

The trouble with

growing old

Baby, it's dead outside

The following is an editorial reprinted from the BU News, student newspaper at Boston University.

If there is something about age which de-activates the sexual or-

gans, dissipates the political impetus, and eliminates all hope in a sea of despair, then we are surely on the brink of some colossal end, for our students are growing old when they have scarcely begun to be young.

Their youth alone will allow them to practice their sexuality maturely and without either adolescent prurience or elderly cynicism, to foment a political revolution which strikes at the heart of the established "values", to reject in the academic community that which is fabricated or false.

But there is no place for youthful, halcyon indifference in a world methodically destroying itself in a maze of textual footnotes, subway clatter, pills, television fancies, packaged beauty, "show" Negroes, napalm, bombs, and gilt-edged murder. Every infant, as a popular song tells, is born with the ghostly inheritance of 20 tons of TNT and an adult responsibility which makes simplicity all but impossible.

Like all the old, we will die. And why should we be concerned when the monstrous cloud will not lighten, the harlot still walks the streets, and the educator teaches cant and sullen introspection?

We are getting old, growing up, and the odds are against our making any news.

RELATIVE AGE

A. J. Muste was old, 82, but he made news. His charm and freshness hung about him like the flesh on his pointed cheek-bones. He had an inner light, a seriousness which kept him on planes, in jail, and at his desk working against war. He did not betray his common humanity, but remained a man. In this sense, he never lost his potency.

Tom Hayden and Paul Potter are old, nearing 30. They helped found Students for a Democratic Society when the notion of politically-aware students was almost inconceivable, and they now run the Newark Community Action Project and the Educational Co-operative of Boston, respectively. Even though their tenacity has not

visibly affected American society, they continue to organize and activate on that inner light, which says:

—Hard times may be ripe, Vietnamese children dead, and the spirit of poetry quite gone, but I will stand for life, even if I stand alone.

And what else is there to do, as adulthood approaches? If life is truly a matter of keeping occupied for the sake of remaining something and somebody, then not even Hiroshima or the statistical analysis of American business trends abroad, or the saccharine fraudulence of the airline stewardess' smile, can defeat us.

USES OF POWER

The young must be mature enough to take power, now, and to wield it imaginatively, or they will surely not be any more able to shape their own ends than their elders have been.

If the war is confusing, and it surely is, they must send their own observers to it to see it plainly without asking the university's permission or the world's. They must do it, move, and be serious. If the war is moreover immoral, they must refuse to fight in it, and must stand by their youthful faith. They must make news.

If the university's dormitory policies are ill-conceived and inhumane, they must disobey, for free men cannot make choices if they succumb to tyranny. If education is irrelevant, they will see through it, stage their Academic Revolution teach-ins, and begin to alter it radically.

If moral standards are outdated and inimical to human nature, they will make love, fornicate with impunity, display their youthful honesty and their blameless flesh. Youth is faith, faith the root of all power, power the song and dance of life.

AGE IS STERILITY

Power is music and harmony, sweetness out of disorder, the capacity to move at one's will and to

be young; age is weakness and discord, blindness and sterility.

Only the young, whatever their age, can sing, lead the cosmic dance, believe. By acting on the strength of their convictions, they are sure of their goals, can reserve their energies and go on to a serious challenge of the status quo. Precisely because they are young, they must emerge from the Almost Grown to the Grown, and infiltrate the skeletal foundation of the society they have not built.

Song need not express joy; it often expresses determination, tragedy, or conviction. What is important, so to speak, is that we must have something to sing about, something to say, and to believe. We must find the middle ground between indifference and dogmatism—we must find conviction.

Without such conviction, all is lost, the serious reforms unattainable, and we wait only for the grave, which is not distant, and the state of nothingness.

MAYBE NOTHING

On the surface, there is no honest faith left—a position in an insurance company, perhaps, and a suburban wife to inseminate, with suburban children to raise, but all an anti-climax, a post-orgasm slumber. Human life is over, and the seed spent, where imagination fails.

It is a matter of life or death, of sexuality, intelligence and humanity or sterility, passive stupidity and a hideous Armageddon. The power is clearly ours, for we can withhold our support from a society and an ethic which cannot exist without it.

If we do not, while we are Almost-Grown, grow up with an intent seriousness of purpose to reshape in our own image—in man's image—the world men have allowed themselves to believe is built in the image of God, then we will be partner to Him in our delusion.

We will kill and we will be self-righteous, and we will grow truly old before our proper time—never—has come.



—Brian Campbell photo
LOOKING OUT
... on nothingness

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