

Unsentimental journey into the past

No Peace, No Place

*Excavations Along the
Generational Fault.*

By Jeff Greenfield.
286 pp. New York:
Doubleday & Co. \$7.95.

By **CRAWFORD WOODS**

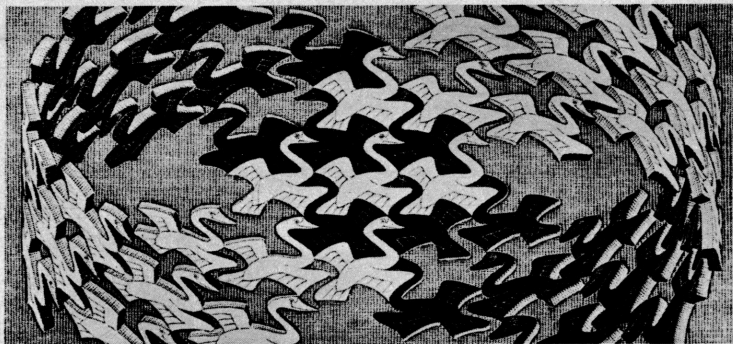
From meditations on baseball, primitive television and the dawn of rock 'n' roll, this book fashions a smart personal history of our last 20 years. Its author co-authored, with Jack Newfield, "A Populist Manifesto," an important book on populist politics and was an aide to Mayor Lindsay. Here he evokes some of the cultural forces that mandated his earlier work.

"No Peace, No Place" lights up a familiar thesis in fragmented but intriguing ways, despite its being somewhat damaged by the author's un-

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accountable urge to glue a capital to every noun in sight; we live in a time of such general sophistication about the operations of popular culture that an encounter with Greenfield's probes throws fixed notions into a revivifying spin. Uninterested in the art-rock that received so much polysyllabic attention at the end of the last decade, he rhapsodizes on rock 'n' roll pre-Elvis as the true unifier of his generation (and mine). Ignoring the much-assayed one-ring circus of contemporary television, he analyzes in careful detail the way early TV unwittingly taught by default values that turned Howdy Doody into Woodstock, into the war against the war. Only a long look at the decay of the New York Yankees seems to miss the mark, to do little to advance his core idea.

Which is what? Roughly, that the history of postwar America has been typified by a gross failure of community, principally imposed by television and partially healed by rock. After the strenuous unity of World War II, Greenfield argues, the nation was offered the reward of suburban separation: Anzio had earned, not the community of the corner



bar, but the protective isolation of the television set. (Extensive quotes from magazine advertising of the period bear him out.) In consequence, we became a people who fled to the suburbs, making the cities rot, the small towns die. And, under the absentee leadership of the General in the White House, we opted en masse for material greed, social docility, moral indifference. If the "Negroes" were being firehosed and later fire-bombed, well one could always change the channel.

But changing the channel gave the gift of images of adult behavior that could be turned against themselves when the author's generation became the adults. And following the rules could be turned to a surface occupation when in our midnight rooms we tuned in radio stations which fed in black music to challenge the Guy Lombardo lameness of the day.

Most of the book is given over to what happened a decade or so later when these new forces came together to form a generation capable of not merely questioning the Eisenhower oversoul, but devastating it. What Greenfield calls the "campus pastoral" could encompass peaceful sit-ins at Memphis lunchrooms and still have the texture of an M.G.M. college musical—but it died with the revolutionaries of the armies of the night.

This revolution—"the revolt of the Peanut Gallery"—takes Greenfield on an unsentimental journey into his own past, where he ends in conversation with the present editor of the University of Wisconsin paper, a post the author had held years ago. The editor speaks of a revival of fifties rock 'n' roll that's sweeping the campus. Will the circle be unbroken? Greenfield concludes:

"And so it is, more neatly

than I would dare to construct that out of the passions unleashed by the music of fifteen years ago has come, in part, a generation so embittered by its battles, so depressed and exhausted, that it retreats back into . . . a music which our parents found subversive, but which suggests to them an Age of Innocence, a time before the war, on the other side of the Generational Fault."

In fact, his whole construction is a bit too neat, an edifice of poetic guesswork. As such, it is no less valuable than the flats of more scholarly history, yet this ending is a little disappointing. Though Greenfield does not seem a man to join the exile in the Vermont hills nor yet to waste himself in formless street hysteria, he offers no prediction of where we're going now, of where we should be. Unless the thrust of the book is that history now runs in quick mad cycles of 20 years . . . in which case, we had best begin to listen closely to the music being made and watch the video images being propagated, if they can indeed be read like sheepgut for the warning this otherwise admirable book fails to provide. ■