

“Wounded Knee” Revisited

THE EDITORIAL “Wounded Knee” (CMD, April 1972) is about 100 years too late. Indeed, to have been for the Indians in those days was out of step with the times. In those days, the consensus was that Indians were unhuman. They were also not “persons” in the eyes of the law, a view then affirmed by many “wise men” including those in control of the printed page.

His subject editorial, however, only reminds us of the process of dehumanization or depersonalization. It overlooks the common denominator of all the past acts which turned into crimes against humanity: that all these crimes were not crimes at the time. All was legal, socially accepted, and even logically justified by enticing words that “proved” unhumanness or “unpersonness.”

For example, Nazi Germany defined Jews to be unpersons and unhuman. In the past, Indians were thought to be neither human nor persons. In 1857, the United States Supreme Court, in Dred Scott, declared Negroes to be “non-citizens,” which really meant “non-person” in a veiled way. A contemporary example is Lieutenant Calley’s opinion that the Vietnamese were not human. Less atrocious is the fact that, in America, students were not persons until the Supreme Court ruled otherwise in February 1969. And, finally, preschool children and fetuses are still not persons in our society.

The editorial decries past dehumanization. That is easy. But none of the dehumanization’s decried was without their logical legalization and social acceptance at the time. It would appear that the “grim lessons” written about in the editorial remain unlearned. In fact, when population growth is lamented at the end of such an editorial, implicit approval is given to the premature terminations of life in the past as well as in the present. Why, goodness gracious, where would we be population-wise without Hitler, the Seventh Cavalry, or the religious wars?

Most surprisingly, 2 pages after the editorial is a clear example of the, type of article that leads to pogroms. Dred Scott, and Wounded Knees, that is enticing words and impeccable logic consistent with the so called needs of the times, all promoting a consensus with the seductive “everybody knows that it is all right.” I am now referring, of course, to N. Shainess’ article, “Toward A New Feminine Psychology.” It is difficult •to take great issue with Dr. Shainess, except in three areas.

First, Dr. Shainess believes “the abortion issue is central to feminine psychology. Because it involves the question of mastery of reproductive life, as opposed to passive submission to chance and fate.” It would be just as valid, however. To argue that war is central to masculine psychology for the same reason—in fact, war used to be just that.

Letter to Editor

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Second, Dr. Shainess decries war as not only singularly masculine, but as “an institutionalized form of murder, which is antithetical to human survival,” The same could be said for abortion, however, i.e. it is singularly feminine, an institutionalized form of killing, and antithetical to human survival. In addition, there are no personal justifications for abortion that do not have their social equivalents to justify war. Dr. Shainess’ article is really an equation:

$$\frac{\text{Female}}{\text{Male}} = \frac{\text{Active receptivity}}{\text{Active penetration}} = \frac{\text{Abortion}}{\text{War}}$$

Third, and of more importance than anything else, is Dr. Shainess’ overlooking the obsolescence of the psychology of male or female. The equation is indeed out of date. This is because the horizon holds the psychology of “humanbeingness” (or more exact, the psychology of relationship). With the arrival of this psychology, responsibility to one another (any-one-any-other) will make war, abortion, and all other anti-life acts unnecessary including those mentioned in the subject editorial.

But, for the nonce, we treat the fetus as the Indian was treated, and we weep only for the latter. Have we forgotten that there is little written about fetuses today that does not have its counterpart for the Indians 100 years ago, the Jews in Nazi Germany, or the Negroes in the days of Dred Scott? Is not abortion the Wounded Knee of our time? Was not a pro-life Posture the only way to have avoided all of humankind’s disastrous past?