Not only was it an insult to the nation's highest office, but to the intelligence of every American voter as well. What should have been a meaningful campaign degenerated into a namecalling, finger-pointing contest. Did you feel the insult? Or didn't you care?

The campaign itself was put into its proper perspective by a cartoon appearing in the Wall Street Journal. The situation was a man and a woman sitting before a television set watching what is obviously a political telecast. Says the man, "It should be over soon. There aren't anymore issues that he can sidestep." Certainly there was no lack of issues. Issues such as civil rights, foreign policy, defense, and above all, the question of the citizens relationship to his government. With few exceptions, however, both candidates failed to provide the voters with clearly reasoned expositions of ideas in these and other major areas. The challenger failed to state his political philosophy with sufficient coherence. The incumbent responded with a vigorous campaign, almost totally devoid of intellectual content.

The issues that were chosen were always trivial and often absurd. One party tried to fashion an issue out of moral decay that bordered on the ridiculous. It almost prompted the release of an obscene film depicting the filth which would have done no more than worsen an already degenerate situation. In a display of infrequent good sense by any party in this campaign, Barry Goldwater ordered the film and copies destroyed. Now allow me to make myself clear. I object to moral laxitude as strongly as anyone else, but it offends my sense of justice and my intelligence when it is ludicrously implied that the blame for the sins of man can be laid at the feet of any one candidate, regardless of party.

Slandorous paperback books about candidates have become best sellers. A non-antic mystery novel, titled The Strange Death of Marilyn Monroe, suggested that Robert Kennedy, no less, toyed with the affections of the movie queen. When she decided to tell all, he had her killed by Communist agents under his control.

No less than 23 examples of anonymous slander have been forwarded to the

F.B.I. by the Fair Campaign Practices Committee. Aside from their content, they are illegal in many states unless their sources are identified. Anonymous, too, were those who erected signs in Marin County, California, with "Go With Goldwater" impressed on a mushrooming atomic cloud.

Sixty-four was also the year of the twisted slogan. Senator Goldwater saw his slogan, "In your heart you know he's right" crudely transformed on a bill-board outside of Salisbury, Maryland, to "In your guts you know he's nuts." Television offered a unique approach to the campaign this year. Unlike the 1960 Presidential debates, this year's cameras chose to focus on one candidate - sprinkling a little girl's ice cream cone with cancer-causing strontium 90, or sawing off the Eastern one-third of the United States because according to the candidate and the television, the country would be better off without it.

At times the efforts of the candidates resembled the attempts of small boys to antagonize one another. Hubert Humphrey's middle name, Horatio, became a source of debate. In reply, Humphrey waid Goldwater wouldn't vote yes for Mother's Day, that he probably would have labeled Abraham Lincoln a Socialist, and that Goldwater sign bearers looked as if they were coming to repent. But even with these feeble "stabs" at humor, the campaign was described by one observer as "one that began sterile and never changed for the better."

Tragically, this sterility permeated the state and local levels as well. Take my home state, Wisconsin, for example - a state in which a campaign for governor of 4 million people hinged on three issues: Broken promises, voterstupidity, and scandal that never existed.

With the venom spouting forth, it became evident early that this was to be a negative campaign. Voters were encouraged not to vote for, but against something or someone. Discouraged from voting in the national election, many cast ballots only in state or local elections - or didn't vote at all. But this was no solution, for it placed the burden even more fully on those whose minds were paralyzed by the poison of this campaign.

Ironically, perhaps the most devastating effect of all was on those who couldn't even vote, those of us coming of voting age in the near future. Prior to this campaign, the office of the Presidency was something of honor and dignity. Let us pray that this image has not been eroded.

What can we do? You'll remember I mentioned a Fair Campaign Practices Committee. Perhaps the start of a solution would be to increase the scope of this committee. Set it up as a commission that would review the tactics of the candidates and make publicly known its findings through the facilities of radio, press, and television. Perhaps with the threat of adverse publicity hanging over their heads, the candidates would shoulder their obligations to the voter and think twice before resorting to unhealthy practices.

And there you have a problem and a solution. But is this the solution? If what I've said to you today hasn't affected you, and created a desire to see that these evils are connected, then I am afraid that there is no solution. For in the final analysis, the answer lies with you and me demanding more than venom from our candidates, walking away from an unsavory political address; writing our candidates denouncing low-level tactics. For it is only with our concern that the festering wounds will heal properly and not be left to scar the campaign in 1968.