

tempered by their own personal involvement in civil rights in the American South, registering blacks to vote, marching with blacks and sharing the violent reaction. The other major influence was the Vietnam War which provided the ignition point of youthful, mostly white rebellion and added hardened veterans of the war to the largely college-oriented movement opposing it. The veterans like the civil rights activists were experienced with violence and capably reacted to attacks by police and state militias attempting to quell the revolt against national policy.

The veterans who crossed political lines to oppose the war that seasoned and repelled them became immersed in leftist ideology although many did not approve of it. Yet the political right had failed them, had inducted them into an unholy war cloaked in righteous deceit; made them prisoners of conscience. Whereas the early New Left had been inspired by the civil rights movement and embraced liberation philosophies, the veterans came into the antiwar movement angry and embittered. Most of the veterans had a limited focus that ultimately was fatal to their campaign far short of its goal to end the war. Similar to the the majority of New Left organizations, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was at first stimulated by argument but eventually debate and disagreement degenerated into quarreling animosities that broke the group apart. All that survived were two mutually hostile splinter groups that orbited a far and exotic fringe.

The U.S. government's most powerful counterstroke was to virtually end the military draft which almost immediately diffused the rebellion. Draft age males assured of avoiding combat service lost interest in the immorality of the war and also stopped thinking and talking about ideas and issues that grew from the war. Only diehards and incurable idealists persisted against the new wave of apathy, driven by hopeful or grim visions. The New Left dissipated into a pabulum of New Age kitsch.

There were always contradictions among the counter cultures of the 1960s: hip culture chasing a buck in contrast to politicized hippies who wanted to abolish wealth; nirvana seeking acid heads versus hardcore speed freaks and junkies; but everybody was against and in fear of the cops. The flower power dream of transcending materialism with goodwill failed but not before it seeded the environmental movement and made ideas about pacifism, justice and equality respectable. The most far-reaching legacy of the inspired and self-indulgent 1960s is the women's movement. The lingering problem, however, is that the fun-seeking nation adopted the sex, drug and party habits of the young boomers but not the philosophies or politics.

Young Ben Braddock, as portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the film version of *The Graduate* (written by Charles Webb) spoke for a disillusioned generation of Baby Boomers in early maturity when he said, "I don't know what I am, Dad, and I don't particularly care." Later that spiritual emptiness would gorge on frenzied materialism, but for a short period a large number of primarily affluent young Americans attempted to combat cultural nihilism with experiments toward a moral republic which was to be lightly governed for the benefit of all persons by intelligent goodwill.

Some among the large restless tribe that worshipped the image of eternal youth never got much older, swept up in the war that everyone seemed powerless to stop. A few endured jail to avoid the war or sought exile in other countries. Others

resisted the war and defiantly braved guns, clubs and disabling chemicals of police and national guardsmen, many of whom enlisted in state militias to avoid service in the war. The drugs that opened the minds of thousands of alienated children seared them to ash in subsequent years.

Although the Baby Boom generation temporarily repudiated the corrupt leadership and incessant greed of the nation, rapidly germinating (and degenerating) dizzily heady ideologies and social solutions, it grew increasingly fond of the riches it had previously loathed. Most softened their resistance to the 7-11 values of their culture as they grew older. Communal patterns and politics were abandoned; business networking among the former rebels replaced communalism. The happily

acquisitive, workaholic, well-dined yuppie metamorphosed from the angst-riven flower child hippie who thought universal love and open sex would make the world a better place. Yuppies contortedly justified their pursuit of wealth and status as fully compatible with their lingering sympathies for social justice.

Now the Baby Boomers who made so much trouble to their families and their country while they were growing up are as old or older than their parents a generation ago. The war that traumatized their vulnerable youth is long over (although its residue continues to disturb amnesia). The psychopathic cold war they grew up with ended abruptly with the collapse and disintegration of the Russian communist empire. The Summer of Love was the generation's iridescent mirage, the watershed of its vanished youth. They were born after World War 2 and their memories don't include the daily sounds of bombers and bombs that tormented and killed children all over the world a few years earlier; yet their continuing angst is a legacy of their parents' war — they were born under the sign of the mushroom cloud. More than their rebellion against prosperity and its flaccid corruption of spirit, their dread of nuclear holocaust defined their passionate protest against the Vietnam War; more even than personal fears of young males they would be drafted into it. This first nuclear generation (also the first TV generation) felt a shared stake in the future, and apart from hype and herd instinct they tried to be kind to one another. They are so large a generation they crash through history as irresistibly as fire, remaking everything they sweep past. They are so accustomed to the attention of society (particularly its merchants) they believe they are the force of history itself.



STEPHEN LONGSTREET

CHILDREN OF SATAN

I am left handed, which is easier to be than in the past. Catholic nuns vigorously attempted to make me right handed when I started school and accused me of being a son of Satan when I refused.

I don't know why most people are righthanded. Because they are the right hand is the hand of sustenance and labor, and the vile left hand began its evil reputation in ancient times when it was used to clean away the body's excrement. Thus from antiquity has developed a sophisticated aversion to the left side of things. Prejudice against people who are left handed predates more familiar bigotries of race, religion, nationality, gender and homophobia. In every culture before record, all that is good and righteous has been accorded the right hand, while everything evil, ugly, wrongheaded or simply bad luck is the left.

In politics as well as society a crude bicameral cleft is made between right and left. The established order that resists change is the political (and cultural) Right which usually defends itself with tradition, religion and autocratic power. The political Left is the force of change and reform that calls upon the future instead of the past and explores new ideas and innovative social and political approaches to greater freedom and well being of the common citizenry. Left is about justice, not privilege.

The Left is the opposition; once in power it automatically reverts to the right.

The oldest struggle after survival is for freedom, of being a part of a community, not enslaved by it — the eternal pitiless struggle between *haves* and *have-nots*, the despairing rage of those condemned to live bitterly wretched lives in the shadows and as menials to the economically and politically aristocratic elite who are in their turn angrily terrified by this rage.

History shrieks with the pain of injustice, only briefly muffled by excesses of gross brutality. Sometimes the oppressed overthrow or forcibly reform their lords and bosses, but elites always rise in even the most originally classless societies. If the American Revolution is accepted as more than a revolt of colonial bourgeoisie and that it gave birth to an essentially egalitarian society in which the common citizenry

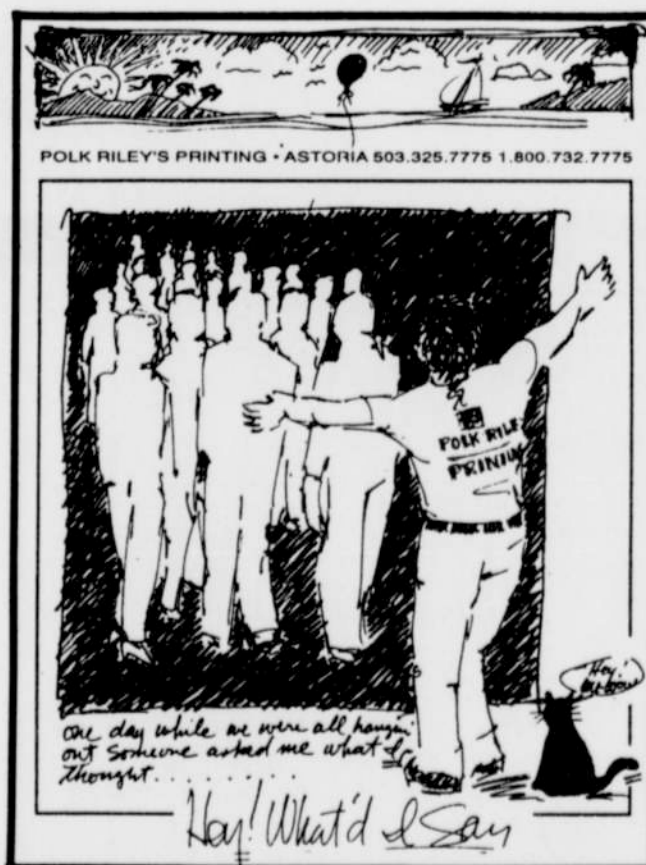
had a chance to be their own rulers, it should also be realized that every reform has been bitterly and often bloodily fought and adopted only with great reluctance. Reforms that have been adopted are usually countered with vicious backlash.

For all the problems western democracies have had with communism and socialism (words that mean *community* and *society* when stripped of ideological abstraction), the ideas at their roots grew as alternatives to rapid industrialization in the 19th century, demanding in philosophy if not practice more than servitude for the mushrooming working classes as their share for producing the technological revolution throughout Western Europe and North America. Fascism (and Nazism) is an extreme rightwing reaction to these "leftist" heresies of class (*i.e.*, social and political) parity. That communist and socialist societies generally become totalitarian states of the political right should not repudiate the underlying perception shared with the democracies, themselves flawed and corrupt, that there is enough for everyone and everyone is equal under law.

Reform, resistance and rebellion to contemporary rule in the United States has since at least the Russian Revolution been called by assaulted authority "leftist," a sinister (from Latin *sinis* meaning 'left' or 'unlucky') hint at Bolshevik conspiracy; a suspicion of alien agents or homegrown dupes of foreign strategies to destroy the American Way of Life operating within its very heart. In other words, dissent and resistance to authority and/or injustice in this land of liberty and justice is implied to be treachery.

Perhaps because of ancient and immediate hostility toward left handed people, we are usually supporters of underdogs and outcasts and feel personally sympathetic to ideals of personal and political liberty. Left handed people share with women and minority races and religions (not to mention people with physical and mental handicaps) the problems of survival in a world designed with no consideration for their presence in it, or much worse, designed to eradicate their presence.

—MICHAEL McCUSKER



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