

The Grooming of America

The Greening of America
by Charles A. Reich
Bantam, 1971 \$1.35

Reviewed by Ron Crocker (ARCUP)

Today we are witnesses to a great moment in history; a turn from the pessimism that has closed in on modern industrial society; the rebirth of a future; the rebirth of people in a sterile land. If that process has to be summed up in a single word, that word would be freedom. Freedom from outmoded economic and political doctrines, freedom from oppressive institutions, freedom from the San Quentin consciousness by which we lock the doors of our minds...

- Charles A. Reich
The Greening of America

Bless you, Charles A. Reich, and where have you been all our lives?

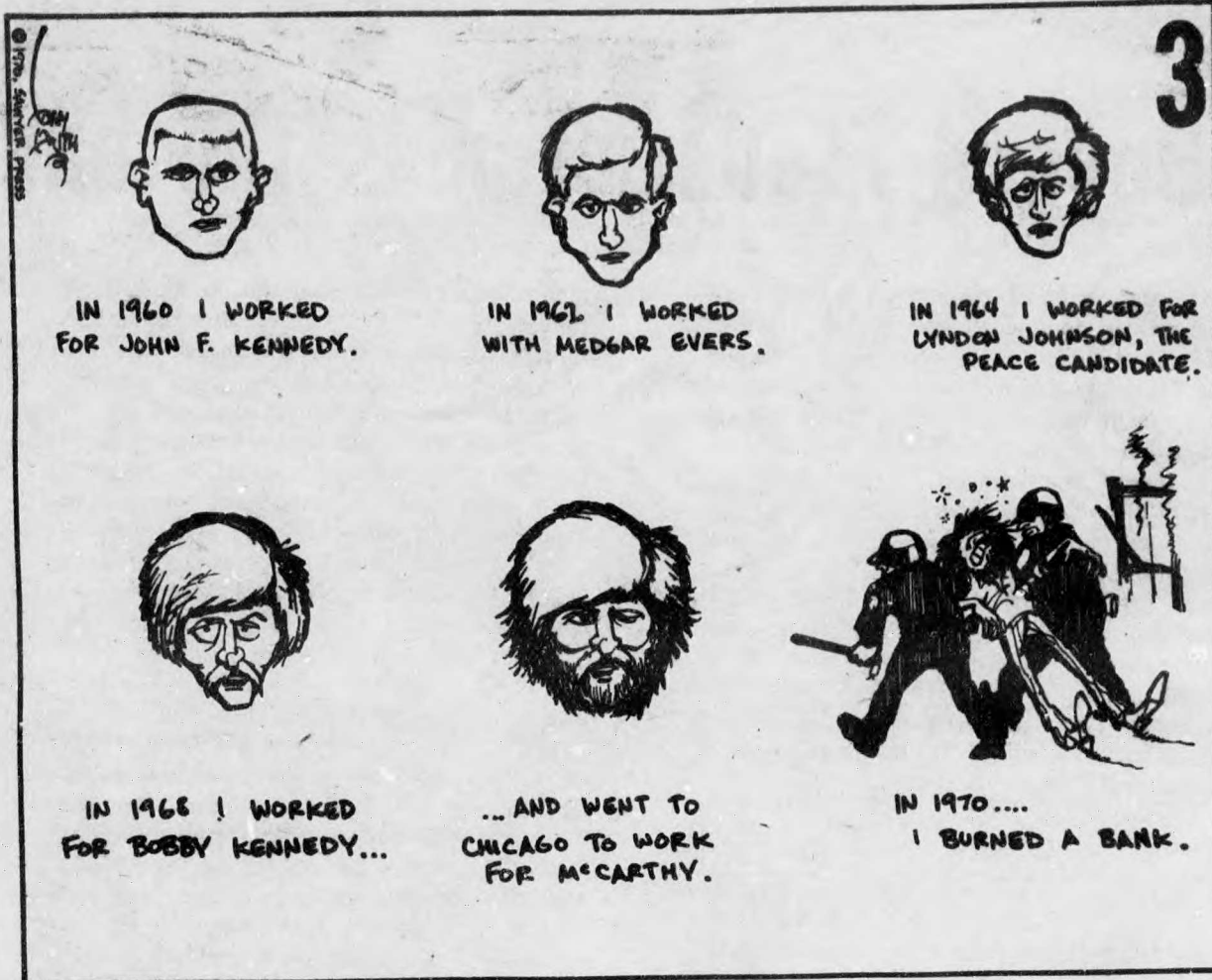
Or rather, where have we been all yours?

And is the revolution really here? And why haven't we noticed it yet?

We've been waiting for it for years and we might never have known it was here if we had not read The Greening of America and had it served up piping cold, dipped in maple syrup and topped with the most potent hit of political soma since the legalization (for all intents and purposes) of marijuana.

It's all there for anyone to see; 430 pages (in paperback) of funny little black dots heralding the nascent Consciousness III, a euphoric and tranquil state of being that transcends the crap and corruption of the Corporate State with its attendant internal and imperialistic atrocities and peckkons one and all to toke and titter along from day to day with never a side-ward glance at the social and political ills that would have spurred them to violence in less enlightened times. The Greening of America attempts to negate the need for overt political action in the quest for social change; Brave New World has an antithesis, and God must certainly be in his heaven.

The historical development of American social awareness, as Reich sees it, has already spawned two lesser levels of consciousness - Consciousness I which revolves around individual action, splendid independence of spirit, and which is eventually undermined by cut-throat competition and economic corruption; and Consciousness II, wherein the obsession with organization and protestant-puritan meritocracy alienates people from themselves and the reality of their existence,



and which is only now starting to give way to a struggle by a refreshing new counter-culture to regain human sensitivity and individuality. Both levels enable and abet the evolution of a multi-tentacled monster called the Corporate State which by the end of the nineteen sixties had gathered enough momentum to tumble along and survive independent of human assistance, feeding itself to obesity on the rotting corpse of human resolution. The machine owes its success and survival to the doublebarrelled tragedy of human willingness to produce and willingness to consume.

But good news from Charles Reich! The hated machine can't survive much longer. America's scummy and pock-marked social topography is in the process of being "greened". Into the telephone booth goes the crew-cut, grey-flanneled, Ivy League, all-American success story - a bit of deft legerdemain - and Zap! Pow! out comes Super Freak, the new all-American hero... Oliver Barrett III in bell-bottoms, shoulder-length hair and peace medallion, virtually pawing the turf in his enthusiasm to spread the glad tidings of Consciousness III amongst the uninitiated. The good word is transcendence. Get above it all; trip off to the new super-culture of dope, hard-rock and meditation; hang loose and groove in the new Shangra-la where the communal bread (pizza) and the communal wine (Coke) is shared lovingly among the group and where the once-hideous neon-lit, glass-enclosed, all-night restaurant becomes "a haven for nocturnal writers and nocturnal walkers", a kind of freak-intellectual's Big Rock Candy Mountain. Shake the evil conditioning that makes you produce and consume with sheep-like acquiescence to the faceless master, and the monster - surviving as it does on your servile willingness to make and buy - will promptly self-destruct. Can revolution be so simple?

Of course it can, Reich declares. It's as plain as the joint in your face and it's all related to the change in consciousness. After all, he tells us, "nineteen sixty-eight was the year of Chicago. Nineteen sixty-nine was the year of Woodstock. That speaks of the distance we have come and the speed with which we are travelling." Ah, yes, 'tis true. But was

not nineteen seventy the year of Kent State? And will nineteen seventy-one not be the year of Attica? Or do we nit-pick?

Reich takes some pain on at least two occasions to puncture Herbert Marcuse's contention that the Corporate State can perpetuate itself by coopting the values of the new culture and gradually meting them out to appease radical demands (The One-Dimensional Man). But in a very concrete sense The Greening of America bears Marcuse out. Its message for would-be activists is terse: do nothing; the machine is its own worst enemy and will soon sink in its own quagmire. Reich has met the enemy and, lo, he is nobody. "Nobody wants war except the machine. And even businessmen, once liberated, would like to roll in the grass and lie in the sun. 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."

To round out the literary night-mare, Reich invokes that tired old hobby-horse, the American (yawn) Dream. "What is the central idea of America, unless each man's ability to create his own life? The dream was deferred for many generations in order to create a technology that could raise life to a higher level. It need be, it can be, delayed no longer."

There is little left to say about The Greening because there is little left in it. Reich's efforts are laudable in a couple of areas: his analysis of the anatomy of the Corporate State could in itself serve as a good radical primer and it is clear that the author has a good grasp of the numbing effects to today's formal educational process and the "lawlessness" of contemporary law.

But the overall impact of The Greening of America is a dangerous white-washing of the latent potential for qualitative change in America's (and Canada's) beleaguered socio-political structures. Reich's refusal to recognize and name a human enemy is either woefully naive or maliciously counter-revolutionary and reactionary. And neither can merit high praise.