


written for the personell and guidance journal, june 1971, by charles ream
where you see the word "counselor" feel free to substitute "teacher"

Full version before editing 

THE YOUTH CULTURE - HUMANITY'S LAST CHANCE

scan

Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is,
do you, Mr. Jones?

--Bob Dylan

This line is now six or seven years old, but the truth it contains becomes more evident every day. Young people are not accepting their socialization and are making their lives into something different. Now is a time of transition in which the whole role of the counselor must be reexamined. If we perpetuate our role as a bastion of the old ways, it is our fate to become irrelevant -- and destructive. If, however, we sincerely and humbly try to find out "what is happening here" and aim to facilitate the transition from the old to the new, we could be a critically important force for sanity and humanism. It would be realistic of us to realize that the latter task is almost impossible since it would require a total reappraisal of our own value structure and life style. Could you still change yourself in truly basic ways? Or do you have too much to do? Or are you too tired?

Now is a terrifyingly disconcerting time for all Mr. Jones'. A new culture and people are bursting forth from his own seed -- flippantly ignoring (or brutally attacking) the precepts along which his life has always been planned. Ten years ago, he was so confident. An All American, stainless steel, tailfinned Utopia was just around the corner. Now white western christian man has lost the initiative. The dynamic of history is being wrenched from his grasp. Worst of all, he knows it and is quite defensive about it.

Mr. Jones is far from alone. He shares his malaise with his generational peers all over the world - with Mr. Cariter and Mr. Ting and even Mr. Ivanovich. The youth of the world are looking aghast towards the future and asking them simply, "My God, what have you done?"

Even sincere adults in America often cannot understand what makes the cutting edge of contemporary youth reject their socialization so vociferously. The first part of this essay will be devoted to exploration of the "reasons" behind discontent, some of which the young people involved can articulate and some which they feel only intuitively.

The second part will look at "results" these phenomena have catalyzed in youth culture.

CAUSES

#1 The Triumph of Technocracy

Primitive man is a naive pansacramentalist. Everything is to him full of sacramental substance, everything. Each thing and each function is ever ready to light up into a sacrament for him.

--Martin Buber

They do what they do just to be nothing more than something they invest in.

--Bob Dylan

What has disappeared between quote one and quote two? Only life itself. Mankind has proliferated over the face of the earth, tripled his life span, raised his standard of living and lost his soul. Reality for us is scientifically determined; that which is not amenable to scientific analysis is either not real or not important. Truth is objective and experts know it. Richard Nixon says that it is not our prerogative to make moral judgments about invading Cambodia -- only he has access to all the information. Only professionals are competent -- to do what? Efficiency and production/consumption are our gods. Magic, mystery and sacrality are inappropriate. Look at America -- Instant Breakfast, perfumed electric garbage crushers, drive-in churches, surgical face lifts, etc.

"Plastic people, O baby, now you're such a drag."

--Frank Zappa and the
Mothers of Invention

Max Weber knew long ago that the end result of bureaucratic, rational-legal social structuring was "formalistic impersonality" in human relationships. Look around you!

What are people to do who are young and strong and see their world "with eyes of fire"? They often refuse their "place among the fossils of our time." A word recurring over and over again in underground literature is "robot." Look at the people on television. Look at businessmen. Do you want to be like them? Long hair and colorful clothes are anti-robot. Young people see the "mad rationality" of their

parents' generation producing enough bombs, gases and germs to extinguish humanity hundreds of times over - in the name of world peace. They see the dominant culture becoming continually more vacuous and sterile. Their minstrels sing of them:

You are the crown of creation
And you've got no place to go.

--Jefferson Airplane

CAUSE # 2 American Public Schools

"Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion has no hold on the mind."

--Plato

"Schools are prisons -- Burn Yours Down!"

-- A. Yippie

Since total chaos is imminent, anyone who tries to write about schools these days might as well be blunt and to the point.

Over a quarter of the people in this country are currently in elementary, junior high and high schools. Most of them are there by law -- even though the thirteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime. Inside school, these once lively and enthusiastic youngsters quickly learn what will prove to be the major learning of their whole school experience -- they learn to submit to arbitrary authority over which they have no influence; they learn to force their bodies to stay still in a chair for one fifty minute period after another; they learn that they and their classmates should be interested in exactly the same thing for the same length of time. They learn to follow directions, to look for "right" answers, to rely totally on the teacher, to follow schedules and meet deadlines. They learn to generate competition, aggression and envy in their interpersonal relationships by being forced to work for grades and recognition. Only a few, definitionally, can come out on top. The rest are failures. In short, the most basic punishment for the crime of youth is to have nearly no control over your life and destiny. In a 1969 Harris poll of high schools, about half the students wanted a say in school rules, curriculum, discipline and class procedure. As the students seek change and self-determination, their parents overwhelmingly believe that "maintaining discipline

is more important than student self inquiry." Even in the face of the obvious disintegration of their world, adults pompously assume that they know what should be "learned" by youth better than young people themselves. It is becoming clear to increasingly more of the young, however, that they want a different kind of world than the one the old have constructed and thus they need a new kind of education. Something's got to give.

There are no end of people who recognize what a sad state education has come to, from John Dewey in 1915 to Charles Silberman in 1970. Even the U.S. Office of Education, in a recent subcommittee report, realizes that "We cannot afford to underestimate the psychological brutality and irrelevance of life in many of our nation's schools." Some research results are truly staggering. It is a fact, for instance, that as children pass through school from first grade to twelfth, their self concept continually declines. This is institutionalized, compulsory murder of integrity and self worth. It is also a fact that in large cities where comprehensive statistics are available, high school dropouts have higher I.Q.'s than graduates. Even though the United States controls over half the world's wealth, at least twelve countries spend a greater percentage of their G.N.P. on educating their young.

Very valuable insights can be gained into the situation of youth and the problems of schools by conceptualizing the young as a colony. Many perspectives lend credence to this view. Unemployment is high in this country; if the employable young between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two were added to the work force, it would be disastrously high. To prevent this, schooling has been expanded enormously. Great stigma is attached to leaving high school. Junior colleges have become part of most communities. It is assumed that to wear a white collar or get a good job, you need at least an undergraduate college degree. And everyone wants a white collar -- don't they? If all this schooling prepared people to do something, we might consider it worthwhile, but the evidence shows that high school graduates are prepared only for college. Those who go to work almost never get a job for which their high school training prepared them. Ask college students why they enrolled and you will get something about "parents" or "draft" or "what the hell else was I supposed to do?" It is simply a hoax

as Paul Goodman points out, that "a highly industrialized society requires twelve to twenty years of prior processing of the young." What is the reality of the situation then? It is that schools are engaged in custodial and police functions, not primarily in education. We have a growing contradiction between the fact that the young know more about the world every year and the fact that adolescent dependence and powerlessness is becoming more and more prolonged.

"The medium is the message" says McLuhan. In school, the medium is the authoritarian classroom structure and the message is that you will come out best in the end if you submit. Students learn about democratic decision-making (through compulsory courses) and then find that their own student government has no office, no budget and no power. They learn about the Bill of Rights in a context where they do not have freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or freedom of assembly.

These conditions are intolerable and students are beginning to revolt. As counselors, we should not think about preserving the school as it is, but about what it must become. We must expand the students' control over his education. That means advocating student power. Instead of protecting inertia, we must institutionalize and publicize procedures for change. It is apparent that the most important thing we could teach a child in school is to enjoy learning. Learning how to learn is more important than any particular content. The whole scope of education must be broadened. It focuses now on rationality and literacy. In the future, it must begin to consider questions of humanity. Healthy interpersonal relationships, for instance, should be given as much weight as arithmetic. Maybe more. Our species would survive if a whole generation went without arithmetic. It will not survive if our growing competition, anomie and hatred detonate the thermonuclear holocaust. "In the coming world," Carl Rogers points out, "the capacity to face the new appropriately is more important than the ability to know and repeat the old." If we refuse to face the future appropriately (and there is no substantive reason to think we will), then current youth unrest is truly the tiny tip of a monstrous iceberg.

CAUSE #3 The Loss of Adult Legitimacy, Politics, Ecology and Repression

The U.S. still hopes to withdraw most of its troops from South Vietnam before the end of 1965.

--Robert McNamara, Feb. 1964

We'll strip the earth of all its green
And then divide her into parking lots.

--Steppenwolf

"They're trying to kill me," Yossarian told him calmly.

--Catch 22, Joseph Heller

Finally, young people are convinced that adults simply do not have the desire or capacity to deal with what is happening. Yossarian is right. They (someone, everyone) are trying to kill us. Isadore Zifferstien, a professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine has found that "a major source of mental illness, neurosis and alienation in 'children of the nuclear age' is a deep anxiety, conscious, unconscious and subliminal, which is based on the conviction that they will not live out their normal span of years." What incredible irony that the old, who may yet die a natural death, demand respect from a generation they have condemned to despair.

SOME REALITIES

1. Politics -- The foreign policy of the United States is imperialism, defined by Webster's Seventh College Dictionary as "gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas." Our troops, corporations and military "aid" are spread all across the world. We have only seven percent of the earth's population, but control well over half its wealth. Imperialism prevents dominated countries from developing strong independent economies of their own. We exploit the world and are thus responsible for much of its suffering. Vietnam is the prime example. Hundreds of thousands are dead and a Gallup poll showed that the people in Vietnam would greatly appreciate our immediate withdrawal. We support South African apartheid. Fifty percent of American investment to the entire continent of Africa goes to that country. Gulf Oil is currently developing Angolan oil reserves that will make South Africa's industrialized economy invulnerable to boycott.

At home, poverty and racism continue as always. Blacks who stick their heads up to protest are likely to have them shot off. We have one of the highest infant mortality rates, some of the worst slums, and some of the most brutal prisons of any industrialized western country.

2. Ecology -- Building on the soul of John Calvin and the dynamism of the industrial revolution, western man, a moment or two ago, (in terms of earth history) decided that the road to progress and prosperity lay in "conquering" nature. Now we have made homo sapiens an endangered species. Two thirds of the world's people go to bed hungry each night and in thirty-seven years (when today's high school senior will be fifty-four), there will be twice as many people. In America, our lakes turn to crud, great brown palls hang over cities, thousands of chemicals are put into our food and we are using up non-renewable resources (thus contributing to pollution) at a suicidal rate. Human mother's milk contains too much DDT to be legally sold. Soon the biosphere may not support life, but we will probably have scented gas masks in a variety of pastel shades.

3. Repression - defined by Webster's as "to check by or as if by pressure...to prevent the natural or normal expression, activity or development of." If you are male, try letting your hair grow naturally out of your head for a couple of years and you will know repression. The young of the counter culture are the "new niggers," discriminated against on the street, in housing, in employment and in small and subtle ways every day of their lives. It would seem "natural or normal" to demonstrate against genocidal, immoral war, but recently when construction workers beat up young demonstrators in New York, President Nixon invited union leaders (many of whom were convicted extortionists and racists in Union Policy) to lunch at the White House. Hundreds of thousands of young people are in jail, for both political and cultural "crimes." Stories (and facts) abound of bloodily shaved heads, beatings, rapes and murder. There are billboards reading, "Beautify America. Get a Haircut" and restaurants with signs out front saying "Hippies not served here."

Once alienated, young people's concepts of this country often change quickly and drastically. They often discover that current policies are not as new and deviant as they had hoped. After all, it was genocide against the red man that gave us the land in the first place. A significant part of our wealth was produced by slaves, possibly the cruelest slave system every devised. Workers in the "Robber Barons" factories were only a little better off and today we wax fat off the misery of the Third World.

Tin soldiers and Nixon's comin'
We're finally on our own.
This summer I hear the drummin'
Four dead in Ohio
Four dead in Ohio.

--Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

RESULTS

I. Drugs

Do you know what a joint is, or hash, or a chillum, or a lid or zigzags or roaches or steamboats? Or Jones? You can bet you know a lot of young people who do. The really critical question about drugs is simply -- if kids are in trouble with acid or speed or heroin, will they come to you for help? Suppose they did. Do you have the knowledge, or the compassion, or the understanding, or the means to help them more than you would hurt them?

Young people use drugs for many reasons, most of which you have heard. Adult example doesn't help much since over one-fourth of all adults use either "uppers" or "downers" or both to get them through the day. I would like to explore a reason you probably haven't heard before. Consider this thought by Ortega y Gasset:

The man who is too cultivated and socialized, who is living on top of a culture which has already become false, is in urgent need of another culture, that is to say a culture which is genuine. But this can only start in the sincere and naked depths of his own personal self. Therefore, he must go back to make contact with himself.

I assert that it is in part this desire to explore the sincere and naked depths of the self that is responsible for the use of consciousness expanding drugs -- marijuana, LSD, mescaline, peyote, etc.

This is obviously not the reason for using consciousness contracting drugs like heroin and alcohol.

A. Marijuana consists of the flowering tops and leaves of the Indian Hemp plant (*cannabis sativa*). It is dried, crushed up and either smoked, eaten or made into tea. Hashish is pollen from the flowers. Both have been used for thousands of years. They give the user a feeling of relaxation, mild euphoria, and heightened sense perceptions for a couple of hours or more. Time is distorted, thoughts bounce in and out of awareness, memory may seem to fail at times; often people stop talking in the middle of a sentence, unable to remember what they were going to say. The users pulse rate increases, he may feel hungry, he may feel like urinating, the air may seem cooler and eyes might redden a bit (no dilated pupils).

Marijuana is really a non-issue since, if used sensibly, it is far less harmful than nicotine or coffee. It cannot be proven to be harmful at all. The only problem is that a couple of hundred thousand young people are in jail for using it. They think it is a very significant issue. Laws against marijuana are nothing more than blatant cultural repression. In the twenties and thirties, it was the "spic" and "nigger" rabble -- now it is the long hairs.

B. Hallucinogens, (LSD, mescaline, etc.) work the same basic way as marijuana but they are very, very strong. Changes in consciousness might resemble psychosis, particularly schizophrenia, or the visions of ancient holy men. The initial enthusiasm for these drugs has died down somewhat -- partly because of bad publicity but mostly because of the difficulty of getting pure drugs on the street. Speed and strychnine are frequent pollutants.

Could you deal with a bad trip? The mind of your client may be working in a framework neither you nor he has ever experienced before. It can be the pinnacle of existential terror. A lot of bad trippers are convinced they have gone crazy forever. The wall may be melting. What to do? First, ask the person if he has a friend he would like to see. Try to find out how his mind is working. Convince him that everything is going to be all right. "Talk him down" over a period

of hours by going with the flow. If you can walk around outdoors, do it. Above all, don't turn the person over to anyone he doesn't want to see (Police, hospital, parents, etc.) or you may be responsible for freaking him out forever.

C. Heroin (Jones, Smack, Horse, Junk, Skag, H.)

"Heroin has all the advantages of death without the permanence." It epitomizes death; it kills all pain. Historically, it has been the drug of those whose lives were misery and held no hope of anything better. Now, since so many of the young feel that way, it is spreading like wildfire into the white middle class. Kids who use heroin want to escape and do it in a way that dramatizes total rejection of everything their parents' world stands for. Heroin gives life meaning; a person must hustle every day to serve his habit.

Obviously, heroin is tremendously destructive to the revolutionary youth culture. Underground media unceasingly try to point out its danger and in some cases propose that the pusher meet a violent end. They don't think much of their prospects for success, though, since "to wipe out junk you'd have to wipe out the need for junk, and to wipe out the need for junk, you'd have to wipe out the system."

II. Struggling Towards Birth -- A New Culture

Well then can I walk beside you?
I have come to lose the smog
And I feel myself a cog in something turning...
I don't know who I am,
But life is for learning

--Joni Mitchell

You see, they can't understand our strengths
Or the very depth of our questions and assault on them
Our so lively substance and imagination
Our dreams and courage.

--Free Vermont

It is at this point that my confidence about writing this article begins to wane and any pretense of objectivity goes totally out the window. How can I write of the "New Age," of the holy energy of creation and liberation surging through my generation and hope to get it all together? Whatever I write, I will want to tear up and

throw away. By the time it get to print, it will be ancient history anyway.

Originally this section was to be divided into two parts, because originally there were two distinct strains in the youth culture. It has been divided many ways, into hippies and radicals, into neo-mystics and neo-marxists, into the uncommitted and the committed. Now these two types have merged to the point where it is more realistic to talk about them together than apart. The hippies have realized that they will not be allowed to live their life style without struggle and the radicals have learned that revolution means a whole new consciousness and life style, not just smashing the State. Hippies are now organizing for self defense and Weathermen are dropping acid. Timothy Leary proclaims, "world wide ecological religious warfare."

Most of America seems to think "This too will pass" or "There has always been a generation gap." What they fail to realize is that the current generation of American youth is different from any other group the human species has ever produced in so many basic ways that it is inevitable that the culture which evolves out of their lives will be new and unique. This is the first generation ever to live their entire lives knowing that species suicide is but a push button away. Efficient contraception makes it possible for sexual relations to be separated from having babies. This generation has grown up with TV and satellite; instantaneous global communication and pictures of our earth sphere shot from space make it obvious that all human beings are in this thing together. The young in America have had more education than any group in history. Most importantly, we now live for the first time in a potentially post scarcity environment. Human technology has the means to supply the basic needs of all people. Only after basic scarcity is overcome can we even begin to explore the vastness of human potential. Now is the crux of human history. From here onward, there are only two paths. Either we continue on our present course towards apocalyptic doom or we leave behind petty hostility and greed and move towards a new, necessarily utopian, vision.

Contemporary youth politics began in 1962 with the Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society. Its essence was

that the dominant attitudes of "loneliness, estrangement and isolation" in this culture must be replaced by people and institutions that "regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom and love." Youth culture, blooming in the 1967 San Francisco "Summer of Love," is basically the expression in people's lives of the political ideals of the New Left.

Throughout the sixties, political activism and cultural alienation grew quickly and steadily. The Chicago Convention of 1968 killed the hope of many that the problems they perceived would ever be worked out through conventional politics. The huge protests and rock concerts, culminating with the half million people at Woodstock, gave a great feeling of power and solidarity. Western rationality and secularism came to be challenged by a resurgence of mysticism and religious quest. Astrology, mind expanding drugs, Tarot and the I Ching became part of youth culture as did interest in a great variety of eastern religions. People became concerned about the "vibrations" in interpersonal relationships and about the wholesomeness and purity of the food they put into their bodies. Many went "back to the land" to live communally on farms and be close to the rhythm and reality of nature. Crafts such as leatherwork, pottery, jewelry or candles sometimes provided a subsistence living.

By the end of the 1960's, it was time for re-thinking. The SDS had grown huge only to have its leadership split into two tiny factions, one group making bombs and the other talking to workers about Marx. The cultural revolution, if measured in terms of long hair and youth alienation, campus and high school political militancy and the popularity of marijuana and acid rock music, was clearly moving of its own momentum. It was time to begin to define, in real and practical terms, what it must move toward.

Instead of trying to build large organizations, radicals are now organizing into small working collectives, the political equivalent of the commune. The intimacy of this type of organization makes participants face the fact that social change begins in their own lives. Each person has to learn to love and live with and work with other real people to try to produce both the non-alienated labor and the kind of warm authentic personal relationships that are

the ultimate goal of "The Revolution." Many collectives produce media, such as underground newspapers or films. Others are involved in trying to form alternatives to the institutions of the dominant culture. The basic strategy is that people will see the need for revolutionary change when something clearly superior is presented. Some characteristic "serve the people" projects are free medical clinics, food buying cooperatives, free stores, breakfast programs, free schools, drug help programs, community switchboards, legal services, tenants' unions, draft counseling and research. Counselors should read "The Radical Therapist" (produced by a Minot, North Dakota collective) and "Vocations for Social Change" by the "Canyon Collective" (California).

The future is very hard to predict. The current mood is one of deep brooding and soul searching. If the young are allowed and encouraged to grow and develop as they wish, America will experience a period of regeneration striking enough to peel the crust of cynicism off even the most hardened heart. All they want is the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of their own road to happiness. If, on the other hand, adults demand that the young live within the bounds of a culture already formed, there will be chaos and anarchy and violence and blood such as this country has never seen. America has bred some sons and daughters who are strong and free. Many of them take "liberty or death" quite seriously.

CONCLUSION

For a counselor to be worthwhile in this age, he must recognize that many of the pollutants of human relationships exist outside the control of an individual "client." They are structured into the fabric of society. For starters: 1) We must reject the sanctimonious supremacy that I call Adult Chauvinism. This is the premise that one should not judge ideas on their intrinsic worth and people on their individual personality but rather that there is a factor weighted for age on the scales of truth. I suggest the opposite. I suggest that we sincerely try to communicate with the young, whose weltanschauung and responses have been most heavily influenced by contemporary realities. They might reasonably be looked to to

first intuit cultural adaptations that will increase chances that the human species will remain viable. Once it was the old who had wisdom; now it is the young. Margaret Mead understands. Young people clearly know the basic fact that they will have to survive longer than older people. Adult chauvinism is often employed by adults (particularly in schools) to mask a severe lack of knowledge and empathy (and no small amount of defensiveness) behind the Mystic Cloak of age or "professionalism."

- 2) We should realize that it is definitionally impossible to be at once a humanist and a capitalist since these philosophies define good in diametrically opposite ways. Good to the humanist is the welfare and happiness of people; good to the capitalist is the maximization of profit on investment.
- 3) We must either redefine progress or pollute ourselves to death. Some system of accounting must be devised that recognizes social as well as monetary cost.
- 4) The nuclear family is not the optimum arrangement for people to live in. It is almost necessarily sexist and severely limits the number of close human relationships available to both growing children and adults.
- 5) We must work for real pluralism in America. People should be allowed to live in vastly different ways. Historically, American policy has been "Melt into the pot or else!"
- 6) The structure of work must be made more flexible and less alienating. All workers, whether in factories, offices or schools must have a role in basic decision-making. A person who needs less money should be allowed to work less time.

it appears to be a long time before the dawn - doesn't it?