



PHOTOS BY WOODFIN CAMP, INC.

*Members of the Hare Krishna sect, often recruited from colleges, demonstrate on a New York City street.*

## The Shadowy Empires That Beckon the Young Cults Using Sophisticated New Recruiting Strategies in Schools, Group Warns

By Sheppard Ramborn

WASHINGTON—Last summer, 12-year-old John Goesch disappeared while delivering newspapers in the Des Moines suburb where he lives. John's mother said she believed her son had been "kidnapped" by a religious cult, "The Way International. *The Des Moines Register* has offered a reward for information about his whereabouts.

Another Des Moines youth, whose mother is an active member of The Way, ran away from the group and was hidden by a Catholic organization in the city. He was discovered, ran away again, and on Aug. 27 came out of hiding so that he would not jeopardize the people who had sheltered him. Juvenile authorities have temporarily placed him in a foster home out of reach of his mother and the group.

These anecdotes, later confirmed, and many others figured in a meeting here last week of more than 400 parents and siblings of cult members, former cult members, lawyers, doctors, members of the clergy, and counselors. The group, the Citizens Freedom Foundation (C.F.F.), has held such annual gatherings since 1978 for the purpose of sharing experiences and information—and in hopes of drawing attention to the de-

structive influence that the organization's members say is exerted on the minds of young people by highly restrictive, high-pressure groups.

### 'Cults' Remain Mysterious

Despite all that has been written about the mysterious, quasi-religious "cults" that have sprung up across the country in the past 15 years, experts at the meeting said, most Americans have little idea of what they are, how they operate, who runs them, how big their memberships are, and what kind of danger they may pose to mainstream society and to young people in particular.

But at least several million adolescents and young adults have already been drawn into this shadowy realm, speakers said, sometimes becoming "lost" to their families and usually helping to amass fortunes for cult leaders either by seeking donations on the street or by working for a pittance in cult-run industries.

Hard data on cults and their operations remain difficult to come by, participants at the meeting said. And their activities have become more sophisticated and subtle, partially in response to the negative publicity surrounding "deprogramming" cases and the public horror of the mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana, which involved a San Francisco-based cult.

But there is no evidence, they agreed, that the phenomenon is a waning one; on the contrary, some cults have become financial giants. And their adoption of corporate characteristics, speakers warned, provides new and perhaps more dangerous strategies for involving young people—that is, by offering employment in an era in which work opportunities are both avidly sought and difficult to come by.

In addition, conference participants noted, many cults have adopted "protective coloration," such as having their members dress in street clothes and recruiting new members through lectures and other "edu-

form of meditation and that more than three million had joined religious cults.

There are no exact totals, because the groups "inflate membership to appear popular," according to Ms. Singer. "One group claims a membership of 30,000 in the U. S., while ex-members say that there is a maximum of only 4,000 to 5,000."

"It's difficult to know if the numbers are increasing or decreasing," she said. "What we do know is that they exert more influence now. They have been able to amass such wealth that they may not want to recruit. New members may affect their tax and legal status."

### Street Solicitations

In 1979, officials of the Unification Church, which is headed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, claimed the organization had collected about \$20 million from street solicitations in the previous year. Allen Tate Wood, the former head of the Unification Church in Maryland, asserted in that same year that the organization took in anywhere from \$109 million to \$209 million annually. A. James Rudin and Marcia R. Rudin reported in their book, *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1980).

Unification Church members who go out on the street raise at least \$100 a day, according to Stephen Hassan, a former fund-raising captain for the organization.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness owns and operates farms in the U. S. and other countries and has recently built a gold-domed palace in Moundsville, W. Va., that includes a school for children of members.

The Way International, which actively recruits high-school students, had \$20 million in property holdings in 1980, according to the Rudins, who claim that many cult groups own hotels, restaurants, estates, camps, airplanes, and real estate. This year, the Unification Church started a new daily newspaper in Washington, staffing it with some cult members and many well-known professional reporters from

two defunct dailies *The Washington Star* and *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, as well as local school students serving as paper carriers.

To gain new recruits and raise money, according to researchers, cults use a variety of methods.

● Hare Krishna groups advertise "Vegetarian Cooking Courses" in newspapers near college campuses in an effort to attract students to their meetings.

● Providing an alternative to pregnant women considering abortions, one cult group, the Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation, advertises on posters in big cities that young women may send their babies to Texas where the foundation will raise and care for them.

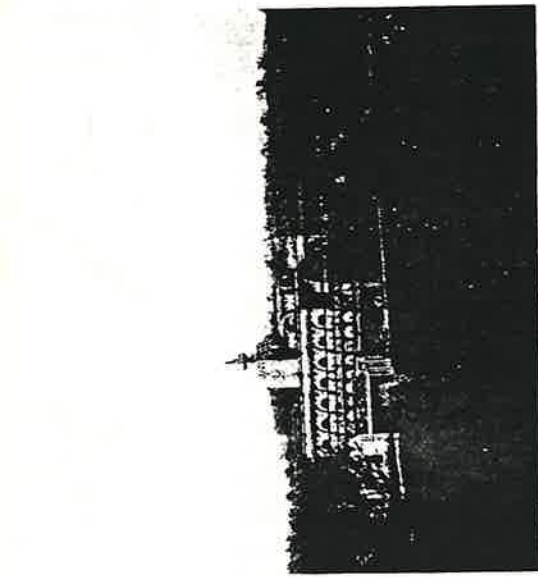
Critics charge that the Alamo foundation, like many others, forces its members to work for little or no money. In April, the U. S. Labor Department demanded that the group pay \$15.5 million in back wages and overtime to about 300 young adults who worked for the group.

● Some cults raising funds do not give their names, but say they are raising money for a hospital or the Y.W.C.A., C.F.F. members asserted.

Schools and educators are affected by the presence of cults, not only when students become involved, according to C.F.F. activists, but also when recruitment activities take place on school grounds. Some examples:

● The Way International has rock bands called "Takit" and "Joyful Noise" that play in cities across the country. The band members are described as "clean-cut kids" whose music and message is billed as being upbeat and positive. But the groups perform at high schools often without telling educators that they are affiliated with The Way.

A controversy developed in Norristown, Pa., in 1980, for example, when one of the bands did not announce its affiliation. The members of the group offered a free concert because they said their television recording session in Philadelphia had been postponed and they had extra time. During the performance, they announced they would appear later



*In a new temple outside Wheeling, W. Va., the International Society for Krishna Consciousness operates a school for its children which, spokesmen say, offers regular academic subjects. Boys and girls are separated at the age of seven.*



*Instructors in the Unification Church, headed by Sun Myung Moon, often set up shop on sidewalks in their effort to recruit new members.*

around colleges and schools. "The cults are reaching out in more subtle ways," according to Priscilla Coates, one of the conferees. "Nowadays, you'll find Krishna members wearing wigs when they solicit in airports. Sometimes they don't say who they're raising money for. Posters handed out at shopping centers asking 'Would You Like Your Child to Read Better?' are really advertisements for a program by the Church of Scientology," she said.

### Millions Involved in Groups

Between three million and 10 million people have been involved or are still involved with the more than 2,000 cult groups estimated to operate in the United States, according to Margaret T. Singer, professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley. Ms. Singer has counseled more than 700 current and former cult members.

A research memo from the National Education Association in 1979 estimated that six million young people had taken up some

in the week at a...flowship house in a neighboring community.

"The band said it was on a tour and that it would give a free concert. Band members were not allowed to talk to students," according to Norristown High School's principal, William M. McCain.

● In May 1982, California school officials investigated reports that volunteer workers and temporary staff members at Roosevelt Junior High School in Oakland were "proselytizing and recruiting" members for the Unification Church. But there was not enough evidence to support the allegations, according to the Oakland School District's public-information office.

● A 1977 court case in New Jersey stopped five high schools from offering a course on transcendental meditation. The course was taught by teachers who were employees of the World Plan Executive Council-United States, a national organization devoted to the propagation of T.M. The textbook used had been developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The court found in *Malnak v. Yogi* that the course propagated a belief in a concept that was inherently religious in nature and that the ceremonies included in the course were essentially a supplication to deceased "teachers" of the beliefs embodied in the "Science of Creative Intelligence." An appeal in 1979 to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit affirmed the district court's opinion.

● Vanessa N. Weber, a former schoolteacher and participant in est therapy, who now works for the New York and New Jersey offices of the Citizens Freedom Foundation, said she promoted an est "Hunger Project" in her elementary school. She gave two presentations to students in grades 3 to 5. "I didn't realize there could be any harm," she said.

The C.F.F. maintains that the young people who join cults and live in poverty do not do so voluntarily; they are, in the words of Sharon Bell, a former member of Way International, being "lured, duped, un-

knowingly enslaved, becoming a tool for a group whose distortion is so subtle, there is no way of knowing what is happening or extricating oneself without deprogramming."

Asked to respond to those charges, one longtime cult member—the 28-year-old son of a prominent New York lawyer who for the last nine years has been a disciple of an Indian guru—vehemently disagreed. "Everything is a cult of one form or another. What isn't calling you to join it?"

"There's the white-collar cult, the new punk cult, the sports cult, the bridge cult, the aerobic-exercise cult, the food-faddist cult, the diet cult," he said. "Our minds are cluttered with garbage. The only way you can find out what your own needs are is to isolate yourself from the everyday environment, from the middle of the family world, from school, from the bombardment of the media."

"I don't care if a cult's theology is to stand on their heads," says Mark A. Scheneman, an Episcopalian minister from Broomall, Pa. "What bothers me are the deceitful techniques they use for recruitment. Naive kids are being lured—and then retained—by the cults through questionable practices."

C.F.F. members think schools should educate children to be more critical, not merely to counter the cults but to make them less susceptible to falsehoods in advertising and consumerism in general.

"Programs in the schools designed to instill awareness about cults don't even have to mention the cults," according to Sydelle Levine, a former classroom teacher, staff-development officer, and school-community coordinator for the New York City public schools. "All we want to do is create an inner alarm bell to make them wise up when they're being conned," said Ms. Levine, who oversees C.F.F. activities in New York and New Jersey.

Stephen Hassan, a former "Moonie" who now heads a nonprofit organization called "Ex-Moon," of-

schools. "I tell them to be careful about instant friendships and to be on guard when someone gets them to talk about themselves without providing the same level of information back. Young people need to know how to ask very specific questions like 'Who do you represent? What do you do for a living?' 'What do you think about this?' When you get a vague response, that's a signal there's something wrong."

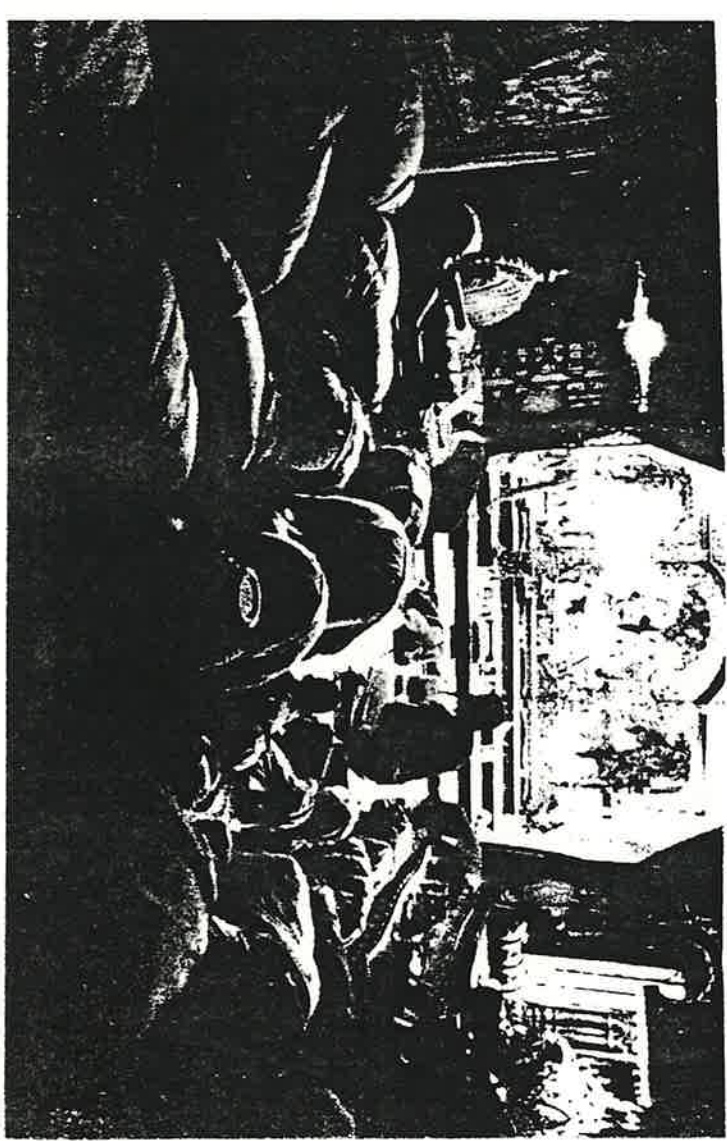
Mr. Hassan noted that destructive cults avoid these questions. "They say, 'Don't ask. Just come tonight and see.' I tell the kids if they are to go, to bring a friend. A destructive cult will try to separate friends. I tell them under no circumstances go to an isolated area. But if they do find themselves in an isolated place, and if they are unsure of what to do and don't understand what is going on, to know enough to stand up and shout that they don't like the situation. I tell them to say they want to see their families or their friends. Most groups won't

bother with those who are resistant. They force you out so you don't influence others."

But the Norristown High School principal, Mr. McCain, said he thought it would be unwise to have anti-cult groups or ex-members make presentations to high-school students. "I don't believe in stirring up problems. If you say that a thing is bad, some students are immediately going to go find out what it is."

Ms. Singer, the psychologist, said: "We need to provide information that is not particularly anti-cult but that will help people not be so easily influenced by others who are intense and insistent and unduly trying to control and persuade."

"We don't have good enough ways of explaining to the young how to be both trusting and skeptical at once," she added. "It's not a flaw in society, but probably just an area of communication that needs to be broadened between parents and children, clergy and parishioners, educators and students."



Sect members rise at 3:30 a.m., take cold showers, and attend worship services at 4:30.

## Who Joins Cults?

Those who join cults are generally not the children of troubled families, according to Robert E. Schechter, director of education for the American Family Foundation in Weston, Mass., an anti-cult organization.

"The fact that most of the kids who join are from normal, happy families bespeaks the power of the cult," Mr. Schechter says.

Counselors, parents, and others with personal knowledge of cult behavior contend that almost any young person or adult may be susceptible to the "lure" of a cult.

"Recruits are usually lonely and between meaningful attachments," according to Margaret L. Singer, a scholar who became interested in the problems of people involved with cults as a result of her experiences in treating American prisoners of war in Korea who had been "brain-washed."

The majority of the cult members she has dealt with, Ms. Singer said, "were depressed, mildly to moderately, when they joined. They didn't get into the college of their choice or had an abortion or were in-between romances or jobs at a time when they had no other major social affiliation."

Because they have money and the freedom to move, and are usually the products of comfortable surroundings, upper-middle class young people, she said, tend to be the most vulnerable as well as the most desirable targets for recruitment by cults.

"The lower classes have 'street smarts,'" she added. "They know there are no free lunches. When they

are offered a free dinner they know somebody wants something in return. The sales pitches appeal to the idealistic and the fairly wealthy who have parents who trust them to go off for a weekend somewhere."

Major target areas for recruitment, according to Ms. Singer, are on or near college campuses and schools, outside counseling centers, and in airports or railway and bus depots where vacationing young adults may be found.

Another prime location is the suburbs, she noted. "That's why private schools in private school haven't been hustled on school grounds by other conniving students. Private-school kids are more susceptible because they know fewer people. There may be 300 students in a private school compared to 3,000 in a public school. There's less a chance of being conned. And the diversity of the students and the wider range of tensions in public schools is educational."

"Kids from fundamentalist religions don't often join cults," she pointed out. "They know the Bible cold and laugh at the cult interpretation. But Jewish and Catholic kids who are not grounded solidly in religion and, at the same time, are seeking some firm base, are highly susceptible. "They often wish," Ms. Singer added, "that they had the same connection to the past that their parents have—to be raised in a closed community of immigrants with all the songs, dances, music, cooking, and stories. Without everything so amalgamated and cosmopolitan."

