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Author(s): Stephen Petrus

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Rumblings of Discontent: American Popular Culture and its Response to the Beat Generation, 1957-1960

On 21 September 1959, *Life* published an article contrasting the values and habits of middle-class Americans living in Hutchinson, Kansas, and bohemians known as “beatniks” from Venice, California. The staff of the magazine decided to run “Squaresville U. S. A. vs. Beatsville,” complete with illustrations, after hearing of a proposition by three young women from Hutchinson to beatnik author Lawrence Lipton. Kathy Vannaman, Anne Gardner, and Lucetta Peters readily admitted in a letter to Lipton that Hutchinson was “Squaresville itself,” and they playfully invited him and some of his friends to come to their town because they wanted “to be cooled in” beatnik ways (31). To their shock, Lipton accepted the invitation and planned to go to Hutchinson until members of the community became aware of the offer and demanded that the girls withdraw their request. Lipton never traveled to Hutchinson, but the proposal attracted the attention of local newspapers—and eventually *Life*. The story impelled the magazine to compare the midwestern town to the west coast enclave, as “the clash between the squares and beats [was] taking place in many small ways all over the U.S.” (31).

The inhabitants of the two communities were polar opposites in terms of family life, amenities in the home, recreational activities, physical appearance, and dress styles. In a pleasant and clean household in Hutchinson, a married couple and their two children gazed happily at a family photo album. In an unkempt “hip pad” in Venice, artist Arthur Richer and his wife and young daughter pondered abstract portraits on their walls. For recreation adults in the Kansas town took

walks in a park or visited the local grain elevator; children swam in the municipal pool, bowled, went to the movies, or danced at a convention hall. In Venice “hip cats” read poetry in a bath tub outdoors, painted garbage cans, listened to jazz, played bongo drums, drank wine, and discussed art philosophy. The citizens of Hutchinson were neat in appearance and conservative in hair style and dress, and the men wore no facial hair. The beatniks looked unclean physically, their hair disheveled, their shirts untucked, the men bearded. Both groups expressed satisfaction with their lives in their respective communities. “I think Hutchinson is the nicest small town in the whole world,” remarked Ruby Haston as she smiled with her children (32). Arthur Richer was equally content in Venice, while he found “chaos” in “the frontier of so-called civilization” (33).

The reaction of the readers to this article was tellingly mixed. Three weeks later *Life* printed nine letters to the editors regarding the story, a variety of provocative responses from people who ruminated on the larger implications of a changing society. Tom Robbins of Richmond thought that the beatniks were “grotesquely ostentatious” and the Kansas families “enervatingly dull.” He hoped that “there is a middle ground between contrived insanity and inherent mediocrity” (16). Alexander Gross of New York believed that the story was representative of a banal culture. “If the values of a Kansas town are so uncannily excellent, why have they not satisfied everyone?” And “[w]hy have the beatniks, with all their admitted mediocrities, sprung into existence?” He answered his second query by pointing to “the intellectual, artistic and spiritual poverty of American life” (16, 18). Other letters defended and denounced both the Kansans and the beatniks. The last letter included a thoughtful question from Ruth Isely, an astute reader, who observed a fad: “Can the nonconformist beatnik explain why all beatniks look so very much more alike than any two squares in the world?” (20).

This article and the reactions it stimulated exemplify a topic that flooded the pages of popular magazines and newspapers from 1957 to 1960. The “Beat Generation” first gained national attention in September of 1957. Scores of articles on that group and its followers, the hipsters and later the beatniks, quickly fascinated an audience that was not reticent about sharing opinions on broader questions of societal values and mores.

It is clear today that the authors of most of the pieces misrepresented their subjects, exaggerated stereotypes, took quotations out of context, and cleverly used illustrations for a desired effect. This inaccurate coverage did not go unnoticed even then. Mrs. Boyd Rostine wrote to *Life* claiming that her Kansas town

had “a little more in the entertainment line than your article would imply” (18). Regarding the same article, Bruce E. Hunsberger cited a “misunderstanding as to the meaning of true beat.” He argued that “beat” entailed a higher “awareness” of existing as a “separate entity and yet as a part of the whole rhythm of the universal life force” (18). The members of the Beat Generation, themselves, were not nearly as polite when addressing problematic journalism. “You are an instrument of the Devil and crucify America with your lies; you are the war-creating Whore of Babylon and would be damned were you not mercifully destined to be swallowed by Oblivion with all created things,” wrote Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso in their typically candid style to the editor of *Time* in 1959 (5). The trio believed that an article the magazine published in the previous month blatantly misrepresented them at a poetry reading.

The slant of reporters distorted the message, as amorphous as it originally was, of the Beat Generation, hipsters, and beatniks, but that is not the critical issue. More important in understanding this segment of American society from 1957 to 1960 is the nature of the coverage by popular culture magazines and newspapers and the response of the public to what it understood to be the philosophy and values of the non-conformists. Americans, to be sure, reacted in different ways to the barrage, but in the end they co-opted much of the beatniks’ culture and thereby rendered the dissidence obsolete.

To contemporary scholars the term “Beat Generation” refers to a group of post-World War II novelists and poets disenchanted with what they viewed to be an excessively repressive, materialistic, and conformist society, who sought spiritual regeneration through sensual experiences. This band of writers includes Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs, who originally met in 1944 in New York City to form the core of this literary movement. Other Beats, less popular, but still essential to the clique were John Clellon Holmes and Gregory Corso. And it is crucial not to exclude Herbert Huncke, Carl Solomon, Neal Cassady, and Peter Orlovsky, who were not writers themselves, but were influential as inspirations for prominent Beat works. Defined loosely, the Beat Generation can be slightly more inclusive, adding certain poets associated with Black Mountain College in North Carolina and the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance.

Though Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs were mostly unsuccessful in persuading publishers to print their material until 1956, the first decade or so of the Beat Generation was hardly a dull one. In 1949, after being arrested for storing stolen goods in his apartment, Ginsberg spent eight months at the New York State

Psychiatric Institute where he met Carl Solomon. From 1947 to 1950, Kerouac periodically traveled in a car back and forth across the country with his friend Neal Cassady. And Burroughs for most of the decade fought his addiction to morphine and heroin. These experiences provided ideas that developed into the most important and popular works of the Beat Generation: Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*, Kerouac's *On the Road*, and Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.

The first wave of articles in popular magazines and newspapers examined what the term "Beat Generation" meant. The authors of these investigations analyzed the origins and historical context of the Beats and the characteristics and philosophy of their members. Different writers presented a variety of interpretations, which contradicted each other and undoubtedly confused readers. The message sent to the mainstream of Americans was never a clear, organized one. Fortunately, though, there was some agreement and overlap and it is this common ground and the response it triggered that warrant further exploration. Because of the nature of the topics, these initial writings were generally profound and intellectual in tone. But they still decorated the pages of magazines that reached a wide audience, such as *Esquire* and *Playboy*.

The first issue was the term *Beat*, which had several meanings. The first definition, which emerged in an article written by John Clellon Holmes in 1952, five years before the popularization, involved a state of mental exhaustion. Holmes, author of the novel *Go* and loosely tied to the Beat Generation circle, credited Kerouac with coining the phrase in a conversation the two had in 1948. He wrote that "[m]ore than mere weariness, [Beat] implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness" (10). This generation, he contended, was a product of the Great Depression and the Second World War. It thus grew up in despair and its members, without a creed and reluctant to categorize themselves, lived with the fear of destructive warfare. Holmes's essay, because of its untimely appearance, isolated from any other event that might attract more notice to the Beat Generation, made little if any impact on popular culture in 1952. Six years later, though, using a similar definition, he crafted another article, which surfaced in a period of frenzy and gained more notice.

The second definition of *Beat* came from Kerouac. Television, newspaper, and magazine reporters had seized the word and hounded the novelist for elaboration on its meaning. Kerouac also traced the origins of the phrase *Beat Generation* to a discussion he had with Holmes in 1948, but he said that he first

heard the word *beat* from hustlers in Times Square and Greenwich Village in the 1940s. *Beat*, he said, originally meant “poor, down and out, deadbeat, on the bum, sad, sleeping in subways.” Since then, however, it took on an elevated and higher meaning. For Kerouac, a Roman Catholic later fascinated by Zen Buddhism, *beat* signified “beatific,” or a feeling of being blessed (42). His was a spiritual interpretation.

In an influential essay entitled “The White Negro” that appeared in the summer of 1957 in *Dissent*, a highbrow socialist journal, Norman Mailer described the “hipster,” a figure whom later writers would link to the Beat Generation. According to Mailer, the hipster was the American version of an existentialist. Shaped by the effect of the senseless murder of World War II and the knowledge of a possible instant death by an atomic explosion or a slow deterioration by the cancerous force of conformity, the hipster responded to his situation by detaching himself from society and rebelling. Attachment, which was the goal of the “square,” or the hipster’s opposite persona, meant security, which translated into boredom and eventually sickness. The hipster’s rebellion included smoking marijuana, enjoying the underworld of jazz, and speaking his own language. He lived for the present, always moving. His world was a violent one of excitement and contradiction that encapsulated “the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create, a dialectical conception of existence with a lust for power.” The hipster existed on the fringes of society like the marginalized African-American, who also lived in constant fear. Mailer wrote that the hipster was the product of the meeting of the Negro, bohemian, and juvenile delinquent, but “for practical purposes,” the author asserted, the hipster “could be considered a white Negro” (279, 280).

Writing for *Playboy* in February 1958, highbrow literary critic Herbert Gold categorized hipsters as Beats and expanded on the violent aspects of the hipster that Mailer presented. Gold’s portrait included motorcycle thugs with sideburns and jeans, college kids enamored with the coolness of a drug addict, and bohemians. Central to his description was the diffidence and “flight from emotional reaction” of this “true rebel without a cause.” An aversion to speaking and an addiction to heroin were also essential traits. “Heroin,” he noted, “enables the hipster to stand guard over his soul, dreaming of cool nothing, beautiful beat nothing, while his feet go ratatat and he strokes a switchblade.” This dissident rejected the values of society and believed himself to be “exemplary because he has no wife, children, responsibilities, politics, work” (84, 86).

Printed in *Esquire* in that same month was John Clellon Holmes's view, which, of course, was more sympathetic. Again, as in his previous article on the Beat Generation, the author emphasized the historical situation that gave rise to the figure. Holmes's rebel, like Gold's, was still reckless in behavior, but less violent and more spiritual and caring. Holmes argued that spirituality existed in this generation despite the growing presence of excessive juvenile delinquency, social irresponsibility, and apathy in politics, communal activity, and orthodox religion. Rather than equating an affection for modern jazz, mild narcotics, and strange idiom with immorality, Holmes associated these activities with an "affirmation of an individuality . . . which can sometimes be only expressed by outright eccentricity." The hipster, who was asocial, not antisocial, emancipated himself from all societal restraint and declared his uniqueness through jazz, sex, and marijuana.

Kerouac objected vehemently to the violent depiction of the hipster. In essays for *Esquire*, *Playboy*, and *Pageant*, he separated the Beat Generation, on a spiritual quest, from juvenile delinquents, who, in fact, were sinful and indifferent. "Woe unto those," he sermonized, "who think that the Beat Generation means crime, delinquency, immorality, amorality" (79). Kerouac saw beauty, sincerity, and energy in the Beats, who were mystics, "digging everything" (6). He identified two types of hipsters: the cool brand "whose speech is low and unfriendly, whose girls say nothing" and the hot kind, a "crazy talkative shining eyed (often innocent and openhearted) nut who runs from bar to bar, pad to pad looking for everybody, shouting, restless" (15). The author said he was a member of the latter version and so were most artists of the Beat Generation.

The articles by Gold, Holmes, and Kerouac, intellectually deep, provocative, and thorough, stimulated dozens of letters to the editors. These responses, also intelligent and critical, were primarily from people who were hostile to the agony and the spiritual plight of the Beat Generation. "Who gives a damn about the Beat Generation?," concluded a dismissive Phillip E. Holt (9). And Carole Wolfman described the Beat Generation as a "minority of people who have used the times as an excuse for their shortcomings" (14). But, just as clearly, a significant number of people were sympathetic. "I, too, am searching for something, I don't know what, but it's there inside me," commented Dirk Delturco. Regarding Holmes, he wrote that "[i]t's just nice to know that for once there's someone on our side" (12). David E. Feldman called the Beat philosophy a "morbid" one but recognized the inevitability of this type of world view considering the historical circumstances of the Cold War. "We live in a terrible world. We do not know

when the big blast will go off and boom, we will be no more. So we must live for today, for tomorrow may never come," he lamented (14).

The mixed response of these Americans to the Beat Generation and its emblematic figure the hipster was not reflective of the feelings of the total popular culture. Delturco was correct in observing that most people were antagonistic to his cause. They were generally hostile to people like himself because they, despite Kerouac's efforts, lumped him together with the juvenile delinquent. And in the middle to the late 1950s juvenile delinquency, as shown by Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, was a serious concern and prominent issue that worried most middle-class Americans (280-287). More and more adolescents, it seemed, defied their parents and blamed them for all that was wrong in society. Even so, the public response to the hipster was ambivalent. The best explanation for this apparent contradiction involves the audience of the specific magazines in question. In 1958, only five years in existence, *Playboy*, with a circulation of more than 600,000, was an especially daring magazine that displayed photographs of young women in the semi-nude. According to David Halberstam, it aimed for a sophisticated male readership, cosmopolitan in taste (570-576). Unsurprisingly, some of its patrons, with progressive views on sexual issues, mildly accepted the dissent of the Beats. And *Esquire*, argued John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, was a magazine that printed relatively longer works of fiction and articles that raised the social awareness of its readers. It, too, sought a more urbane, male audience (186, 190). The nature of these publications and the more liberal ideas of their readers, mostly—but not entirely—explain the varied response. Partial acceptance of social heretics unveils not a completely intolerant, stagnant culture, but one slowly in motion. A clearer picture of this society emerges in the next series of responses to the Beat Generation.

If the initial response was like a wave, the second was a tsunami. From approximately the end of 1958 through 1960, popular magazines, newspapers, television shows, and even comic strips bombarded Americans with images of the Beat Generation. People replied in a number of ways to what they saw. Some were amused and receptive to a point, others went so far as imitation, while some condemned specific traits of the non-conformists. But these Beats to whom Americans were responding were not the same violent characters introduced to the culture in the sophisticated magazines from the latter part of 1957 throughout 1958. Gone was the James Dean renegade stereotype connected to juvenile delinquency and in came a new, eccentric figure, pejoratively labeled the "beat-

nik.” Beatniks, with their distinctive traits, proved to be much more intriguing characters than hipsters in the realm of the public.

The term *beatnik* surfaced inconspicuously in Herb Caen’s column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 2 April 1958. “Look magazine, preparing a picture spread on S.F.’s Beat Generation (oh, no, not AGAIN!),” he quipped, “hosted a party in a No. Beach house for 50 Beatniks, and by the time the word got around the sour grapevine, over 250 bearded cats and kits were on hand, slopping up Mike Cowles’ free booze” (15). The phrase that Caen used stuck for the bohemians living in small districts not only in San Francisco’s North Beach, but also in Venice West in Los Angeles and New York’s Greenwich Village. Americans soon equated beatniks with—or more appropriately viewed them as disciples of—the Beat Generation. Kerouac, Dennis McNally wrote, unwantingly earned the title “King of the Beatniks” (243). Ginsberg, Barry Miles noted, worked to dissociate his clique from these cultural defectors (248-249). All attempts at separating the two groups, however, were futile. Similarities in terms of fondness for poetry, jazz, and drugs prevailed as the press failed to see Kerouac, Ginsberg, and others, such as Gregory Corso, first and foremost as dedicated writers.

Life, the mass culture periodical with a weekly circulation of 6,500,000, featured and explored beatnik values, habits, and disillusionment in a long and involved article entitled “The Only Rebellion Around,” by staff writer Paul O’Neil. Appearing on 30 November 1959, this investigation into the flip side of the mainstream was by far the most thorough and exhaustive work done by a popular magazine on the topic in those three years. O’Neil’s article first brought the reader visually into the beatniks’ “well-equipped pad” or apartment. Using paid models and props, the magazine arranged and displayed twenty-two items which it claimed were virtual necessities in any such residence. The more significant materials included a Beat “chick” wearing black and excessive eye make-up, a naked light bulb, a hot plate for warming espresso, marijuana, crates that served as tables, a hi-fi loudspeaker, an unfinished poem in the typewriter, a bearded Beat wearing sandals and studying a record by the late saxophonist Charlie Parker, a bare mattress, bongo drums, and a Beat baby, asleep on the floor amidst empty beer cans.

O’Neil began his text by characterizing beatnik attitudes, though he admitted the pitfalls of generalizing because “most . . . are against collectiveness of all kind” and “spend hours differing vehemently with their own kind.” Still, he claimed that beatniks oppose “virtually every aspect of current American society” such as

the traditional nuclear family, politics, organized religion, law, the Ivy League suit, higher education, and the hydrogen bomb. And they especially abhorred working. They also sought “freedom to disorganize” and liberation from the “rat race” of squares, and they were typically “ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed by preference.” Described by O’Neil as the “cult of the Pariah,” the Beat Generation was a group of masochistic exhibitionists who challenged the values of society, rejected American materialism, and loathed conformity (115). But the author noted that “bohemianism is not new to big American cities.” There had always been cultural dissidents in the country, such as the radicals of Greenwich Village in the early part of the century. The Beat Generation, however, unlike any of its predecessors, was popular and influential throughout the nation, most notably in urban areas and on college campuses (115).

What O’Neil observed were the acceptance of the beatnik dissent and the emergence of a fad: a cultural protest transformed into a commodity. Many Americans found the beatniks amusing. Purveyors of popular culture depicted them as ridiculous and harmless. But a goodly number of people looked beyond that portrayal and saw something significant. The original beatniks themselves became tourist attractions. Spectators flocked to San Francisco’s North Beach, the bohemian district, passed a sign which read “Gateway to Beatnikland,” and gawked at the people they saw. Reluctantly, Venice West also received many visitors, especially after the publication of Lawrence Lipton’s 1959 best-seller *The Holy Barbarians*, which described the alternative lifestyle in that community. Greenwich Village, too, became a tourist center.

Beatnik culture pervaded American society. Their odd idiom, taken mainly from jazz musicians and narcotics addicts, containing expressions such as “cool,” “crazy,” “dig,” “go,” and especially “like,” turned into catchwords. The radio soap opera “The Romance of Helen Trent” and the comic strips “Nancy,” “Pogo,” “Gordo,” and “Popeye” incorporated beatniks into their casts (Cook 92). Dennis McNally noted that television programs such as *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Route 66*, and *San Francisco Beat* also included beatnik characters. These shows depicted the bohemians in various ways. Sometimes the beatnik was violent as in the case of *Route 66* and episodes of *San Francisco Beat*, while on *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, he was silly. Probably the most popular beatnik was Maynard G. Krebs of the highly rated *Dobie Gillis* show, a situation comedy in the fall of 1959. Maynard was an innocuous, lovable young man who behaved like a child. He wore tattered clothing and often carried around

bongo drums. The thought of work terrified this goofy character who frequently began his sentences with the word “like” (271-73).

Newspapers and magazines teemed with ridiculous stories about beatniks. Particularly comical were the attempts of beatniks to win political office in 1960. In the summer of that year the American Beat Party held a convention with the hopes of placing a candidate on the presidential ballot. William Lloyd Smith of Chicago earned the nomination of the party, whose platform consisted of “abolition of the working class [and] a \$10,000,000,000 subsidy for artists,” reported the 18 July 1960 *New York Times* (13). “Since its convention this summer,” journalist Harold Faber later wrote, “both the party and the candidate have been strangely silent” (60). An article in *Life* told that beatnik candidates also tried to run for local office in Fort Worth, Texas, that same year. Despite a creative slogan—“Kick the cows out of Cowtown and let the cats in to swing”—they were unsuccessful in their bid (48).

Mad magazine, of course, was unable to resist the frenzy. In September 1960 the editors devoted six hilarious pages to mocking the beatniks. They focused on stereotypes and ridiculed the Beat argot, aversion to cleanliness, fondness for Zen Buddhism, styles of dress, and physical appearance. Especially amusing was a story about the regression of “Wild Harry,” a beatnik, who transformed back into a square. Harry’s beatnik friends painfully “saw the handwriting on the wall” when he expressed hatred for espresso, wanted to take a walk down Madison Avenue, went to a baseball game, shaved his beard, drank beer out of a glass, and took a bath—the most terrifying sign (41-46).

Many entrepreneurs, seeking financial gains, took advantage of the popularity of the bohemians. Coffee houses, cellar nightclubs, and espresso shops, where beat poetry readings occurred, began to sprout in hundreds of cities and college towns all over the country (O’Neil 116). Jim Morad pointed out that the coffee house business, prominent only in Greenwich Village at the end of World War II, flourished into a \$5,000,000-a-year enterprise by 1959 (43). Beatnik clothing also turned into a hot commodity. The Young Individualist Shop, a boutique in Manhattan on Fifth Avenue, noted the *New York Times*, sold a variety of fake furs and a black wool dress with a sleeveless tunic of mock leopard designed to appeal to the “on-beat chicknik” (25). College stores throughout the nation, as shown in *Life*, offered loose sweaters, tight black trousers, skirts, and leotards—items that beat chicks consider “the end” (48-49). And department stores, wrote

Lloyd Zimpel, advertised beatnik kits, complete with the standard dark glasses, sandals, beret, and even a phony beard! (16)

Fred W. McDarrah, a photographer for the *Village Voice* of New York, also attempted to capitalize on the fad. Beginning in December 1959, McDarrah ran advertisements in that weekly newspaper, offering to “Rent a Beatnik.” Ranging in price from \$25 to \$200, genuine beatniks were available to read poetry, play music, hold lectures, and have question and answer sessions on the Beat Generation. Prices depended on specific accessories. They came bearded or beardless, long-haired or short-haired, bereted or bare-headed, sweated or shirted, leaved or leotarded, sneakered or sandaled, and bongo-drummed or empty-handed. McDarrah actually was partly sincere, and his business helped many novice poets earn their wages (Millstein 26-30).

Even *Playboy* exploited the passing fancy by featuring a beautiful beat chick playmate in July 1959. Staff members of the magazine found Yvette Vickers in a coffee house in Hollywood. Vickers, who despised conformity, admitted to being “somewhat of a nut” for health food. The poetry of Dylan Thomas interested her and the classical music of Prokofiev drove her “out of [her] skull” (47). Just as with any other playmate, her pictorial spread stimulated many readers to submit letters to the editor. But because the magazine labeled her a “beatnik,” the responses exhibited more than the usual trite comments. Walter E. Magureta, for example, wrote, “Your coinage beatnik to describe Yvette is erroneous. She’s a breastnik” (8). Connie Gray, however, was more perceptive and serious, and his letter revealed a great deal about how absurd the popularization of beatniks had become:

[Yvette] is not only not beat, the whole story was fictitious! I have lived in and among the so-called beats, and have fancied myself one for several years. Never have I seen a beat chick shed her britches . . . bra, yes. Secondly, I’ve yet to see a beat drink wine out of a glass that at one time or another didn’t hold jelly, peanut butter or a candle. There was, in your triple-page picture, no evidence of bongo drums, long black stockings, the essential shark tooth on a chain, or many, many other items no beat could be complete without. You call the Unicorn and Cosmo Alley beat hangouts. Man, have you seen the prices they charge? No self-respecting beat could afford an evening there, nor would he want to. (8)

Gray observed in this small example a trend that was sweeping the nation. Many people, like Yvette Vickers, found something useful and meaningful in beat-

nik dissent and absorbed some of the traits and ways of the bohemians (though apparently sometimes unsuccessfully, as in the case of this model). Imitation was one important way that Americans, particularly adolescents, college students, and young adults in cities responded to the beatnik craze. Called amateur or “week-end beatniks,” these people, according to Paul O’Neil, “have jobs and live the comfortable square life but . . . seek the cool state of mind, spread the Beat message and costume themselves in old clothes to ape the genuinely unwashed on Saturday nights” (119). He further wrote that “in the U.S. there are few colleges without a cell of bearded Beatniks and fewer yet where some overtones of Beat philosophy have not crept into the minds of students in general” (126). Beatnik outposts burgeoned in areas in the Midwest and South, in addition to the original villages in California and New York. There were beatnik centers in Cleveland, Houston, Dallas, Amarillo, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C.

Amused, tolerant, and imitative to a point were Americans—but only to a point. The distinguishing beatnik features including their dress, argot, physical appearance, fondness for poetry, and impractical attitudes on certain issues were not a real threat to society, and Americans consequently showed a degree of tolerance for them. Two other beatnik attributes, however, which involved their proclivity to commit crimes and their contempt for work, drew sharp condemnation from many citizens. Such behavior provoked J. Edgar Hoover to say at the 1960 Republican National Convention that “Communists, Eggheads, and Beatniks” were America’s three greatest enemies (Schumacher 339). The print media were not as harsh and explicit even though constantly reminding readers about the immorality of beatniks.

The behavior of beatniks even attracted the attention of the medical world. In a study that spanned a year, Dr. Francis J. Rigney, a San Francisco psychiatrist, performed a variety of tests and held countless interviews with fifty-one beatniks. His results, made known in *Newsweek* and *Science Digest*, were grave. He found that only fifteen of fifty-one were mentally sound. The remaining thirty-six were unable to deal with the basic challenges of life. Of this group, less than half had the ability to maintain a steady job, more than a fourth had been divorced, nearly twenty percent were alcoholics, and four percent were drug addicts. Rigney concluded that “the Beats, like alcoholics and juvenile delinquents, have severe social-adjustment problems. The public ought to stop regarding them as laughable freaks and the press should leave them alone” (56, 26).

The press, however, was quick to report beatnik offenses. In North Beach and Greenwich Village beatniks ran into trouble with the law. In the spring of 1958, Herb Caen of the San Francisco Chronicle joked that the odor of marijuana was stronger than the aroma of garlic in North Beach. In April of that year undercover cops arrested Neal Cassady, the famous “Dean Moriarty” in *On the Road*, for possession of marijuana (Schumacher 285). In January of 1960, the *New York Times* reported that Bay Area authorities raided a beatnik outpost and made thirty arrests and sixteen indictments on charges of narcotics possessions (53). In November 1959, the same newspaper told how New York narcotics agents organized a sting operation and posed as beatniks for three months to accumulate evidence. The results were three raids and the arrests of nineteen beatniks (1, 62). There were many other publicized disputes between beatniks and city leaders pertaining to, for example, the closing down of cafes because of a failure to meet fire safety codes. In Venice West, for example, the beatniks posed a problem for the rest of the community when, in August 1959, they sought an entertainment license for the Gas House, a popular coffee shop. Bill Becker wrote that citizens opposed the idea, testifying to police that “beatniks were noisy around the clock, that in [their] hangouts wine and beer were consumed by apparent minors, and that on at least one occasion a nude model was observed posing nude in a beatnik art center” (67). Mrs. Alfred S. Roberts, wife of the President of the Venice Civic Union, strongly argued against granting a permit. “We’re not criticizing their clothes and beards or their way of life, except when it becomes immoral,” she said. “Then it has a bad influence on our children. It looks glamorous, but it isn’t” (67).

Newspapers and magazines also linked beatniks with vagrancy. This accusation was prevalent in many condemnations. “The goals of the Beat,” according to a feature story in *Look* magazine, “are not watching TV, not wearing gray flannel, not owning a home in the suburbs, and especially—not working” (65). Articles in *Time* and the *New York Times* reiterated this characterization. Lawrence Lipton, defending the bohemians, claimed that “our poverty is holy” (88). People who wrote letters to the editors were extremely critical of their indolence. As George B. Galinkin grumbled in *Look*, “It’s about time [they] got off their boastful behinds and got to work” (17). And, finally, a policeman from Hutchinson, Kansas, concisely summarized the attitude of many people toward the shiftless beatnik. A “beatnik doesn’t like work,” the officer noted, and “any man that doesn’t like work is a vagrant, and a vagrant goes to jail around here” (31).

Amused toleration, imitation, and denunciation. These were the three obvious ways in which Americans responded to the beatnik. Judging by the manner in which forms of popular culture portrayed beatniks, it is no surprise that the attitude of most people who responded to the bohemians was one of amused toleration. Producers of popular culture depicted the beatniks as innocuous and silly figures, causing Americans to laugh at them and embrace them. This portrayal in effect co-opted much of the beatniks' culture. The group of people most receptive to the beatniks were high school and college students and young adults in urban areas with a bent for non-conformity. These weekend beatniks followed the genuine beatnik path and assumed a bohemian appearance. Although this rebellion was comparatively an incomplete one that did not go beyond dress, physical appearance, slang, and attendance at coffee houses for poetry readings, it still demonstrated a growing sense of disaffection that troubled the youth and constituted a noticeable form of dissent. But being a weekend beatnik was not as precarious as being a genuine beatnik. The difference existed in the fact that the genuine type risked their livelihood by living an alternative lifestyle, which might entail unemployment. Those Americans who denounced the beatniks for repudiating work appear to have had material interests in mind. Having lived through times of uncertainty during the Great Depression and World War II, many Americans valued stability more than anything. Middle-class citizens reveled in the new economic prosperity of the 1950s. Millions of people exited the cities to live in more affordable homes in the suburbs, which grew at unprecedented rates in the decade. Married couples with children dwelling in houses that looked the same were central features of the suburbs. Hard work and higher education generally were their avenues to success. It seems logical, then, that such middle-class suburbanites reaffirming their own lifestyles would condemn a lazy beatnik. Stepping back and viewing this entire picture, one sees on the surface a culture that valued economic security. Members of this society were unwilling to jeopardize their stable lives and dare to exist like Kerouac's Dean Moriarty or a poet in Venice West. Memories of the 1930s and 1940s were too strong.

But the beatnik phenomenon shows that this society was not entirely stagnant. Beneath a placid surface were rumblings of discontent. Some members of the Fifties' Silent Generation expressed disenchantment by becoming weekend beatniks. Other Americans were also receptive to the cultural protest. Pierre DeLattre saw beatniks as "people who are trying to gain a more direct insight into reality through emotional and intuitive forms of experience . . . [mainly] through

poetry, jazz, various narcotics, different personalistic religions” (53). Bill Klemann said, “I applaud the Beat for having the courage to live as they please, rather than the way someone else tells them they should. . . . Their philosophy makes a lot more sense to me than the . . . middle-class struggle to keep up with the Joneses” (17). In other words, society of the late 1950s was ripe for change. Americans departed the Eisenhower Era and elected a younger President who seemed to be more vigorous and energetic than his predecessor. Around this time the beatnik craze lost its appeal. In February 1960 author and critic John Ciardi wrote an article entitled, “Epitaph for the Dead Beats.” In this piece Ciardi reflected on the end of the rebellious movement and attacked nearly everything associated with the Beat Generation, including its literary and artistic aspects and the physical appearance, dress, slang, and practices of beatniks (11-13, 42). There were also new stories to be told about restless groups of students challenging American domestic and foreign policies. The year 1960 saw the formation of Students for a Democratic Society, the black college student sit-in movement, and student demonstrations at San Francisco and Berkeley against the House Un-American Activities Committee. The focus of the print media then shifted and slowly began to concentrate on stories pertaining to the energy and disaffection exuded by the young people of the country.

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