

We Are Not Americans

by Terence Cannon

Written 45 years ago. Still here.

I

There has been much talk of life styles
and styles
of writing and dressing, talking,
content, ideology and form
Shaggy hair, Afro hair, teased hair, bluejeans
bermudas, business suits, evening gowns.
We all wear clothes around our actions.
Our bodies move
under the grey flannel, black leather, khaki coats
When the body stops moving
The embalmer chooses for you.

There has been much talk of thoughts
Our thoughts immigrate from the world
We have grown desperate from thinking
Our fears give off a heavy coat of thinking
around us
of heavy grey flannel, black leather, evening gown.
Inside them our body of action sweats.
We wait for the tower of power to be dynamited.
The riots don't, the strikes,
demonstrations, letters
We wait for the man with the fuse:
Jesus Guevara and Mao Tse Lenin.

We wait to be swept up
in an uprising of passion
Instead we are swept down like loose pages
of an unwritten book
in a narrow, narrowing channel
until the veins loosen, the heart attacks
and the last business man

gives us our final instruction:
Lie down.

We pore over texts of diagrams
showing the match, the fuse, the explosive
Russian fuses, Cuban matches,
Chinese gunpowder
None are sold in the American supermarket.

In our rooms we study ideas
We want the idea
that will rearrange the cells of our minds
the DNA structure
The idea that when spoken will awake
the cataclysmic vibration in American walls
cracking the cement, the plastic,
the plaster, the chrome, and the steel.

Out of the stone of despair
we seem to have hewn the mountain of defeat.

II

There is no such thing as America.
It is united by brute force only
What else holds the black,
white, biblesinging, pacifist,
communist, rich, plastic, hippie,
blues, country and western, jewish,
fascist, cowboy, indian, gangster
guru America together.

Blacks burn down a neighborhood
That is called
a local problem.
We destroy the corner gas station:
Standard Oil has 10,000 more.
We await the arms shipment to arrive
on a boat from the Third World
There is no such boat
We return to the texts and the tomes

describing who designed the bomb
in Germany, who carried it to China,
Who lit it in Cuba
Uh uh
The people named in those books
do not live in America.

Our fear feeds American power
Our richness comforts it
Our comfort enriches it
We are led into green pastures
of boredom and jobs
And we lie down,
gifting our lives to those who employ them:
Scrap in the mechanism building
more scrap.

We envy the blacks who are forced into
action, we envy the Indians who went down
fighting, we envy the hippies
who have signed a separate peace.

When we think are up against the wall
it moves.
When we plant our gunpowder under the tower
it gives way
The dead heap up where the wall once was
but they are our dead.

The enemy moves through America
like fish through the sea
We throw out glittering nets of words.
The smiling fish at mahogany desks
slip through the netting
like debaters through logic
like Kennedy through a throng of students
like a society matron through her servants.
The smile on the face of the mighty
is their passport.
We don't believe in passports
But the smile is the shape of a gun

and we believe in guns.

We allow the book to be thrown at us
The book is full of liberals' words
and it is heavy
like a club.
I suggest the sea turn to stone.

III

Our short lives and our bodies are our
only weapons.
If we surrender them to America
it will use them as the NLF uses
guns captured from America.
We cannot allow our lives and our bodies
to be captured and used.

We are foreigners on our own soil
This suggests *counter-insurgency*.

We begin where the enemy
is weakest and most exposed
These are the institutions
that control the young.
We throw out a fine net
of our own weavings
to feed off, control, replace
the enemy's.

It is not enough to agitate the sea
We must throw fine powdered cement into it.

We ask of our people
allegiance life long
We ask action, motion, unto death
We demand hard work and strong pleasure
(divide them and die),
The hippies have shown how pleasure
can be taken
without aid from the enemy

(he will gladly provide pleasures of his own making)
We will enjoy our brothers and our sisters
They are our weapons and our homes.

We will infiltrate America's strongholds:
bureaucracies, police stations, corporations,
armies, postal services, welfare departments, governments
Sap them, loot them, learn them well.
Returning home at day to assemble
its parts in our basements,
to build strange, exciting traps,
pleasures, and tools.
We will assemble schools, homes, families,
services, unions, churches, theaters
With only the intention of replacing theirs.

We will drum our desires into institutions
our loves into families
our neighbors into friends.
Remember what Che left behind him in Cuba:
a brigade to clear land and plant it.
Clearing and planting the land are not
romantic revolutionary callings.
They are necessary revolutionary jobs.

I call for a lifestyle of action
When asked what style of life we lead
We answer:
We are tough
We protect our own
We steal from the enemy
and give freely to our own
We defy property
and support people.
We defend ourselves.
We fight no wars except our own.

When America tells us to lie still
we move
When America tells us to watch it on TV

we go to see it ourselves
When America tells us to talk on the phone
we talk in person

When America says: read my newspapers
we write our own.
When it says: listen to the experts
We become experts
When it says: fear one another
We embrace
When it says: peace
we call for conflict
When it says: unity
We plead civil war

Knowing there will never be unity
as long as we are foreigners on our own soil.
We are not Americans
until we have created America.
Until then we are spies,
traitors, looters, immigrants,
suspicious, practical, dangerous,
young!

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