

The Cracking of the Two Halves of the Walnut --On American Anti-War Movement in The 1960s

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ABSTRACT: *The young American generation in the sixties seemed to have launched a pro-communist crusade against American establishment reversing the anti-communist crusade at home which William Chafe compared to “the other half of the same walnut” in his book *The Unfinished journey*. So what cracked open the walnut? Was it really like the conspiracy theory put forward by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which explains that the American young had been poisoned by communism to act against the society built by their parents’ generation? This paper will demonstrate that the anti-war movement and the counterculture movement on the whole was actually an accumulated end product of the development of American history in the 20th century especially that of the post-war years. And to the contrary of the conspiracy theory, the student generation was actually the staunchest promoter of the original American ideals,*

Keywords: *young generation, sixties, conspiracy, communism, promoter*

I. Introduction

When asked about his impression of the American in the 1960s, a senior from Hawaii University, Justin Young, recalled the one famous expression in the 1960s “make love not war” and Beatles’ “Give Peace a Chance.” For both people who have actually been through the sixties or at least read about it, the great surge of anti-war sentiment as the single most overwhelming and dominating theme of the counterculture movement in the 60s paralleled to the Civil Right movement surely sank deep in to their memory or impression.

Americans undergone that social turmoil could still vividly recall the draft riots, anti-war demonstrations, anti-war speeches, draft resistance movement, all with university students acting at the front-line. They protested on college campuses and in major cities. Even Washington D.C. was not immune to this new age of rebellious youth. In 1965, first draft riots occurred on college campuses. In 1967 when President Johnson authorized CIA to investigate antiwar activists 35,000 protesters demonstrated outside the Pentagon. In a surge of boldness, 50,000 flower children and hippies journeyed to San Francisco for the “Summer of Love”. In 1968 protest outside Democratic National Convention turned violent. The end of the 1960s marked the peak of the anti-war movement and counterculture with 1970 Kent State University students’ anti-war protest and National Guards’ killing of four of them. Students gathered in crowds and banded in organizations, spearheading in demonstrations and protests against the American government’s unsound decisions in the Vietnam War. The semi-socialist organization Student for a Democratic Society (SDS) was the most influential anti-war and counterculture organization in the sixties.

The anti-establishment and anti-authority stand taken by the students was considered by the time as an unpatriotic act infiltrated and manipulated by international communism. This is the key notion of conspiracy theory initiated by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which was mainly responsible for the implementation of the policy of anti-communist at home. By heeding and promoting Marxism as one of its alternative ideology, drawing inspiration from new revolutionary communist thinkers like Mao Zedong, HO Chi Minh and Fidel Castro, and protesting against the Vietnam War, a conflict President Kennedy reiterated during his presidency from 1961-1963 as one small part of the larger struggle between freedom and communism, the students indeed seemed to have been infiltrated by communist thinking to line themselves with the rival communists against their home country. The young American generation in the sixties seemed to have launched a pro-communist crusade against American establishment reversing the anti-communist crusade at home in the 1940s which William Chafe compared to “the other half of the same walnut” in his book *The Unfinished journey*. Following this line of thought, the walnut of the post-war 40s and 50s seemed to have crack open in the 1960s with America’s continuing containment policy abroad in the form of the Vietnam War and Cold War while domestically the anti-communist movement had been reversed into a anti-war movement.

So what cracked open the walnut? Was it really like the conspiracy theory put forward by HUAC which explains that the American young had been poisoned by communism to act against the society built by their parents’ generation? The following study of the anti-war movement and the counterculture movement serving as its broad background proves otherwise. The anti-war movement and the counterculture movement on the whole followed no ideological lead of the communist organizations in America or abroad. Instead of being infiltrated by

communist abroad, the anti-war movement and the counterculture movement on the whole was an accumulated end product of the development of American history in the 20th century especially that of the post-war years. Ironically, being accused of being unpatriotic and conspiring communist abroad, which the parent generation failed to uphold.

II. A Rebellion Against The Established System

The young generation of the anti-war movement or the counterculture movement was an independent movement separated from the circle of communist conspiracy. The anti-war movement was not a communist and anti-imperialist movement in nature and it only accepted communist ideology on their own condition. Though the college young accepted communism or socialism as an alternative to American capitalism, they actually did very little reading of Marx. Their taking after Marxism was more an act of rebellion than a behavior of sincere conversion[1]. A revelation of the core theme of the counterculture movement was a rebellion against the establishment and the parental generation. It was true that from the very beginning, part of the counterculture trend did follow the socialism or communism but that was largely because communism was an alternative to the established American capitalist ideology. Because it accepts no imposed system, the basic stance of the younger generation is openness to all experience, and communism was a piece of that alternative experience.

Take the most active and influential semi-socialist anti-war organization SDS for example. Indeed, it started as a semi-socialist organization with the Intercollegiate Socialist Society(ISS) as its forerunner, and was established with the help of Walter Lippman, Jack London and Clarence Darrow, the American Fabian socialist to encourage socialist activity among youth, focusing primarily on the college campus. Then in the 1930s ISS changed its name into The League for Industry Democracy(LID). During the 1950s, more young adults than ever before entered universities and colleges in massive numbers, which LID viewed as an opportunity for fresh and young members. It created a youth arm the Student League for Industrial Democracy(SLID) so as to access the growing number of college students with the function of educating students about socialism by handing out literature and organizing lectures given by their elders. However, the SLID members soon took matters into their own hands and changed the name of SLID to the Students for a Democratic Society(SDS) in 1959, attempting to strike out on their own and get rid of the control of the older socialist schools. When the LID imposed its paternal-like authority on the youth organization, it decidedly split up with the father organization. Despite the accusations made by the established government of its espousing socialist or communist ideology, SDS refused to focus on only one issue or subscribe to a single ideology, welcoming people of almost any political affiliation, including liberals, socialists, conservatives and communists. It was such a rebellion against and independence from the paternal authority regardless of ideology that it won the term "New Left" as different and distinct from the socialist or communist Old Left radicals in America.

III. Disappointment To The Present Society

Instead of being a result of communist infiltration, the young generation's resentment towards the American establishment and existing value system was brought about by a sense of disappointment and despair in the present society. The despair was the result of a combined efforts by the parents' generation and the Corporate State. For one aspect, America made the promise of an ideal living with its affluence, high technology and most appealing high ideals of liberation, freedom, democracy and equality. The parents' generation themselves having been right through the ordeal of the Great Depression tried to spare their kids of all the hardship of life and offered them all the permissiveness and over-protectiveness, and made their children the center of their life. For another aspect, when the counterculture youth, most of them from middle class families, were out of the shield of their suburban home, they only found a whole different world where their carefree and willful lifestyle was forced to conform to Corporate State standards. Their ideals were mocked by racism, poverty and corruption which are prevalent in the society. Schools conspired with business to deprive students of their selves. They became factories churning out products for the Corporate States with only two set roles: consumer and producer. Workers and employees were made into impersonal machines that were fine tuned to compete to repress their personality and individuality in order to produce the best profit for the Corporate States on a meritocracy basis. Instead of being fully liberated in expressing their personalities in their suburban homes, the young middle-class generation was forced to submerge their personality to social acceptability. Meanwhile, the Corporate State that forced the submission of personality and individual freedom was not worthy of the people's dedication: the Corporate State itself was corrupted and racist-ridden. Peaceful strikes and civil rights demonstrations were brutally suppressed. Despite the overall affluence of the society, many were still caught deep in poverty. Racism remained as powerful and prevalent as before in public and work places.

Besides, the Corporate State's excessive material concern slashed moral value in worldly possessions and hence reduced the whole worthiness of the current civilization. Unlike their parents' generation who had been through thick and thin with the nation in the Great Depression to cherish the hard-earned prosperity at hand, the young generation had very little attachment to the affluent surroundings readily available to them since the moment of

their birth and thus made it easier to sever with the existing social order and value system and replace it with their own way of life and value system just as the hippies did to temporarily rebel against all consumer goods during the 60s[1]. Having witnessed all the inconsistency and phoniness of the society, the young tried very best to be an outsider to be free from the lures and temptations and the corruption of the Corporate State. The counterculture youth assumed indecent clothes, adopted undesirable speech mannerism, operated illegal activities like taking drugs, listening to rock music, practiced and developed a whole set of hippie culture and life style, unworthy in the eyes of their parents' generation. Posing as an outsider, they were less tolerant of the pathology of the current society and became more radically critical.

All of the young generation's criticism of the society was brought into sharpest focus by Vietnam War. The anti-war movement was based on a rationale that the Vietnam War was a artificial, manufactured product of the Corporate State devoid of genuine needs or dangers. Tens of thousands of young American soldiers were sent to some faraway Asian countries unknown to most Americans only for the interest of the Corporate State, be specific the military-and-industry complex. Therefore the Vietnam War, even the Cold War on the whole was seen as the country's domestic pathology extended overseas. It was an intense manifestation of the unjust to the poor and minorities for the benefit of a privileged few, the destruction of environment and self which was happening meanwhile at home in a more subtle form. Such a slap on the face of the proclaimed democracy and liberty was to be protested against and challenged in the face.

IV. Staunch Defenders Of American Values

The anti-war protesters, the draft dodgers and the whole counterculture generation are far from qualified "Centaur" which was named by Theodore Roszack in his famous book *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflection on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* [2]. They were more like Apollo defending the American values and ideals upheld by their forefathers against the centaurs of the technocrats and domination of man by technology. They were brought up feeding on the American ideals of freedom, democracy but in a sharp contrast they witnessed their parents' failure to live these same ideals they claim. As Kenneth Keniston puts in his book *Young Radicals* young radicals showed a continuity of ideals from childhood on, they simply stayed with them while their parents failed to [3].

According to Charles A. Reich, the consciousness of the young counterculture generation established its premise on self and values based on human life rather than technology and efficiency of the existing society. Such a consciousness and value system stressed a restoration of human values like humanity, freedom and democracy in the industrial age where technology dictated and controlled human being's personality. Their stress on self did not mean being selfish but a respect to individual human potential and morality and treasures nature, the counterculture young generation actually evoked and echoed to transcendentalism initiated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American philosopher early in the mid 19th century that greatly inspired America to stuck out on his own feet in literature and other cultural aspects that had been dependent on the Old world in Europe [4]. Compared to the Parents' generation's departure from original values and all the corruption and hypocrisy in the society, the young were more fit for the role of the defending Apollo of the most cherished American values while their parents' generation are the Centaurs that had been around and invading the American Civilization for quite some time. Take Free Speech Movement in 1964 in Berkley, University of California as an example. Students led by Mario Savio only exercised their lawful right of speaking in public but were threatened by police sent by the State governor Ronald Reagan and finally 800 of them were arrested by the police [5]. A more blatant example is the Kent State University shooting. On May 4th, 1970, after four days of increasingly agitated demonstrations by members of the student body of the Kent State University, Ohio, protesting against the American invasion of Cambodia which President Richard Nixon launched on April 25, and announced in a television address five days later, the Ohio National Guard opened fire at a crowd of unarmed protesters leaving four dead and nine others wounded. Both incidences reflected the repressiveness, lawlessness or even madness of the established force. The school authority and state government adopted a high-pressure stance that obliterate inalienable individual right to free speech and peaceful demonstration guaranteed by the Constitution.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, when American found their kids turning against them concerning the Vietnam War in specific and lifestyle and value system on the whole, they were too proud to search inwardly for the reason for such an internal revolt in their seemingly affluent and prosperous "city upon the hill". So they blamed the communism for poisoning their young. However, the American anti-war movement and counterculture on the whole did not happen because the young students were infiltrated by communism as the conspiracy theory explains. Although some key organizations did take the position of Marxism and communism conditionally, they hardly read much about Marxism or communism, and were organically separate from any socialist or communist authority in America, not to say to be controlled by the Soviet Union. Actually, the "walnut" was not forced open by any outside force but it cracked open all by itself. The real reason for the student resentment demonstrated in the

anti-war and counterculture movement was embedded in the American society: the young was taught with American high ideals while those high ideals were reversed and replaced with corruption, suppression, racism and poverty for the minority. The young generation by protesting against the war and battle the existing social order and value system, did no more than attempting to right what had been wronged by their parents.

Reference

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