

Mrs. Eaton, James Baldwin

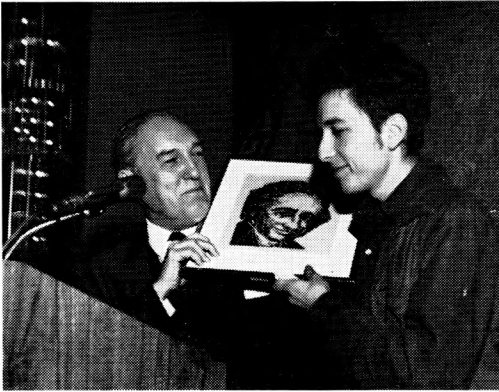
Challenge Civil Libertarians

The Bill of Rights Dinner held yearly by the ECLC scored its biggest success this past December. Some 1400 people filled the Grand Ball Room of the Americana Hotel in New York to hear the speeches of Mrs. Cyrus Eaton and Mr. James Baldwin. John Henry Faulk was toastmaster, and the 1963 Tom Paine Award was given to Bob Dylan, ballad singer and composer. A portion of the speeches of Mrs. Eaton and Mr. Baldwin are reprinted here. Mrs. Cyrus Eaton spoke on "Ban the Boob or Two Generations of Imbeciles are Enough."

Article I of the Bill of Rights says Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press. It isn't strange that the authors did not anticipate the man who yells "fire" in a crowded theater when there isn't any fire. He is a liar; they had other assumptions about men.

To be blunt, I couldn't care less *why* he is a liar. Psychiatrists are ready to analyze him into accepting the fact that he lies, so he can be a contented liar. That's called his pursuit of happiness; it's guaranteed here. They can have him; all I care about is the theatre crowd that stampeded because they believed him when he yelled "fire."

The Bill or Rights authors didn't anticipate newspapers that would yell anything that came into their heads, either; they had different



The picture at the left shows Dr. Clark Foreman presenting the Tom Paine Award to Bob Dylan. Robert Shelton has written in the New York Times, Bob Dylan is a "moralist, a pamphleteer, an angry young man with a guitar, a social protest poet, a latter-day James Dean who knows what he is rebelling against, perhaps an American Yevtushenko."

assumptions about the press. By now with radio, TV, movies and magazines, the press can spread more lies farther faster than the old boys dreamed when they made that First Amendment. A lying press has stampeded this whole nation over and over, including the Congress which often must be elected in the middle of a stampede. (That's why it's called "running for office.") I'm not advocating changing the First Amendment; Congress is the last body capable of controlling the press; but I am here to say that a nation of people who have knocked each other down, trampled on their neighbors and killed a few innocent bystanders in an unwarranted stampede *more than once* needs to have its collective head examined. . . .

One of the really self-evident truths in man's history is that garbage smells. So does most of our press. It's no longer a question of news that's fit to print: obviously everything is fit to print. It's a question of news that's fit to *read*; there's very little of it. Our press garbage can is so full the lid won't go on. A psychiatrist won't dump it, he's too interested in analyzing it; a committee will talk about how best to dump it, and appoint a subcommittee to look into that matter. But who actually dumps it, if it's to be got rid of? All our Negroes, because they know more about dumping this country's garbage, out of their own minds than any other citizen; they've had to. White women, because even if they don't know exactly what's wrong, they know something is; and white men because sooner or later they're going to smell it even way downtown in their air-conditioned offices.

Garbage it is, yet we all carry it carefully in our front doors every morning, bring it to the breakfast table, listen to it on radio and TV, read it in magazines, swallow it whole, and pay for the privilege. Why? We've been sold a bill of goods. Why was it this particular mess of international, domestic, racial and educational potage?

Go back a generation. There was a war following a depression and ending with Uncle Sam's atom bomb. The most effective statement of the depression was "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." Even then we had to be told to wise up. During the war our memorable voice belonged to the American soldier who replied to a German demand for surrender with one resounding word: "Nuts." And that's the last public utterance

reported by the press that made sense, had guts, and was at the same time popular.

What happened? Well, war was hell; the bomb was unspeakable, even if we did use it, or maybe *because* we did; the world was changing and everyone was tired. The thing to do was to go home and get some rest. The American spirit went to sleep: scared liberals, disillusioned radicals, and frustrated conservatives. We dreamed we were young again on a long, long Sunday afternoon in summer before the war. The First War. . . .

It was easier to think about home, love, business and children than about communism, McCarthy, desegregation and the arms race. It was lots easier to accept the psychiatrist's biological explanation of man's behavior than to look critically at his society and act to right wrongs. It was easier to hate than to analyze our hatred. A commitment to home and family was easier than commitment to truth. It was easier for social workers, psychologists, clergymen, and educators to analyze people and personal problems than to go deeply into the common causes of man's suffering. It was easier for writers to think about motives than public purposes. Painters and musicians glorified the evasion of meaning. Dramatists reduced human purpose to nonsense; the only reality seemed to be perversion because the hero both loved and hated his mother—and the old goatee gave the whole mess its dimensions of endless, tantalizing, intellectual mystery. . . .

Justice Holmes had the bottom line on the stampeding Boob in a decision on the sterilization of the feeble-minded: "three generations of imbeciles are enough." I say two.

How do we stop the stampede? How do we dump the garbage?

By some beautiful miracle we have some Americans who know how. the ones who never swallowed an American myth, old or new, who refused to be told what assumptions to live by, who have been living in the world as it is. We look for most of our help, wisdom, courage and concern for this country to the Americans who were brought here against their will, a long time back, in chains. (And it won't be the first time that Negroes have inspired white men to act in their own behalf. Many Ohio women, for instance, never recovered from helping run-away slaves via the Oberlin underground railway. They went on to try to free women.)

Here we are again: Mr. Baldwin, whose name, tells us, belonged to a white man who owned his ancestor; Mrs. Eaton, whose name belongs to the man she married—very voluntarily, I hasten to add; and Mr. Faulk who owns his name outright. (It's a wise child who knows his own Founding Fathers.) When Uncle Remus, Aunt Jemima, and the Little Woman are wised up, how do they wise up the boob? How do we achieve the impossible again?

For me, the lesson of our history today is that the American Negro is now our teacher. He is achieving the impossible. James Baldwin has written the impossible book: the only book by a living American with vision broad enough, and compassionate enough to accommodate the whole of the American spirit, black, and white, and to visualize what it could mean to the world. And he's yelling "fire" about the real fire next time.

Fortunately, nobility, like garbage, is self-evident. Our Negro aristocracy "that has achieved its own unshakeable authority," in the words of Mr. Baldwin, is just that. This is a noble book with a noble theme. He says: "We must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible for the sake of those who come after us."

So I conclude: if we *do* end this nightmare, wake up the American spirit, and become a real country and change the moral history of the world it will be because the nobility self-evident in enough Negroes finds a response in enough whites, not the other way around. The lesson of American history which we must learn in order to survive is that the noble underdog still is our teacher. And the vindication of the authors, the noble underdog authors, of that First Amendment, corrupt their vision as we may, is that although our free-press-for-hire spews out garbage, false alarms, deliberate lies, irresponsibility, James Baldwin's best-selling, passionate textbook for a new and noble American purpose was, after all, and after all, printed in the United States of America.

One last word: the stampede was stopped violently on November 22nd in Dallas. I quote from Chief Justice Warren's eulogy in the Capital Rotunda:

"If we really love this country, if we truly love justice and mercy, if we fervently want to make this nation better for those who are to follow us, we can at least abjure the hatred that consumes people, the false accusations that divide us and the bitterness that begets violence."

The picture at the right shows John Henry Faulk, toastmaster at the Bill of Rights Dinner, Dr. Corliss Lamont and James Baldwin. At the dinner Miss Edith Segal, whom Paul Robeson has called "a true poet of the people" read her poem "Ballad for Four Children and a President" which is soon to appear in Freedomways Magazine.



James Baldwin spoke about the evils of the segregated state and the segregated mentality. A segment of the transcript of his talk follows:

I am terribly oppressed by the number of warnings one receives from liberal white northerners, and in another tone of voice, from people like Leander Perez, who says that the Negro revolt, or the Negro revolution, or the Negro discontent, is in great danger of being infiltrated by Communists. We have tremendous warnings from J. Edgar Hoover, from Harry Ashmore, from Theodore White, and they don't seem to notice that Leander Perez takes almost exactly the same position. Speaking for myself, again, and speaking out of my own experience, and also speaking

if I may say so, as a relatively hard-bitten American cat, who would recognize a Communist if he saw one, as distinguished from most of our eminent anti-Communists, and being unable to imagine precisely what motive at this moment in the history of Russia or even Peking would have to involve itself in this domestic struggle the warning falls for me on a jaundiced ear because the warnings sum up a kind of panic. There was a time in the history of everyone in this room, or let us say the old people in this room—in my own years—I grew up in the depression and in those years a great many people—I must say very few Negroes—thought of Moscow as the holy city and a lot of us thought of the dictatorship of the proletariat as being the salvation of the world—in those days you remember there were such slogans as “Black and White Workers Unite,” etc., the black workers and the white workers had more in common with each other because they were workers, than divided them. But the intervening years have proven how inexact that theory was.

There was a time when we were more romantic than we are now and also I think more courageous—when one would argue about the relative merits of Stalin, Trotsky, Lenin, etc., because after all, there they are and they can be argued about. There’s no point in pretending they’re not there. But I am speaking again of the Harlem Negro, and speaking as the representative of people who have endured millions of promises, not from the Russians, but from the Americans. For many generations the Communists haven’t made any infiltration into Harlem because if you’ve endured the Democratic Party and the Republican Party for as long as we had by then, anyone promising you what the Communists promised was doomed to fail. They promised too much. Furthermore, when I had learned, by the time I was an adolescent, a great deal about the ways of power, and—to put it very rudely—when I was an adolescent and just beginning to try to think my way through this maze of jungle of whole America, and when I first went downtown and began to get involved in inter-racial cocktail parties and began to meet—dare I say it?—white girls, it was a great blow to my self esteem to discover that a lot of the girls were not dealing with me but were only trying to recruit me. If you’ve had that kind of inoculation it’s very hard to be tempted again. What these people really mean—I will quote J. Edgar Hoover who says—I think I’ve got him right—devotion to race should not supersede devotion to established institutions. . . .

I don’t quite know what he means by race. I think I know what he means by devotion, and I know what he means by established institutions. So let us face a very important fact, and it would be so and it would still be important if no one said so. This country has several established institutions which it can no longer afford. Speaking as a Negro, the only conceivable way that I can gain my freedom and also gain yours, because it is a battle—as Frederick Douglass put it something like a hundred years ago—to save black men’s bodies and white men’s souls there are several established institutions I must attack. I must, for example, attack the power of Leander Perez or a Senator Eastland holds in this country. I must attack the trade union system which keeps me at the bottom of the labor barrel. I must attack the Christian church which has

never accepted me as a Christian. I must attack the Republican Party which wants me to make peace with Eastland.

One does not attack these established institutions out of some wild desire to go to Moscow or to Peking. One attacks these established institutions in order to liberate one's self and put these institutions back into the hands of the people. It is very significant—I think it is very significant—that a government should be so concerned, not so much about all the citizens going to Cuba, which is sinister enough—we will return to that in a minute—but should be particularly concerned lest Negroes should ever go to Cuba. . . .

No, no amount of rhetoric and no number of editorials in any of our newspapers can disguise this fact: that if I were going to take my family on a vacation and if I had to choose between Havana and Miami, I would obviously go to Havana. And not, ladies and gentlemen, because I am a Communist or a Castroite, but for a very simple reason, I could sleep in a hotel there and my kids could go to pee, if I may put it that crudely, in any service station there. We can no longer have it both ways. One can on the one hand pretend to be the moral leader of the free world—and that's very important; this country does occupy a very important position in the world; there are some things that only this country can do—no other country could do it, if they would do it—but let us no longer presume first of all on my patience as a black man or on the abjectness of a white citizenry, and one can no longer assume that when any of our politicians make speeches that only America is listening. Vast countries just below the border and continents overseas are also listening. The world has become very small. What Leander Perez says in Louisiana is heard in Johannesburg; it is heard in Peking. When Dr. Verwoerd says that he is the leader of a Christian nation and one of the only bulwarks against Communism, it is heard all over the world. And it is not any longer a question of political doctrine—if it ever was—it's a question of whether or not we really do want to be free. And if we want to be free, then any citizen of this country ought to be considered old enough, mature enough, to go anywhere in the world. And come back and report on what he saw. Have we become so abject, so untrustworthy, that a visit to another country, another continent, another system, will hopelessly corrupt us? Isn't it a rather peculiar vision of American individualism? Isn't it true that we'd be safer knowing what is happening in China than not knowing? Safer knowing what is happening in Cuba than not knowing? Safer knowing what is happening in Veitnam than not knowing? . . .