

In Harvard Square, 'Street People' Are Challenging Liberal Ideas

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pg. 41

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Aug. 18 — Thousands of young "street people," wearing faded blue jeans and long hair, low on money and looking for others like themselves, have come to Harvard Square this summer. They are confronting the Cambridge community with a challenge to its liberal ideals.

They squat on crowded sidewalks, panhandle passers-by and sometimes shoplift for their dinners. On lazy Sunday afternoons at weekly rock concerts, the smell of marijuana hangs across the Cambridge Common, where George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775.

Because of four recent riots in which many of Harvard Square's small shops and restaurants were stoned and looted, the local merchants, citizens and even Harvard students have become worried, and some of them

have become involved in trying to help the street people.

"Harvard Square isn't healthy any more," said a young Radcliffe graduate who has been active in an anti-pollution campaign. She lives in Cambridge, a city of 100,000 across the placid Charles River from Boston. "I sympathize with the street people, but the situation is out of control. So I avoid the square whenever I can."

The merchants, many of whose shattered display windows are still boarded up, say that business has fallen off by as much as 40 per cent because middle-class customers are afraid to venture near the square. Some have had their insurance policies canceled, and they fear that the prosperous square is turning into a slum.

But merchants are now pressing the traditionally lenient Cambridge police to enforce the laws against panhandling and loitering in an

effort to reduce the number of street people.

At the same time, agencies are springing up to help care for the street people. Among others are the Cambridge Port Free Clinic, which provides free medical and psychiatric care for an average of 30 of them a day, and Sanctuary, which offers a free place to "crash" or sleep, in one of Harvard's exclusive clubs.

Harvard Square has many attractions for street people: the dozens of specialty shops and boutiques that cater to exotic tastes; the police who do not arrest people smoking marijuana on the steps of Christ Church; the rock concerts in the Commons and Harvard Stadium —Janis Joplin was there last week—and Harvard's intellectual atmosphere.

The Main Attraction

But the main attraction is in the other street people, or "freaks." . . . they sometimes call themselves. "It's easy to just be sitting in the Common and have some freak turn you on, and maybe take you into his commune," said a boy who would identify himself only as Paul, from a middle-class family in Pittsburgh that he could not get along with. "Everybody is so friendly."

Dr. Joseph H. Brenner, a psychiatrist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who founded the Cambridge Free Clinic, believes there are now 3,000 to 4,000 street people in Cambridge at any given time. In his experience, the real street people, as opposed to Harvard students who are often indistinguishable in appearance, are young, poor and usually very lonesome.

"They are all dropouts from something, from high school, from college, their families, the Great Society," Dr. Brenner said in an interview in one of the clinic's small offices, which are decorated with brightly colored posters and curtains.

Dr. Brenner observed that



Joyce Dopkeen for The New York Times

Young people on Cambridge Commons, where George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775

the most common medical disorder among the street people was gastrointestinal, resulting partly from bad diet, but, more important, from anxiety. "These are lonely people," he said. "They are nervous, afraid. But they are very open and friendly, and it makes them wonderfully cooperative patients."

"They are really poor, though they come from middle-class backgrounds," he said. "We had one girl come in suffering from acute malnutrition with sores around her mouth. It turned out her father was head of a department in one of the universities in Cambridge."

A Staff of 18

The clinic, which is financed by a grant from the Field Foundation, has a staff



Dr. Joseph H. Brenner, a psychiatrist from M.I.T., founded the Cambridge Free Clinic for street people.



John W. Black, manager, outside Saks Fifth Avenue's University Shop on Mount Auburn Street. One of many stores that were invaded and looted recently, it has just reopened.

of 18 doctors, some of them senior specialists at Boston hospitals, who each volunteer their services one night a week. Next to stomach disorders, the most common problems are venereal disease, mononucleosis and hepatitis.

The Sanctuary, a red brick Colonial-style building with ivy on its walls, is rented for the summer from Harvard's Iroquois Club with money provided by the Episcopal Diocese. Every hot summer evening it is jammed with street people, resting their feet on the plush carpeting or sprawling on the mat-



Continued on Page 79, Column 3

Sidewalk at Harvard Square is popular as a sitting place

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Harvard Square 'Street People' Are Challenging Liberal Ideals

Continued From Page 41

tresses provided for them in two large rooms.

To avoid giving the police an excuse to raid them, the Sanctuary has established strict rules against any drugs, weapons or sex on the premises. One evening last week, there were people registered from San Diego; Phoenix, Ariz.; Chicago; Oklahoma City; Utica, N. Y., and Brooklyn.

The residents and a visiting observer were startled when a young black boy with a headband around his Afro haircut suddenly fell down the stairs, landing on his head. His friends thought he was high on drugs.

When they discovered that he was a diabetic and had not eaten anything for two days, they quickly helped walk him to a restaurant nearby.

No one is sure if it is really the street people who are to blame for the riots and looting, which have occurred after peace marches and rock concerts.

Inspector George Powers of the Cambridge Police Department, a native of Cambridge who has a thick Boston accent, was not certain whether it was the street people, political militants or gangs of local toughs. "We just don't know," he said. "It is very hard to tell in a riot, with everyone dressed the same, with their long hair and all that."

He conceded that the Cambridge police had generally been lenient in their attitude toward the street people. "We got psychiatrists, psychol-

ogists and all kinds of people coming in here and telling us the police were to blame for the troubles. So we eased up. Now look what's happened."

While some of the merchants say they are sympathetic toward the street people, they are now adamant about reducing their presence in the square. Alexander Zavelle, manager of the Harvard Cooperative Society, the largest retailer in the area, explained their position.

Mr. Zavelle said that the merchants had formed a committee to try to establish a dialogue with the street people. "They think we owe them a living," he said. "They even suggested that we establish a 300-bed hostel at our expense."

"But this is a national problem, not a local one. These people come from all over the country. Why should we be responsible? And we can't afford that kind of solution anyway."

Bobbi Baker, who owns an elegant women's boutique, has been hit twice by looters. Now she hires a carpenter for \$75 to board up her windows before every rock concert.

"We had someone come in and tell us the store looked like a doll house. We thought it was a compliment," she said. "Then he said, 'You should be burned down. Boys are dying in Vietnam while you make money.'"

"I am heartbroken," she continued. "I know Boston was the center of the first American Revolution. I hope it won't be the center of another."