

Counterculture

Counterculture

The American Counterculture refers to the period between 1964-1972 when the norms of the 1950s were rejected by youth.



The Peace Sign

The peace sign became a major symbol of the counterculture of the 1960s.

- Counterculture youth rejected the cultural standards of their parents, especially with respect to racial segregation, the Vietnam War, sexual mores, women's rights, and materialism.
- Hippies were the largest countercultural classification comprising mostly white members of the middle class.
- The counterculture movement divided the country.
- The movement died in the early 1970s because most of their goals had become mainstream, and because of rising economic troubles.

stagflation

Inflation accompanied by stagnant growth, unemployment or recession.

counterculture

Any culture whose values and lifestyles are opposed to those of the established mainstream culture, especially to western culture.

quash

To defeat forcibly.



Vietnam War Protest

The counterculture of the 1960s was marked by a growing distrust of government, which included anti-war protests like this.



Woodstock Youth

This photo was taken near the Woodstock Music Festival in August, 1969. The counterculture in the 1960s was characterized by young people breaking away from the traditional culture of the 1950s.

A counterculture developed in the United States in late 1960s. This movement lasted from approximately 1964 to 1972, and it coincided with America's involvement in Vietnam. A counterculture is the rejection of conventional social norms – in this case the norms of the 1950s Figure 2. The counterculture youth rejected the cultural standards of their parents, specifically racial segregation and initial widespread support for the Vietnam War.

As the 1960s progressed, widespread tensions developed in American society that tended to flow along generational lines regarding the war in Vietnam Figure 1, race relations, sexual mores, women's rights, traditional modes of authority, and a materialist interpretation of the American Dream. White, middle class youth, who made up the bulk of the counterculture, had sufficient leisure time to turn their attention to social issues, thanks to widespread economic prosperity.

Unconventional appearance, music, drugs, communitarian experiments, and sexual liberation were hallmarks of the sixties counterculture, most of whose members were white, middle-class young Americans. Hippies became the largest countercultural group in the United States Figure 0. The counterculture reached its peak in the 1967 "Summer of Love," when thousands of young people flocked to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. The counterculture lifestyle integrated many of the ideals and indulgences of the time: peace, love, harmony, music, and mysticism. Meditation, yoga, and psychedelic drugs were embraced as routes to expanding one's consciousness.

Rejection of mainstream culture was best embodied in the new genres of psychedelic rock music, pop-art, and new explorations in spirituality. Musicians who exemplified this

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era include The Beatles, The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, and Pink Floyd.

New forms of musical presentation also played a key role in spreading the counterculture, mainly large outdoor rock festivals. The climactic live statement of this occurred from August 15–18, 1969, with the Woodstock Music Festival held in Bethel, New York. During this festival, 32 of rock and psychedelic rock's most popular acts performing live outdoors over the course of a weekend to an audience of half a million people.

Countercultural sentiments were expressed in song lyrics and popular sayings of the period, such as "do your own thing," "turn on, tune in, drop out," "whatever turns you on," "eight miles high," "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll," and "light my fire." Spiritually, the counterculture included interest in astrology, the term "Age of Aquarius," and knowing people's signs.

The counterculture movement divided the country. To some Americans, these attributes reflected American ideals of free speech, equality, world peace, and the pursuit of happiness. To others, the counterculture movement reflected a self-indulgent, pointlessly rebellious, unpatriotic, and destructive assault on America's traditional moral order.

In an effort to quash the movement, authorities banned the psychedelic drug LSD, restricted political gatherings, and tried to enforce bans on what they considered obscenity in books, music, theater, and other media. In the end, the counterculture collapsed on its own around 1973.

Two main reasons are cited for the collapse. First, the most popular of the movement's political goals—civil rights, civil liberties, gender equality, environmentalism, and the end of the Vietnam War—were accomplished (to at least a significant degree), and its most popular social attributes, particularly a "live and let live" mentality in personal lifestyles (the "sexual revolution")—were co-opted by mainstream society. Second, a decline of idealism and hedonism occurred as many notable counterculture figures died and the rest settled into mainstream society and started their own families.

The "magic economy" of the 1960s gave way to the stagflation of the 1970s, the latter costing many middle-class Americans the luxury of being able to live outside conventional social institutions. The counterculture, however, continues to influence social movements, art, music, and society in general, and the post-1973 mainstream society has been in many ways a hybrid of the 1960s establishment and counterculture—seen as the best (or the worst) of both worlds.

Theatre and Novels

The counterculture of the 1960s gave rise to several independent or underground newspapers, whose publishers were often harassed by police.



The Rag

A Rag staffer selling the newspaper in Austin, Texas, in 1966.

- The term "underground newspaper" generally refers to an independent newspaper focusing on unpopular themes or counterculture issues. Typically, these tend to be politically to the left or far left.
- By the mid-1960s every urban area had an underground newspaper.
- The boom in the underground press was made practical by the availability of cheap offset printing, which made it possible to print a few thousand copies of a small tabloid paper for a couple of hundred dollars.
- Musical theatre in the 1960s started to diverge from the relatively narrow confines of the 1950s. The musical "Hair" was the first of many musicals to use rock music.
- Like newspapers and theatre, the cinema of the time also reflected the attributes of the counterculture.

counterculture

Any culture whose values and lifestyles are opposed to those of the established mainstream culture, especially to western culture.

Offset Printing

A commonly used printing technique in which the inked image is transferred (or "offset") from a plate to a rubber blanket, then to the printing surface.

The Establishment

A term used to refer to a visible dominant group or elite that holds power or authority in a nation.

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Hair" the Musical

Attributes of the counterculture were reflected in theatrical productions of the time, for example, in "Hair." Also note the elements of psychedelic art in this particular poster.

Counterculture in Literature: Underground Press in the 1960s

In the U.S., the term "underground newspaper" generally refers to an independent newspaper focusing on unpopular themes or counterculture issues. Typically, these tend to be politically to the left or far left. The term most often refers to publications of the period 1965-1973, when an underground newspaper craze swept the country. These publications became the voice of the rising New Left and the hippie/psychedelic/rock and roll counterculture of the 1960s in America, and a focal point of opposition to the Vietnam War and the draft. Underground newspapers sprang up in most cities and college towns, serving to define and communicate the range of phenomena that defined the counterculture: radical political opposition to "The Establishment," colorful experimental (and often explicitly drug-influenced) approaches to art, music and cinema, and uninhibited indulgence in sex and drugs as a symbol of freedom.

The boom in the underground press was made practical by the availability of cheap offset printing, which made it possible to print a few thousand copies of a small tabloid paper for a couple of hundred dollars. Paper was cheap, and many printing firms around the country had over-expanded during the 1950s and had excess capacity on their offset web presses, which could be negotiated for at bargain rates.

One of the first underground newspapers of the 1960s was the "Los Angeles Free Press," founded in 1964 and first published in 1965. "The Rag" Figure 0, founded in Austin, Texas in 1966, was an especially influential underground newspaper as, according to historian Abe Peck, it was the "first undergrounder to represent the participatory democracy, community organizing and synthesis of politics and culture that the New Left of the midsixties was trying to develop."

In mid-1966, the cooperative Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) was formed. The UPS allowed member papers to freely reprint content from any of the other member papers. By 1969, virtually every sizable city or college town in North America boasted at least one underground newspaper. During the peak years of the underground press phenomenon, about 100 papers were publishing at any given time. A UPS roster

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published in November 1966 listed 14 underground papers, 11 of them in the United States.

There also existed an underground press network within the U.S. military. The GI underground press produced a few hundred titles during the Vietnam War. Some were produced by anti-war GI coffeehouses, and many of them were small, crudely produced, and low-circulation papers. Three or four GI underground papers had large-scale, national distribution of more than 20,000 copies, including thousands of copies mailed to GIs overseas. These papers were produced with the support of civilian anti-war activists, and had to be disguised to be sent through the mail into Vietnam. Soldiers distributing or even possessing them might be subject to harassment, disciplinary action, or arrest.

Many of the papers faced official harassment on a regular basis; local police repeatedly raided offices, charged editors or writers with drug charges or obscenity, arrested street vendors, and pressured local printers not to print underground papers.

Counterculture in Theatre

Musical theatre in the 1960s started to diverge from the relatively narrow confines of the 1950s. For example, rock music was used in several Broadway musicals. This trend began with the musical "Hair," which featured not only rock music, but also nudity and controversial opinions about the Vietnam War, race relations, and other social issues. "Hair" is often said to be a product of the hippie counter-culture and sexual revolution of the 1960s Figure 1.

As the struggle for minorities' civil rights progressed, musical writers were emboldened to write more musicals and operas which aimed to normalize societal toleration of minorities and urged racial harmony. Early works that focused on racial tolerance included "Finian's Rainbow," "South Pacific," and "The King and I." The musical "West Side Story" also spoke a message of racial tolerance. Later on, several shows tackled Jewish subjects and issues, such as "Fiddler on the Roof." By the end of the 1960s, musicals became racially integrated, with black and white cast members even covering each others' roles.

Counterculture in Film

Like newspapers and theatre, the cinema of the time also reflected the attributes of the counterculture. Dennis Hopper's "Easy Rider" (1969) focused on the changes happening in the world. The film "Medium Cool" portrayed the 1968 Democratic Convention and Chicago police riots, which has led to it being labeled as "a fusion of cinema-vérité and political radicalism." One studio attempt to cash in on the hippie trend was the 1968 film "Psych-Out," which portrayed the hippie lifestyle. The music of the era

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was represented by films such as 1970's "Woodstock," a documentary of the music festival.

Art and Music

Forms of art in the 1960s could be described as psychedelic, and reflected characteristics of the counterculture itself.



Woodstock

The crowd and stage at Woodstock, one of the most important music festivals of the 1960s counterculture.

- During the early 60's, British rock became popular in the United States. The biggest group was the Beatles.
- The West Coast generally promoted hippie music, such as the Grateful Dead, while the East Coast produced edgier artists, such as the Velvet Underground.
- The Monterey Pop Festival was the first modern music festival, while Woodstock is the most famous.

counterculture

Any culture whose values and lifestyles are opposed to those of the established mainstream culture, especially to western culture.

Woodstock

A music festival in the town of Bethel, New York, from August 15 to August 18, 1969; it is widely regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music history.

Counterculture in Music

The music of the 1960s moved towards an electric, psychedelic version of rock, reflecting the off-beat, psychedelic characteristics of the counterculture itself. The Beach Boys' 1966 album *Pet Sounds* paved the way for later hippie acts, with Brian Wilson's writing interpreted as a "plea for love and understanding". *Pet Sounds* served as a major source of inspiration for other contemporary acts, most notably directly inspiring The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

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During the early 1960s, Britain's new wave of musicians, such as the Beatles, gained popularity and fame in the United States. The Beatles themselves were influenced by many artists, among them American singer/songwriter Bob Dylan, who was a lyrical inspiration as well as their introduction to marijuana. Other folksingers like Joan Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary took the songs of the era to new audiences and public recognition (see "Rock and Roll" atom for more).

The Beatles went on to become the most prominent commercial exponents of the "psychedelic revolution" in the late 1960s. Meanwhile in the United States, bands that exemplified the counterculture were becoming huge commercial, mainstream successes. These included The Mamas & the Papas (If You Can Believe Your Eyes and Ears), Big Brother and the Holding Company (Cheap Thrills), Jimi Hendrix (Are You Experienced?), Jefferson Airplane (Surrealistic Pillow), The Doors, and Sly and the Family Stone (Stand!). Other bands and musicians, such as The Grateful Dead, Phil Ochs, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Melanie, Frank Zappa, Santana, and the Blues Project did not achieve such commercial success but are considered key to the counterculture movement.

While the hippie music scene was born in California, an edgier scene emerged in New York City that put more emphasis on avant-garde and art music. Bands such as The Velvet Underground came out of this underground music scene, and were predominantly centered at Andy Warhol's legendary Factory. The Velvet Underground supplied the music for the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, a series of multi-media events staged by Warhol and his collaborators in 1966 and 1967. The Velvet Underground's lyrics were considered risqué for the era, since they discussed sexual fetishism, transgender identities, and the use of drugs.

The 1960s saw the protest song gain a sense of political self importance, with Phil Ochs's "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and Country Joe and the Fish's "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die-Rag" among the many anti-war anthems that were important to the era.

Music Festivals

The 1960s was an era of rock festivals, which played an important role in spreading the counterculture across America. The Monterey Pop Festival, which launched Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix's careers, was one of the first of these. This festival was held in 1967, and had an estimated 55,000 to 90,000 attendees. The Monterey Pop Festival embodied the themes of California as a focal point for the counterculture, and is generally regarded as the start of the "summer of love". This festival became the template for future festivals, most notably Woodstock.

In August 1969, the Woodstock Festival was held in Bethel, New York. Woodstock became a symbol of the hippie movement. During this festival, 32 rock acts performed

outdoors in front of 500,000 people. It is widely regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music history and has been regarded as a cultural touchstone of the 1960s.

Sixties Counterculture in Art

As with film, press, and music, art in the 1960s responded to the new counterculture, primarily in pop art and psychedelic art. For example, pop art challenged traditional fine art by including imagery from popular culture such as advertising, news, etc. The concept of pop art refers as much to the art itself as to the attitudes that it led to, and Andy Warhol is often considered representative of this type of art.

Psychedelic art also emerged in response to the counterculture, and is defined as any kind of visual artwork inspired by psychedelic experiences induced by drugs such as LSD. During the 1960s, psychedelic visual arts were often a counterpart to psychedelic rock music. This psychedelic art also represented the revolutionary political, social and spiritual sentiments that were derived from these drug-induced, psychedelic states of consciousness.

Youth Culture and Delinquency

San Francisco was the center of the hippie revolution during the 1960s.



"Further"

The famous bus that Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' used to travel across the country, doing LSD

- During the summer of 1967, San Francisco became a melting pot of music, psychedelic drugs, sexual freedom, creative expression, new forms of dress, and politics.
- The unprecedented gathering of young people known as the Summer of Love is often considered to have been a social experiment, because of alternative lifestyles that became common.
- As members of the hippie movement grew older and moderated their lives and their views, and especially after U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended in the mid-1970s, the counterculture was largely absorbed by the mainstream.
- During the 1960s, casual LSD users expanded into a subculture that extolled the mystical and religious symbolism often engendered by the drug's powerful effects, and advocated its use as a method of raising consciousness.

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"Summer of Love"

The summer of 1967, noted for its love-ins and the flourishing of the hippie movement.

commune

A small community, often rural, whose members share in the ownership of property and the division of labor; the members of such a community.

free love

The practice of sexual intercourse without the restraints of marriage or commitment.

Hippies and the Summer of Love

In 1967, musician Scott McKenzie's rendition of the song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" brought as many as 100,000 young people from all over the world to celebrate a "Summer of Love" in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. The Summer of Love became a defining moment in the 1960s, as the hippie counterculture movement came into public awareness.

San Francisco was the center of the hippie revolution; during the Summer of Love, it became a melting pot of music, psychedelic drugs, sexual freedom, creative expression, new forms of dress, and politics. This unprecedented gathering of young people is often considered to have been a social experiment, because of the alternative lifestyles that became common. These lifestyles included communal living, the free and communal sharing of resources (often among total strangers), and free love. When people returned home from the Summer of Love, these styles and behaviors spread quickly from San Francisco and Berkeley to many U.S. and Canadian cities and European capitals.

Some hippies formed communes to live as far outside of the established system as possible. This aspect of the counterculture rejected active political engagement with the mainstream and, following the dictate of a Harvard LSD proponent, Dr. Timothy Leary, to "Turn on, tune in, drop out," hoped to change society by dropping out of it. As members of the hippie movement grew older and moderated their lives and their views, and especially after U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended in the mid-1970s, the counterculture was largely absorbed by the mainstream, leaving a lasting impact on philosophy, morality, music, art, alternative health and diet, lifestyle, and fashion.

Drug Use

During the 1960s, casual LSD users expanded into a subculture that extolled the mystical and religious symbolism often engendered by the drug's powerful effects, and advocated its use as a method of raising consciousness. The personalities associated with the subculture, including gurus such as Leary and psychedelic rock musicians such as the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, Big Brother and the Holding Company,

Jefferson Airplane, and the Beatles soon attracted a great deal of publicity, generating further interest in LSD.

Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters

The popularization of LSD outside of the medical world was hastened when individuals such as Ken Kesey participated in drug trials. Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters helped shape the developing character of the 1960s counterculture during the summer of 1964, when they embarked on a cross-country voyage in a psychedelic school bus named "Further."

Beginning in 1959, Kesey had volunteered as a research subject for medical trials. These trials tested the effects of LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, and other psychedelic drugs. After the medical trials, Kesey continued experimenting on his own, and involved many close friends; collectively they became known as "The Merry Pranksters." The Pranksters visited Leary at his Millbrook, New York retreat. Experimentation with LSD and other psychedelic drugs, primarily as a means for internal reflection and personal growth, became a constant during the Prankster trip.

The Pranksters created a direct link between the 1950s Beat Generation and the 1960s psychedelic scene. The bus was driven by Beat icon Neal Cassady, Beat poet Allen Ginsberg was onboard for a time, and they dropped in on Cassady's friend, Beat author Jack Kerouac.

Experimentation with LSD, Peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, MDA, marijuana, and other psychedelic drugs became a major component of 1960s counterculture, influencing philosophy, art, music, and styles of dress.

Rock and Roll

The rock music of the 1960s had its roots in rock and roll, but also drew strongly on genres such as blues, folk, jazz, and classical.



Jimi Hendrix

Performing in 1967, as part of the psychedelic rock movement.

- Rock placed a higher degree of emphasis on musicianship, live performance, and an ideology of authenticity than pop music.
- Far beyond simply a musical style, rock and roll in the 1950s influenced lifestyles, fashion, attitudes, and language. In addition, rock and roll may have helped the cause of the civil rights movement because both African American teens and white American teens enjoyed the music.
- The "Beat Generation" poets had an effect on numerous rock bands, including the Beatles and Bob Dylan.
- Psychedelic music's LSD-inspired vibe began in the folk scene, with the New York-based Holy Modal Rounders using the term in their 1964 recording of "Hesitation Blues".
- The Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 made famous major American stars Jimi Hendrix and The Who, whose single "I Can See for Miles" delved into psychedelic territory.
- The contrast between parental and youth culture exemplified by rock and roll was a recurring source of concern for older generations, who worried about juvenile delinquency and social rebellion.

rock music

A genre of popular music that originated as "rock and roll" in 1950s America and developed into a range of different styles in the 1960s and later. Musically, rock has centered around the electric guitar, usually as part of a rock group with bass guitar and drums. Rock has also embodied and served as the vehicle for cultural and social movements.

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British Invasion

The gain in British music bands' popularity in the United States in the 1960s.



The British Invasion

The Beatles arriving in New York City in 1964 at the beginning of the "British Invasion"--a time in which American rock music was dominated by British musicians.



The Who, "I Can See for Miles"

This song, performed live in 1967, depicts the psychedelic rock of the 1960s

Rock music is a genre of popular music that developed during the 1960s, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. It has its roots in 1940s and 1950s rock and roll.

Rock music also drew strongly from other genres such as blues and folk, and was influenced by jazz, classical and other musical sources. Like pop music, lyrics often stressed romantic love but also addressed a wide variety of social and political themes. Rock placed more emphasis on musicianship, live performance, and an ideology of authenticity than pop music.

By the late 1960s, a number of distinct rock music sub-genres emerged, including hybrids like blues rock, folk rock, country rock, and jazz-rock fusion. Other genres that emerged from this scene included progressive rock, which extended the artistic elements; glam rock, which highlighted showmanship and visual style; and the diverse and enduring major sub-genre of heavy metal, which emphasized volume, power and speed.

The British Invasion

In 1964, the Beatles achieved a breakthrough to mainstream popularity in the United States (Figure 1). Their first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show drew an estimated 73 million viewers (an all-time record for an American television program), and is often considered a milestone in American pop culture. They went on to become the biggest-selling rock band of all time. Over the next two years, British acts dominated both UK and US charts with Peter and Gordon, The Animals, Manfred Mann, Petula Clark,

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Freddie and the Dreamers, Herman's Hermits, The Rolling Stones, The Troggs, and Donovan all having one or more number one hit singles.

Psychedelic Rock

The "Beat Generation" had a pervasive influence on the development of psychedelic rock and roll and pop music; these included the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison. The Beatles spelled their name with an "a", partly as a Beat Generation reference, and Lennon was a fan of Jack Kerouac. Ginsberg later met and became friends with the Beatles. Bob Dylan, also cited Ginsberg and Kerouac as major influences.

Psychedelic music's LSD-inspired vibe began in the folk scene, with the New York-based Holy Modal Rounders using the term in their 1964 recording of *Hesitation Blues*. The first group to advertise themselves as such were the 13th Floor Elevators from Texas, at the end of 1965; producing an album entitled *The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13th Floor Elevators*, the following year. The Beatles introduced many of the major elements of the psychedelic sound to audiences in this period.

It particularly took off in California's emerging music scene. The psychedelic life style had already developed in San Francisco and prominent players were The Grateful Dead, Country Joe and the Fish, The Great Society, and Jefferson Airplane. In 1965, two major blues rock bands debuted, Cream and The Jimi Hendrix Experience Figure 0, whose extended, guitar-heavy jams became a key feature of psychedelia.

Psychedelic rock peaked in the final years of the decade. In 1967, the Beatles released their definitive psychedelic album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The Rolling Stones responded later that year with *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Pink Floyd produced what is usually seen as their best psychedelic work, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*.

The Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 made famous major American stars Jimi Hendrix and The Who, whose single *I Can See for Miles* delved into psychedelic territory (Figure 2). These trends climaxed in the 1969 Woodstock festival, that saw performances by most of the top psychedelic acts.

However, by the end of the decade psychedelic rock was in retreat. Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones, Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac, and Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd were early "acid casualties"; the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Cream broke up; and many surviving acts moved away from psychedelia into more back-to-basics "roots rock", the wider experimentation of progressive rock, or riff-laden heavy rock.

Cultural Impact of Rock and Roll

Far beyond simply a musical style, rock and roll in the 1950s influenced lifestyles, fashion, attitudes, and language. In the cross-over of African American "race music" to a growing white youth audience, the popularization of rock and roll involved both black performers reaching a white audience, and white performers appropriating African American music.

Topics that were previously considered taboo, such as sex, began to be introduced in rock and roll music. An awakening in the young American culture began to take place. Several rock historians have claimed that rock and roll was one of the first music genres to define an age group, giving teenagers a sense of belonging. It is often identified with the emergence of teen culture among the first baby boomer generation who had both greater relative affluence and leisure, and who adopted rock and roll as part of a distinct sub-culture. The contrast between parental and youth culture exemplified by rock and roll was a recurring source of concern for older generations. They worried about juvenile delinquency and social rebellion particularly as, to a large extent, rock and roll culture was shared by different racial and social groups.

Rock music of the 1960s also embodied and served as the vehicle for cultural and social movements. It led to major sub-cultures like the "hippie" counterculture that spread out from San Francisco in the US in the 1960s. Inheriting the folk tradition of the protest song, rock music has been associated with political activism as well as changes in social attitudes to race, sex and drug use, and is often seen as an expression of youth revolt against adult consumerism and conformity.

The Beats

The Beats were a group of post-World War II American writers who came to prominence in the 1950s.



Allen Ginsberg Allen Ginsberg, one of the main authors in the Beat Generation, with Bob Dylan in 1975.

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- Central elements of Beat culture included experimentation with drugs; alternative forms of sexuality; an interest in Eastern religion; a rejection of materialism; and the idealizing of exuberant, unexpurgated means of expression and being.
- While some of the original Beats embraced the beatnik identity, or at least found the parodies humorous, others criticized the beatniks as inauthentic posers.
- The 1950s Beat movement beliefs and ideologies metamorphosed into the counterculture of the 1960s, accompanied by a shift in terminology from beatnik to hippie.

The Beats

A group of American post-World War II writers who came to prominence in the 1950s, as well as the cultural phenomena that they both documented and inspired. Central elements of Beat culture included experimentation with drugs; alternative forms of sexuality; an interest in Eastern religion; a rejection of materialism; and the idealizing of exuberant, unexpurgated means of expression and being.



Beatnik

The Beat generation was characterized as beatnik in mainstream society. This picture represents a beatnik; a caricature of someone in the Beat generation.

The Beat Generation

The Beat Generation was a group of American post-World War II writers who came to prominence in the 1950s, including the cultural phenomena they documented and inspired. Central elements of Beat culture included the following:

- experimentation with drugs;
- alternative forms of sexuality;
- interest in Eastern religion;
- rejection of materialism;
- idealizing of exuberant, unexpurgated means of expression and being.

Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) are among the best known examples of Beat literature. Both *Howl* and *Naked Lunch* were the focus of obscenity trials. The publishers won, and publishing in the United States was liberalized. The members of the Beat Generation

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developed a reputation as new bohemian hedonists, who celebrated non-conformity and spontaneous creativity.

Origin of the Beats

Jack Kerouac introduced the phrase Beat Generation in 1948 to characterize a perceived underground, anti-conformist youth movement in New York. The adjective beat could colloquially mean tired or beaten down, but Kerouac expanded the meaning to include the connotations upbeat, beatific, and the musical association of being on the beat.

The origins of the Beat Generation can be traced to Columbia University when Kerouac, Ginsberg, Lucien Carr, Hal Chase, and others first met. Classmates Carr and Ginsberg discussed the need for a new vision to counteract what they perceived as their teachers' conservative, formalistic literary ideals. Later, in the mid-1950s, the central figures of the Beat Generation (with the exception of Burroughs) ended up in San Francisco together.

Beatniks and the Beat Generation

The term Beatnik was coined to represent the Beat Generation, and referred to the name of the recent Russian satellite, Sputnik, and the Beat Generation. This suggested that beatniks were far out of the mainstream of society and possibly pro-Communist. The beatnik term stuck and became the popular label associated with a new stereotype—the man with a goatee and beret reciting nonsensical poetry and playing bongo drums, while free-spirited women wearing black leotards dance (Figure 1).

While some of the original Beats embraced the beatnik identity, or at least found the parodies humorous (Ginsberg, for example, appreciated the parody) others criticized the beatniks as inauthentic posers. Kerouac feared that the spiritual aspect of his message had been lost and that many were using the Beat Generation as an excuse to be senselessly wild.

The Beat Generation Lifestyle

The original members of the Beat Generation used a number of different drugs, which included the following:

- alcohol;
- marijuana;
- benzedrine;
- morphine;
- psychedelic drugs that included peyote, yagé, and LSD.

Much of this usage was experimental, in that they were often initially unfamiliar with the effects of these drugs. They were inspired by intellectual interest, as well as simple hedonism. The Beats claimed that these drugs could enhance creativity, insight and productivity.

Many of the key Beat Generation figures were openly homosexual or bisexual, including two of the most prominent writers (Ginsberg and Burroughs). Many of them met each other through homosexual social connections. Both Ginsberg's *Howl* and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* contained explicit homosexuality, sexual content, and drug use.

The Beats' Influences on Western Culture

The Beat Generation phenomenon itself had a pervasive influence on Western culture. In 1982, Ginsberg published a summary of the essential effects of the Beat Generation:

- Spiritual liberation, sexual revolution or liberation (i.e., gay liberation, which somewhat catalyzed women's liberation and black liberation);
- Liberation of the world from censorship;
- The demystification of cannabis and other drugs;
- The evolution of rhythm and blues into rock and roll as a high art form (as evidenced by the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and other popular musicians who were influenced in the late fifties and sixties by Beat generation's poets and writers);
- The spread of ecological consciousness and a respect for land and indigenous peoples and creatures;
- Opposition to the military-industrial machine civilization.

The End of the Beats and the Beginning of the Hippies

The 1950s Beat movement beliefs and ideologies metamorphosed into the counterculture of the 1960s, accompanied by a shift in terminology from beatnik to hippie. Many of the original Beats remained active participants, notably Allen Ginsberg, who became a fixture of the anti-war movement. Notably, however, Jack Kerouac broke with Ginsberg and criticized the 1960s politically radical protest movements as an excuse to be spiteful.

There were stylistic differences between beatniks and hippies—somber colors, dark sunglasses, and goatees gave way to colorful psychedelic clothing and long hair. The beats were known for playing it cool (keeping a low profile), but the hippies became known for being cool (displaying their individuality).

Beyond style, there were changes in substance: the Beats tended to be essentially apolitical, but the hippies became actively engaged with the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.