

Associate editor Wayne Lutton discusses how *The Camp of the Saints* was received by reviewers when it first appeared in the United States in 1975, and illustrates this with excerpts from some of the many reviews that were published.

The Emergence of a "Classic"

By Wayne Lutton

"Forget *Jaws* and *The Towering Inferno*.

This is the ultimate disaster novel."

—from an ad in the *New York Times*
August 19, 1975

The Camp of the Saints first appeared in France in 1973. It soon became a best-seller and foreign rights were sold. By November 1973, the Trade Division of the respected New York firm of Charles Scribner's Sons contracted to publish an English-language edition. Scribner's secured the services of Norman Shapiro of Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, to translate the novel. *The Camp* was released in this country in the late Summer of 1975.

The book was immediately attacked by the guardians of liberal opinion. Paul Gray fired one of the first salvos in the August 4, 1975 issue of *Time* magazine. Under the title of "Poor White Trash," Gray dismissed it as a "harangue" and a "bilious tirade" that read as if it had "come off a mimeograph machine in some dank cellar." He accused Raspail, and by clear implication his American publisher, of "exacerbating" racial enmity.

The editors of *The New York Times* found the book so offensive that they published two attacks on it, the first in their issue for Wednesday, August 13, 1975 where Richard Lingeman fumed that "reading Jean Raspail's novel *The Camp of the Saints* is like being trapped at a cocktail party with a normal-looking fellow who suddenly starts a perfervid racist diatribe." As far as Mr. Lingeman was concerned, "on the subject of race [Raspail] apparently becomes a bit loony." Dubbing him "the white man's Franz Fanon," Lingeman dismissed his assumptions as "preposterous" and the story as "grotesquely orchestrated." The novel is "bilge," he warned.

After this panning by America's "newspaper of record" failed to kill sales of the book, the Sunday *New York Times Book Review* launched a second attack on October 5, 1975. If readers and other book reviewers who take their "cue" from the editors of *The Times* didn't get the message the first time, Thomas Lask repeated the charge that the story line was "preposterous." Granting that "we may need the message," Lask chided the author for engaging in "windy rhetoric." *The Camp's* "moral is overwhelmed by its flaws as a work of art: the narrative is sluggish, the symbolism banal, the scolding tone an affront to the readers."

The New York Times "line" was parroted by other reviewers, especially on the East Coast. Representative of these was the review written by short-story writer and critic Silvia Tennenbaum for *Long Island Newsday* of September 10, 1975. Ms. Tennenbaum called it a "Fascist fantasy...a disgusting book" purveying a theme that was "hideously corrupt." "Fascist rhetoric" marred what she emphasized was "the crudest kind of propaganda, the kind that works on our deepest fears and exploits our hidden disaffections. It is, as I said in the beginning of this review, a truly disgusting book."

To Bruce Allen, in *The Providence Journal*, September 28, 1975, *The Camp* was "a jerrybuilt nightmare," a "diatribe," and a "psychotic fantasy." Moreover, the story was "foolishly conceived" and "blindly over-written." Finally, his Rhode Island readers were advised that Raspail's novel was simply "a dull and stupid book." So there was certainly no need to go out and purchase a copy.

Further afield, one Virgil Miller Newton Jr., writing for the *Tampa Tribune* of September 5, 1975, complained that his editor had forced him to review what amounted to "a flood of bilious exacerbation from France."

Conceding that Raspail was an award-winning author in France, the Florida critic noted that his work "hasn't raised a ripple in the more realistic American literary world." Newton the Younger came up with a new literary twist of the knife: he attributed much of Raspail's "vitriol" to the "fact" that Frenchmen were haunted by an apparently congenital inferiority complex. "Today France is nothing more than a second-rate country and not a very good one in our industrial age. This, of course, has left the modern Frenchman in quite a quandary." As a consequence, Newton declared, Raspail was simply exhibiting the French sense of frustration when he created a scenario for the end of Western civilization.

Not to worry. From the comfort and relative security of Tampa Bay, Mr. Newton opined that "of course the world faces a great problem in feeding the population explosion during the next 25 years. But I personally don't think we're going to face a racial apocalypse....The brains who gave the world television, nuclear energy, the computer, and put a man on the moon can solve this problem, and without French leadership, too."

To the dismay of the Smart Set, *The Camp of the*

Saints did not die a quick death and expire on the remainder tables. James J. Kilpatrick highlighted the novel in both his widely syndicated newspaper column and in the pages of *Nation's Business*. Dartmouth English Professor Jeffrey Hart praised it in *National Review*. In addition, smaller-market newspapers and journals across the country praised the novel and encouraged their readers to buy it. Thanks to the efforts of independent-minded editors and reviewers, word of *The Camp's* existence spread, and the book became a success.

No small part of *The Camp's* initial success in the American market, and its enduring readability, was due to the English-language edition prepared by Professor Shapiro. The task of translating any work of literature is not an easy one, especially where the author makes allusions to places, people, and events that are not necessarily familiar to even educated foreign readers, as was true in several instances in Raspail's novel. Quite aside from its "message," the Shapiro translation of *The Camp of the Saints* remains a work of genuine literary merit.

Further, Professor Shapiro took to answering some of the most outrageous attacks on the book. For example, in response to Silvia Tennenbaum's review in *Newsday*, Dr. Shapiro observed that "it shouldn't take much literary acumen to realize that it was *intended* to shake up the complacent ostrich mentality to an awareness of the major problem of our time: overpopulation...." Elsewhere he pointed out that *The Camp of the Saints* is not "a propagandistic, racist tract, but an intentionally graphic warning of what may well happen to our world if we ignore the real villain of the piece: overpopulation."

Unfortunately, anyone consulting *Book Review Digest* or other literary indexes will not be apprised of the fact that *The Camp* received such wide acclaim in the United States, especially in smaller publications. We are pleased to be able to offer excerpts from a number of the favorable reviews:

John Barkham
Syndicated Book Reviewer
July 23, 1975

This book is a French entry in the fiction disaster stakes, and, as you might expect, it is more logical and less imminent than its American counterparts. But its scale is apocalyptic and its implications awesome. It leaves flaming skyscrapers, sinking liners, and even earthquakes as simple local problems. How can you top the racial clash of civilizations postulated in this vivid French-novel?

To call it terrifying would be an exaggeration, but that is likely to be the impression it leaves on more thoughtful readers, for what Jean Raspail pictures is a global Golgotha...His novel is predicated on the supposition that the population time-bomb ticking away in India and elsewhere in the Third World will reach explosive force around the beginning of the next century. Then, according to present projection, the human population of the planet will have reached seven billion, less than a tenth of whom will be white.

It is not a pleasant situation to contemplate. Raspail has done more than contemplate it: He has painted a fictional but depressingly convincing picture of the human catastrophe which conceivably would occur. The eruption is triggered by Belgium, which, as an act of benevolence, adopts some 40,000 starving Indians from the gutters of Calcutta. For them, life in Belgium's white society is the purest nirvana. Like wildfire the word spreads through India. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of Indian mendicants ask, demand to be "adopted" by Europeans.

But no European country wants to be overwhelmed by blacks, browns, and yellow people. The Third World comes anyway in an armada of ancient ships. Europe braces for invasion by almost a million starving, desperate people. France is the center of the crisis. What will the French do?

New York, Paris, Rome, London and other capitals become armed fortresses. The Third World has discovered that the white race is rich, and to be rich is better than to be poor. What began as an essay in Christian charity by the Belgians has turned into a race war with whites about to be engulfed by swarms of nonwhites. Raspail's imagination is totally unfettered....

No wonder this novel has created such a deep impression in Europe. It sounds a startling tocsin, and whether you accept

Raspail's nightmare or not, his premises are sound. Nature has a way of dealing with overpopulation by any species, and if it doesn't happen to the human race as blueprinted here, it could happen some other way. This is a story to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest, especially by those under 40.

Book Browsing
The Charlotte Observer
August 3, 1975

If you want to be in the international literary "with-it" group, grab *The Camp of the Saints* by Jean Raspail. Already acclaimed in Europe the novel struck me as a combination moral *Jaws* and *Brave New World*...It's macabre, chilling, overdone, but it makes a point. And the point is vital. The tide is pushing it ever closer to you and me.

Henry Orland
St. Louis Globe Democrat
August 9-10, 1975

At sore points of history mankind is often graced with genial thinkers, prophets, writers who are able to put their fingertips on wounds developing or festering in the *corpus humanus*. A generation ago Orwell and Huxley set ominous problems before us; and we still grapple with them. Now there is Jean Raspail. The Academie Francaise was farsighted enough to award him the Jean-Walther Prize (1970) before he had written this apocalyptic novel. After having read *The Camp* I rank him above most Academicians. The translation is a work of art.

Raspail's basic premises are irrefutable: in a very short time the Third World population will outnumber the inhabitants of the Developed World by almost eight to one; essential resources will become scarcer, and many familiar issues will be perceived in racial terms. Few people are willing to face these chilling facts. Raspail digs into them with existential relish....

The Camp is not a sociological treatise, nor a symbol-laden philosophical dissection of the erosion of Western Civilization. It is a gripping piece of fiction projected into a future practically upon us....

With a pinch of passion and ironic eloquence, the author uncovers the ineluctable truth: the greatest threat to our most cherished values—freedom, com-*passion*—is the population bomb. He does it with great stylistic aplomb, through discomforting, infuriating detail,

and with enervating verve. No reader can remain unaffected by the questions raised in this compelling novel. Raspail has succeeded in challenging the contemporary mind, and, hopefully, shocking it into healing action before it is too late.

Richard Langford
The Weekender
August 3, 1975

The Camp of the Saints attracted much attention in Europe and has been a best seller in France. By Jean Raspail, the novel describes the end of the white world and the beginning of the black.

The novel takes place in the near future, at a time when the poor, impoverished, starving nations suddenly decide to abandon their homes and descend in multitudes upon the West....

Simultaneously, in New York, London, Manila, and in Latin America and Australia, huge masses of "have nots" leave the ghettos and begin the peaceful takeover of the wealthy, mostly independent portions of every city. Part of the power this novel asserts stems from the presentation of political, official discussion of how to handle the huge social changes taking place. The rationalizing, moralizing, confused mouthings of the more liberal "haves" ends in ironic self-defeat. Religious leaders, teachers, news editors, TV journalists, all see the upheaval in the light of their individual motives, and each is consumed in his own passion.

The Camp of the Saints is dramatic, satiric, strong medicine for liberals and "bleeding hearts." It offers an apocalyptic vision that is all too valid, given known population figures and the decision by most nations simply to ignore the future....

The Camp of the Saints ... will be attacked by liberals, and its chilling vision of the final submission of the western world to the eastern is a nightmare as frightening as it is probable. Jean Raspail's novel is a major contribution to the swirling discussion of human survival, and it may very well change some minds. If it does, then it could affect the outcome of the very situation it discusses, thus offering again evidence of the power of fiction. Suspenseful and compelling as this fiction is, it may very well become truth—or change the course of events in such a way that the novel's very existence prevents the apocalypse it predicts. That kind of fiction is, indeed,

powerful, and *The Camp of the Saints* is just that kind of fiction.

Alfred Coppel
Peninsula Living
August 9, 1975

I cannot recall when, if ever, I have read a book of such stunning force and disturbing content as Jean Raspail's *The Camp of the Saints*. I am no stranger to the apocalyptic novel but this work has invaded my consciousness and disturbed my conventional wisdom in a remarkable way.

More remarkable still is the fact that it is being published here in the United States, for it raises questions of morality and survival that few liberals, or even moderates, have any intention of confronting.

As in all powerful works of fiction, the basic story—the premise—is both simple and plausible. At a time in the very near future, a time of famine and deprivation in the Third World, a great throng of hungry Indians take up upon themselves to commandeer a fleet of rusty steamers in Calcutta and embark on a voyage to Europe, the "promised land." These unfortunates are familiar to all of us. They are the skeletal shades of Biafrans, Bengalis, Bedouins and Mauritians we see often on our television screens—the unwanted, the starving, the walking wounded of the Third World.

...
In Raspail's world—not too different from ours—the church has lost all traditions, all discipline. It has become an activist instrument for arbitrary social reform. The government of France (and, by implication, all governments) has lost touch with pragmatism. Inflamed by the communications media, permissiveness and the guilt of affluence, Western populations face the prospect of invasion with mingled apprehension and enthusiasm. In a kind of humanitarian-egalitarian hashish dream, the West awaits the arrival of the pilgrims with no real notion of what is to come....

...The French president, slowly awakening to the incredible implications of an invasion by a near-million starving illiterate refugees from the Third World, tests the willingness of his defense forces to confront the invaders. The sailors rebel when asked to stop the fleet. Few men are willing to slaughter naked and starving multitudes. The Last Chance Armada is invulnerable; its greatest weapon is Western morality.

...The ordinary folk, confronted at last by the Third World, flee in horror. The army deserts. The hippies and radicals

trooping into the south to welcome their "brothers" are overrun by a wave of dark humanity... Other armadas embark in Africa and Southern Asia. It is the end of the white world.

To call this novel frightening is an understatement... To call it the world of the future (if the developed world cannot come to terms with its own guilt) is certainly prophetic... This is a bitter, brilliant work. Read it and consider.

James J. Devaney
The Hartford Courant
August 25, 1975

This fascinating novel, if widely read in this country, is sure to raise both hackles and questions. The author has made it impossible to be neutral about his message.

Raspail's *bête noire* is the Third World, and those in Europe and America who, either through personal conviction or for reasons of their own, support the sharing of the developed world's resources.

...

The emigrants are non-violent, but because of their numbers and utter degradation, are unthinkingly merciless to individuals who get in their way, either by accident or design.

The major part of the book concerns the reaction of the Western opinion-makers, who hail the migration as the hope of mankind, until they realize, too late, that the landing of the millions means the end of European civilization.

The characters are drawn in acid and the reader feels a sense of impending doom as Raspail uses the novelist's craft to pose questions which, sooner or later, must be answered.

James J. Kilpatrick
syndicated columnist
in *The Boston Globe*
August 29, 1975

Fifty years ago, T. S. Eliot told us how the world ends: Not with a bang but a whimper. In a brilliant novel just released by a courageous publisher, Jean Raspail says the same thing. *The Camp of the Saints* is one of the most chilling books of this generation.

...Not surprisingly, the novel has been viciously ridiculed by *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*....

Raspail makes the point that horror is like beauty, which lies in the eye of the beholder. To the haves of the Western world, his vision is horrible indeed; to the have-nots of the Third World, the prospect is of paradise.

Who can blame the brown-skinned invaders for seeking at any risk to escape their misery? Yet who could absolve the

pusillanimous western leaders for their failure to resist the swarming horde? Raspail absolves no one. The brainwashed West, in his nightmare, is incapable of identifying or defending its own values. Scarcely a shot is fired as the browns, the blacks, and the yellows swarm over the globe. And the curtain falls.

The work is much more than a novel. Two thousand years ago, according to the Population Institute, the world's population was perhaps 250 million. By the year 1000, the figure was only 350 million. In 1500, maybe 450 million. The one billion level was reached about 1800. A reasonably accurate census in 1900 put the estimate at 1.65 billion. Today the world's population is roughly four billion. Now take a breath: Between 1975 and 2000, the four billion is expected to double to eight billion and the growth will occur, overwhelmingly, among the browns, the blacks and the yellows.

Those of use who dwell by God's mercy or by good luck in the "have" nations of this planet must think upon these things. What is to become of our political and cultural values? What of our shiny cities, our plump farms, our tidy little suburbs? Among the Third World peoples of Raspail's vision, the instinct to survive is fiercely developed. Do Western peoples have an equal determination?

Douglas J. Maloney
Pacific Sun Literary Quarterly
Fall 1975

If only the people of the Third World could seize power from the odious oligarchy of multi-nationals, corrupt statesmen, and the CIA, most of civilization's ills would vanish. We would live in harmonious propinquity, cheerfully sharing our resources as Nirvana is at long last achieved. Right?

Not according to Jean Raspail's powerful, almost stunning book. He is certain to be denounced as a racist, fascist, or whatever "ist" is popular these days, not only for commission of the most heinous sin against radicalism—disagreement—but for his eloquently blistering and sardonic attack on the hypocritical platitudes we liberals and conservatives alike use to insulate our over-fed hides from the guilty knowledge that people elsewhere are living in abject misery.

Everyone deplores the fact that more than a billion people are starving and suffering, but what would we do if millions of these unfortunates set sail for California to share in our bounty? Sink

the ships? Machine gun them as they wade ashore? Welcome them in the name of kinship? Most liberals would not care to put their credo to such a test. But this is precisely what happens in *The Camp of the Saints*, when almost a million Indians depart for France from the shores of the Ganges in a "Last Chance Armada" of rusting, stinking hulks. As the fateful convoy wallows across the seas, France is torn by a moral crisis of unprecedented acuity.

Moreover, Third World people everywhere are ominously waiting for the outcome of the invasion. In fact, the Third World has launched a war against the West, armed with a weapon far more powerful than all of the arsenals of modern industry—helplessness. Unless the fleet is turned back, the first foray will be followed by one after another, totally engulfing and paralyzing the Western countries....

Raspail is a powerful and fluent writer. His use of simile and metaphor enhances the chilling realism that is maintained throughout the novel. He is often misanthropic, but his bitterness is laced with a Gallic elan that is infectious....

He has turned a lofty ideal into harsh reality, like turning a butterfly into a caterpillar. Those most quickly disillusioned are the radicals. They don't realize that to the Third World hordes, they also are pampered whites, indistinguishable from their hated brethren. As they rush to greet the invaders they are trampled or swept away....

The Camp of the Saints was a best seller in France and is bound to become a source of controversy in the United States. Liberals will probably condemn it as a racist polemic because the author refuses to ignore some unpleasant truths and makes most leftists appear fatuous or sanctimonious. But much of his finest vituperation is saved for the acid bath with which he showers the unfeeling complacency of the world's privileged few.

Whatever your political orientation, it's an exciting, superbly written book....

Lin Williams
"World At Large" column
Maple Heights (Ohio) Press
November 13, 1975

The ingenuity and determination of those trying to rip off the world is astonishing. The newest gimmick in the arsenal of blackmail—mass invasion by unarmed civilians—is particularly frightening in its potential.

The first test of this technique was launched last week by King Hassan of

Morocco who sent tens of thousands of his subjects into the Spanish Sahara on a "March of Conquest."

The column advanced some six miles toward the Sahara capital of El Aaiun, but drew up short before a 15-mile long mine field posted and marked by barbed wire. The Spanish lobbed over a few artillery rounds to emphasize their determination to resist with military force... After shouting a bit and running up a red flag ... the Moroccans began trekking home, claiming a "symbolic victory."

...The Spanish authorities demonstrated that nations with a will to resist despite maudlin public opinion can resist criminality.

This newest wrinkle in modern banditry is disturbing because it was taken straight out of a French novel just recently translated and published in the United States. The book is titled *The Camp of the Saints* and deals with a fictitious invasion of France by a million Ganges Indians.

...the novel describes the conflict between the pacifist nations which rush food and assistance to the oncoming ships and the tough nations which resist the invasion.

In the end, France gives in to "compassion" and allows the fleet of Indians to land. The first whites to be killed are those "liberal thinkers" who rush to the ports to welcome the invaders. Then all whites in Europe are overcome and wiped out systematically. The dark skinned races triumph.

The plot may seem far fetched in synopsis but Raspail's development of the themes is all too plausible....

Raspail takes to task all the institutions that lately have taken the lead in preaching a doctrine of white-guilt and Third World "rights" to the earned wealth of the Western nations.... Raspail's novel is controversial, but thought provoking.

Susan Bernhardt
Sunday Peninsula Herald
Monterey, California
September 21, 1975

"Chilling" is the word printed on this novel's jacket. It is an excellent description....

It's not for the squeamish or those of an "ostrich" bent. It is graphic (but matter of fact) in evoking the hordes of "invaders" who set sail in an antique armada from the banks of the Ganges on their crusade to reap their share of the world's land and goods....

There is never any doubt what the culmination of the invasion will be, and

therein lies much of the book's devastating chill-factor. So expertly is the novel built that the many changes of scenes and the philosophical discussions by the characters don't detract but only add to the irrevocable cataclysm.

Meantime, Raspail has made an eloquent statement about world conditions, the class society, modern politics and about the hearts and minds of people.

Leslie Sowers
The Houston Post
September 21, 1975

Raspail's book examines the core of racism and the frightening monster of overpopulation. His symbolic prophecy is extreme ... but mounting Third World pressure must be relieved or disaster can be expected. The novel is worthy of careful consideration.

Rick Neumayer
Louisville (KY) *Courier-Journal*
September 28, 1975

This propaganda novel is at once a terrifying nightmare and sedulous polemic, the thesis of which is that the decadent West has lost its soul, no longer believes in itself and therefore lacks the will to survive. It links civilization inextricably with race: whites are the "chosen people," but being white "isn't really a question of color" but "a whole mental outlook."

Nevertheless, the reader must face up to the world's grotesque overpopulation and the unlikelihood that wealth will be redistributed voluntarily. Raspail argues that "even if the specific action, symbolic as it is, may seem farfetched, the fact remains that we are inevitably heading for something of the sort...."

Choice
November 1975

Raspail's Spenglerian premise, that Western civilization must decay from within while at the same time its outreaches are overwhelmed by masses of darker-skinned humanity, is given a new and frightening twist... Raspail's thesis, too persuasive to ignore, is that a racial apocalypse is at hand, one that signals the collapse of civilization as we know it. Although the author's argument is potentially racist, Raspail makes clear his belief that the Third World's vengeance upon its white oppressors will be total, a vast chaos without political organization and consequently without hope for conciliation... *The Camp of the Saints* seizes the imagination. Recommended.

Directions

September 1975

Translated from the French, Raspail relates the quite possible tale of hungry third world masses embarking to the prolific, contented West... Understandable, but confused reactions arise in the Western countries; fear combines with armed protectiveness and impractical humanism.

A novel of ideas ... the grim thesis keeps the reader turning pages and, in doing so, she or he realizes the enormity of trying to solve the world's problems; the have's and the have-not's remain tensed in confrontation. Translator Norman Shapiro (Wesleyan University) has done a good job with a difficult book.... Recommended, but get of copy of the French edition, too, for your modern language collection.

Jeffrey Hart

National Review

September 26, 1975

Earlier in the century, the avant-garde artists deliberately outraged bourgeois expectations. Fauves, cubists, dadaists, Joyce, Stravinsky: the riot outside concert hall or gallery, the novel confiscated by customs officer—these were the defining events. In a curious way Jean Raspail's novel *The Camp of the Saints* is reminiscent of that sort of thing. It, too, is an assault, a scandal... In freer and more intelligent circles in Europe, the book is a sensation and Raspail a prize-winner.

In this novel Raspail brings his reader to the surprising conclusion that killing a million or so starving refugees from India would be a supreme act of individual sanity and cultural health... His plot is both simple and brilliant....

A great fuss is currently being made over Jean Raspail's supposed racism, but some distinctions need to be made. For "racism" has without a doubt become the great taboo of our times, and like all taboos is routinely exempted from critical examination. But what is racism? Most people do not now and have not in the past subscribed to esoteric theories regarding the superiority of this or that race. Most people, however, are able to perceive that the "other group" looks rather different and lives rather differently from their own. Such "racist" or "ethnocentric" feelings are undoubtedly healthy, and involve merely a preference for one's own culture and kind. Indeed—and Raspail hammers away at this point throughout his novel—no group can long survive unless it does "prefer itself." One further point is implicit. The liberal rote anathema on

"racism" is in effect a poisonous assault upon Western self-preference.

...

Despite the huffing and puffing among the respectable types, Raspail is not really writing about race—he is writing about civilization, and in particular the civilization of the West. He is stating an obvious but outrageous truth. Civilization involves particular forms of being. It is not an amorphous mass. As Frederick Wilhelmsen put it over a decade ago in these pages: "In order to be, a society must defend itself against whatever and whoever might threaten its existence. The inability to defend oneself against the enemy has always been the sign of approaching death.... Men can live and act together only if they are bound together by code and custom, myth and legend, sculpture and song... Where such underlying orthodoxy is lacking we find ourselves in the midst of an aggregate of ghettos, not a society." ■