

Let Them Eat Space

William Van Til

By now we have had time to get used to the fact that men from planet Earth have walked upon the surface of the moon while television watched. I yield to no one in my admiration for the heroism of the astronauts and for the sheer brilliance of the supporting science and the implementing technology involved. I support both moon landings and unmanned probing of whatever is out there, so don't mistakenly categorize me as an isolationist as to outer space. But after the moon celebration of the summer of 1969, it is time for the American people to have some sober second thoughts about first priorities. Before we go gung ho for colonizing the planet Mars, we might spend a decade or two making sure that the planet Earth survives, including that piece called the USA.

If President John F. Kennedy could say in 1961, "I believe that nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon," and American genius could respond with the perfect moon landing of 1969, why can't Americans of 1970 commit to the conquest of poverty, pollution, and racism by the year 2000? Certainly the overcoming of social problems is more difficult than the achievement of a Mars landing, but is it not more crucial for all we hold dear? If this nation has what it takes to reach the moon in a decade, this nation should be able to root out cancers in American life by the close of the century.

There is no need for people to still be hungry in America. There is no need for fear and hatred among black and white Americans. There is no need for the continuing decay of the cities. There is no need for the fouling of our water, our air, and our earth.

I am sick and tired of half measures applied to such American social problems. Half measures? More like quarters or tenth measures. We proceed through fractional measures when our commitment should be to full measures.

We need the full measure of a Marshall plan to wipe out ghettos and demolish slums. But we get the fractional measure of black capitalism within persisting ghettos and slums. We need the full measure of a guaranteed income for all and a negative income tax. But we get the fractional measure of a family assistance plan providing \$1,600 for a family of four though anything below \$3,700 is defined as poverty level for 1969. We need the full measure of societal care for the aged. But we get the fractional measure of a Medicare Program conducted in obsolete, overcrowded hospitals and in nursing homes form which the old are barred by long waiting lists. We need the full measure of a concerted attack on pollution. But we get the fractional measure of a capping an occasional poisonous stench and raking up the dead fish from the beaches. We need the full measure of general Federal aid to education. But we get the fractional measure of categorical aid to education for "national defense" or "the culturally disadvantaged" or for "federally impacted areas."

We need unashamed love of this country of the American dream of democracy as a way of life. But even some of the intelligent young who should know better confuse love of

our country and the American dream with support for the war in Viet Nam and for the industrial-military complex. We need commitment to racially desegregated and integrated open society. But even some of the intelligent blacks who should know better work for separatism and an American version of apartheid in a society rapidly moving toward becoming two nations. We need expansion of the processes of democracy in government, in organizations, and in education. Yet even some of those who most clearly recognize the necessity for social change use the sick and dangerous strategies of confrontation and coercion, ignoring the lesson we thought the world had learned from the tactics of the bully boys of Nazism. We need high statesmanship as to social priorities from our governmental and community leaders. But even some of our leaders who should know better play the role of contemporary Marie Antoinettes who advise "let them eat space."

I often see the angry bumper sticker reading, "America--love it or leave it." But I have not yet seen the constructive bumper sticker reading, " America--improve it or lose it." Yet it seems to me that the better way of showing our love for America is to improve it lest we lose it.

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