

Popular culture--

By Dr. John J. Fritschier

## You are in the midst of the 2nd American Revolution

Ed. Note: Dr. Fritschier writes in a serious vein this month about the interaction of art with our new rough-and-tumble American society. He here gives candid opinions on the secularizing, revolutionary world parents can expect

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No matter what your opinion of the Chicago Seven trial, one fact is unmistakably clear. The arts, especially film, are of immense import to our revolutionary times. This came personally clear to me on New Year's afternoon, 1970.

It was a cold and gray day, a bad way to begin the new decade in Chicago. The political climate was even more depressing than the weather. Costa-Gavras' film "Z" had opened a few days earlier. Word-of-mouth said "Z" was good. I called some friends and took off.

I'll not soon forget that beginning of this year sitting next to Abbie Hoffman watching him watching "Z." I had the sick feeling the film was about Abbie and I wanted to ask Anita, his wife, if she felt that, too. Seven weeks later, another of the Chicago Seven, Tom Hayden, stood in a middle-America courtroom saying on his day of sentencing that he felt as if he were a character in "Z." It was no accident that at the same time as the trial, a film was in town to comment on the difference between politics and justice.

Now "Z" has five Academy Award nominations and five of the Chicago Seven have maximum prison sentences.

### Chicago, that bogglin' town

Chicago at best is a strange, artless place. Southern Blacks moving North don't move to Chicago. They move to 63rd and Cottage Grove in Chicago. Displaced Southern Whites locate around Belmont or Argyle in Chicago and prey nights on the homosexuals cruising solitary in middle Lincoln park. The Patch, a



### Receives joint film award

NEW YORK -- The French-made film, "Z," has received the joint award of excellence from the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures. The annual award from the national Protestant and Catholic film agencies called the motion picture "a deceptively simple, exciting action narrative of outstanding artistry which, in passionately protesting a particular instance of political injustice, confronts the mature viewer with the implications of these events for himself and the family of man." In the scene above, a riot breaks out at a rally where a political leader is killed. (RNS)

gang that grows out of the Catholic basketball courts up around Loyola Avenue, is neither as feisty nor as infamous as the militant Blackstone Rangers, but the Patch spawns more police vocations than any other gang in Chicago.

The People's park at Halsted and Armitage is rocks since its neighborhood sponsor was murdered late last summer. He and his wife were killed while a friend of mine sat studying late next door. The next morning the detectives wondered why he had heard nothing; and he looked out on the play-yard swings of the children with the dead parents and said again, no, he had heard nothing.

The Spanish-American Young Lords gang continues making into a daycare center the local Protestant church emptied by the changing neighborhood. The Coven, a diabolical rock music group, can be reached c/o Dunwich, 25 East Chestnut, Chicago.

WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) has its main chapter for the Women's Liberation Front in Chicago. And the blue and white cop cars are everywhere, sudden and tough, keeping all these parts and pieces in tight control.

## **Entertainment's place**

No matter what the fine line between police protection and police state, the Chicago fact is clear that the city's population is divided. Some support the police as protection against the lawless; others say the police themselves are the lawless. Fear and over-reaction are the tunes they're fiddling in the city that has once already burned.

One side or the other overreacted outside the Hilton during the 1968 Democratic convention. Since then more and more dissatisfied ordinary people have been dropping out. Haskell Wexler's beautiful "Medium Cool" — a film about how art might explain a riotous society — could not find an audience in Chicago.

The "Sun-Times" liberal film critic Roger Ebert gave Wexler's film four reviews trying to hypo it as a must-see. As a socially responsible critic, Ebert knows how art can clarify a confusing social situation. But he knows the double frustration of the artist in Chicago even better. "Reviewing a' frothy piece of entertainment," Ebert said, 'is a futile enterprise on the day when William Kunstler was sent to jail for four years and seven days."

Art in Chicago has hardly fared well, The movies are censored by the Chicago Film Board, a group of ladies whose credentials are (rumor has it) that they are widows of machine-politicians.

If the musical "Hair" is representative of Chicago commercial theater, then Chicago "Hair" — unlike New York or LA "Hair" — is stripped of social comment dialogue.

Chicago "Hair" sings pre-censored set lyrics and ad libs little satire. Only the poster "DIAL-A-BEATING: PO5-1515" — sneaked into a mob scene — makes any reference to the Chicago police by giving the fuzz' phone number. Art is obviously having a hard time in the city the kids call "Prague West."

## **Tax art, exempt churches**

Chicago's head like Chicago's location is central Mid-America, without the extremities of either Coast. So it's no wonder art can barely survive. Acting out of 300 years of repressive Founding-Father Calvinism, the U.S. government continues to tax art and exempt churches.

This inequity ignores the radical connection between art and religion: that both once performed the same function. They both mean to sort out man's relationship with other men and all men's relationship to their universe.

Even politically Catholic Chicago is paring back its piety. Religious orders are now restricted from buying any more old non-taxable mansions on North Sheridan Road, two and three blocks south of Loyola university on Lake Michigan.

The city prefers instead that plush residential high-rises (highly taxable) replace the razed manses so that 3,000 taxpayers stack up on a lot formerly occupied by a family of seven.

### **Nixon and the arts**

Chicago is typical of the tax ground that institutional religion is losing just this side of Madelyn Murray O'Hare. This past year, in fact, as Chicago took frown at its multiple religious exemptions, the same city's International Film festival was declared, at long last, tax-exempt to insure its artful survival.

While a move in the right direction, it is roughly equivalent to President Nixon appropriating \$35 million this year to promote culture. This entire annual cost — \$35 million — is spent every 10 hours by the U.S. in Vietnam.

Up to this year, the most the U. S. spent annually on the arts was \$20 million. This is a global scandal when nearly every other government makes provision to sustain cultural activities through the arts and humanities. Not through militarism and violence, but through the arts does a nation preserve and promote its heritage of civilization.

### **Parents, kids, and revolution**

Despite the fact it's fashionable to knock Chicago, this appraisal is only accidentally fashionable.

The Chicago Seven, free on bond, are preparing a film of their exploits. They'll act it themselves in the streets where -it-happened-with-the-original-cast. They will film their own "Z" in a city so uptight it's surprising the Film Censor board let "Z" and its message ever be screened there.

I suspect the board didn't realize the underlying implications of "Z," a French film made in Algeria about Greece — and about the Chicago-like society that spreads across America. The point is the Seven, like "Z's" director Costa Garvas, are turning to art to make the score they couldn't make in the Mid-American streets and Mid-American courts.

Maybe art can make sense out of disordered human reality. If so, then America's social reality is certainly disordered enough to give art a try. The possibility, at least, is enough that our short shrift of the popular arts ought to make us nationally embarrassed.

Half the kids in our primary schools won't finish high school. One-third of the kids who make it to high school won't graduate. If so few Americans finish even lower level education, then the informal education provided through the open-minded arts seems a likely avenue into their unfilled minds.

Everyone sees some TV, some movies, some magazines and newspapers. The point here is: the popular arts of our popular culture can be more meaningful than frothy fluff and nonsense.

### **A personal note**

Maybe this week's column is too defensive, but if more parents with their children would look somewhere for some social answers about what it is to be human in our crazy society, then maybe I won't be tear-gassed again as I was last Wednesday while lecturing before 200 teachers at a Midwestern University convocation. The students blamed the police and the police blamed the students.

I blame whoever was short in the art communication, That's a short-circuit which society can't afford. Tear gas is frightening in a crowd where 12 thousand dollars worth of damage is done. And we can all expect more of this from people and police alike before the Second American Revolution is over.

I'm still looking for an alternative to the coming violence,