

“Who’ll Stop the Rain?: Youth Culture, Rock ’n’ Roll, and Social Crises” (1994)¹ *George Lipsitz*

To many observers at the time, the most important change in American society during the sixties seemed to be the emergence of youth as a distinct political and cultural force. Political activism by college students on and off campus, the popularity of youth-generated styles of dress, grooming, speech, and music, and perceptions of a “generation gap” denoting a difference in values between people born after World War II and those born before it all contributed to the idea that age might become as important an indicator of social identity as race, class, or gender.

In retrospect, these claims seem excessive and overblown. Youthful activists did play an important role in the political struggles of the decade, but they represented specific interest groups and constituencies among youth, not youth as a whole. Young people who came of age in the sixties did have an enormous impact on popular culture, but their influence came more from their sheer numbers and purchasing power than from any particular values or tastes. A generation gap might have been felt painfully in individual cases, but a series of sociological studies revealed that youth in the sixties had values that were remarkably consonant with those of their parents in most important matters.

Yet the social upheavals of the sixties greatly influenced what it meant to be young. If we broaden our definition of youth beyond the campus and the counterculture, we encounter individuals entering adulthood in a variety of contexts—on active duty in a shooting war thousands of miles away from home, living in inner-city neighborhoods set ablaze by the domestic insurrections that expressed the rage and frustration of people seeking jobs and justice in a segregated society, and entering the work force at a time when the future seemed to offer no guarantees. The emerging availability of contraceptive devices and the trend toward longer periods of schooling allowed men and women to redefine the relationships between sexual pleasure and procreation or family formation. New developments in technology and commerce encouraged the establishment of new venues for communication and recreation, while government social welfare programs and local activist organizations created new social spaces conducive to experiments in social relations.

It is not easy to reconstruct retrospectively the experiences of youth in the sixties. Conventional historical methods that privilege the public records of political, economic, or military institutions are indispensable to historical understanding, but they tend to slight the experiences of ordinary people and the ways in which they make meaning for themselves. They are particularly deficient in understanding young people because public records most often reflect the concerns of those in power and only rarely contain evidence of the thoughts, action, or

¹ George Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain?: Youth Culture, Rock ’n’ Roll, and Social Crises,” Ch. 7 from David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 206-234.

aspirations of teenagers and young adults unless those groups are seen as some kind of threat to people with power.

In this chapter, I examine some of the popular music of the sixties to see what clues it contains about the experiences of young people and the problem of “youth culture” in that decade. Although grounded in empirical facts about the production and reception of music, my argument necessarily relies on reasoned speculation about this evidence in order to offer one interpretation of the experiences of youth in the sixties. Studies of youth crime, comic books, or teen fashion magazines might lead to very different conclusions. Even in respect to music, my study emphasizes the artists and songs most associated with alternative youth countercultures and slights the music of other youth subcultures—surfers, dancers, car customizers.

Yet the power of popular music in shaping and reflecting cultural changes makes it an important site for social and historical analysis. While indices of commercial popularity cannot measure the depth of attachment or engagement with any particular song, the broad-based nature of musical production and reception gives us significant clues to trends and tendencies across the broad population of consumers. Taken in conjunction with other evidence, it can help us assess some of the short-term and long-term consequences of sixties youth culture.

That music was central to the experience and consciousness of many young people in the sixties seems undeniable. In his history of the United States since World War II, William Chafe identifies music as “the most important ‘sacrament’ for the young” in the sixties, as the center of a lifestyle and a counterculture that “testified powerfully to the fragmentation taking place within the Society.” Indeed, perhaps no area of American culture better epitomizes the complicated realities of the sixties than popular music. During that decade, rock and roll emerged as the core practice of an exuberant youth counterculture, growing from a youth-oriented genre to the dominant form of American popular music. The music industry expanded its reach and scope through the cultivation of an entire generation of avid consumers, yet music also emerged as an important site for cultural conflict and dialogue about prevailing values. The tumultuous decade defined by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, by destructive riots and demoralizing assassinations, also gave birth to the popularity of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, and of Bob Dylan and Aretha Franklin. Yet in music, no less than in politics there was no one distinct sixties experience. Instead, music making in the sixties emerged from a plurality of experiences, all riddled with contradictions.

Any retrospective account of the sixties inevitably runs up against our collective societal capacities for remembering and forgetting. In politics, we may recall the sixties as a time of radical change, forgetting that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., lost most of the battles he fought (the 1965 Voting Rights Act was his only clear-cut victory, while defeats included the campaigns in Atlanta in 1960, in Albany, Georgia, in 1962, in Chicago and the Meredith march in Mississippi in 1966, and in Memphis and elsewhere with the Poor People’s campaign in 1968, as well as the antiwar protests of 1967 and 1968). We may forget that most Americans supported the war in Vietnam throughout the sixties, and that they opposed most of the specific objectives of both the civil rights and black power movements. Similarly, in music, we may remember the sixties as the decade of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix but forget that Elvis Presley, Brenda Lee, and Connie Francis joined the Beatles and Ray Charles as the five best-selling artists of the decade. We may recall the emergence of folk-rock and the popularity of psychedelic acid rock, while forgetting

that the best-selling song of the sixties was Percy Faith's saccharine instrumental ballad "Theme from a Summer Place." If the motion picture *Woodstock* (1970) leaves indelible impressions of the searing social commentary encoded in Hendrix's satirical "Star Spangled Banner" or Country Joe and the Fish's "Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," it may allow us to forget the appearance on the bestseller charts of Sergeant Barry Sadler's "The Ballad of the Green Berets" (1966), or of countersubversive prowar classics like Pat Boone's "Wish You Were Here Buddy" (1966), Victor Lundberg's "An Open Letter to My Teenage Son" (1967), or Merle Haggard's "Okie From Muskogee" (1969).

Although American society and culture did not change as much during the sixties as contemporary popular memory indicates, it is nonetheless indisputable that important changes were made during those years. The disruption and turmoil of the decade left a deep impression on Americans, offering an often unspoken social subtext to all of the cultural creations and practices produced in its wake. More than mere nostalgia drives us back to the texts of sixties popular culture. In them we encounter reserves of collective memory that unite cultural texts with their historical contexts, that encapsulate powerful dynamics of imagination and desire, and that enable us to gauge the successes and failures of yesterday's hopes and dreams. Above all, we encounter some of the radical transformations engendered within American popular culture because of the social movements of the sixties. Even when they failed to achieve their immediate political goals, those social movements often created both physical and figurative spaces for cultural transformations.

Looking for the Sixties

Decades are always artificial constructs, but in discussions of the sixties artifice has been accompanied by mythology as well. It has seemed appropriate to many observers to note that the decade that began in hope with the nonviolent civil rights protest by four teenagers at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960 ended in hopelessness and resignation at a rock music festival in Altamont, California, in December 1969, when Hell's Angels beat to death a black spectator while the Rolling Stones performed on stage. This periodization gives the decade an organic trajectory, one that roughly corresponds to the hopes of civil rights workers and student activists who could envision their cause as ascendant in the early years of the decade, but doomed by its finish. Yet many other schema could be applied to the same calendar of events. An optimist might start the decade with the election of President John F. Kennedy in November 1960 and conclude it with the landing of Americans on the moon in July 1969. A critic of American foreign policy might point to the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians in 1969 as the relevant boundary points for understanding the sixties. But events take place in response to forces that rarely conform to the contours of the calendar, and in a country as deeply divided over politics, economics, and culture as the United States was in the sixties, it is dangerous to assign a single narrative trajectory to events.

Similarly, monumental changes within sixties popular culture followed no single linear path of development. Yet the enormous differences between the 1970s and the 1950s raise

important questions about exactly what took place in the intervening decade. In 1961 Johnny Burnette had a minor hit with “For God, Country, and My Baby”—a patriotic affirmation of a soldier’s willingness to serve during the Berlin crisis of that year. Ten years later, country singer Arlene Harden reached the best-seller charts with “Congratulations,” a bitter indictment of the war in Vietnam from the perspective of an army wife who “congratulates” the army for “making a man” out of her husband by turning him into a tormented and embittered person “whose eyes tell of where he has been.” The distance between “For God, Country, and My Baby” and “Congratulations” provides an important clue to the cultural distance between 1971 and 1961 for some Americans. Similarly, Bobby Darin began his career as a ducktailed teen idol in pegged pants in 1958, when his juvenile party song “Splish Splash” reached the best-seller charts, but by 1969 he had long hair and wore a leather jacket with buckskin fringe as he recorded songs like Tim Hardin’s antiestablishment “Simple Song of Freedom.” Dion Di Mucci, was twenty-one years old when he recorded his first hit record, “Lonely Teenager,” in 1960, and his next eighteen hit songs all concerned themselves with teenage love affairs. But in 1968, he reached the best-seller charts with “Abraham, Martin, and John,” a song about the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. For young women, popular music in the first half of the decade might have meant listening to “girl groups” like the Crystals, Angels, and Shangri-las singing hymns to their boyfriends. In the second half of the decade, however, Aretha Franklin and Janis Joplin soared to popularity with strong and self-assertive songs telling stories from a female point of view.

The commercial nature of the music industry makes it an imperfect mirror of social relations. Direct and indirect censorship coupled with fears of alienating distributors and consumers render overt political statements within popular culture relatively rare. Yet by the late 1950s, several artists were already attempting to insert political concerns into their songs. Songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller tried to make a veiled attack on white supremacy in their 1959 song parodying western movies, “Along Came Jones.” But their record company persuaded them to make the lyrics inoffensive in order to guarantee airplay on commercial radio stations. Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil had a similar experience trying to write about race relations in their 1964 song, “Only in America.” In its original form, the song included lyrics stating that “Only in America, land of opportunity, can they save a seat in the back of the bus just for me” and “Only in America, where they preach the Golden Rule, will they start to march when my kids want to go to school.” But again, nervous record company executives persuaded the songwriters to change their lyrics to secure commercial acceptance. In its hit version sung by Jay and the Americans, the song became simply about romance and upward mobility, celebrating America as “a land of opportunity” where “a classy girl like you can fall for a poor boy like me.” Yet by 1969, Sly and the Family Stone’s “Stand,” Jefferson Airplane’s “Volunteers,” and Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son” all made the best-seller charts with lyrics that explicitly attacked racism, government repression, and militarism.

Were these changes reflective of a genuine shift in cultural values and political ideals in America, or did they merely manifest efforts by marketers to cash in on changing trends? Was popular music in the sixties the product of young people struggling to establish their own artistic visions, or was it the creation of marketing executives eager to cash in on demographic trends by tailoring mass media commodities to the interests of the nation’s largest age cohort?

Taking Care of Business

From a business point of view, the dynamic interaction between young people and popular music in the sixties began in 1964, when the Beatles made their first tour of the United States. Marketers had developed a growing appreciation of teenagers as consumers by 1959. In that year the average teen spent \$555 a year on goods and services not provided directly by parents. But after a spectacular leap in sales between 1955 and 1959, music industry revenues remained static until 1964. By the late 1960s, popular music had become big business, bringing a much higher rate of return on investment than most other areas of the entertainment industry. The Beatles alone had sold \$154 million in records by 1968, and by 1970 the music industry's total sales of records and tapes exceeded \$2 billion, surpassing the total sales generated by motion pictures (\$1.6 billion) and by all sports events (\$600 million). Rock music accounted for almost all of the increased sales; by the early 1970s rock and roll accounted for nearly 80 percent of recorded music.

Demographics played an important role in shaping the music industry. In 1964 seventeen-year-olds became the largest age cohort in the United States, and their purchases of records by the Beatles and other rock groups demonstrated their potential as an economic and cultural force. In succeeding years, the taste preferences of this group displayed considerable power to reshape the economy. In 1965 a decision by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requiring stations in large markets to broadcast separate programs on their AM and FM bands created an immediate need for "product" among FM programmers. FM technology made it possible to make broadcasts in stereo, making the emerging medium more conducive to music programming than AM radio had been. The narrow playlists of the AM stations restricted the range of music available to radio listeners (many "top forty" stations played as few as fifteen different songs per week), leaving an emerging consumer demand unfilled. The relatively low capital requirements for entry into business in FM radio, coupled with the FCC's ruling, made FM radio a prime site for the development of the new rock and roll. In order to fill the available airtime and to take advantage of stereo technology, many of these stations played albums instead of single records. By 1969 albums accounted for 80 percent of popular music sales, and recording groups could be commercially successful without a hit single played on "top forty" AM stations.

The popularity of FM stations and the emergence of album-oriented rock music shook up the music industry. As Joe Smith, then president of Warner Brothers Records, remembers, "We found we couldn't sell the Grateful Dead's records in a traditional manner. You couldn't take your ad in *Billboard* and sell a record that way. We found that they had to be seen. They had to play concerts. We had to advertise on FM stations which were just emerging about that time. The packaging was important. The cult was important. Free concerts where you handed out fruits and nuts were important."

Along with FM radio, an "underground press" emerged in the sixties as an important adjunct to the music business. Following the lead of the eminently successful *Berkeley Barb* and the *Los Angeles Free Press*, guerrilla journalists all across the country started their own weekly newspapers. Mixing New Left politics with commentary on alternative "hippie" countercultures,

these papers became an important source of information and inspiration for the young. At a time when few daily newspapers printed articles critical of the government or stories about rock music, the underground press became a vital resource for countercultural communities. But they served as well to identify the contours of an emerging youth market, advertising the wares of clothing stores, head shops selling drug paraphernalia, and, most important, record companies. Record companies discovered that favorable reviews in underground papers could “break” new acts successfully, while negative notices could produce serious sales problems even for established artists. Music industry executives began to funnel advertising dollars into the underground press, in some cases providing the bulk of their revenues.

Record companies, FM radio stations, underground newspapers, and clothing, record, and head shops formed the infrastructure of the “youth culture” economy. Yet for all of the capital expended directly and indirectly to bring this market into being, the youth culture was not simply a creation of marketers. Rather, it coexisted and overlapped with a youth counterculture that emerged from the political and social transformations of the sixties.

Dancing in the Street

During the sixties, large numbers of middle-class white youths raised in suburban subdivisions surrounded by superhighways rediscovered the energy and intimacy of the urban street. From Dinkytown in Minneapolis to Houston’s Montrose District, from Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to Tompkins Square Park in New York’s East Village, young people poured into inexpensive dwellings on rundown streets, trying to find themselves by finding each other. Ellen Sander underscores the importance of the street in her remembrance of the emerging counterculture of that decade:

Whatever it was that was making us so unhappy pulled us toward the street. It was the only way out and it was completely open. The street was the place to meet kindred souls of every physical description, the place to score dope, the place to hang out and find out what was happening. It was dotted with shops and coffeehouses where you could find anything from a chess game to every conceivable assortment of sexual partner or partners. It was where we lived, learned, worked, played, taught, and survived; it was where you oriented yourself among it all. Naturally, it was the best place that anyone who wanted to could find and play and make and go to hear music.

The movement of young people into the streets emerged in part as a reaction against the corporate culture of conformity that had shaped much of suburban life since World War II, but it also responded to the ways in which political struggle transformed the nature of urban space. In his moving reminiscence about participating in sixties antiwar and civil rights demonstrations, Marshall Berman recalls a “transforming experience” that enabled people to feel the kind of physical warmth and trust from strangers that they might have known previously only with one person in intimate privacy. The experience “gave many of us an ease and confidence in public spaces that we had never had before, and never expected to have at all,” Berman observes.

The reconstitution of public space by political movements had important ramifications for popular music. The popularity of folk music as an organizing tool within the civil rights and antiwar movements made musical expression an organic part of political protest. The popularity of folk-rock as a commercial genre and the identification of the mass rally as a site for music evolved organically out of the prominence of music making within oppositional movements. For years Bob Dylan had a relationship with a woman active in civil rights work with the Congress of Racial Equality. In the early 1960s he appeared in Mississippi to sing protest songs as part of the civil rights organizing in that state, and he also attended a national council meeting of the most important white student protest group, the Students for a Democratic Society. Political movements established the legitimacy of singing in public, they demonstrated the ways in which music might make serious commentaries on political issues, and they brought diverse groups together in a way that set the stage for the subsequent appreciation of difference and diversity within public music performances and audiences.

In addition, as political “sit-ins” evolved into cultural “be-ins” and “love-ins,” the ritualized sharing of public space with like-minded “brothers and sisters” remained at the core of the experience. William Chafe describes the countercultural sensibility that emerged from these spaces as one that held that “‘being’ was more important than ‘becoming,’ living *now* more valuable than the drive to get ahead.” The music festival and large concert hall emerged as privileged sites for the making of music, and the ability of musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Otis Redding to transform audiences through live performances, provided an important basis for their prestige. Yet it was not just large numbers that made these gatherings important; on the contrary, it was the cultural unity that they affirmed. Presumptions of a common community with a mutuality of values pervaded festival rock concerts no less than they did political mass demonstrations.

In myriad ways, rock music in the sixties translated the energy and imagination of street politics into art. From “Dancing in the Street” (1964) by Martha and the Vandellas to Thee Midnighters’s “Whittier Boulevard” (1966) to Wilson Pickett’s “Funky Broadway” (1967), songs about the street conveyed hidden messages about riots, car cruising, and black power to knowing (or perhaps merely imaginative) listeners. In some cases, heavily politicized countercultural communities produced their own musical acts. In Detroit, the political activist and “white panther” John Sinclair managed the rock band MC5. Sinclair’s white panthers specialized in street theater and agit-prop interventions, like the time they applied to the Detroit City government for permission to blow up the General Motors Building and, when refused, vowed that the experience taught them the futility of trying to work through the system. Despite limited radio airplay, unenthusiastic record company support, and outright censorship, the MC5’s “Kick Out the Jams” reached the Billboard “Hot 100” charts in 1969, and their album *Back in the USA* reached the top thirty. When John Sinclair was arrested for selling a small amount of marijuana to an undercover police officer, musicians rallied to his defense. A benefit to “free John Sinclair” in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1971 featured performances by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Archie Shepp, Bob Seger, and Stevie Wonder.

West Coast promoter Bill Graham discovered rock and roll music through a series of benefits that he produced for the radical theater ensemble that he managed, the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Graham produced the famous Merry Pranksters’ Tripps Festival at San

Francisco's Longshoreman's Hall in 1966 featuring the music of Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, who would soon change their name to the Grateful Dead. Ten thousand people showed up for the three-day festival, and Graham soon began producing concerts for his own benefit at the rented Fillmore Auditorium. He would go on to become one of the most successful entrepreneurs of rock and roll, producing live music on both coasts and playing a major role in Woodstock and other rock festivals.

Even when musical groups had no direct links to community organizations, their art often reflected the values privileged in the streets. Aesthetics of amateurism and multiculturalism permeated sixties rock and roll. Audiences knew that Janis Joplin had been a secretary and that Jim Morrison had been a film studies major in college who only started singing when the prevailing aesthetic of amateurism invited their participation in the alternative music scene. The participatory democracy of the New Left that encouraged people to take control of the decisions that affected their lives found a cultural concomitant in a musical subculture that asserted that everyone could be a star. As one participant in the early San Francisco hippie subculture recalls while discussing the centrality of music (and drugs) to that community:

We were held together by our own good vibrations and with the rise of the Sound, we were drawn together into a family. The Fillmore and Avalon [ballrooms] of 1966 radically changed our language, our interests, and our lives; from a goal-directed, school-directed way of living, we'd moved to a life-style directed way by our music and acid. Acid and the bands became the loci of our lives. Saturday night became the center around which the rest of the week was left to move; reminiscing about the last, planning for the next. All day Saturday spent in preparation, collecting flowers, buying new costumes, buying and selling dope, getting super stoned and listening to music.

Multiculturalism also played an important role in the aesthetics of sixties rock music. The "Age of Aquarius" may have become an instant cliché when the Broadway musical *Hair* presented it as the supposed anthem of the counterculture, but a distinctly "Aquarian" desire for transcending differences did provide one of the driving mechanisms of sixties music. Just as folk-rock's connections to the civil rights and antiwar movements brought to the surface long-suppressed folk traditions in American music, the civil rights and black power movements placed a new emphasis on African American music through their emphasis on black pride. Within black communities songs like Aretha Franklin's "Respect" (1967), the Impressions's "We're a Winner" (1968), and James Brown's "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968) served as important emblems of self-affirmation, but their popularity with white audiences also reflected an important, if limited, transformation in American race relations. The black-owned Motown label grossed over \$30 million in 1967, with an estimated 70 percent of its sales to white audiences. White artists and entrepreneurs in the sixties still received a disproportionate share of the rewards from a popular music that was undeniably African American in origin, while black innovators including Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and B. B. King never gained the critical or commercial respect due them for their achievements. White groups including the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Young Rascals openly acknowledged their debt to the black musical tradition, yet all reaped benefits far beyond those available to

black artists. Nonetheless, in comparison to previous and (perhaps) subsequent decades, the white popular music audience of the sixties did demonstrate an exceptional receptivity to multicultural dialogue.

In Janis Joplin, a white woman steeped in black blues, and in Jimi Hendrix, a black man mastering the possibilities of psychedelic rock, the counterculture found “outsiders” able to transcend their personal histories and build new identities in an openly multiracial musical environment. Sly Stewart, of the group Sly and the Family Stone, enjoyed success with his gospel- and soul-oriented dance music played by a “family” mixed by gender and race. The great James Brown revolutionized popular music by having all the instruments play rhythm and by breaking up bass lines into choppy two- or three-note patterns in the style of Puerto Rican and Afro-Cuban music. At the same time, New York Puerto Ricans garnered extraordinary sales of records with blues chord progressions, English lyrics, and Latin rhythms including Joe Cuba’s “Bang Bang” (1966) and Hector Rivera’s “At the Party” (1967).

Southern studio musicians and producers played a crucial role in fashioning the Muscle Shoals Sound popularized on records by black artists Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and Otis Redding. Chicano rockers Cannibal and the Headhunters and Thee Midnighters reached the best-seller charts in 1965 with cover versions of “Land of a Thousand Dances” by the African American rhythm and blues singer Chris Kenner. Mexican-born Carlos Santana enjoyed great success at the Fillmore West in San Francisco and at the Woodstock Festival in Bethel, New York, in 1969 with his blend of rock and roll, Afro-Cuban jazz, and blues. A white Texan named James Smith, recording under the name P. J. Proby, had a hit in 1967 with “Niki Hokey,” a “swamp pop” song that sounded like black rhythm and blues from Louisiana, although it was written by Lolly and Pat Vegas who were American Indians from Los Angeles. Counterculture bands including the Byrds, the Grateful Dead, and The Band rediscovered and popularized traditions from country music, while the country singer Johnny Cash recorded with Bob Dylan. Jazz great Miles Davis recorded a best-selling rock-jazz fusion album, headlined concerts with Laura Nyro and the Grateful Dead, and regularly played private jam sessions with Jimi Hendrix. Even the Englishman Eric Burdon got into the act with his tribute to Haight-Ashbury, “San Franciscan Nights,” which talked about an “American Dream” that “includes Indians too.” To many listeners to popular music, the social barriers dividing groups in American society seemed to be eroding, and the market categories that had segregated the music business suddenly seemed obsolete. For a brief time, Bob Dylan’s audience was also James Brown’s and Grateful Dead listeners could also be Beatles fans.

The youth subculture that developed around rock and roll music in the sixties owed enormous debts to black culture: from the musicians who provided the core vocabulary of rock music to the activists and intellectuals whose compelling moral vision and devastating social critiques alerted young whites to the shortcomings of their society. Yet white youths could not or would not embrace black culture and politics directly; for the most part they preferred to fashion alternative cultures and communities that spoke more to the alienations of middle-class life than they did to the racial and class inequities of American society. The music of the counterculture employed traditional blues techniques and devices, but its emphasis on electronic distortion (through feedback, reverb, and wa-wa pedals on electric guitars), the focus of its lyrics on

alienation and drug use, and the extended length of individual songs and concerts all reflected the concerns and interests of an emerging (mostly) white subculture.

In retrospect, it may seem difficult to imagine how such an inner-directed subculture could see itself or be seen by others as “revolutionary” in a political sense. But the value placed on altered consciousness in the counterculture reflected a belief that social change had to start with self-knowledge. It was difficult to imagine how society could change unless people changed, but it was equally difficult to see how people could become different unless societal structures allowed them space for reflection and growth. For many young people, the policeman on the corner was less a barrier to social change than the policeman inside their heads. They wanted a movement that would be both subversive and therapeutic. One participant in San Francisco’s counterculture remembers the inspiration he drew from the popular Peter Weiss play *Marat/Sade* to understand his own situation, “The protest politics of the early sixties had come to a dead end. The problem was described in Weiss’s *Marat/Sade*: we’d left the politically revolutionary, albeit objective Marat to come to a position much closer to that of de Sade. ‘Before I decide what is wrong and what is right, first we must find out what we are....The only truths are the ever changing truths of our own experience.’”

For some musicians and some political activists, the youth counterculture represented America’s best hope for substantive change. John Sinclair, the manager of MC5 and self-described “white panther,” proclaimed in his 1972 book *Guitar Army*: “The duty of the revolutionary is to make the revolution. The duty of the musician is to make the music. But there is an equation that must not be missed: MUSIC IS REVOLUTION. Rock and roll music is one of the most vital revolutionary forces in the West—it blows people all the way back to their senses and makes them feel good, like they’re alive again in the middle of this monstrous funeral parlor of Western civilization.”

Within the counterculture itself, few would make such claims. Music might intersect with important social practices, at times it might even talk about social change. But it was also part of an industry organized to sell commercialized leisure, a functioning part of life in a capitalist country, and a reflection of all the ideological contradictions of the world surrounding it. Yet to its enemies, the claims of revolutionary significance sometimes seemed plausible. After the 1969 arrest of the Doors’s Jim Morrison for alleged lewd behavior and indecent exposure at a Miami concert, a “rally for decency” in that city featuring Anita Bryant and the Lettermen drew a congratulatory telegram from President Richard M. Nixon. Early in 1970 the chief government prosecutor in the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial justified the trial to the Loyola Academy Booster Club by explaining its cultural stakes: “We’ve lost our kids to the freaking fag revolution and we’ve got to reach out to them....Our kids don’t understand that we don’t mean anything by it when we call people niggers. They look at us like we’re dinosaurs when we talk like that.”

Of course, rock and roll did not initiate revolutionary change in America. But neither was it debased or immoral. Rather, it emerged as part of a complex cultural response to concrete historical conditions, and it is in the context of its dialogue with those conditions that it must be evaluated.

Trouble Coming Every Day

The cultural and political contestations of the sixties emerged from an extraordinary social and economic crisis, from the breakdown of a seemingly stable system. The affluence of the 1950s had been built within a highly stratified work force that manifested severe gaps between the wages paid to skilled and unskilled workers. When President Lyndon B. Johnson refused to raise taxes to pay for the Vietnam War, he started an inflationary cycle that undermined many of the gains of even relatively affluent workers. Civic insurrections contributed to the economic climate that already deterred investment in either urban infrastructure, affordable housing, or industry, setting the stage for the severe urban crises of the 1970s and 1980s.

Neither singularly malicious nor exceptionally heroic, most of the rebels of the sixties sought to make sense out of the same circumstances that confronted their political and cultural adversaries—instability and social change within a society suffering from a bloody war overseas and from racial conflagration at home. This context of social chaos frames all of the artifacts of popular culture from the sixties, and it adds an indispensable element to their interpretation.

During the 1965 Watt riots, 14,000 national guardsmen and 1,500 law enforcement officers occupied south-central Los Angeles for a week, in an effort to control an insurrection that destroyed \$30 million worth of property. Six days of rioting left 34 people dead and more than 900 injured, as police officers arrested some 4,000 “suspects.” The insurrection in Newark, New Jersey, in 1967 did \$10 million worth of damage; it left 20 dead and more than 1,200 people wounded. In Detroit that same summer, police and national guard troops killed 43 people and wounded more than 1,000 in an attempt to control rioting that destroyed \$250 million worth of property. In the summer of 1967 alone, there were 90 killed, 4,000 wounded, and 70,000 arrested in America’s inner cities. At the same time, the number of those killed in Vietnam rose steadily. In his book about the decade, Todd Gitlin captures some of the tenor (and terror) of the late 1960s when he asks:

How can I convey the texture of this gone time so that you and I, reader, will be able to grasp, remember, believe that astonishing things actually happened, and make sense to the many who made them happen and were overtaken by them? Statistics are “background,” we do not feel them tearing into our flesh. The years 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1970 were a cyclone in a wind tunnel. Little justice has been done to them in realistic fiction; perhaps one reason is that fiction requires, as Norman Mailer once said, a sense of the real. When history comes off the leash, when reality appears illusory and illusions take on lives of their own, the novelist loses the platform on which imagination builds its plausible appearances.

Many of the song lyrics and the countercultural practices of the sixties were created to arbitrate these historically specific crises of the moment. They expressed the rage, frustration, and despair of people who felt that they had no future while at the same time projecting utopian fantasies about community, cooperation, and pleasure within a deeply divided society that routinely resorted to violence to advance its objectives.

The youth culture that emerged in and around rock 'n' roll music in the sixties represented both a rejection of the dominant culture in America and a peculiar reaffirmation of it at the same time. In the midst of an extraordinary social crisis where war, official misconduct, social disorder, and a growing recognition of inequality grievously undermined popular faith in the competence and the moral legitimacy of political leaders, rock in' roll music became a site of alternative, and sometimes oppositional, practices. Writers today often refer to the unrealistic utopianism of the sixties counterculture with its "All You Need Is Love" ethic, portraying its adherents as either naive or arrogant in their expectations of how rapidly change might be accomplished. Yet these accounts obscure the sixties counterculture's even more powerful apocalyptic strain. From Barry McGuire's angry "Eve of Destruction" (1965) to The Buffalo Springfield's resigned "For What It's Worth" (1967), to the Band's tragic "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" (1969), to the Doors's "The End" (1967), popular songs routinely projected fatalism and dread about political crises. Even in personal matters, despair and cynicism reigned, as evidenced by the Jefferson Airplane's 1967 "Somebody to Love," which began, "When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies." The Byrds recorded Bob Dylan's disillusioned "Nothing Was Delivered," and the Doors sang about "the end of our elaborate plans, the end of everything that stands, the end." Jimi Hendrix covered Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" with its haunting last lines, "outside in the distance a wildcat did growl, two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl." Bob Dylan's insistence that "When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose" in "Like a Rolling Stone" articulated the resignation and fatalism of a generation that saw itself caught between warring factions at home and abroad. Its strongest impulse was neither to defend nor to attack the American empire, but to get out of the way of the confrontation.

For these reasons it is not surprising that a sizable part of the counterculture felt itself drawn to the appeal of Eastern religions with their emphasis on avoiding authority, to the lure of the rural commune severed from the modern world, and to the seductiveness of hallucinogenic drugs that could block out the ugliness of ghettos aflame and peasants' bodies scorched by napalm. Timothy Leary's injunction to young people to "turn on, tune in, and drop out" reflected more of an attempt to escape from society than to reform it. The reckless hedonism of a Janis Joplin or a Jim Morrison, the distorting and transforming combination of sight and sound in the psychedelic light show and rock concert, and the gallows humor of Country Joe MacDonald's "Ain't no need to wonder why, whoopee we're all gonna die" spoke to these alternative rather than oppositional impulses.

The 1967 album *Freak Out* by Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention served as an important icon of the counterculture, connecting alternative life-styles to a generalized condemnation of middle-class culture. Yet its political stance came less from revulsion against war, racism, and poverty than from a desire to avoid the consequences of those products of the system. Like Zappa's subsequent "We're Only in It for the Money" (a parody of the Beatles's "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"), this record offered listeners the pleasures of cynicism, privileging a standpoint of bemused detachment rather than of engaged activism. In this respect, the emblematic song on *Freak Out* was "There's No Way to Delay That Trouble Coming Every Day," which positioned listeners as passive and paralyzed media consumers. Contrasting the banalities of news reporting and advertising with the grim stories of destruction and death that

form its content, Zappa evokes images of the urban insurrections then raging in America's ghettos, musing in apocalyptic dread that "there's no way to delay that trouble coming every day."

In its song lyrics, its musical structures, and even in its cover design, *Freak Out* seemed to make a decisive break with the culture of commercialism dominating the music industry and the rest of American culture as well. Yet its stance was more alternative than oppositional. In 1964 Malcolm X had warned Americans that they were sitting on a racial powder-keg about to go off, but his warning included a plea for social actions capable of remedying the conditions that caused such racial tensions in the first place. Listeners to *Freak Out* heard no such message, and the countercultural emphasis on avoiding authority—on "dropping out"—made it difficult for them to hear voices championing the cause of social reform. This is not to minimize the massive rejection of middle-class values signified by the emergence of the counterculture, but it is to call attention to the irrelevance of that middle-class strategy toward the real problems facing other aggrieved populations. The influx of hippies into slum neighborhoods like New York's East Village or San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury only led to increased rents and weakened community institutions for their existing inhabitants. "Liberated" zones in urban ghettos or rural communes might provide escape from the suffocating sterility and moral bankruptcy of middle-class suburban families, but they did little to help the already victimized inhabitants of those places who found that the presence of the counterculture brought them only higher rents and more oppressive police surveillance.

Countercultural communities built on sharing surplus wealth provided important alternatives for young people stifled by the unnecessary materialism of middle-class life, but they did little to generate more material resources for desperately poor populations of inner cities and rural slums. The trusting openness and undercurrent of pacifism permeating countercultural communities represented a significant alternative to the masculinist aggression of a society at war, but by itself the gentleness of the counterculture could not stop the systematic and unremitting use of violence in the sixties by America's police and military forces. Similarly much of the preoccupation with sexual liberation within the sixties counterculture contained too little critique of dominant notions of sexuality, making it all too easy for the ideals of sexual freedom to become translated into practices that pressured women to be available sexually for men without a larger vision of an intersubjective, egalitarian, or emancipatory definition of sexual pleasure itself.

Within the countercultural community, escapist tendencies led "hippies" to fashion a better picture of what they were running from than of what they were running to. Individuals who originally prided themselves on their distance from dominant ideology found it hard to resist the attention of the media in cultural spheres and the temptations of violence in politics. Thus a romance with the television camera and the gun often led activists to confuse provoking one's enemies with helping one's friends. In its search to balance the ideals of an individualism without selfishness and a sense of community without totalitarian conformity, the counterculture could be both narcissistic and totalitarian. Finally, for all its oppositional intentions, the counterculture did too little to interrogate the axes of power in society—the systematic racism, class domination, sexism, and homophobia that constrained individual choices. It might be one thing for white middle-class youths to discover the benefits of Timothy Leary's advice to take drugs and expand

consciousness, but many of their potential allies in the rest of society were too precariously placed in it to drop out, and too busy with all-encompassing problems to tune in to anything else. Listeners to George Harrison's "Within You Without You" (on the Beatles's 1967 *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album) might have gained real insight from hearing that "it's all within yourself, no one else can make a change," but for the victims of institutionalized racism and sexism such advice might be quite unacceptable and even dangerous.

Elites and those they rule often share a common culture. Cut from the same cloth, their practices often mirror one another. Societies often get both the leaders and the rebels they deserve. In the case of the sixties counterculture, its problem was not its radicalism, not the ways in which it differed so markedly from the culture it challenged, but rather the ways in which it so closely mirrored the system it claimed to be overturning. At key moments, alternative sixties cultural institutions faced the possibility of becoming oppositional, but in each case, they replicated rather than resisted the ruling cultural and ideological norms of American society. Relatively unstructured "free days" and "be-ins" that celebrated the diversity of participants' imaginations and desires eventually became ritualized "love-ins" with almost obligatory nudity and drug use. Cultural practices designed to bypass existing institutions like the "free" concerts staged by community groups worked so well that they became the model for "hippie-capitalist" promoters who found that antimaterialism sold very well to the right audiences. The Tripps Festival organized by Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters in San Francisco in January 1966 combined music, strobe lights, and a festival setting to celebrate the creativity embodied in the emerging counterculture. But the festival also provided a model for Bill Graham and for other rock capitalists interested in marketing the new culture to semicomprehending audiences as just another novelty. Even sober community organizing efforts designed to help empower working-class people like the Economic Research and Action Project of the Students for a Democratic Society dissolved when they failed to produce immediate results, bringing in their wake an escalation of revolutionary rhetoric, an idealization of anticolonial struggles in the Third World, and a romance with the television camera that equated appearances on the evening news with victories in the struggle for social change.

The eclipse of the Diggers by the Yippies encapsulates much of the trajectory of the counterculture's politics in the sixties. As Todd Gitlin relates in his excellent account, the Diggers emerged in San Francisco in the mid-1960s proclaiming "the death of money and the birth of the free." Taking their name from the seventeenth-century rebels in Britain who despised private property and depicted the earth as a common treasury for all, the Diggers launched a series of programs designed to help people live outside the money economy. They collected surplus clothes for their Haight-Ashbury area "free store." They distributed free food every day for a year at a stand in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park, and they promoted free concerts in the park as well. Although often expressing scorn for the world of work, the Diggers labored diligently at their many projects, trying desperately to prove to people that they could free themselves from the materialism of American society and bring about significant social changes through seemingly apolitical "service towards a new society in the making."

Diggers wanted people to trust their own instincts, to live outside the cash economy, and to make culture for themselves rather than merely consuming what was placed before them by the culture industry. They disrupted New Left meetings as enthusiastically as they defaced

advertising billboards, seeing themselves as the enemy of all manipulative discourse. Craving anonymity, they used each other's names on television appearances to confuse interviewers, and they attempted to confuse rather than illumine reporters who showed up at their creative disruptions and happenings.

Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, among others, tried to employ the spontaneity and creative anarchism of the Diggers for more directly political ends by proclaiming "Yippies" (the nonexistent Youth International party) as the politicized successors to the hippies. In part, Hoffman hoped to channel the "pre-political" rebelliousness of the counterculture toward an activism on behalf of social change. But whereas the Diggers tried to motivate people to rely on their own instincts, Hoffman and Rubin attempted to organize people by entertaining them. Rather than confounding the media, the Yippies tried to use it to become publicized media stars. They burned money at the New York Stock Exchange and attracted enormous media coverage with their efforts to turn antiwar demonstrations like the 1967 march on the Pentagon and the 1968 protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago into provocative street theater. Instead of "free" concerts, the Yippies tried to attach themselves to the stars of the culture industry, appearing on stage at Woodstock to appeal for funds for their defense at the Chicago conspiracy trial. In a much publicized emblematic incident demonstrating the schism between rock stars and cultural radicals, Peter Townshend of the British rock group, The Who, hit Hoffman over the head with his guitar to get the activist offstage so that the band could begin its set.

Yet the failure of the counterculture of the sixties to realize its own best hopes should not lead us to conclude that nothing of importance happened within the popular culture of that decade. The youth counterculture in and around rock 'n' roll music sometimes did raise profound challenges to the dominant culture. In their affirmations of sexual pleasure, their desire to cross racial barriers, their attempts to neutralize gender as fixed source of identity, their construction of voluntary affective relationships outside the realm of the biological family, their celebration of peace and love in a society being consumed by war and hatred, and their revolt against materialism and hierarchy, the counterculture made significant breaks with dominant cultural values in America. In addition, the rise of folk-rock, of Motown Records and the more rural "soul" sounds on Atlantic and Stax Volt, the emergence of Aretha Franklin and Janis Joplin as distinctively female yet powerful entertainers, the blending of races and cultures exemplified in the popularity of Jimi Hendrix, and the emergence of regionally and racially inflected music into the best-seller charts all represented important changes in American popular culture.

Darkness on the Edge of Town: Remembering the Sixties

The popular music of the sixties endures in the present as one of our few direct affective links to that decade. Political realignments, deindustrialization, and demographic shifts have led to the rapid senescence of much of sixties politics and culture, but in the realm of popular music, remakes and rereleases preserve fragments of that decade's "materials memory" within the everyday life experience of Americans in the 1990S.

Frank Zappa claims that those like Robert Frost who debate whether the world will end “in fire or in ice” have seriously underestimated paperwork and nostalgia. A full discussion of paperwork will have to await another opportunity, but nostalgia provides an indispensable frame for understanding the popular culture of the sixties and its legacy for the present. In the 1990s, remakes and rereleases of sixties songs pervade the pop charts and provide a recurrent motif for television commercials. The lyrics in a series of popular songs ranging from Bruce Hornsby’s “The Way It Is” (1986) to the Grateful Dead’s “Touch of Gray” (1988) to Billy Joel’s “We Didn’t Start the Fire” (1990) reframe the sixties from the perspective of subsequent changes in society. Music videos, including Artists Against Apartheid’s “Sun City” (1985), Jackson Browne’s “For America” (1986), and Queen Latifah’s “Ladies First” (1990), dramatize their messages with still photos and newsreel footage from sixties social protests. Perhaps most significant are the ways in which recombinant practices of 1990s popular culture ranging from performance art to popular fashions, from rap and hip-hop iconography to rock music lyrics, all employ strategic redeployments of remnants and remembrances of sixties culture.

Within the culture industry, memories of the sixties serve diverse ends. A popular song like the 1990 “This Old Heart of Mine” by Rod Stewart and Ron Isley can seem completely new to young listeners, while at the same time evoking memories of earlier versions of the same song by the Isley Brothers in 1966 and by Rod Stewart in 1976. Commercial music producers, radio programmers, and music store shelvees prefer releases by established names with proven track records because they minimize risks in an otherwise unpredictable business. Television advertisers employ sixties songs like the Beatles’s 1968 “Revolution,” Percy Sledge’s 1966 “When a Man Loves a Woman,” or Doris Troy’s 1963 “Just One Look” because they tap the affective memories of the largest cohort of consumers in a way that connects material goods from today with pleasant sensory experiences from the past. Television programs that present a dialogue between the present and the past like “Family Ties” and “The Wonder Years” prove extremely efficient for network advertising sales personnel because they draw both youth and adult audiences.

Yet commercial considerations do not totally explain the deployment of sixties memories within contemporary popular culture. For rap artists like Public Enemy’s Chuck D or Queen Latifah, visual images and spoken references to Malcolm X and Angela Davis connect the conditions confronting young African Americans in the 1990s with the uncompleted agenda of the sixties civil rights and black power movements. References to sixties music in John Cougar Mellencamp’s 1986 “R.O.C.K. in the U.S.A.” or to sixties social conditions in Bruce Springsteen’s 1985 “My Hometown” problematize the present through poignant remembrances of the past. Even in films like *The Big Chill* and *Running on Empty* that completely obscure any semblance of the specific political and cultural struggles of the sixties, a deep sense of regret for lost idealism informs the nostalgia and undermines the smugness of the contemporary tendency to understand the present as inevitable and the past as exactly like the present.

There is *a* truth about the sixties and about its popular music that emerges from these contemporary sounds, images, and accounts, but it is hardly the whole truth. Because the entire decade of the sixties has become associated with the idea of tumultuous social change, collective popular memory often fails to recall how little actually changed and how persistently conservative American culture and political life remained during those years. Contemporary

neoconservatives, including Allan Bloom and William Bennett, have identified the legacy of sixties rock music as the product of a “destructive” and “nihilistic” counterculture organized around drug use, antiwar activity, and sexual experimentation. They have traced contemporary social problems dramatized by drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, and poor classroom performance to the “glamorization” of antisocial behavior by sixties rock stars like Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison. Conversely, some leftist writers, including David Pichaske and Robert Pielke, have recalled the sixties as an era of authenticity and experimentation, as a time when barriers separating artists from audiences and dividing art from life temporarily broke down. On the other hand, yet another school of leftist thought has indicted the rock music of the sixties because it was not radical enough, because it remained too much within the ideological consensus of mainstream American life and too much within the commercial apparatuses of the music industry. These writers, including Todd Gitlin, David James, and John Street, have emphasized the paucity of social criticism within sixties song lyrics, the escapist and elitist aspects of countercultural practices, and the importance of popular music as a profitable element within a larger communications apparatus determined in large measure by the profit-making imperatives of large conglomerates.

In many respects, cultural politics in the 1990s has become a kind of referendum on the cultural politics of the 1960s. Some of the most significant redeployments of sixties memories occur within the discourse and ideology of those at the center of power in the American system. For them, the sixties serve a vital function, as the “revolution” that justifies a counterrevolution, and as a shorthand way of scapegoating all of the ills of the present upon the “mistakes” of the past. For example, in one of the stranger moments of the 1988 presidential election campaign, George Bush boasted that one of the proudest accomplishments of the Reagan years had been to change America from a nation that enjoyed films like *Easy Rider* to one that favored films like *Dirty Harry*. One might well wonder how the nation has become better off by replacing a fantasy about countercultural hedonism with one about vigilante revenge, or how the country is better served by replacing an escape from responsibility with an escape into sadism. But even more curious, neither of these films were products of the Reagan era. *Easy Rider* and *Dirty Harry* were made and released only two years apart, during the early years of the Nixon administration (1969 and 1971); they represent the cinematic concerns of the late sixties, not the cultural changes engendered in the 1980s. Yet while patently false as historical description, Bush’s remarks reveal important truths about the ways in which competing imagery from the 1960s continues to inform and shape political discourse in the 1980s and 1990s.

Bush’s identification of competing cinematic images about pleasure and authority as one of the stakes of political contestation speaks eloquently about the relationship between the politics of the 1980s and 1990s to the cultural legacy of the 1960s. His inscription of consumer preferences as a definitive index of proper citizenship typifies the merging of politics and popular culture embodied in the popularity of Ronald Reagan. Furthermore, Bush’s opposition between the libertarian fantasies of *Easy Rider* and the authoritarian violence of *Dirty Harry* exposes many of the psychological and sexual undercurrents influencing the framing of political issues.

The sixties that emerges from these neoconservative accounts appears as a kind of organized lunacy that produced (rather than responded to) racism, changes in gender roles, and divisive debates about foreign policy. In this scenario, the activities of those in power before,

during, and after the sixties largely escape critical scrutiny, while an infinitesimally small number of oppositional events and practices (like flag burning) receive blame for nearly all of society's current problems with drug use, sexually transmitted diseases, worker productivity, educational achievement, and crises within families.

In response to the neoconservative scapegoating of the sixties, liberals and leftists have launched a politics of recuperative countermemory. As exemplified in the title of the anthology by Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Fredric Jameson, *The Sixties without Apology*, leftist intellectuals and activists have fashioned a picture of the sixties that, for all its problems, emerges as a moment of heroic citizen mobilization against racism and against an unjust war, and as a time of cultural resistance to oppressive regimes of authoritarian sexual codes, educational policies, and workplace discipline. Yet contrary to conservative expectations, almost no liberal-leftist accounts of the sixties celebrate the decade uncritically. While lauding efforts at social and cultural change, these accounts remember a decade when assassins' bullets killed Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, when candidates elected because of their promises to bring peace escalated the Vietnam War, and where government agencies ignored wrenching problems in order to devote their energies to persecuting dissident critics. They remember how the expenditures on the war in Vietnam doomed the War on Poverty, how ghetto rebellions at home and nationalist insurgencies overseas revealed the antagonistic contradictions embedded in the American economy, and how efforts by women to secure full participation in political and economic life met with reactionary resistance and ridicule from male and female opponents across the political spectrum.

By the early 1970s, the counterculture knew that it had lost the battle, and the rhetoric of rock and roll changed accordingly. As John Street explains, the 1970s tended to substitute glitter for rhetoric, sequins for beads, decadence for politics, and open plagiarism for originality. Whereas the counterculture of the 1960s tried to defuse sexual tensions by having men and women take off their clothes, the "glam" and "glitter" rock of the 1970s encouraged men and women to wear each others' clothes. Fashion replaced pharmacology, and the ruling slogan of the day became "paint your face" rather than "feed your head." In part, 1970s music emerged as a critique of what had been left out of the sixties (working-class anger, desires for androgyny), and new musical forms reflecting new social realities emerged. Yet while punk rock, disco, reggae, and revived rock music like Bruce Springsteen's departed in some ways from sixties aesthetics, they nonetheless carried on many of the projects and sensibilities of the previous decade.

In the seventies, economic stagnation and deindustrialization undermined the reigning assumptions of the sixties counterculture that had always presumed to be operating in an economy of abundance. Declining economic opportunities brought fundamental changes in work, gender roles, family relations, education, and welfare policies, as automation and capital flight overseas promoted deindustrialization at home. Increases in male unemployment and the necessity for more women to work transformed family relations, while tax breaks for property owners worked to curtail the growth in education and welfare spending that had characterized the sixties. For neoconservatives, these changes drew retrospective justification from the perceived excesses of the sixties, while for leftists the changes interrupted the nascent progress of the previous decade. Yet both arguments underestimated the radical transformations in society wrought by capital and the state in the 1970s. Consequently, the myth of the sixties has served as

more of an impediment than an aid toward understanding contemporary cultural politics. This is not to belittle the changes brought about during the sixties, nor to underestimate the extraordinary creative cultural accomplishments of the decade. But idealizing or demonizing the historically specific practices of one decade in order to justify serious social decisions in another serves only as a form of reactionary nostalgia. One can understand the appeal of such accounts—to demonize or deify the sixties provides an easily recognizable image capable of mobilizing selected constituencies. But it does little to address the problems of our own day where the deadly serious oppressions of race, class, and gender still guarantee “no way to delay that trouble coming every day.”

Youth culture of the sixties emerged in the context of social contradictions, and it reflected a full range of aesthetic and social stances, careening between idealism and cynicism, collectivity and individualism, hedonism and selflessness. Grass roots efforts to create “free spaces” succeeded in revitalizing urban spaces and building rural communes, but they also alerted capitalists to the potential of untapped market desires that could easily co-opt emancipatory impulses for mercenary ends. Political activists secured media coverage of their demonstrations and campaigns yet failed to see the harm done to their movement by overreliance on spectacle mediated through a communications apparatus that they did not control. The hippie counterculture articulated powerful defiance of the corporate culture of confidence and consensus that dominated life in post-World War II America, but it failed to find sustainable ways of living outside the system or establishing permanent alternative networks that might provide the basis for future change. Within popular music, young people created important new forms of performance and composition appropriate to the messages they sought to convey, but they never figured out a way to reconstruct society to make it look like the visions they conjured up in culture.

The counterculture rebels of the sixties were not as revolutionary as their spokespersons proclaimed nor as successful as their opponents alleged. Attempting to negotiate the contradictions of their time, they created a culture that was both a critique of their society and a symptom of its worst failings. But in their anarchistic impulses and erotic self-affirmation, in their egalitarian intentions and their spiritual strivings, they articulated an agenda that continues to be fought over today.