

## Green Grow the Reichs O!

### The Greening of America, by Charles

A Reich, *New York: Random House, 1970. 399 pp. \$7.95.*

THIS IS an evidentiary document of the first importance. Up to now no single book has so illumined the current scene, so analyzed, epitomized, explicated and narrated the movements which lend this declining third of the American twentieth century its special flavor of denouement. Professor (at the Yale Law School) Reich's irrefutable premise is that ideas have consequences. He examines three interrelated packages of ideas—Consciousness I, Consciousness II, and Consciousness III—which have shaped America and Americans, and while his labels are his own, and his interpretations, few would question the accuracy of his descriptions.

Quite briefly, Consciousness I was the original America, which valued "character, morality, hard work and self denial." More briefly still, Consciousness II was the New Deal and its ideological sequels. Let Reich himself announce in rather more detail the experiences, qualities, virtues, now lost but still recoverable, that he promises in Consciousness III. It will be noted at once that much of the author's list reflects his reading of Peter Laslett's winsome book, *The World We Have Lost*, cited among Reich's acknowledgements. This study of late mediaeval England could easily be called proto-Consciousness I, reporting as it does the culture which our founders fled and then reconstituted in the wilderness.

Certainly there is a clear note of the seventeenth century in Reich's first count of the good things to be retrieved: "Adventure, Travel—the Yukon, the Hebrides, a blizzard, fog on the Grand Banks, the lost cities of Crete, climbing a mountain on rock and ice in elemental cold and wind." Or against the early 1800's consider: "Na-

ture—the experience of living in harmony with nature, on a farm, or by the sea, or near a lake or meadow, knowing, using, and returning the elements; Thoreau at Walden."

Reich makes a traditional point of "Morality—Having a moral stand with respect to something happening to oneself, to others, or to society; maintaining that stand, and giving it expression. . . ." And, without elaboration: "Bravery, Worship . . . Awe, Wonder, Reverence . . . Community, Solidarity, Brotherhood, Liberation."

Yet intermittently in the listing—it has fifty-nine entries and runs for three pages—a faint ambiguity begins to sound: "Responding to Own Needs—staying in bed when the need is felt, drinking a milkshake on a hot afternoon, or stopping everything to watch a rainstorm." Again: "Own Special Excellence—Having enough independence to disregard other people's standards of excellence, discover one's own special excellence and to pursue it." Also: "Sensuality—being sensually aware of all the stimuli at a given moment; smell, temperature, breeze, noises, the tempo of one's own body."

But early and abruptly, intimation explodes into rather strident affirmation, and Consciousness III—naked and unashamed—makes the scene: "Sex—experiences with many different people, in different times, circumstances, and localities, in moments of happiness, sorrow, need, and comfortable familiarity, in youth and in age." And climactically: "Mind-expanding drugs." No elaboration here, but later on Reich cites "the magnificent sense of detachment" available in the poem "Stoned," from R. Crumb's *Head Comix*:

Hey boparee stoned  
Omigod he stoned  
Whatthell is this stoned?  
Like nobody's bizness stoned  
Stone cold daid stoned  
Sick in the Haid stoned  
He she it stoned. . . .

and so on for another nineteen lines.

Now obviously in sex and drugs, Consciousness III is not retrieving, but intruding; in these and other stresses peculiarly its own, it rejects not merely Consciousness I, not just certain benign aspects of Consciousness II, but the strong residual strands of both in the still prevailing culture. Reich is against what he calls the Corporate State, blaming it largely on the New Deal. Its productivity, while immense, he finds in general deleterious to health and subversive of spirit. He is against status, honors, competition, the meritocracy, élites of any other kind, hierarchy in all its forms. Authority itself is evil, and one discipline which it imposes.

Reich does rebuke overt violence. He prefers infiltration to confrontation—seeking the process whereby the corporate state will just wither away by itself. Though he rejects materialism, he relies on present affluence, a steady abundance for everyone, to ease the access of all to Consciousness III. Not even work is excluded altogether from his prospectus. The people of Consciousness III will merely “refuse to be driven and disciplined, imprisoned and impoverished by work; they will not be robot-tenders of the machine, but human beings whose work is always subordinate to this humanity. . . .”

The somewhat casual, almost episodic work programs thus projected do not quicken Reich's interest in capital formation for more labor-saving machinery. After all, thrift, the seed of investment but a repressive concept, went out with Consciousness I. Deploring inflation, as he does from time to time, Reich programs an exponential intensification of the consume more-produce less fallacy which generates it. His economics suggest a greening of America by volunteer grass (i. e., *Cannabis sativa*) in city streets depopulated by its yield and otherwise by universal dearth.

Reich's vision of external affairs is hardly more provident. To him Vietnam and the Cold War are special depravities, but of a curiously *ex parte* nature. He sees no threat to the lotophage republic from the envy of

less happier lands. Though Marx and Marcuse are constantly on his lips, if the word “Russia” or the initials “U.S.S.R.” occur in the work, one reader missed them. Reich does say he is against totalitarianism, and he concedes somewhat listlessly that “perhaps we do need a defense force of 100,000 or 200,000 men.” He does not mention inter-continental missiles or nuclear submarines.

What is the ideational pedigree of these proposals? An immediate antecedent is described in the book as follows:

Unquestionably the blacks made a substantial contribution to the origins of the new consciousness. They were left out of the Corporate State, and thus they had to have a culture and life-style in opposition to the State. Their music, with its “guts,” contrasted with the insipid white music. Their way of life seemed more earthy, more sensual than that of whites. They were the first openly to scorn the Establishment and its values; as Eldridge Cleaver shows in *Soul on Ice*, and Malcolm X shows in his autobiography, they were radicalized by the realities of their situation. When their music began to be heard by white teen-agers through the medium of rock 'n' roll, and when their view of America became visible through the civil rights movement, it gave new emphasis to the subterranean awareness of the beat generation. . . . The great change took place when Consciousness III began to appear among young people who had endured no special emotional conditions, but were simply bright, sensitive children of the affluent middle class.

Of course it was not Consciousness III but Consciousness I which first heard the music of “guts,” earthiness and sensuality in its fateful anabasis from New Orleans and up the river to the country at large early in the century. What made Consciousness III more susceptible to this music—and to the drug culture that has evolved around it—than the grandparents of Con-

sciousness I? A special contribution of Consciousness II across a wholly amicable generation gap is clearly part of the answer. How it happened is suggested by Professor Reich's own *cursus vitae*.

The brilliant young man fresh out of Oberlin College matriculated in the Yale Law School and went on to graduation in 1952. The Yale brand of positivism—the “scientific” jurisprudence which stressed “facts” over theory, “pragmatism” over principle—to the “relative neglect of the problem of values”—still colored the law curriculum. Professor Thurman Arnold had written one witty book proving that government is a mere manipulation of fictive symbols and another, even wittier, on “the folklore” of capitalism. Shortly after his graduation, Reich joined the law firm that Arnold had by then established in Washington—Arnold, Fortas, and Porter. Arnold was, of course, the former image-breaker of the Yale Law School, Fortas the future Supreme Court justice who would resign after public questioning of some of his financial arrangements *extra forum*. Among the “good and generous friends” to whom “the book owes much,” Reich cites William O. Douglas, a Supreme Court justice in the full Yale “realist” tradition, and in his time and theirs a Yale law professor with Arnold and Fortas. When Reich says that Consciousness III is “deeply suspicious of logic, rationality, analysis, and of principles,” he celebrates bright law school years and their cacophonous beaming of disinhibit vibes, via the fathers of Consciousness II, to the children of Consciousness III.

But Reich has still deeper roots, to which clues begin to show surprisingly again in Arnold. The lawyer's effort to reduce objective reality to law and order, wrote Arnold in 1935, is identical with that of the theologian. So is the result: “The unifying element of the inconsistent institutions which arise out of the attempt to make the world logical and symmetrical must . . . be completely unintelligible.” The hundred or so law reviews are just like the “books of sermons and theological reasoning” of yes-

terday. “Today these tracts are completely forgotten.”

But perhaps not in Reich's (subliminal) Consciousness III. Attentive readers will have picked up one antic sign in his hymn to sexuality, quoted above: the cadences and some of the very words and word orders echo the supplication found on page 74 of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Elsewhere Reich says “it is no accident that marijuana joints are always passed around from hand to hand and mouth to mouth . . . that a single pizza or a single Coke is passed from person to person . . . the group is sharing its bread and wine. . . .” Transcendence, redemption, conversion in the sense of regeneration sound more and more often as his theme advances. His is a trinitarian revelation. Out of inference and *innuendo* Reich comes clean at length with an acknowledgement of his model—and his competition:

How is changing one's way of life [Consciousness III] different from Christianity? . . . Christianity asks men to give up power, aggression and materialism for a promise of something better in another world, a world after death. . . . The new way of life proposes a better life now.

In short, Reich is promoting one more rematch of the straight religion and the great god Pan; a new instant and earthly heaven, with drugs displacing the older psychological opiate of Marx's celebrated sneer. His way, says Reich, “offers something that is immediately more satisfying—the sensual beauty of a creative, loving, unrepressed life. . . .”

But it offers as well an ethics of appetite derived at least in part from jurisprudential notions traced by reputable scholars to proto-Hitler Germany and read (in their seapassage to America) as the revenge of the vanquished upon the victor in two world wars. And while Nemesis herself might see in the drug plague now ravishing white middle-class youth an appropriate judgment on three hundred years of black

slavery, that clearly is not what Reich had in mind.

As a wistful medievalist, yearning for lost simplicities, weary of rat-racing, television commercials, super-highways and other industrial pollutions, Reich is not alone, even among the over-thirties. But that is not his full meaning. The poet-historian Toynbee, perhaps not an infallible guide but possessed of an expressive vocabulary, says that in disintegrating societies there are heroes and there are truants; there are men who defend the permanent things and there are men who "surrender to a sense of promiscuity"—in the largest sense, "abandon" for short. Toynbee's truant "realizes with dismay that the regiment has now lost the discipline that his hitherto fortified his *moral*, and in this situation allows himself to believe that he is absolved from . . . duty." As for abandon, "it is a state of mind in which antinomianism is accepted—consciously or unconsciously—in theory or in practice." Consciousness III—and consciously so—is antinomianism in theory and practice, in core, essence and impact. Those who teach it, especially the drug courses, and even more especially in law schools, are surely truant. And Toynbee's own hard answer to the inevitable next question was, *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice!*

Reviewed by C. P. IVES