



Poor by choice in pursuit of happiness

6 It is no news that much of the 'American Dream' is to lead a lavish lifestyle. They love to work hard and enjoy life. You can find state-of-the-art technology in many middle-class American homes. But John Carlin reports on the new creed of Americans that is sweeping America whose motto is "Voluntary Simplicity".

Sure!
The Editors

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The American Way of Life is like other peoples' ways of life, only more so. The pursuit of happiness through the accumulation of goods is more frenzied; the desperation to succeed is more consuming; the peer pressure is more intense. But all this might be changing. A growing number of Americans are beginning to question the received orthodoxies. Subversive forces are at work, plotting to redefine the priorities that shape the modern world.

There is a quiet revolution under way involving millions of people the length and breadth of the United States, and it goes by the name of "Voluntary Simplicity". The revolution's

goals are to emphasise quality living over quantity buying, to abandon the material points systems by which people are conditioned to measure their self-worth and to do this by working less, earning less, spending less and saving more. The slogan "time is money" has been replaced by a novel American concept: time is precious. Voluntary Simplicity has been identified by the Trends Research Institute (TRI), a widely quoted body based in New York state, as a major social phenomenon of the Nineties, one poised to set the tone for life in the next millennium.

"You sell your time for money, but the exchange is not as good as you think it is"

The baby boom generation is 76 million people, and between 3 and 4 per cent of them are consciously engaged in the movement," said Gerald Celente, the director of TRI. "The phenomenon is emerging - not by accident - at a time of

widespread economy downsizing, of underemployment, of people waiting for the axe to fall because job security is so fragile. Those who opt for this change of life are like heart attack victims who survive and then, under doctor's orders, set about a change in their lives."

Christopher and Caroline Green, a middle-class couple in their thirties who live in Richmond, Virginia, did not need a heart attack to set them on the revolutionary road. They received their sharp jolt in December 1992, when Mrs Green, after a particularly stressful day of work, suffered a miscarriage.

Two weeks later her husband heard a man called Dominguez talking on the radio about a book he had written called *Your Money or Your Life*, a Voluntary Simplicity guidebook which has sold more than half a million copies. Mr Green and his wife read the book and were instantly converted. She had been working for eight years with disabled and emotionally disturbed children.

He was a building contractor specialising in home restoration, who became self-employed in 1991 after being laid off by a local company. Between them they were making about \$50,000 a year, \$18,000 above the American household median. "We decided", Mr Green said, "that it was important to spend time together and not spend 95 per cent of our lives working, waiting until we're 65 and have a pension and then spending time together like my parents and my grandparents did."



Sure!