

WORKER-PRIESTS

Hippie Diggers Give Outsiders the Jitters

BY DAVE FELTON
Times Staff Writer

In San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, as in other underground communities around the country, love has become an ultimate weapon of the hippies.

The so-called love generation uses it almost universally—sometimes in its pure form and sometimes in a diluted form cut by syrup or unstable compounds.

Love is the principal factor that separates hippies from the beats who flourished a decade ago. Where the beats turned their back on society, the hippies have turned their other cheek.

It is an extremely infectious and explosive weapon, and it has caused society to view the hippie world as one of mixed blessings.

For example, the hippies have to an impressive extent tamed the Hell's Angels and other motorcycle gangs, something the police have been trying to do for years. Yet the love generation has shown open contempt for law enforcement agencies, which they see as unloving and a constant source of harassment.

Influence Music

Indirectly, the hippies have influenced popular music — particularly folk-rock—to the point where true poets are writing best sellers. But the sophisticated lyrics often question or reject established society and urge a new order, "for the times they are a-changin'."

Many hippies practice faithfully an experiential religious life. Yet most of them have abandoned organized Western religions that to them seem based more on dogma than experience.

Of the several subcultures which harbor in the Haight-Ashbury district, no segment of hippies has

forced to walk Haight St. and beg for change and usually settle for a meal of doughnuts and ice cream bars.

The diggers have come under heaviest attack, however, not for what they serve but whom. Some parents consider them a veritable orchestra of pied pipers, luring innocent youngsters from their Hameln suburbs.

Have to Care for Them

They claim the free digger hostels are attracting young fugitives, both from homes and the law. The youngsters would come anyway, reply the diggers, and someone has to take care of them.

"These are nice kids," argued artist Arthur Lisch, a founding digger and street worker for the American Friends Service Committee. "It wouldn't bother me that they're leaving home if the facilities here were adequate.

"We're doing what we can with the little we have. The city government has been fantastically unresponsive. The mayor says he won't allow it, won't stand for it.

"Fine, don't worry, but we're getting 200 runaway kids every night."

Most of the runaways get home-sick after three days, said Lisch, so the diggers have acquired the services of a psychiatrist who counsels them and gets them in touch with their parents.

"But you know, the key to something is to try and feel what's going to happen," he said. "What's going on now is so fast and has so many implications. The kids come because they can't find any way to relate to society.

You Try to Help

"The city government's working against what's happening. It's like if some woman is trying to have a baby, why you're glad and you try to help her. In this case we have the alternatives of being glad and helping or of facing a clash with the authorities."

Lisch, who lives a block from Haight St. with his wife, Jane, and two young children, helped organize the diggers last year with several ex-members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a controversial group of avant-garde happeners.

Named after some agrarian communists in England who organized and asked for free land in 1649, the Haight-Ashbury diggers were originally conceived as a theatrical experiment.

Lisch and the others issued a digger manifesto calling for "total theater in the streets," a dramatic concept which pretty much includes anything that happens in real life.

New Art Form

"This is a new art form in which everybody is fair game," said Lisch of the Haight-Ashbury project. "Some people tend to be more ministers, while others, the psychedelic people, tend to be more mystical."

The artist described the hippie movement as "the new society," one that is more creative, less materialistic and more free than the old.

"Basically, the old order is through, like the brontosaurus. The brontosaurus became extinct when he was no longer relevant to his surroundings. Those people who identify with the brontosaurus are through too."

But one might remember that the original English diggers also became extinct after only two years. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, they fell prey to legal harassment and wealthy landowners.

NEXT: Sociological implications of the hippies and a profile of "Mellow Yellow," a hippie who made a new business out of bananas.



caused more split emotions with outside society than the diggers, the worker-priests of the hippie movement.

They have been called everything from the conscience of the hippie community to "inside agitators" and promoters of juvenile delinquency.

Their office is in the parish hall of All Saints' Episcopal Church at 1350 Waller St. in the Haight-Ashbury district. It is a tiny room, not much bigger than a church janitor's utility closet.

Office Never Closes

Crammed between walls is a table, a blackboard, a bulletin board, some folding chairs, some psychedelic posters and a few pastel water-colored pictures of Jesus left over from Sunday School. Like the church, the office never closes.

"We assign someone here 24 hours a day," said a thin, red-bearded man assigned there for that hour. "We have to, in case somebody needs help or someone gets busted and needs a lawyer."

As do many diggers, the man asked to remain anonymous. He explained that all major digger projects are directed from the office, including three youth hostels, a job co-op to find "jobs that aren't meaningless" for hippies, a free store, a newly organized hippie health department to inspect Haight-Ashbury buildings and sanitary conditions, and digger produce farms in Santa Cruz, Petaluma and Santa Barbara.

All food and official information must pass through the office, as must, in most cases, newsmen who want to visit digger establishments, he said.

Girl Comes In

Just then a girl digger entered the office with two cartons of eggs. "Great, great," said the man. "One of those goes to 848 and the other to 1775. They can really use 'em." He was referring to digger hostels at 848 Clayton St. and 1775 Haight St.

There are no material rewards, only the vague purpose of trying to make the Haight-Ashbury district "a going thing." Yet this is enough to get some diggers out of the sack at 2 a.m. to hit wholesale markets for discarded bread, milk and lettuce; to get others to spend the day in digger kitchens preparing the 4 p.m. free feed held daily, when possible, in Golden Gate Park.

The trouble, is, say critics of the diggers, the funds are not always possible, because there's not always enough food. When that happens, the poorest hippies—which generally means the youngest hippies—are