

# THE YOUNG ARE THE FUTURE

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"I don't know what I am, Dad, and I don't particularly care."

~BENJAMIN BRADDOCK  
"THE GRADUATE"  
BY CHARLES WEBB (1963)

Young Ben Braddock, as portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the film version of *The Graduate*, spoke for a disillusioned generation of Baby Boomers in early maturity. 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 by persons of intelligent goodwill.

These masses of young people were drawn together in the 1960s by their antipathy for the Vietnam War (and a few by the earlier Civil Rights movement) and attempted to restructure their society, which was interminably involved in a psychopathic war of nerves with the now defunct Soviet Union of Russia.

The young Americans turned to animistic socialism and developed a political philosophy that loosely resembled gypsy law. They thought they could bind state socialism and social control with a tribal sense of freewheeling individual freedom.

Reality, which in some respects means that all dreams take time for fruition and are modified by circumstances, disillusioned the young once more. Most of them softened their resistance to the 7/11 values of their civilization as they grew older. Communal patterns and politics were abandoned; business networking among the former rebels replaced communalism. The acquisitive, workaholic, well-dined yuppie metamorphosed from the young angst-riven hippie who thought universal love and open sex would make the world a better place.

The colleges and universities the rebellious youth tore apart or opened up (both views are prevalent) with wild curricular insurrection nearly four decades ago are quietly occupied by their children and/or grandchildren, who seem to share no less disillusion than they had. The difference is that today's disaffected young souls lack hope, which puts a hard edge to their tense bleakness. They defend their sense of futility by pointing to the failure of the youth of the infamous 1960s to change society. If those hundreds of thousands who held mass demonstrations and disrupted the nation's universities failed, what chance has this smaller, less-noticed generation to be successful?

Perhaps that might be why the young today seem so keen on taking for themselves what wealth and pleasure they can out of a culture that appears to be spoiling like an overripe fruit.

"Kids today live with awful nightmares," Abbie Hoffman, "Clown Prince" of the youth rebellion that now seems ancient, irrelevant history told a jury in 1987 (He had been arrested for "trespassing" at the University of Massachusetts while demonstrating against CIA campus recruiting. The jury acquitted him.) "AIDS will wipe us out; the polar ice cap will melt (it is!); the nuclear bomb will go off any minute. Even the best tend to believe we are helpless to affect matters. It's no wonder teenage suicide is at a record level. Young people are detached from history, the planet, and most important, the future. I maintain to you that this detachment from the future, the lack of hope, and the high suicide rate among youth are connected."

A few years later, speaking for still a later group of American youth, Kelly Hoffman (no relation to Abbie) wrote for the *Times Eagle* when she was 16 in 1995:

"We are told our generation will be the first generation of Americans to be worse off than their parents. Every year jobs are harder to find. The economy is weak and will probably collapse right when our generation comes to power. What do we have to look forward to?"

She accused the people in power for having forgotten the responsibilities of leadership.

"My generation is the future but we do not control the future. Those in power today need to realize that their children and grandchildren will be the ones to suffer if they do not start working on the problems now...but it seems that the politicians of today have forgotten there is a future."

Aside from the usual breathless despair of youth, a reason for the disaffection felt by generations of young Americans might be society's inability to present a sustainable vision for the young to grasp. Such a vision should transcend propaganda and the banalities of popular culture. Real values of life and purpose should be nurtured through the ancient process of schooling.

This is not happening in the United States. Youth are leaving school inadequately prepared, not simply economically but with little awareness of the underlying foundations of their society. Children are not learning although they are passed up through the system. Their parents (or grandparents), an earlier generation of disaffected youth, are dissatisfied with public education and hold it responsible for their children's alienation.

Yet there are some who believe that American education satisfies its intent by producing generations of credit card carrying shoppers. And schools are in flux, not only financially, but are politically stressed on what to teach and whom to teach it to.

The old rebels ought to know the system of education reflects the values of its culture. What is taught their offspring is a political decision more concerned with churning out docile consuming masses than with across the board high quality education.

Education has its sinister side after all. The risk of teaching children the techniques of things is that they might think. Thinking does not need education, but without an educated guess on the status of the universe, intelligence is in a vacuum. The educated thoughts of individuals are often at variance with the social molding of public education and prefer change and progress over conformity and stability.

"My generation does not have a big voice in American government. Our concerns are rarely heard by those in power," Kelly Hoffman wrote. "We need our leaders to work together to improve the future. True leaders look to the future and they have a vision that goes beyond political parties and reelections. Our leaders need to lead the country to a better future."

Abbie Hoffman (no relation to Dustin or Kelly) had it right when he said, "You cannot have change without the young. The young have the creativity, they have the energy, they have the impatience. You need the youth to dissent."



RON COBB

## EYE OF THE TIGER

BY MARGARET FRIMOTH

*What if we have it all wrong?  
What if it could be better than we could ever imagine?  
What if we respect the land as we develop and prosper?  
What if we really loved our children?  
What if the word was safe?*

If you believe any of the *What if* possibilities, then you are looking directly into the eyes of the social change tiger.

Being close to recognizing the possibilities can take your breath away, leave you gasping for a bit of common air. It can be exhilarating — a mind rush like no other. Diamond faceted clarity. Bouncing prisms of light (and understanding) in every direction at once.

But it can be dangerous to believe fully. So dangerous in fact that fear can send you fleeing back to the mainland. Solid ground on which you are familiar. Terra Firma. Something you can touch with your own hands. A place where you can breathe, though the air be heavy. Unshackled by the burden of possibilities. A known place. A place to stay put.

What holds us back? What moves us forward? When we move forward are we moving over the backs of others? Doesn't *that* hold us back? How can we move forward without hurting others, the land, ourselves?

A mind quieted by fear subdues the possibilities of change. Social change theory evokes the raging mind. It is in this rage, this well-fire of possibilities that I watch for glimmers of truth. Rage is after all just energy. It is rage that breaks through the desire to hold back, to *not* change. It is rage that festers like an infection demanding attention. Rage that desires healing, inflamed until tended.

This is the rage of children's violence. In the big picture this violence is a natural rhythm, an ebb and flow. Cause and effect. Violence is power. Children have little power. Love, attention, care, respect and value can balance the lack of power. But without the balance...

Children want, perhaps even need power. Violence gives adults power. Perhaps our adult intrigue with violence, our use of violence as entertainment, our mix of violence and sexual intimacy, gives unquestionable value to violence, especially in the eyes of children. Perhaps we value violence more than we value children. Then, of course, children will imitate and bond to

our values and use of our tools of power for their gain. Children learn incredibly fast.

How much can we take from children for our own profit and not expect a backlash? How much abuse and trauma do we expect children to withstand before counteracting? How different are they from us? Here's an easy example. Imagine living in a house with 25 people unrelated to you. How would you react to the chaos — or the rigid control in the house (i.e., classroom)? What are we thinking when we send our children to an under-funded, so-called "educational environment" that cannot protect, cherish and attend to our children? What in the world is wrong with our thinking that we would even consider less funding for our schools?

By our actions, what are really teaching our children? Here's another easy example to consider. Imagine that a co-worker "popped" you (i.e., hit you) in the face, and when you reported it to your boss, you were questioned about your part in the situation and then told to return to work with the person who assaulted you — who was now blaming you for making the boss angry. What would you do? How would you react? Kids have this experience all the time, except that the co-worker is a parent. How dare we blame our children for "acting out."

How can we build our financial and corporate empires and let schools and families fall apart? It's not the way the world has to be! The world can be a better place by first making it safe for all our children. Not just the rich kids. Not just the white kids. Not just the cute kids. Not just the nice kids. We need to make our world safe for all our kids.

Children need the focus to be on them. They need to be the center of attention. Their world is the most important, and those of us who portend adulthood are responsible for valuing children's lives. They need to be surrounded by adults and other children who cherish, protect, love and educate them. If we cannot provide this, then we should not be surprised by the outcomes.

Look the social tiger directly in the eyes and say yes to the possibilities of a much better future. Begin here in our community. Begin today!

Margaret Frimoth is the Director of VOCA (Victory Over Child Abuse) Camp. For information about training dates, call 325-2761.

### REALITY TV

"You look like a TV set," a man said to 8 year old Savannah Henderson (daughter of Colleen, Astoria's original 'Jane Barnes' redux) when she mimicked an antenna by holding two sticks above her head.

"What's on your screen?" the man asked.  
"My smile," she said.

~MPMC



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~JONATHAN NICHOLS, THE OREGONIAN  
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