

THE GROANING OF AMERICA
(Originally published September 1971)

(Charles A. Reich: Color Him Green)

"In America, the young are always ready to give to those who are older than them the full benefits of their inexperience." - Oscar Wilde

The groans you hear come from thousands of ordinary Americans who were conned into reading the recent non-fiction work on the youth revolution. The burden of an alienated young rests heavily on our shoulders and this latest fad book does nothing to lighten the load. Hailed as a "#1 Bestseller" by an indiscriminating publisher, Charles Reich's *The Greening of America* has little to recommend it save a clever title.

The obscure intransitive verb "to green" has been lifted from the realm of poetry and applied optimistically to the changing culture created by the new visionaries of youth. In ecological ecstasy, new sprouts of green are supposedly pushing up through the hardened asphalt and plastic of modern materialism to herald a rejuvenation of all society in the image of its liberated young.

The book itself is a tiring exposition of jumbled socio-psychological fantasy in praise of the revolution in progress, as the young retreat into a world of make believes. The writing style is convoluted and tedious. Paragraphs are loaded with multiple questions, which are infrequently answered except in vague simplistic terms. For some of the lengthy chapters, skim reading is the only salvation.

You must first struggle through the Reich concepts of Consciousness I and Consciousness II before reaching the nirvana of Consciousness III, the transitional Utopia of a greening never, never land en route to the as yet unformulated Consciousnesses IV, V and VI. The early Consciousnesses were, of course, bad things. Consciousness I, which carried the American founders up into the Twentieth Century, was the traditional outlook of individual enterprise and competitive striving in an increasingly industrialized society confounded by the Puritan ethic. With some overlapping, Consciousness II took over for most of the Twentieth Century and, especially after the Second World War, occupied itself in a conformist struggle for success with individuality sacrificed to organizational systems and dominated by machine-oriented technology. Consciousness III has been with us only since the mid- sixties, but with it has come liberation from old values, rejection of authority and excellence, freedom from competitiveness and a return to individualism, love, goodwill and nature. It will deliver us from evil, abolish war, reform the world, establish a classless brotherhood of man, eliminate poverty and cure the common cold. The Consciousnesses yet to come could go on to greater heights.

The main adversary in the book (variously labeled in the past by other less discerning analysts as the Establishment, the Structure, the Machine, Big Business, Big Labor and the Military Industrial Complex) is identified by Reich as the Corporate State. There can be no doubt that the Corporate State is a despicable entity since most of the authorities quoted do confirm the author's opinions. A partial listing of experts admired and quoted by Reich follows: Marx, Kafka, Thoreau, Sinclair, Steinbeck, James Joyce, Miller (both Henry and Arthur), Galbraith, Marcuse, Norman Mailer, Vonnegut, McLuhan, Eldridge Cleaver, Justice Douglas, Margaret Mead, Arlo Guthrie, the Rolling Stones, Jefferson Airplane and *R. Crumb's Head Comix*.

Mr. Reich believes firmly that the new rebelliousness, protest, thinking, clothes, drugs, music, sexuality and liberated life style are neither passing fads nor irrational. In fact, he considers it necessary and inevitable that the new culture must, in time, absorb not only the youth but all people in America. He likes everything about the whole movement and is accomplished at explaining any part of it. (It is a tribute to his perceptiveness that he can find significant meaning in even that new generation expression, "Wow!")

He explodes the belief that the new generation has an aversion for work. It is not "lazy," it just prefers to work at things worthwhile like practicing for hours on the guitar and bongo drums, sharing healthful labor on a communal farm, and creating Pop Art or a new People's Park.

The clothes may look uniformly drab and dirty, but to Reich they are "earthy," expressive of "profound democratic values," have a "functional affinity with nature" and are most adaptable for "lying on the ground." He is particularly fond of bellbottoms, which "give the ankles a special freedom" and invite dancing in the streets. Beads, headbands, costumery and strange hats add gaiety to the world and "nudge the wearer with deep questions." The new clothes "demonstrate a significant new relationship between man and technology."

There are twelve pages of praise for the new music. The art of rock is likened to a medieval cathedral and he feels that it has attained a pinnacle unreachable by such old fashioned geniuses as Beethoven and Mozart. It has "achieved a height of knowledge, understanding, insight and truth concerning the world and peoples' feelings, that is incredibly greater than what other media have been able to express." Although from the foregoing it is obvious that Mr. Reich is no student of Shakespeare, he is an admirer of poetry. Who can experience a magnificent sense of detachment, a feeling in the poem "Stoned" from *R. Crumb's Head Commix*.

“Hey boparee stoned
Omigod he stoned
Whattthehell is this stoned?
Like nobody's bizness stoned
Stone cold daid stoned
Sick in the haid stoned
He she it stoned!
. . .” Etc., etc.

Getting stoned," the drug experience expresses "an attitude toward life" and opens up new vistas to "recapture truth." Marijuana is the "truth serum" of the new culture, and psychedelic drugs are excellent consciousness expanders, which make possible a "higher range of experience."

Reich feels that we are witnessing a great moment of history, the rebirth of a shining future; that if we but choose the new set of values, a great discovery awaits us. "The discovery is simply this: there is nobody whatever on the other side. Nobody wants inadequate housing or medical care (sic)—only the machine. Nobody wants war except the machine. And even businessmen would like to roll in the grass and lie in the sun." So with inescapable logic: "There is no need, then, to fight any group of people in America. They are all fellow sufferers. There is no reason to fight the machine. It can be made the servant of man. Consciousness III can make a new society."

The author is exhilarated by the young, and especially by the conversion of the well-groomed, hard-working freshman with solid, conventional values who, after a few short months of college life, is transformed into a "drug-using, long-haired, peace-loving `freak.'" The converted student is discovering his true identity. The new awareness of Consciousness III is taking over.

If the older generation wonders how such miracles of "conversion" can be wrought, just multiply by thousands the Charles Reich's we've developed during four decades of social adjustment education and scatter them throughout hundreds of liberal arts institutions to advise and teach our sons and daughters and the answer becomes evident.

Somewhere back in the intelligent reader's own suffering consciousness is a nagging suspicion that Reich could be kidding. If he is just pulling our leg, then he has written a magnificent hoax. On the other hand, if the book is for real, then you must wonder about the intelligence of the young and the vacuous idiocy of the intellectual sophisticates who take it seriously, ("One of the most gripping, penetrating and revealing analyses of American Society I have yet seen." – Senator George McGovern.)

It does seem strange that a 42-year-old professor of law at Yale could qualify as prophet and spokesman for the under-thirty generation. However, the halls of learning have sheltered many a case of arrested development before, and it may be that Reich, nurtured in the academic insularity of the Berkeley-New Haven axis, is following in the footsteps of that other profound thinker from the same environment, Dr. Timothy Leary. In the words of a knowledgeable South Georgia farm philosopher, "Ain't so much he's bad wrong, he wuz jus' picked green."

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "The Doctor's Lounge", Sep 1971, Vol. XVIII No.9, p.12