

NewOptions

January 29/February 26, 1990

Issue No. Sixty-four

The 1980s Were Better Than We Thought

Dear Subscriber: This story took me two months to research and write. I hope you decide it was worth the wait. — M.S.

Most "sophisticated" commentators hated the 1980s with a passion. "The My Decade," proclaimed ABC News. "The decade of glitz and greed," cried *Esquire* editor Phillip Moffitt. "The wannabe decade," "the squandered decade," "a decade of death," moaned the *Village Voice*. Now there's even a book-length trashing, *The Clothes Have No Emperor: A Chronicle of the American 80s*, by superhip political writer Paul Slansky (1989).

I guess I'm not sophisticated enough to see things correctly. I liked the 1980s. I think the 80s were a lot better than the commentators realized.

The 50s revisited?

In some ways the 80s reminded me of the 50s. In the 50s many "sophisticated" commentators thought they were living through an era of bland conformity and quiescence: Uncle Ike and that sort of thing. Now we remember the 50s as the decade of the Montgomery bus boycott, the Beatniks, the beginnings of critical theory (Wright Mills), the explosion of black music into white culture through Elvis Presley . . . the decade that laid the groundwork for the 60s.

In the 80s we laid the groundwork for realizing the longings that were first brought to mass consciousness in the 60s. All kinds of strains are waiting to be hot-wired, now, by a new social movement. In addition, in the 80s we improved upon many of the things we ignored — or botched — in the 60s.

But the commentators didn't get it, and as a result they helped poison and mystify the decade for the rest of us. *It was a decade of death! The yuppies read books with "love" in their titles! Damn yuppies with their cuisinarts and VCRs. . . . The mainline churches were becoming more liberal — but people left them in*

droves for evangelical churches and, worse, sought instant gratification in "new age" spiritual pursuits! . . . The most talented rock star, Prince, was all glitz and dance beat with no message! . . . It was a decade of death, I tell ya.

These media caricatures may have contained some elements of the truth. But they missed the hopeful signs that were everywhere in the 80s. They missed the new ways of approaching social change that could be found in everything from the environmental movement to Third World development theory. They missed positive themes that emerged in rock music, self-help books and other manifestations of popular culture. They missed exciting perspectives that emerged in "serious" disciplines like science, philosophy and history.

The caring individual

The underlying message of the 80s was one of hope. You can see this clearly if you look at the evolution of three American archetypes. During the 80s, American society and culture began to move away from a focus on the rugged individual and collective individual, and toward a focus on what I call the caring individual.

The **rugged individual** is the Republican party's model of the American citizen. Rugged individuals are ambitious and assertive, "real go-getters," leadership types. They get their primary identity from their corporation or profession. They believe strongly, even passionately, in the notion of freedom. On the down side, they don't worry much about the increasing importance of giant corporations. They figure it's an unavoidable consequence of modern life. They are not particularly introspective — they definitely prefer "doing" to "being." And they are not socially conscious — they will, if unleashed, make money at the expense of the community and the environment.

The **collective individual** is the Democratic party's model of the American citizen. Collective individuals are not particularly ambitious or entrepreneurial; they're most comfortable being followers. They get their primary identity from their labor union, ethnic, racial or religious group, gender category or sexual orientation. They believe in social justice and occasionally even fight for it. On the down side, they don't worry much about the increasing importance of bureaucracies and government. They figure it's an unavoidable consequence of modern life. And they're not particularly introspective — they think the television show *thirtysomething* portrays pointless self-absorption. In their view the "best" people are self-sacrificing.

The **caring individual** is an archetype that's emerging in the culture. Caring individuals care deeply about self *and* others; they are equally committed to self-development and social change, individual freedom and social justice. They even want their jobs to provide them with opportunities for both personal growth and social relevance. They identify with their jobs and interest groups, but also — and more profoundly — with "all humanity" or "Earth as a whole." They don't mind being leaders or followers, but they'd rather be working *with*, and they enjoy the image of society as a vast network-of-networks or web.

In the 80s mainstream American culture and public life gave us signs, portents, hints of this new way of being in the world. The first five sections below look at the rise of the caring individual in social movements and institutions; the next six, in popular culture; the final six, in the "serious" disciplines. Put them all together and you'll see why the 80s were better than we thought — in some ways even better than the 60s.

Close to home

In the 60s and 70s, we saw the environment as fundamentally separate from us. On

Earth Day 1970 we chanted "Save our Earth!" as if it were being attacked by outside forces. In the 80s we began to realize that we aren't separate from the environment, and that the Earth is in trouble because of our own attitudes and values, not just because of the Bad Guys.

From New York to Nairobi, experts rushed to declare their oneness with the Earth. "We had seen the Earth as separate and colonizable. . . . It has been a near-fatal mistake," wrote Sri Lanka's Anuradha Vittachi, summarizing the findings of the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival (in *Earth Conference One*, 1989).

The old environmental movement was about legislation, lobbying, voting. The new movement included all that, but since it saw us as part of the Earth it was also about consciousness change. "To solve [our ecological] problems, humanity must begin to perceive the world in unaccustomed ways," said *New Yorker* staff writer Bill McKibben, author of the bestselling *The End of Nature* (1989). "We must invent nothing less than a new and humbler attitude toward the rest of creation. And we must do it quickly."

In the 60s and 70s, we could blame Earth's problems on a "them." In the 80s we began to realize that we couldn't pass the buck. "The [environmental] crisis exists precisely because of actions we have taken," said the brochure for Earth Day 1990. The ecology movement of the 80s was a powerful force encouraging us to re-think our attitudes and values and become caring individuals.

Money is not enough

In the 1960s and 70s, we assumed that the way to help poor blacks was by spending more money on them. "I think it's fair to say," John Kenneth Galbraith told the *New York Times* in 1975, "that no problem associated with New York City could not be solved by providing more money." By the 1980s, many responsible voices in the black community itself were arguing that money was not only not enough, it was not even the heart of the issue.

In the early 80s, the Council for a Black Economic Agenda (CBEA) — 22 black leaders including Harvard's Glenn Loury and National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Robert Woodson — began articulating an alternative agenda to that of the major traditional civil rights organizations. What the civil rights organizations wanted was more civil rights legislation and the expansion of top-down, bureaucratic welfare programs. What the CBEA wanted was for government to help blacks help themselves and their local communities. It spoke of the need to build up feel-

ings of self-esteem and personal responsibility among young blacks ("Young black men can be heard to brag about the children they have fathered but need not support," Loury wrote). It urged government to help blacks provide their own social services. It advocated tax breaks for businesses locating in black neighborhoods. It called for tenant-run housing projects, "choice" in education (i.e., voucher programs), innovative neighborhood-based adoption programs.

By the end of the 80s nearly every major civil rights organization had adopted parts or all of CBEA's self-help perspective. Without abandoning its "basic civil rights mission" of the last 80 years, NAACP president Benjamin Hooks said last year, the NAACP intends "to assign most of our future resources to programs that will enable our children to become self-sufficient citizens." Later he added, "We must begin to get our act together in our own communities."

For years we white people got to feel deliciously "anti-racist" pretending that nothing was wrong in the black community that money couldn't solve. In the 80s we started paying attention to black leaders who understood that their real task was to help more blacks become caring individuals.

The light and the dark

Dictatorships require rugged individuals and collective individuals. The former are the rulers, the latter are the masses. In his well-received book *Modern Dictators* (1987), Barry Rubin described the dynamic between rulers and masses in the 80s in grisly and heartbreaking detail.

Democracy, especially grassroots democracy, requires caring individuals: personally and socially responsible individuals. While it is hardly true that the majority of the world's governments became democratic in the 1980s, I think it's fair to say we made more progress toward that goal in the 80s than we did in the 60s or 70s.

All over the planet, caring individuals were seeking to reconcile universal democratic ideals with their own particular traditions and perspectives. Edem Kodjo's *Africa Tomorrow* (1987) summed up the ideas of Africans who were moving toward a humane but "unsentimental pan-Africanism"; Ziauddin Sardar's *Islamic Futures* (1985) summed up the ideas of Muslims who were moving toward a humane and "future-oriented Islam." Some of Gorbachev's economic advisors wanted Soviet collective farms and factories to give way not to private ownership but to a leasing system that would, presumably, combine the best of capitalism and socialism.

Perhaps more than any other national leader, Czechoslovakia's new president, Vaclav

Havel, spoke the language of caring individuals. In his New Year's Day address he spoke not only of his country's decayed physical environment but of its "decayed moral environment," and he added, "None of us is merely a victim of it, because all of us helped create it together." In an earlier speech he said, "We want to live as a free and dignified people who do not think only of themselves, but of the fate of generations to come."

De-massification

In the 60s and 70s, most of us thought of the people in the Third World as "the masses" or "the oppressed masses" — hapless, depersonalized victims who'd all become Marxists if given half a chance. In the 80s that began to change. The more we actually listened to Third World farmers, women and migrants to the cities, the less they sounded like proto-Marxists and the more they sounded like proto-entrepreneurs who faced two crushing practical problems: Third World bureaucracies and lack of access to credit.

Conservatives focused their attention on the bureaucracies. In his book *The Other Path* (U.S. edition 1989), a best-seller in Latin America, Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto — lionized by the U.S. right — revealed that in parts of the Third World over one-half of the work force is outside the formal economy. It's not that the "informals" (as he called them) are lazy, he said. If anything, they work unusually hard. In Lima they're responsible for 90% of the clothing business and 87% of the buses. It's that a top-heavy bureaucracy imposes crippling costs on anyone trying to go into business legally.

Liberals focused their attention on the lack of access to credit. Beginning with the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, dozens of Third World and U.S. groups sought to give tiny (\$50-100) loans to Third World farmers and vendors. By the end of the 80s Grameen

NewOptions

NEW OPTIONS (ISSN 0890-1619) is published every month except August by New Options Inc., 2005 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., lower level, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 822-0929.

Please address ALL correspondence to Post Office Box 19324, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Subscriptions \$25 a year in the U.S., \$32 Canada, \$39 elsewhere. Back issues \$2 each. Microfilm from Univ. Microfilms (Ann Arbor).

Editor: Mark Satin

Assistants: Sherri Schultz, Holly Segal, Caroline Udall

Bookkeeper: Leslie Plant

Business Consultants: Richard Perl, Roger Pritchard

Design Consultant: Baker Johnson

Printer/Mailer: Newsletter Services, Inc.

Mailing List Manager: Montgomery Data Systems, Inc.

Board of Advisors (partial listing): Lester R. Brown, Ernest Callenbach, Fritjof Capra, Herman Daly, James Fallows, Marilyn Ferguson, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Joan Gussow, Vincent Harding, Willis Harman, Hazel Henderson, Jane Jacobs, Petra Kelly, Winona LaDuke, Hunter & Amory Lovins, Joanna Macy, Jane Mansbridge, Patricia Mische, Robin Morgan, Magaly Rodriguez Mossman, John Naisbitt, Jeremy Rifkin, Robert Rodale, Theodore Roszak, Mark Rudd, Kirk Sale, Charlene Spretnak, Robert Theobald, Nancy Todd

Groups

alone had 250,000 borrowers. Virtually all the groups reported payback rates exceeding 95%.

De Soto's book implied that the real struggle in the Third World was between mercantilist *and* socialist bureaucrats and the entrepreneurial poor. The liberal approach implied that the struggle was between the tight-fisted rich and the enterprising poor. What both approaches had in common was the assumption that the Third World poor, far from being faceless masses, were creative and responsible individuals.

See how they run

In the 60s and 70s, most businessmen still assumed that successful companies had to be run in a top-down, quasi-authoritarian manner. In the 80s, the whole model of what constituted successful business management underwent a sea change. Instead of rugged individualist bosses and collective-individual employees, the new model stressed the need for both bosses and employees to become more personally and socially responsible: more caring.

In his best-selling book *Megatrends* (1982), John Naisbitt popularized the new business gospel. He argued that leadership-as-control was part of the problem, and leadership-to-inspire-persons was the wave of the future. He gave many examples of companies that were moving from a "hierarchical" to a "networking" style of business management.

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's best-selling book *In Search of Excellence* (1982) took the same tack. Their "excellent companies" — which included such major players as Hewlett-Packard, Procter & Gamble and 3M — fostered "autonomy and entrepreneurship" throughout their organizations. They listened, "intently and regularly," to their customers. They treated their rank and file as "partners" and with "dignity" and "respect."

Fortune magazine started doing an annual issue on "America's Most Admired Corporations," and the criteria it used included "ability to develop and keep talented people," "quality of products or services," and "community and environmental responsibility." In the 80s, it seems, even major segments of the business community began to expect our companies to be havens and training grounds for caring individuals.

A dose of reality

Until recently, television was not where you went to find out about the real world, or to think about real people in real relationships. It was not a medium for caring individuals.

In the 1980s, that began to change. ABC News's *Nightline*, launched in 1980, is televi-

sion's best news program ever. Five nights a week, live and unrehearsed, Ted Koppel and guests discuss the burning issues of the day — sometimes even the deeper issues. Since the guests are usually blown up "bigger than life" on a large screen, you can often tell a lot about them (and their ideas) just by watching them squirm.

The guests come from a narrower ideological range than one might like. Still, they include not just politicians and former politicians, but policemen, feminists, community activists, religious leaders, union officials . . . a dazzling variety of American types. And they're often forced to talk *with*, not past, one another. It's as if the American family was getting to know itself well for the first time.

The 80s have also seen the best entertainment series ever. First came Steven Bochco's *Hill Street Blues*, a police drama in which the cops weren't unambiguously "good," the law-breakers weren't necessarily bad, and some characters led three-dimensional personal lives. Next came Bochco's *L.A. Law*, which delved even more deeply into the lives of its principal characters. Suddenly we were getting "heroes" who faced some of the same dicey life situations we did.

Finally came Marshall Herskovitz and Ed Zwick's *thirtysomething*, a show about seven middle-class people who lead normal lives and take themselves seriously (when had you ever seen *that* on television?) and share their thoughts and feelings with each other . . . just like caring individuals do. The show raises, deftly, many of the important questions about life in the contemporary U.S. How much idealism is it safe to keep? How can we balance work and loving, independence and intimacy? For the first time on a consistent basis, television began helping us think about our real lives. For the first time, television began helping us become caring individuals.

American love trilogy

The 1960s was the so-called "love decade." But, ironically, in those days it was intellectually unacceptable for us to be seen reading self-help books about love. In the 1980s the liberal commentators still made fun of such books ("Getting Better All the Time," smirked the *Washington Post*), but they no longer had the power to define what was intellectually acceptable, and three self-help books with "love" in their titles became wildly popular.

Each saw love as a driving force in the society. Leo Buscaglia's *Living, Loving and Learning* (1982) saw love as a humanizing force. Bernie Siegel's *Love, Medicine & Miracles* (1986) saw love as a healing force. M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (published in 1978 but not a best-

seller till the 80s) saw love as an evolutionary force.

On a less highfalutin' level, each contained much that was helpful. Buscaglia urged us to be ourselves, and reminded us that being ourselves has a lot to do with connecting with others. Siegel told us that the healthiest and most resilient people are — among other things — self-respecting, independent, assertive, and capable of giving and receiving unconditional love. Peck painstakingly explained the importance of discipline (and self-discipline), and reminded us how much *work* love is.

It is no accident that, among them, these books spent nearly 10 years on the *New York Times* best seller list. Each is a veritable handbook for the caring individual.

Sex, lies, and caring

In the 60s, you had to watch foreign films to think about the person in any kind of depthful or intelligent way. In the 80s, some of the most popular American films focused on our struggles to become caring individuals — to become self-aware and responsible to others.

Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) showed us what it's like to be truly without self-understanding. It told the story of Jake La Motta, a boxer who lost his career, his wife and the love of a brother because he was unable to understand or control the emotions raging inside him.

Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* (1983) did exactly the opposite. It showed us the essence of being a caring individual. The key thing was the little boy Elliott's ability to establish a heart connection with the Extra-Terrestrial. Their heart connection survived our mechanistic, depersonalized world's every attempt to drive them apart.

Some popular movies ran what I call riffs on the caring individual. Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* (1987) argued that love and caring — not feminist rhetoric in the absence of those — deserves to win out in the end. Oliver Stone's *Talk Radio* (1988) showed that the world might not be as degraded as you think, that your antennae might also be at fault. (Some of Stone's left-wing fans didn't like that message much. Writing in *Vanity Fair*, Ron Rosenbaum ridiculed what he called Stone's "need to love yourself" movie.)

Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) may have been the ultimate caring-individual movie. It was socially aware and talked about racism; at the same time it celebrated the variety of individual human life and was a paean to community. Moreover, it didn't tell us what to think. Every character got to speak their piece. In the end it offered us contradictory advice from Martin and Malcolm and said,

Hey, you figure it out. (Caring individuals want parameters, not The One Correct Answer.) The challenge of the 90s will be to come up with solutions to the problems raised in the best works of the 80s — works like *Do the Right Thing*.

Death of the glass box

All during the 60s and 70s, the American urban landscape was being destroyed. Wonderful old buildings were demolished, and impersonal concrete-and-glass boxes went up in their place. The architects who designed them felt they owed no one an apology; they were pleased to present their brutalizations as examples of “modern” architecture.

The 80s saw the birth — and rapid critical acceptance — of a “postmodern” style in architecture. Postmodern buildings seek to be everything modern buildings are not. They’re consistent with their surroundings. They respect the street. They’re full of color and texture and ornaments and things (postmodern architectural theorists like to use the word “sensual”). They’re full of subtle references to well-known buildings and architectural styles. They’re full of not-so-subtle historic references and icons (modernized Greek columns, updated medieval turrets). Above all, they’re person-friendly.

Among the best-known examples of post-modern architecture are Philip Johnson’s A.T.&T. Building (1982) in New York City, whose roof looks like the top of a grandfather’s clock; Michael Graves’s Humana Building (1985) in Louisville, which looks like an updated medieval palace, but more fun; and Frank Gehry’s Loyola Law School (1984) in Los Angeles, a sumptuously inviting collection of maroon towers, steel columns, cobblestone walkways and . . . hey, is that a greenhouse up there? . . .

Modern architecture emphasizes unity, repetition, uniformity. It is perfect for a society of collective individuals, “mass men.” Postmodern architecture is diverse, complex, fully cognizant of past and present context — just like caring individuals.

Fully alive

The realistic human figure virtually disappeared from the art world in the 60s and 70s. It was as if we stopped being interesting to ourselves. The art scene in the 80s was incredibly diverse — most critics agreed it had never been more so — and one of the most striking developments was a rebirth of interest in the human form in both painting and sculpture.

Although they may never become as well-known as “pop” artists like Roy Lichtenstein, Alfred Leslie and Duane Hanson began to get some of the recognition they deserved.

Leslie’s paintings of people reveal so much — buried resentments, deep-seated fears, inexpressible longings — that they make you feel you’re reading the most private diaries. And swear you’ll do better at life! (Leslie has said he wants his paintings to “elevate” his viewers, i.e. turn them into caring individuals.) Hanson’s sculptures of ordinary and mostly lonely working-class people — polyvinyl, polychromed in oil, lifesize, equipped with false hair and glass eyes — are so devastatingly accurate that at first you want to turn and run. Then you’re deeply moved. Both artists managed to remind us what it means to be fully alive.

The most talked-about single art work of the 80s had an abstract design, but was as intensely human-centered as anything by Leslie or Hanson: Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982).

Yes it pronounces judgment on the war (the utter blackness of the wall), but its power comes from elsewhere. Most war memorials studiously avoid focusing on individuals. Not only does the wall contain the names of all the war dead, you are encouraged to locate the names of your dead relatives and friends with the help of a couple of big books built into the memorial. And when you go up to the shiny black wall you are shocked and appalled to see your image mirrored there. Lin is forcing us to confront our responsibility for the war dead. She is forcing us to be caring individuals whether we want to or not.

Let the day begin

By the late 1970s rock music was in crisis. The old songs were wearing thin; the new songs weren’t tuneful and their lyrics were predictable and boring.

All that changed in the 80s. Melody returned to rock, yoked to a fresh drum beat. And those of us who bothered to listen to the lyrics were in for a surprise. Even our glitziest and most popular singer-songwriters were saying some important things.

Peter Gabriel’s popular album *So* (1986) dwelled at length on what it takes to become a caring individual. In one song he criticized the rugged individual, the one who wants to “be a big noise with all the big boys.” In another he criticized the collective individual, the one who “do[es] what we’re told.” In a third he suggested that an alternative was to try to become “complete.”

How does one become complete? That was a key question our singer-poets sought to answer even as they sought to get people dancing and sell records. They adopted four broad strategies toward helping us become complete:

- *Practice relentlessly honest self-disclosure.* Prince did it in *Purple Rain* (1987), perhaps

the most affecting rock album of the 80s; and he did it so completely, telling us about everything from his sexual fantasies to his relationship with his parents, that you couldn’t listen to it without resolving to explore your own depths too. Cyndi Lauper’s *She’s So Unusual* (1983) mined this same rich vein and was more socially conscious to boot — one reason “Girls just want to have fun” is that “O mama dear, we’re not the fortunate ones.”

- *Generate an empathy so great that it passes into understanding.* Suzanne Vega was one of the spate of socially conscious folk singers that emerged in the 80s. Her hit single about an abused child, “Luka” (1987), was as moving and convincing as anything Bob Dylan did in the 60s. She sings it in the first person, as if she herself is little Luka, and the effect is riveting — “If you hear something late at night/Some kind of trouble, some kind of fight/Just don’t ask me what it was. . . .” Almost as affecting was Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam’s hit single about a teenage runaway, “Little Jackie Wants to Be a Star” (1989).

- *Combine political anger at “them” with caustic criticism of “us.”* Tracy Chapman does this to stunning effect on her best-selling first album *Tracy Chapman* (1988). The first song is the powerful “Talkin’ Bout a Revolution.” You hear it and you figure you’re in for a whole album of songs preaching the 60’s gospel: all poor people are infinitely deserving. But in the very next song, “Fast Car,” she says goodbye to a down-and-out lover who’s irresponsible and immature. The best rap album of the 80s, Public Enemy’s *It Takes a Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back* (1988), takes a similar tack. “Clear the way/for the prophets of rage,” they shout. But they direct part of their rage at unaware and uncaring black people — for example, mothers for whom “all their children/don’t mean as much as the [TV] show.”

- *Navigate the passage from rock’s traditional language of yearning to a deeper language of personal maturity or political awareness.* Bruce Springsteen did it. His album *Born in the USA* (1984) ached with inchoate longings; *Tunnel of Love* (1987) revealed a steadier and more mature Bruce, ready to “walk like a man.” U2 also did it. Their popular album *The Joshua Tree* (1987) ached with spiritual yearning; *Rattle and Hum* (1988) gave that spirit flesh with soaring freedom songs, urgent pro-ecology songs, and protest songs laced with love.

Rock’s insistence on helping us become “complete” in the 80s meant that at its best it generated a sensibility that was inclusive rather than self-righteous. Paul Simon captured that sensibility beautifully on his album *Graceland* (1986), in which he sings “These

Continued on page seven, column one . . .

The Ear . . .

The people speak

Thank you for your letter in which you talk about the need for NEW OPTIONS to "grow" and "uplevel" (enclosed with #61). The tone of it strongly resembles the usual growth-intoxicated hype that is all around us.

I am not subscribing to this particular noble cause because in an information-addicted environment NEW OPTIONS is unusual in being short and to the point. More is not always better — I'm sure I've heard that somewhere.

— **Jonathan Woodbridge**
Katonah NY, "N.Y. Suburbs Bioregion"

I am overwhelmed with reading material. If you become more like a magazine I'll drop you. Can't small be beautiful?

— **Elizabeth A. Beale, Ph.D.**
Thousand Oaks CA, Pacific Rim Bior'n

Expanding content is a two edged sword. Sure you could put more information into the newsletter. But you'd also make it less likely that the busy people you want to reach would actually read it.

Why don't you keep the publication as it is and continue expanding circulation? The content is *already* wonderful. You don't need better content; you need more people reading what you have.

— **Eleanor M. LeCain**
Political consultant
Dorchester MA, Lower New Engl. Bior'n

I hope you don't waste too much paper on the vanity of "a tad more white space."

— **Douglas N. Clayton**
Jaffrey NH, Highlands Bioregion

I've read your letter about expanding NEW OPTIONS. Perhaps it's a good idea. I personally doubt it.

It seems to me NEW OPTIONS is you, just as *The Washington Spectator* is Tris Coffin, and I.F. Stone's newsletter was his.

Look what's happened to *Mother Jones* — impersonal, slick, gimmicky and *in decline*.

— **Glenn Rice**
Davis CA, Central Valley Bioregion

First blood

Your courage in printing "Drugs Are Not the Enemy" (#62) is admirable, but I'm afraid your quiet, logical argument will be lost in an

irrational wind. We're re-playing the sensational 1950s McCarthy Era — just substitute the word "drugs" for "communism."

— **Sydney Lois Stewart**
Tucson AZ, Sonora Bioregion

Your "Drugs Are Not the Enemy" article did it for me! You are unrealistic, to say the least!! Remove my name from your subscriber list.

— **G.W. George**
Claremont CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

Splendid presentation of the drug situation! Now I understand why I have not gotten anywhere with my repeated suggestions for jute or hemp to replace wood pulp, the demand for which is absolutely devastating our old-growth Douglas fir forests.

— **Milly Clapp**
Mount Vernon IA, Heartland Bioregion

Doesn't it seem a bit odd to be keeping company with William F. Buckley Jr., Milton Friedman and George Shultz, all of whom favor legalization?

All of you omit the "little" problems. How to limit intoxication and the often fatal accidents? How to help the 375,000 addicted babies that are produced each year?

— **Lyman S. Faulkner**
Ashland OR, Cascade Bioregion

Is legalizing drugs a first step, along with demilitarization, education, the environment, etc.? Or is it perhaps a 17th step?

— **Jared Scarborough**
Author, A "Home" Party Platform
Payson IL, Heartland Bioregion

Getting there

You've identified the key problem, which is that drug legalization won't sell to most Americans. But you don't identify even one or two first steps toward making it a marketable idea.

The Netherlands and Switzerland permit the open sale of drugs. I suggest doing some scholarly research on the effects of that approach to the drug problem.

— **Thomas O. Gray**
Norwich VT, Highlands Bioregion

Legalization of all drugs is indeed an important part of any approach to the drug problem. The thorny question is, How do we help the many who are opposed to legalization see its value?

I don't have many answers, but I'd like to suggest that a gentle approach to those we'd like to influence might be helpful.

I wonder if our using terms like "New Hon-

esty" to describe our approach, and "hypo-critical" to describe those who differ, might be somewhat polarizing — and lead to a defensive entrenchment on their part.

— **Margaret Boydston**
Sheffield MA, "Berkshire Bioregion"

Howl with Jefferson

I agree with you that a solution to the drug crisis is not as simple as Jesse Jackson stated. But I don't agree that the "New Honesty" provides a solution. Modern drugs, such as LSD and the new variations of older drugs, are the deadliest tripwires our scientists have invented.

Yes, intoxication has a legitimate place in our behavior. But we must also ask: What kind of intoxication are we looking for?

How could a Thoreau, a Muir or an Eisley write of pristine beauty through eyes glazed with drugs? Just think how Rachel Carson would have railed against drugs that blind us to the beauty of the natural world!

Herman Hesse and Coleridge gave us eloquent images. But so did Goethe, Wordsworth, Rilke, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and those wonderful Russian composers. Now Kitaro, Tangerine Dream and Paul Winter are doing the same.

There are alternatives to drugs that we can put in place in our (e)merging cultures. Let us "Howl" not with Ginsberg but with Jefferson.

— **Robert A. Smith III**
Retired NASA official
Abbeville AL, Dixie Bioregion

At Sun Mountain we use drums and rattles, voice and dancing body, to unify ourselves and invoke assisting powers. The most ancient non-drug "high" is this drum. (Does take learning.)

— **George Ballis**
Sun Mountain Medicine Ways
Tollhouse CA, Central Valley Bioregion

Who is responsible?

Finally, some sanity about drugs: We have not taken responsibility for using them wisely.

Drugs will always call to us because ecstacy is the ultimate source of health. But the accompanying loss of control is frightening to conservative folk. Suppressing drug use is one of the hopeless ways they try to preserve linear, rational, hierarchical thinking during the present chaotic interregnum.

Drug usage is not going away. It can serve constructive purposes if we empower legitimate, non-criminal businesses to design and sell addictive drugs that induce *desirable* personality changes — peaceful and cooperative

attitudes in the users.

This proposal to drug people into peacefulness will be terribly upsetting to many. But addiction won't go away, and the addicts insist on relinquishing control of their lives. Will we take that responsibility, or continue giving it to the pushers?

— **Rev. Pondurenga Das**
Berkeley CA, Shasta Bioregion

A number of the working suggestions set forth in your drug article are right on the mark. The concern I have is with your thesis that the problem is, ultimately, the relationship (good or bad) between an individual and drugs.

Do people deserve blame for their inability to deal with an external environment? Does the entire burden of historical development rest on each of us as individuals? I would rather hope not.

Each and every individual is ultimately responsible for their state. But I would suggest that there are structural societal factors that impose an environment that makes drug use a desirable escape route. Inner city conditions, for example. Or a society that, on the surface at least, appears to be devoid of meaningful values.

In these circumstances, perhaps "dropping out" through drug abuse is as viable an option as packing up from the Bronx (or wherever).

Supermen can deal with these structural conditions. But it is unrealistic and a bit presumptuous to mandate that each person has an obligation to remake their own reality.

— **Edward E. Frankel**
Concord NH, Highlands Bioregion

"As it is now"

Your "New Honesty" solution to the problem of drugs — decriminalizing them, taxing them, making them safe, and promoting alternative ways to expand consciousness — might work . . .

- IF they could really be made "safe," that is, nonaddictive and harmless to human physiology; and

- IF everyone behaved as responsibly as Andrew Weil and Winifred Rosen recommend they behave — which would require a healthy balance in society, economic balance among groups and emotional balance among individuals.

As it is now, however, most drugs are addictive and/or physiologically harmful. And there are widespread imbalances that make far too many people victims instead of responsible users.

Drug use today is a tight-wire walk. If drugs were legal to use and easy to get now,

there's no doubt in my mind that society would take the plunge. Today's already unstable conditions would deteriorate fast. So it makes me nervous when people talk about legalizing narcotic drugs.

— **Mark Macy**
*Editor, Solutions for a Troubled World
Boulder CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion*

I find your article on drugs very provocative, interesting and creative. However, I believe that crack — which is newly invented — is incapable of being "used" (as distinct from abused). This makes me question the benefit of the legalization of drugs.

Crack appeals to the many people who see no way to join in the upward mobility that used to be an achievable part of the "American Dream." It also appeals to the affluent, maybe because they experience the boredom and disappointment that comes from *achieving* the American (European) Dream.

— **Marianne Preger-Simon, Ed.D.**
Whately MA, Pioneer Valley Bioregion

The sacred is absent

Your drugs article was very perceptive. But somehow it stopped short in its reflections.

Yes, drugs need to be used in social settings. But that is not enough — alcohol and heroin are used socially now. It is also necessary for societies to be permanent and hold certain spiritual values through which an individual life gains meaning, even after the drug experience has passed.

When communal drug use accompanies a ritual reinforcing sacred bonds, abuse is seldom a problem. When such sacred meaning is absent, drug use becomes abuse — either an attempt to create a sense of fellowship in the absence of meaning, or an attempt to escape an empty reality.

It is *these* deficiencies in contemporary society that drug czars like Bennett simply cannot admit exist — they can't afford to!

— **Mary E. Clark**
*Author, Ariadne's Thread
San Diego CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion*

The old delusion

I agree: Spiritual intoxication, ecstasy, is not only another need, it's *the* human need underlying all others. That is precisely why drugs are so dangerous.

Taking drugs to achieve ecstasy is precisely what the age of technology would come up with. The drug experience is chemically induced, dehumanizing and autistic. People who resort to it extensively become *less* aware of one another and of nature, to say nothing of their own human potential.

I am afraid that in failing to question this technological answer we fail to extricate ourselves from the very thinking to which NEW OPTIONS tries, and often succeeds, to propose alternatives. Can't you see the horror of Ronald Siegel's mad proposal to use molecular chemistry in place of human will and our capacity for spiritual disciplines?

When I think of the new movements of thought struggling to be born I often think of Laocoon, tangled in the invisible coils of the very paradigm he's struggling to escape: the political left espousing violence, anger and re-creation in its search for "peace"; the greenish left espousing hedonism in its struggle for meaning. While we agree on so much else, what for you is the "New Honesty" for me is part of the Old Delusion.

I do not overlook the distinction between psychedelic experience and crack. I do not argue against decriminalization, or accept alcohol because it's "legal." I'm only asking for a real awareness that there is a human potential we can find when and only when we give up chemical props and face inward challenges with courage and discipline.

— **Michael N. Nagler**
*Author, America Without Violence
Tombala CA, Shasta Bioregion*

Imagine

Your "Drugs Are Not the Enemy" article was great!

In my opinion, our culture promotes "concentricism" because altered states of consciousness might make us less susceptible to advertising, and more critical of bureaucratic institutions.

There are many ways to "get high" you haven't mentioned, such as shamanic journeying and other practices of tribal/ethnic cultures. Perhaps our Native Americans could help teach us how to incorporate spiritual practices with daily life — vision quests, etc.

Some transpersonal psychologists use techniques such as Jungian "active imagination." Then there are educational systems such as suggestopedia (called "superlearning" in this country) which, along with mind/body disciplines like yoga and t'ai chi, could be taught in our schools as an alternative to "just say no" bulls ---.

Imagine a society/culture that promotes ecstasy instead of making money, reveres people like the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa instead of sports stars, and in which kids go to school to learn how to get "high" from their teachers (and *without* drugs!).

Oh well, back to my law books.

— **Alan Glaser**
Rochester NY, "Finger Lakes Bioregion"

Continued from page four:

are the days of miracle and wonder" even as he comforts his lover, "Don't cry, baby, don't cry." The Call, one of the most critically acclaimed new groups, gave us a primer on inclusiveness in their album *Let the Day Begin* (1989). The title song begins,

Here's to the babies in a brand new world,
Here's to the beauty of the stars,
Here's to the travellers on the open road,
Here's to the dreamers in the bars,
Here's to the teachers in the crowded rooms,
Here's to the workers in the fields. . . ."

If four kids in a rock band can weave together — in six simple lines — nature, workers, idealists, professionals and generativity ("babies"), surely we can create a world that's just as harmonious, just as diverse, just as complete. Rock in the 80s spelled out the tools we'd need: honesty, empathy, anger, self-criticism, personal maturity and political awareness. Put them all together and you have the caring individual.

"Butterfly effect"

They say that the spirit of an age can be found in its science. "Chaos theory" was the science of the 80s, and its spirit elevated the caring individual.

The most popular science book of the 80s was James Gleick's exquisitely written introduction to chaos theory, *Chaos* (1987). According to chaos theory, scientists are now able to see order and pattern where before they saw only randomness. A central component of chaos theory is what Gleick calls the "butterfly effect," after the "notion that a butterfly stirring the air today in Peking can transform storm systems next month in New York." The butterfly effect is technically known as "sensitive dependence on initial conditions." According to Gleick, it had a place in folklore:

"For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
For want of a horse, the rider was lost;
For want of a rider, the battle was lost;
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost!"

The spirit-of-the-age message of the butterfly effect is obvious. It is that everything each of us does — even the smallest things — are laden with long-term significance. This is not compatible with the outlook of rugged individuals, who figure their deeds are more significant than those of others. Nor is it compatible with the outlook of collective individuals, who don't feel personally that significant and don't spend much time thinking about themselves. It is perfectly compatible with the outlook of caring individuals, who are committed to self-discovery and self-development in part

because they sense their actions have a ripple effect on life.

Two self-exams

It's rare for a decade to produce one truly outstanding analysis of the American condition. The 1980s produced two, and both were widely read: Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) and Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground* (1985).

Wolfe's novel tells you all you ever wanted to know about rugged individuals and collective individuals. It isn't pretty. Sherman McCoy, the Wall Street bond salesman, is the very embodiment of rugged-individual-Americanus. Reverend Bacon, the black activist/hustler, is the rugged individual who uses collective-individual rhetoric to enrich himself. Larry Kramer, the crummy assistant D.A., is the collective individual striving to become a rugged individual. They're all trapped by the same hell, our relentlessly status-driven society. None of them thinks about it much.

Lukas's book follows three Boston families through 10 years of the school busing wars. It's nonfiction, but it's as intimately revealing as Wolfe's book and its canvas is as broad: the Divers are upper-middle-class, the McGoffs are Irish working class, and the Twymons poor and black. At different times, various people in each family take steps toward transcending their stations in life (e.g., Lisa McGoff begins to question some of the prejudice she was brought up with), but you aren't advised to hold your breath. The title is ironic: there's nothing holding these Americans together.

Both authors served up bleak visions. But they did raise our awareness — and accurate observation is essential for effective social change. And like Spike Lee in *Do the Right Thing*, they refused to offer us The One Correct Answer. Instead, they made us think . . . and care. In a way, the heroes of both books were the authors themselves, with their courage to see things truly. That courage is one mark of the caring individual.

Equal, but different

The dominant feminism in the 1960s and 70s was what political scientist Naomi Black called "equity feminism." It emphasized how similar women are to men, and demanded equality for women on that basis. It envisioned a world in which women and men would become much more androgynous.

The dominant feminism in the 80s emphasized women's differences from men. It focused on women's "specificity" — women's characteristic values and perspectives — and demanded equality for women precisely because women's values and perspectives were so desperately needed by society as a whole.

Theorist upon theorist presented a vision not of a pallid and politically correct androgynous society, but of a society in which "female nature" was understood and appreciated — and fully incorporated into public life. Jean Elshtain, in *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981), suggested that women who entered the "rat race" should not try to be like men, but should resolve to bring their learned values of nurturance and community with them. Carol Gilligan, in *In a Different Voice* (1982), contrasted men's "ethics of justice" with women's "ethics of care," and argued that the world needs a big dose of both.

Marilyn French, in *Beyond Power* (1985), argued that society desperately needs the feminine world's values of pleasure-with and power-to, as distinct from power-over. Sara Ruddick, in *Maternal Thinking* (1989), argued that the everyday practices of mothers, which she summed up in the phrase "caring labor," can give rise to new ways of thinking about public policy.

For many women and men, there was something mechanistic and forced about equity feminism. But you couldn't read the feminists of the 80s without being moved by their commitment to the true personhood of women — or suspecting that the archetype of the "caring individual" is one they'd easily recognize!

The carceral society

In the 60s, Jean-Paul Sartre was all the rage on college campuses, and no wonder. His existentialism appealed to the rugged individual in us. His Marxism appealed to the collective individual in us. In the 80s, the philosophy shelves in college bookstores groaned under the weight of books by and about Michel Foucault, a philosopher of the caring individual.

Consider his political philosophy. In the conventional wisdom, we are ruled by massive institutions from the top down. In Foucault's view, the rule we are subjected to is both more subtle and more effective. It is exercised by means of a "network of disciplines" that entraps everyone. The ideas, routines, mores, etc., that we learn (often subconsciously) in schools, hospitals, prisons, armies, asylums, factories, etc., all work to turn us not into "free agents" but "useful subjects," useful, that is, to keeping the whole thing going. Foucault's terrible name for this is the "carceral society," with its echo of the word "incarceration."

If we live in a society that's run by rugged individuals from the top down, then social change means either replacing one set of rugged individuals with another, or inspiring the "masses," the collective individuals, to revolt. But neither strategy seems to bring real change. If, however, we live in a society that

rules us primarily through its local and immediate institutions, and especially through the ideas, concepts, etc., that those institutions put into our minds — then a liberating strategy would have us constantly question (as Foucault urges) all our routines, all our assumptions, and our very identities; and seek to vitalize our communities.

In the 60s, we felt we had to choose between the Rolling Stones' message to be "street fighting men" and the Beatles' message that the battle was within. Foucault's work smashed that phony dichotomy by showing just how intimately connected are the "without" and the "within." Read Foucault and you'll see clearly why a new politics can only be built by self-aware *and* socially conscious individuals — caring individuals.

That's the spirit

Millions of us left the mainline churches during the 1980s. But we weren't becoming less religious or spiritual — according to a Gallup poll, 84% of us believed in the divinity of Christ in 1988, up from 78% in 1978. Instead, we were pouring into evangelical churches and taking up "new age" spiritual disciplines.

We left the mainline churches because we felt they were becoming spiritually hollow. "Spiritual uplift no longer appeared to be the mainline churches' top priority," wrote *Time* magazine associate editor Burton Pines in his popular book *Back to Basics* (1982).

A staggering 40 to 60 million Americans called themselves evangelical Christians in the 80s, and no wonder. The evangelical churches challenged us to take God back into our lives. "[Evangelicals] proclaim that finding God is not easy," Pines wrote. "It requires extraordinary effort and commitment. The required belief in Christ is intense, the profession of faith public and frequent, the lifestyle morally rigorous and the missionary obligation serious."

According to John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene in *Megatrends 2000* (1990), 10 to 20 million Americans identified with the "new age" movement in the 80s. Many new agers were drawn to yoga, meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Many were also drawn to such concepts as "global mind change" and the "intimate Earth community."

Most people suppose that evangelicals and new agers are poles apart. Naisbitt and Aburdene know better: "[They're both seeking] a link between their everyday lives and the transcendent." To that extent, they're both seeking to become caring individuals.

The new heroes

Traditional history books are about "great men," presidents and military commanders,

rugged individuals. Beginning in the 1960s, a new wave of history books focused on masses, movements and classes. Free will was out, determinism was in. Narrative was out, statistics were in. The individual mattered little except to illustrate some larger point grounded in sociology or social psychology.

The 1980s saw the phenomenal commercial and critical success of three books that offered a third approach to American history. Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters* (1988) and David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross* (1986) were histories of the U.S. in the 50s and 60s; Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie* (1988) was a history of the U.S. in Vietnam. But their focus was neither on presidents nor masses. Instead, they focused on *one key person interacting with others*. Specifically, Branch and Garrow focused on Martin Luther King, Jr., and his relationships with other civil rights leaders; Sheehan focused on Lt. Col. John Paul Vann and his relationships with other military personnel and with the press.

This choice of focus allowed Branch, Garrow and Sheehan to make an important political point. They showed that history is created neither by Supermen nor masses, but by key people working within networks or webs. (A little free will, a little determinism, a lot of pluck.) That is, of course, how caring individuals hope to do social change.

A caring constituency?

The 1980s was not only the decade of glitz and greed. It was also the decade when the archetype of the caring individual broke into the mainstream. In science, the environment, movies, religion, rock music, business — in virtually every area of modern life — the caring individual was recognized, catered to.

There is a constituency of caring individuals now, and it is increasingly (albeit imperfectly) showing up in social surveys. In 1980,

SRI International's Values and Lifestyles Program found that 10% of us are either "socially conscious" or "integrated." Before the 1988 election, the Times-Mirror Co. reported that 16% of us are caring types. That's 40 million people.

While caring individuals are wary of pat ideologies and One Correct Answers, they have the makings of a political agenda. From our brief review we can glean that they support, among other things, self-esteem training to create confident and caring young people; social programs that are self-help-oriented, not top-down and paternalistic; economic policies that foster community economic vitality, not GNP growth per se; and foreign aid programs that bypass governments and channel seed money to individuals and small groups in the Third World.

But if there is one area of life in the U.S. in which the caring individual is manifestly not recognized or catered to, it is electoral politics.

The Republicans continue to promote a politics of the rugged individual; the Democrats, of the collective individual. Among our (potential) third parties, only the U.S. Greens have the makings of a politics of the caring individual. And they are too weak and inept to matter much for now.

In the short run, the political prospects for the caring individual in the U.S. are less than glowing. But only in the short run. For if the caring individual is emerging as a new American archetype, as this article argues — and if that archetype models the hopes and dreams of anything like 40 million people — then it is only a matter of time before a major national movement or competent third party begins to articulate a politics of the caring individual. The challenge of the 90s is to ensure that that happens sooner rather than later; and that it happens with integrity.

NewOptions

New Options, Inc.
Post Office Box 19324
Washington, D.C. 20036

Issue No. Sixty-four

Address Correction Requ

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Washington, D.C.
Permit No. 4999