



Exploding The Phone

db605

www.explodingthephone.com

Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **Ripping Off, The New Life Style**

Publication *The New York Times*

Date 1971-08-08

Author(s) Drosnin, Michael

Abstract Article about the "rip off" lifestyle. "The best things in life are free, if you steal them from the bourgeoisie."

Keywords Rip-off set; rip-off lifestyle

Notes We only have the first two pages in hard copy, but full text in electronic format.

The following pages may contain copyrighted material. We believe that our use of this material for non-commercial educational and research purposes constitutes "fair use" under Section 107 of U.S. Copyright Law. If you wish to use this material for purposes that go beyond "fair use," you must obtain permission from the copyright owner, if any. While it will make us slightly sad to do so, we will nonetheless comply with requests from copyright owners who want their material removed from our web site.

Ripping Off, The New Life Style

By MICHAEL DROSNIN

New York Times (1857-Current file); Aug 8, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2005)

pg. SM12

Ripping Off, The New Life Style

By MICHAEL DROSNIN

PASSING a joint from one hand to the other, Brad peels off his clerical garb. "I never imagined my religious training would pay off so well," says the 24-year-old Harvard Divinity School dropout, slumping into an American-flag-slipcovered armchair at the "Orphanage." His words are half drowned out by a Jefferson Airplane record:

*We are all outlaws in the eyes of
Amer-i-ca*

MICHAEL DROSNIN, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post, is now a freelance.

"All your private property is
Target for your en-em-y
And your enemy is
We-e-e."

THE BEST
THINGS IN
LIFE ARE
FREE

In order to survive we stealcheatlie-
forge---hideanddeal
We are obscenelawlesshideousdanger-
ousdirtyviolent and young
All your private property is
Target for your en-em-y
And your enemy is
We-e-e.*

Despite his background, Brad is not spiritual leader of the Orphanage. "I'm only the steward here," he laughs. And despite its name, the Orphanage houses no children. It is in reality an East Village commune which for almost two years now has been getting its food free from wholesalers under the guise of being a Protestant home for the homeless. Every other week, Brad dons his collar and drives a VW bus to Hunt's Point Market in the Bronx for fruits and vegetables, or to the meat-packing district on the lower West Side, or down to the Fulton Fish Market.

Hanging on the wall over the dinner table is a framed sampler: "The Best Things in Life Are Free—If You Steal Them From the Bourgeoisie."

Nobody at the Orphanage works, but Jamie, a former newspaperman, gets an unemployment check every week he can remember to report in at the local office, and another commune member has been on welfare for seven months. They receive food stamps as well, but prefer to steal from the neighborhood A. & P. whatever items Brad can't hustle. The stamps they sell when money is scarce, and give away otherwise. Everything in the apartment—except the dope and a second-hand freezer—has been "ripped off."

RIPPING OFF—stealing, to the uninitiated—is rapidly becoming as much a part of the counterculture as drugs and rock music. Brad, Jamie and the five other youths in their commune are far from unique. Like them, hundreds of young people live solely off goods they are able to liberate from private enterprise and funds they manage to extract from the Government. Thousands more supplement conventional income with frequent forays, as often for the sheer joy of bilking hated institutions as for the plunder itself.

Middle-class youngsters who 5 or 10 years ago would have been working their way up the corporate ladder can now be found stuffing their

*From "We Can Be Together," words and music by Paul Kantner. © 1969 by Icebag Corp. All rights reserved.

pockets in supermarkets, shoplifting in department stores or collecting relief benefits from assorted public agencies (often defrauding several states at the same time). College graduates who once might have dreamed of, say, a law partnership, now fantasize knocking over a Brink's truck.

There's even a handbook for rip-off artists. Written by Abbie Hoffman and appropriately entitled, "Steal This Book," it contains instructions on how to cop everything from bowling shoes to buffaloes. "I tried to write a book nobody would publish," says Hoffman, who succeeded. Although his two previous efforts have sales totaling three-quarters of a million copies, 30 outraged publishers turned down "Steal" before Hoffman finally decided to print it himself. "We haven't had so much trouble with a book since 'Tropic of Cancer,'" says a spokesman for Grove Press, the distributor.

Many big jobbers and the majority of bookshops refuse to handle the new paperback—one Cleveland store, which does, packages each copy in a band imprinted with Ohio's shoplifting law. Five thousand copies were seized at the Canadian border, and several other countries have banned it. No radio station will play a commercial for the book, and establishment newspapers have refused to run its ads. (A recent advertisement appearing in the radical magazine Ramparts gives the names of stores in nine cities which carry the book—along with advice on how to steal it from each of them.)

"Steal," which already has sold more than 100,000 copies despite boycotts and blackouts, gives survival instructions while preaching revolution and put-on. "I enjoy blowing people's minds," admits Hoffman, who has been known to walk up to complete strangers and ask, "Would you hold this dollar for me while I go in that store and lift something?"

As youths increasingly adopt larceny as an acceptable life style, angry businessmen absorb increasingly unacceptable losses. Major retailers report that "inventory shrinkage" more than doubled in the last five years. The telephone company says "toll fraud" jumped 800 per cent in the same period. Record and book clubs with a youthful clientele find that at least one out of 10 subscribers never pays at all. And college bookstores often have "shortages" two and three



CHARGE IT—False credit cards are a weapon for attacking a society in which, according to the counterculture, the most respected business leaders are those who "have most successfully held up the most people."

times greater than the rest of the industry. "The thing that gets me is that they [young shoplifters] don't seem to care when they're caught," says Joann McGreevy, director of New York University's bookstore. "They don't think they're doing anything wrong."

BEHIND the new morality of theft-without-guilt is a radical ideology—some would call it a rationalization—which sees America as a society based on the rip-off, its most respected citizens businessmen who have most successfully held up the most people. Stealing from these robber barons, runs the argument, is certainly more moral than working for them. It may be called a crime, but it's only a justified redistribution of the wealth. "The dictionary of law is written by the bosses of order,"

writes Hoffman. "Our moral dictionary says no heisting from each other. To steal from a brother or sister is evil. To not steal from the institutions that are the pillars of the Pig Empire is equally immoral."

General Motors, U.S. Steel and most other major corporations are, however, beyond the reach of the average ripper. A. T. & T., on the other hand, is as close and vulnerable as the nearest telephone. Free calls worth almost \$22-million were placed last year alone; as recently as 1965 the Bell System was able to collect on all but \$2.7-million. "We seem to be everybody's favorite victim," laments an A. T. & T. spokesman. "But the young definitely do appear to be involved in more than their share of the toll fraud."

A year ago, the phone company
(Continued on Page 47)

Social protest or just plain stealing, it means increasingly heavy losses to business.

(Continued from Page 13)

threatened to disconnect the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a guerrilla-theater group whose skit "Ripping Off Ma Bell" plays to throngs of enthusiastic street people. Buoyed by its smash hit, "Meter Maid" (or how to recycle the tear-shaped tabs from flip-top cans by using them in parking meters), the Troupe set out to popularize do-it-yourself telephone credit cards. Weak on plot but long on strategy, the Ma Bell skit features a show stopper belted out to the tune of "Yellow Submarine":

Call your friends, it's just a dime

From California

On company time

Say my cre-e-dit card is S

Any number 158.

A. T. & T. issued a new, more complicated credit code for 1971, only to have it immediately decoded in scores of underground newspapers. Once the formula is known, a call can be charged to any number, but the young seem to prefer banks, major defense contractors and the Fortune magazine 500. Dow Chemical Company, better known to the counterculture for napalm than Saran Wrap, reportedly was billed for 10,000 false credit-card calls last year, and the citizens of Woodstock Nation borrowed \$1,500 in free calls in just one month from their friends at Chase Manhattan. "We do control a lot of money, but we're not big bastards entirely," pleads a spokesman for the bank.

"Paying for a phone call is almost counterrevolutionary," says a Columbia sophomore who never enters a telephone booth without his tape recorder. "When the operator says \$3.75 for the first three minutes, I just play back the sound of 15 quarters dropping into the coin box. When it's all prerecorded, you can do it for any combination at all." Other youths place collect calls at prearranged times to friends waiting at prearranged pay phones. And an Eastern Michigan University "phone freak" even set up a private long-distance system in his dormitory room. Built with equipment borrowed from A. T. & T. for "educational purposes," it was engineered to bypass the other system's automatic billing apparatus. It was two years before Bell discovered it had competition.

THESE kids don't know the difference between public property and private prop-

erty," complains Howard Haimowitz, general manager of the National Retail Merchants Association. "They take over college campuses—which don't belong to them—and get away with it. So they figure, 'If I can rifle the files in the dean's office, why not steal from Macy's?'"

Macy's main store alone lost \$8-million to people slipping past the cash register last year, and goods carrying the same value disappear from the nation's department stores every day. Since 1965, "inventory shrinkage" has increased 2 per cent annually, and despite a heavy investment in security, retailers are expected to report "shortages" of more than \$4-billion in 1971. Nobody claims that hippies are making off with the entire haul, but the N.R.M.A. did distribute some unusual literature at a security seminar it sponsored last year—reprints of "Rip Off," an article by Lizzie Liftwell published in the underground newspaper Rat. "Go to the most expensive uptown stores," Lizzie advises women shoplifters. "Be sure to dress the part—look as though your father or husband was supporting you, casually as though money doesn't concern you. A good guerrilla in enemy territory is always perfectly camouflaged.

"Check out the store before the actual rip-off day," the article continues. "Know where the exits are, know where the fitting rooms and cashier counters are. Look for blind spots. And most important, do the ripping at the busiest shopping hours. Big holidays are runaways. It's not safe to take too much at once. The less you have on you if you're caught, the easier it is to look like the wayward socialite who is a little dizzy or klepto. Ripping off big business is the goal. Now you see it, now you don't apply. Be fast."

"I generally work the fancy department stores with my woman," says Chris, a 22-year-old New Yorker who claims to make as much as \$1,000 a week shoplifting. "She goes into her epileptic routine — everybody worries about a beautiful girl writhing on the floor and slobbering at the mouth in Saks Fifth Avenue. Meanwhile, I roll up two or three \$300 suits and split." Chris boasts he could easily double his income if he worked full-time but says, "You have to take a rest now and then. wait till it feels natural, then do it again. Otherwise you become a furtive thief with darting eyes."

"Shopping with credit cards is probably the most feasible and fun way to shop,"

writes Pearl Paperhanger, not in a testimonial for MasterCard, but in "More Rip Off, Rip More Off," a Rat sequel to the Liftwell piece. "If we are really serious about destroying the Man, why contribute to his survival by paying?" asks Pearl. "When you get a credit card, use it a lot. Buy stuff for friends. Buy stuff you don't need. Just to sock it to him. Phony credit-card purchases destroy the concept of credit without which capitalism can no longer survive."

ONE Washington youth, who bought everything from a stereo tape deck to a set of Michelin X tires for his '53 Chevy using a credit card identifying him as the Rev. Barnaby Farnsworth, considers a \$150 dinner at the posh Sheraton-Park Hotel the high point of his career. "It was an incredible evening," he recalls. "I was wearing my Brooks Brothers suit, but looking none too holy nevertheless, and my friends just got together uniforms that would pass but were really absurd. You know, black shirts, silver ties, houndstooth sport coats, Confederate flag ascots.

"We started off with three rounds of Golden Cadillac, ordered Chateaubriand and four bottles of their best wine. The bill came to \$128 for the five of us, and we left the waiter a \$25 tip—on the card, of course—so he'd slip us a Mumm's Cordon Rouge to take out. We drank the champagne on the way home, passing it between two cars going 70 m.p.h. They never questioned it when I handed them the Reverend Farnsworth card at the end of the meal."

The card in this case was obtained by a fugitive dope smuggler who established false identity as a clergyman to escape arrest, getting himself ordained by the mail-order Universal Life Church of Modesto, Calif.

Another method is described in the novel "Trash-ing," written by the wife of a well-known activist under the pseudonym Ann Fettamen. Invited to East 70's parties by wealthy liberals eager for radical chic, she passed up the caviar to rummage through purses and overcoats while her husband talked revolution with the swells. "Our pickings were peanuts compared to your average embezzler, not to mention the Mafia, Standard Oil, or U.S. Steel," writes Ann. "But, as I said to Danny, once you get into the really big stuff, it's nothing but work, work, work, and you lose all the fun of it."

Doug, a Boston youth who

enjoys a good rip-off even if it's only emptying a soft-drink vending machine with the aid of a bottle opener and a straw, specializes in fine wines. "We always head straight for the vintage rack," he says, sitting on the floor of a run-down loft apartment, swigging from a bottle bearing a \$26 price tag. For a friend's wedding recently, Doug and his roommate Jeff dropped in on the best wine shop in the city. "Jeff slipped a '34 Grand Vin Chateau Margaux up one sleeve of his dashiki and a Lafite Rothschild up the other while I stuffed two more bottles into my pants. Not a block away we run into the groom. He goes back to the store and the heat's already there. While the manager is busy rapping with the cop, he makes off with a 1919 Latour."

Doug says getting drunk off selected French wines is almost as good as tripping. "I doubt there are many millionaires in this country who drink better than we do," he adds. "But you'd be surprised, half the wines we rip—\$15 and \$20 bottles—are so ba you can't swallow them."

"In recent years consumerism has supplied a vocabulary for dishonest customers," complains F. Harry Brown, vice president of the Book-of-the-Month Club. "Younger people tend to use these terms more, so we assume they're a large part of our problem. We get innumerable letters claiming 'unordered merchandise,' citing F.T.C. actions, etc. Some just about come out and say big business is fair game for anybody." More than 10 per cent of the club's subscribers never pay, according to Mr. Brown, and while similar operations refuse to discuss their losses publicly, one record club admits to finding names like Alvin Rypoff

and Stanley Stealmore on its blacklist.

IF the counterculture considers private enterprise fair game, it approaches ripping off the government with almost a sense of mission. "Embarrassed to accept government handouts? That's really a hang-up! They're financing the revolution," exclaimed one young welfare recipient questioned about the ethics of taking money from a system she rejects. Youths line up at unemployment insurance offices, happily explaining they can't find work because potential employers object to long hair, and at supermarket checkout counters where the signs say, "We Accept Food Stamps."

"Programs intended to help deserving poor folks are perverted to subsidize hippie communes," charges California's Gov. Ronald Reagan. "Poverty - stricken mothers stand in line at the market to buy meager amounts of beans and dried milk, and watch shaggy dropouts use food stamps to pay for steaks and butter." In a move aimed at denying stamps to communes, the Agriculture Department will soon require that all members of a household be related by blood or some legally sanctioned union. A major supermarket-chain executive complains: "The only thing they'll achieve by doing that is giving us a bigger shoplifting headache."

"I only shoplift occasionally now to keep in practice," says Keith, a 22-year-old ex-panhandler who faked his way onto the relief roles in New York and California simultaneously with the same psychiatrist's letter he used to beat the draft. "When you're getting free money, there's no need to hustle."

(Continued on Page 52)



LARCENY, LTD.—Rules of the rip-off forbid counterculturists to rob one another, according to Abbie Hoffman, whose heister's handbook is a best seller. Hoffman was indignant when his TV was stolen from his apartment.

(Continued from Page 48)

Placed on total disability, Keith, a 6-foot-2 190-pounder now collects \$200 from Berkeley and \$120 from New York City every month. "When I'm here," he explains, "my friends on the Coast pick up my checks, and when I'm there, my friends in New York do it. I give them a 10 per cent commission. If the case-worker comes around investigating, they say I'm seeing my shrink. Once I went on a seven-month around-the-world tour, and the checks kept coming without a hitch."

Last March, while Keith was living in New York, the Berkeley welfare department threatened to cut off payments unless he appeared to sign some papers. "I flew there youth-fare—it cost me \$20 less than one month's check — and flew back the same day," he laughs. "On an impulse, I had a friend 'steal' my suitcase from the J.F.K. baggage area. I got \$250 from T.W.A. and made a \$270 profit on the trip."

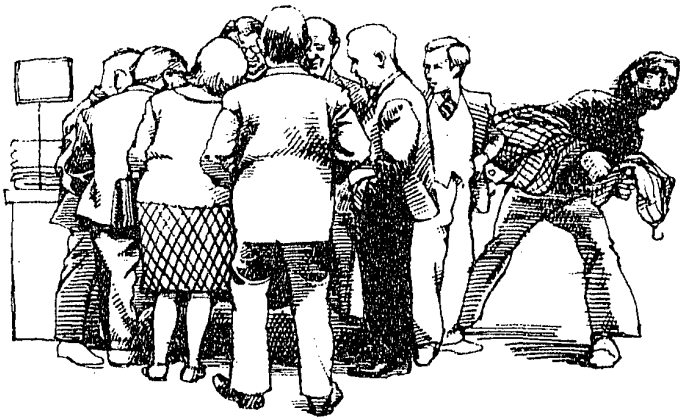
"You hear a lot of talk about hippies taking advantage of welfare," says a spokesman for H.E.W. in Washington. "But the rules are strict, and generally these people cannot qualify for benefits." Abbie Hoffman writes: "It's so easy to get on welfare that anyone who's broke and doesn't have a regular relief check coming in is nothing but a goddamn lazy bum!"

Is ripping off piecemeal revolution, an unorganized conspiracy of hit-and-run assaults on capitalism, or is it simply criminality without the extenuating circumstances of forced poverty?

"There's no longer any distinction between political dissent and deviant behavior," says Irving Louis Horowitz, a professor of sociology at Rutgers and editor of the journal *transaction*. "The two are becoming one, and obviously the merger is going to lead to strategies that are traditionally considered criminal."

"But when blacks riot in the ghettos, is it a crime or a political act?" asks Dr. Horowitz. "When young radicals steal from corporations that are involved in price-fixing, tax evasion and false advertising, is it a crime or a political statement? Ripping off is essentially a moral outcry. The ambiguity is where morality ends and petty thievery begins."

"There's been a total breakdown of morality in the United States," objects Robert Daley, New York City Deputy Police Commissioner. "People



DECOY—One youthful shoplifter works the department stores with his girl. While she draws the crowd by feigning a fit, he makes off with several expensive suits.

don't see things as wrong any more which are obviously wrong. But we don't know what to do about it. We can't even catch the kids who are stealing."

Experts estimate that only 1 out of 200 shoplifters is caught, a smaller number prosecuted and even fewer convicted. A. T. & T. boasts a high conviction rate—207 of the 215 arrested for "toll fraud" last year—but the figures lose their impact when stacked against losses in the millions. The Harvard Co-op now prosecutes students, a step eschewed by most college bookstores, but it still had "shortages" of almost \$1-million in 1970.

Even if the risks were greater, ripping off would probably continue as long as the youth culture considered it an acceptable source of income and an effective means of protest. Harvard sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset argues that it is neither. "Stealing is stealing, even if you call it revolution," he says. "It isn't the way to strike a blow against capitalism or anything else. Besides, it corrupts a movement and it corrupts the people in it. They even steal from one another."

On the surface at least there's ample evidence to support Professor Lipset's point of view. When Yuppies opened three Free Stores on the Lower East Side several years ago, all had to be shut down because everything in them—including the window panes and counters — was stolen. Radicals return from Cuba bitter that their "brothers" in the Venceremos Brigade have expropriated their meager belongings. Scores of youths camping in Rock Creek Park during the Washington May-day demonstrations lost their sleeping bags, back packs and even tents to other presumed antiwar protesters. And while Abbie Hoffman faced Julius Hoffman in a Chicago courtroom, someone broke into his

New York apartment and stole his color TV. "I was really p—— off," admits the author of "Steal This Book." "That was banditry, not revolution. But you can't expect everybody who leaves a society based on greed to immediately understand where it's at."

"A bandit—a professional thief or a junkie—cares only about what he gets," continues Hoffman. "A revolutionary is primarily concerned with whom he takes it from."

CRITICS on both the left and the right, however, say counterculture rippers are, in effect, stealing from all the people. "They're not revolutionaries," Jarvis Tyner, a Communist party youth leader, says accusingly. "We're struggling to get welfare payments increased, and they're giving the government an excuse to put down welfare. They shoplift, so supermarkets raise their prices, and the poor pay more for food. It's a game for middle-class rejects, and it takes the dignity and seriousness out of the real social struggle."

"While Abbie's ideological siblings take for free, 'the people' get charged more," agrees the conservative *National Review*. "In urging his brothers and sisters to rip off retail stores, he forgets, or probably doesn't give a damn, that shoplifting accounts for part of the continued rise in prices."

"Saying that shoplifting accounts for high prices is like saying that people using colored toilet paper are responsible for the ecological mess," argues Hoffman. "All our rip-offs together don't equal one price-fixing scheme by General Electric. What we have to create is a nation of revolutionary outlaws and do away with the concept of money entirely. We want a society where your birth certificate is your passport, and everything is free." ■