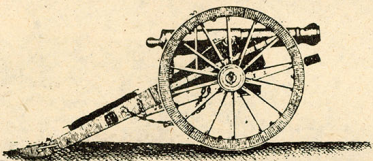


The Bicentennial of what?



A REVOLUTION!

On June 11, 1974, Jeremy Rifkin of the Peoples Bicentennial Commission spoke before a Bicentennial conference of over 300 corporate executives. What follows is an edited version of the speech. For more information contact: Peoples Bicentennial Commission, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Back in 1971, Mr. Guelich, the Chairman of the Public Relations Society of America, said that the Bicentennial will be the greatest, single peace time public opinion mobilization effort in our nation's history. And well it will be. A New York advertising executive, writing in the New York Times, put it much more bluntly. He said, "If we can sell millions of bottles of soda each year, why can't we sell Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness? If we can sell coffee to Americans, why can't we sell America to Americans?" The answer he suggests is quite simple; to get a good advertising agency and get on with the business of selling America.

There are many giant corporations represented here today and your job is to find out how to sell America during the next few years. In that spirit I would like to suggest some tasteful, appropriate commercial and public relations tie-ins for our nation's anniversary celebration. But before I do, I'd like to remind all the advertising and public relations people and the corporate representatives here today, of the cardinal rule of merchandising and marketing. Unless you believe 1000 percent in the product you are selling you're not going to be able to sell it to the American consumer. The same holds true with the Bicentennial. Unless you believe 1000 percent in the Bicentennial, you're not going to be able to do an effective job of selling it to the American people.

Well, what is the Bicentennial? The Bicentennial of what? We're celebrating the Bicentennial of a Revolution. REVOLUTION! That's what your corporations are going to be selling over the next two years. The Bicentennial of a revolution. What is a revolution? It's a massive upheaval of the social, political and economic institutions of a society — and that is exactly what happened 200 years ago in this country.

Let me give you a little flavor for the historical period of the Revolution because there has been very little said about it this morning.

Historians call the 1760's the Decade of Protest. There were student strikes at Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary. There were Black insurrections on the land-owning estates of the very wealthy throughout the colonies. There were protests and insurrections over rising prices and inflation by artisans and mechanics in all of the major urban areas on the East Coast at that time. Much of this was spontaneous and much of it gravitated towards the Stamp Act in 1765. Protests continued to mount through the later part of the 1760's culminating in a watershed event, The Boston Massacre, where four people were slain by government troops almost 200 years ago, to the month, of Kent State.

Historians call 1771 - '73, the Silent Years. A man by the name of Lord North came along and took over the reins of government. He gained a reputation for cooling off the colonies, for stopping the protests. And in case you are wondering where the term "Silent Majority" came from, those were the exact words that Lord North used to explain the political mood of the colonists in 1771 to '73. It got so bad for activists and

radicals that many of them quit the scene. They went and got little farms out in the western parts of Pennsylvania and Maryland. They went to "do their own thing." Many of them thought that it was all over; that the protests didn't amount to anything; that the people would not rise up; that the rich aristocracy and government interests were too powerful to challenge. Sam Adams, one of the few who stuck it out, kept writing letter after letter, to his fellow activists saying, "Don't give up now; you must understand that the silence that you see is really only a sullen silence. The Boston Massacre has created a situation of self-reflection. People are asking themselves whether it's worth committing their lives to the cause. People are reappraising and absorbing everything from that past decade of protest; and soon they will stand up as a united force against their oppressors."

Then, in 1773, two things occurred which were to change the course of history in this country and throughout the world. In the Spring of that year Benjamin Franklin, while in London, secured hundreds and hundreds of secret documents "leaked" to him from Parliament. These documents written between Gov. Hutchinson of Massachusetts and Lord North, outlined an elaborate plan to repress the civil liberties of the people. Ben Franklin took those documents and sent them to Sam Adams, who gave them to John Hancock, who distributed them to every newspaper in the colonies, where they appeared in banner headlines for several months. The instant shock waves that went through the country were enormous. Everything that the radicals and activists had said during the decade of protest was now verified in the very documents of the government.

In the Fall of that year another event happened. The East India Company, the first of the giant, multi-national corporations, with far-flung investments throughout the world, was going bankrupt. Members of Parliament owned stock in the East India Company, and they did not want it to go under. So, they bailed it out with a two million pound subsidy and, then, gave it a monopoly on the tea trade in North America. Now a lot of people are under a misconception about why the people in the colonies turned back the tea, burned it, destroyed it and confiscated it. It was not because the tea was more expensive with the tax on it. In fact, the taxed tea was cheaper than the smuggled tea that the people already enjoyed. Parliament made a calculated risk. These people in North America would rather go for a cheap item and forget the question of political power and political principle; and once we get our foot in the door we are going to be able to do whatever we want. But, by that time, after a decade of protest, after a few years of thinking it over, after the leak of secret papers incriminating officials, the people were no longer willing to accept corporate and government collusion. And we had the Boston Tea Party.

1774, '75, and '76 were marked by protest, repression and more protest. It all culminated on July 4th, 1776, with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. That is the document we are paying homage to during America's Bicentennial.

Is the Bicentennial just a commemoration? Or as Coca-Cola would say, "The Real Thing?" Let me read a little bit of that document we are celebrating:

Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience has shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

In every stage of the Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms and our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injuries. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

That is the document that you and I are celebrating during America's Bicentennial observances.

Let me touch on one more thing before we go on. The attitudes of some of the major, self-appointed, alleged, self-styled revolutionaries of 200 years ago toward business, finance and the economy. I think this will be of particular interest to the corporations here, so, I would like to quote from a few of the founders on this subject. If you have a pen and pad handy you might want to jot these quotes down and take them back to your board of directors' meeting.

The accumulation of great wealth is, in many instances, the effect of paying too little for the labor that produced it, the consequence of which is that the working people perish in old age and the employer abounds in affluence.

THOMAS PAINE

I sincerely believe with you that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

A field of battle covered with dead bodies putrifying in the open air is an awful and distressing spectacle; but a nation debased by the love of money and exhibiting all the vices and crimes usually connected with that passion is a spectacle far more awful, distressing and offensive.

BENJAMIN RUSH

It is said that Paper systems being open to all are not monopolies; he who has money can buy some stock. All then is fair as every man, meaning every moneyed man, may share in the plunder. Well, every person may enlist in an army yet an army may enslave a nation.

JOHN TAYLOR

[And finally] No man is entitled to a greater portion of this earth than another. Land was made for the use of all.

PENNSYLVANIA FARMERS

PEOPLES BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
c/o CHICAGO
2440 NORTH LINCOLN AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60614

continued

Of course these weren't just words. The revolutionaries meant what they said and they acted on it. During the American Revolution thousands and thousands of wealthy Tories (bankers, merchants, and land owners) were deported out of this country to Canada and abroad. Their lands were confiscated. Their properties were taken and redistributed among the people in this country. Only the handful of wealthy landowners that fought on the side of the Revolution were spared. All of the basic economic laws that had protected the feudal order were completely abolished by every state legislature of the thirteen original colonies.

We deported more wealthy aristocrats during our revolution than the French did during their entire revolutionary period. And, in case you are wondering where "America, Love It or Leave It" came from, I can tell you right now. It came from the American Revolution. The slogan was "America, Love It or Nova Scotia." That is what the rebels had to say to the rich people as they departed.

Now that you know what we are celebrating, you must decide how your company will tie in to the revolution. In making that determination, you might apply a simple litmus test to your own corporation. It could go something like this: If the president or board chairman of my corporation were alive 200 years ago, which side of the fence would he be on? Would he be on the side of the Tories, the wealthy bankers, merchants, land owners, or on the side of the rebels? Would he sign the DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE or fight the Declaration of Independence? Would he sanction the confiscation of land and property or oppose it?

Put another way: if Sam Adams, Tom Paine, and Jefferson were all alive today, which side of the fence would they be on? Would they be likely to belong to your boss's country club? Would they be likely to work for your boss at General Motors, Exxon, or ITT? It's something to think about.

Now I think we should get into some commemorative tips. The key as we have heard before is *tasteful, appropriate* tie-ins to the Revolution.

How about this one for American Express. Complete with a television series, promo-campaign, and ads in the New York Times, the natural theme for American Express is the celebration of the mass travel exodus of all those wealthy Tories I just mentioned: with an exclusive, one way trip to Canada for America's Millionaire Club.

And if that one doesn't excite you, how about this one for Penn Central. Penn Central could commemorate the year 1773. That was the year Parliament passed the law which "subsidized" the floundering interests of the East India Company. That should give you some point of departure.

The most important thing during the Bicentennial is that each corporation come up with a slogan, a one line saying that identifies the corporation with the Revolution. I would suggest that the best kind of slogan to take is right from the revolution itself. Take a quote that everybody knows very well and make it synonymous with your corporate logo. How about this for ITT? "We must all hang together or most assuredly we will hang separately."

Penn Central again. "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country."

The big five oil companies. "Don't tread on us."

Lockheed and Boeing. "Don't give up the ship."

And for the entire corporate community as a whole. "If this be treason, let's make the most of it."

Speaking of treason, the sponsors of this conference have told me that I could not use the word "treason" on a public platform in relation to corporate America, unless I could back up my allegations with facts. I think that is a fair thing to ask. I think we ought to examine the allegation of treason very closely, for if the giant corporations really are subverting the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights, if they are subverting all the values we believe in, then we certainly would not want them to participate in the Bicentennial of a Revolution. That would be as ludicrous as George Washington inviting Benedict Arnold to the victory celebration at Yorktown.

Have the corporations subverted the Constitution of the United States and the principles of government of, by and for the people? It is an ancient

maxim of power — and I'm sure the corporate representatives in this room know this ancient maxim all too well — that whoever controls the economic wealth of a country controls its political decisions. That is a maxim that has held true throughout recorded history. Today 200 giant corporations control 2/3 of the manufacturing assets of the United States of America. Of the hundred largest money powers in the world today 36 of them are not even countries anymore. They are American corporations. We have these giant nations within the nation. These corporate institutions control vast amounts of resources, people and property. So while it is interesting to talk about the private sector vs. the public sector, we all know in reality that such distinctions do not exist any more. The '72 elections have shown us that.

The corporations finance the candidates for office; they put their hand-picked people into government regulatory agencies; they maintain massive lobbies on the state and national level; and through the lobbies, and through their political representatives, they determine the legislative fate of the country, and they divide up our tax dollars through grants, subsidies, and contracts.

I do a litmus test when I travel across the country. I ask people three questions. One, do you believe in democracy? Yes! Two, do you believe in one person, one vote? Yes! Three, do you believe that your vote has the same influence in the decision-making of this country as Exxon, General Motors, and ITT? No one has ever said yes.

Government of, by, and for the people?

Now, there are those who shout back that their vote shouldn't have the same influence as Exxon, General Motors and ITT because they are big corporations. Well, then, I say, if you believe that, and I'm sure there are people who do, then have the guts to stand up for what you believe in. Demand that it be written into the Constitution: Four branches of government. Judicial. Congressional. Presidential. And Corporate. Demand that the Constitution prescribe how many votes General Motors and Exxon are to get in relation to the individual, sovereign citizens of this country. Let's make the reality a law, if we really believe it should be.

Corporations defy the concept of government of, by, and for the people. There is no doubt about it. The public opinion polls have shown it. According to a recent Gallup poll, 68% of the American people now

"As I travel across the country, I see millions of foot soldiers in the giant corporate armies."

believe the country is run of, by, and for big business. Only 7% of the people believe that they have some access in the affairs of government.

That's what the Bicentennial is all about. Democracy or rule by the few.

I don't know how long any reasonable person can continue to deny the facts. Buying elections, bribing the highest officials of our country, selling wheat to the Russian government so that they can charge higher prices for bread to the American consumer, intensifying a fake energy crisis in order to amass windfall profits, polluting the environment, and producing products each year which kill and maim thousands of Americans. All of these acts are committed against the citizens of this country by America's giant corporations. All these acts constitute treason.

And now the corporations are going to bring us the Bicentennial of the American Revolution!

What's the matter with commercialization of the Bicentennial? What's the matter with public relations tie-ins? Is there anyone in this room who could condone General Motors or Coca Cola bottling company using passages from the Bible and taking quotes from Jesus, Matthew, and Mark and plastering them on their products; identifying the founders of Christianity with their sales campaigns; is there anyone who would condone that? There is no difference between that and these corporations today exploiting the sacred principles that began this democratic nation by plastering them on Kellogg's Corn Flakes boxes and Spirit of America

Chevrolets. At a time when millions of Americans are asking themselves the question "What Does America Stand For?" your corporations are so plasticizing the fundamental principles that we cherish as a people, as to make those principles absolutely meaningless for millions of people, who need desperately to renew their strength and patriotism in this country.

I don't believe that the giant corporations are fit to celebrate the Bicentennial of the Revolution. I believe that they are Tories in every sense of the word. A Tory, by the way, is an old Irish word. It means "thief," in case you are interested. So, I suggest that America's giant corporations be honest, that they identify with their true sentiments and interests, that they show their true colors and flag, royal purple, and that they conduct a Bicentennial fitting and proper for the place that they assume in American Society. I have taken the liberty of drafting up a new Declaration of Independence for Corporations. I hope that some energetic young public relations people will see some value in it.

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all business corporations are created equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. That among these are price-fixing, fraudulent advertising, and the pursuit of profit. That to secure these rights governments are bought by corporations deriving their just power from the consent of the stockholders. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends it is the right of the corporations to alter or abolish it and to finance new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and their profits.

I believe the corporations are spitting on the American flag! I believe that they are undermining the democratic process! I believe that they have destroyed the principle of self-reliance and fostered the idea of government handouts and a free ride mentality through subsidies and special favors! I believe they undermine the principle of personal responsibility and accountability by engaging in wholesale crimes under the protection of that corporate charter! I believe they have robbed us, the American people, of the property of this country!

The American monopoly corporations have issued a death sentence against the individual human spirit, and that is what this experiment in nationhood started out to be.

Every day these giant bureaucratic prisons are draining every one of us in this country of that special energy that was to be our trademark and our destiny as a people. We all used to believe that we were each "the captains of our fate and masters of our soul." Now, as I travel across the country, I see millions of footsoldiers in the giant corporate armies.

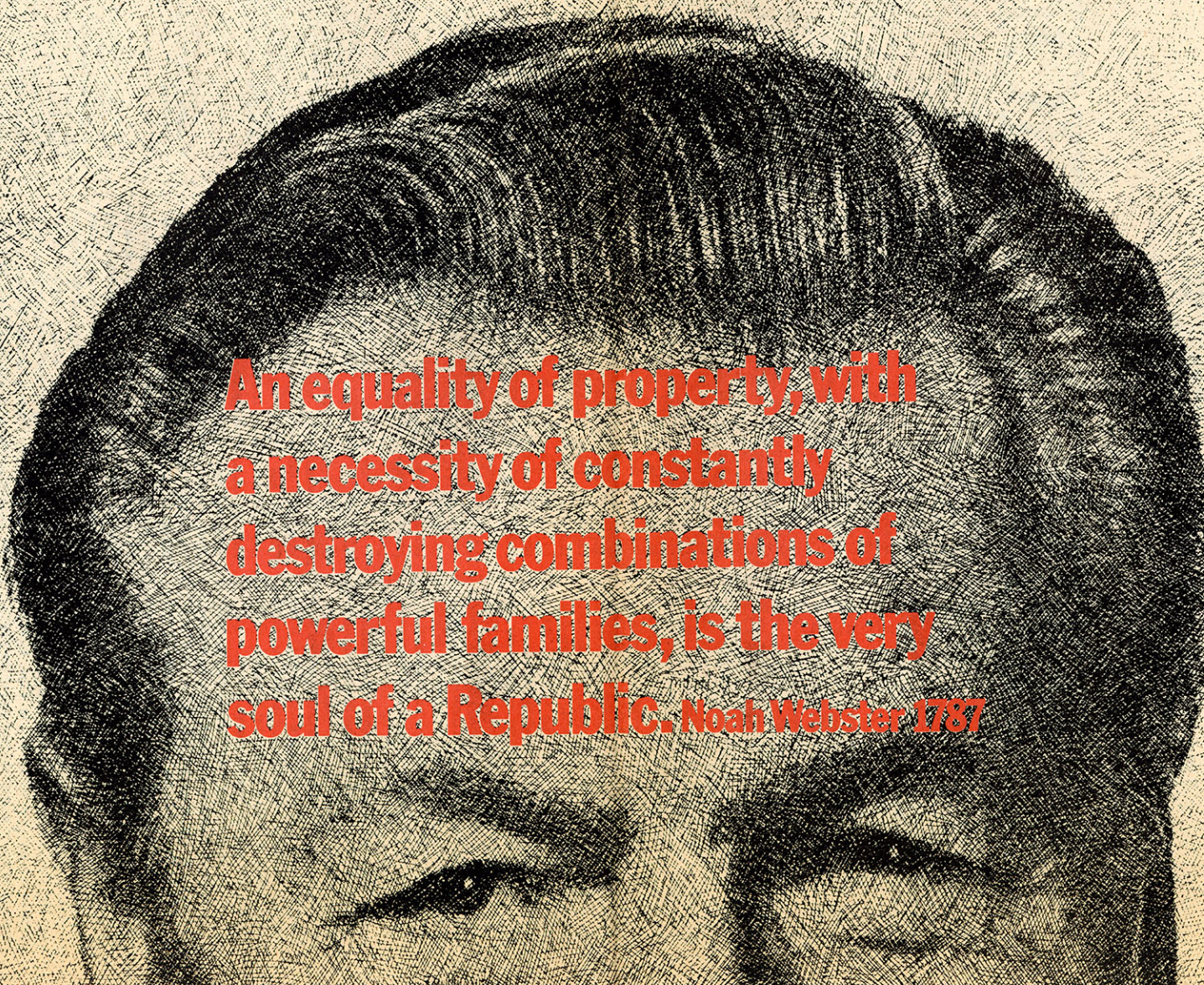
There is only one way to celebrate the Bicentennial of a revolution for democracy, for individual sovereignty, and for a sense of shared community — and that is a new grassroots revolutionary movement to abolish these giant corporate tyrants which are destroying the fabric and fiber of this country. It is time to restore a sense of economic democracy here in America.

Finally, it is time for Americans across this land to begin to stand up once again for patriotism. It is time for people to stand up for the Declaration of Independence. It is time for people to pledge their commitment to the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and to make their voice heard. I'd like to ask all of you to do something right now. I'd like to ask all of you who believe that it is time to stand up for those principles, who believe that it's time to pledge your lives, your fortunes, and your sacred honor to what that revolution was all about to stand up and make your commitment, outside of the anonymity of your corporation and the seat in which you sit. . .

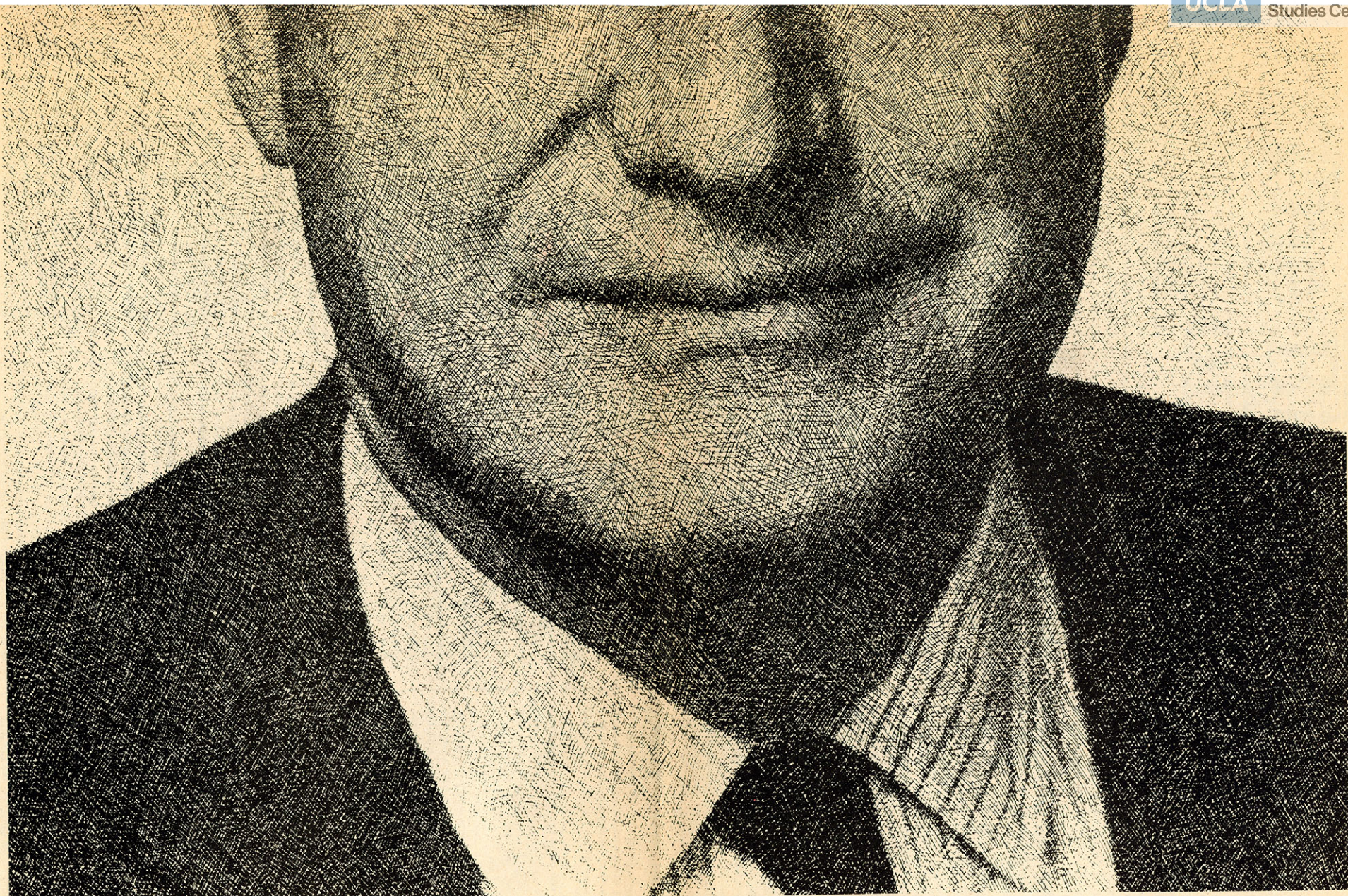
[At this point, a silence fell over the room. Not a single corporate executive rose from his seat.]

All right, then, we should all heed the words of Sam Adams:

If you love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animated contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you, may your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that you were our countrymen.



**An equality of property, with
a necessity of constantly
destroying combinations of
powerful families, is the very
soul of a Republic. Noah Webster 1787**



Peoples Bicentennial Commission, Washington, D.C. 20036.