America's Uncivil Wars

The Sixties Era
from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon

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In 1958, Mao Tse-tung organized "the great leap forward" to mobilize the peasant masses of China's countryside. Six years later, a group from La Honda, California, set off on a cross-country trek to disorganize the America masses. "Get them into your movie before they get you into theirs," Ken Kesey told his motley crew. The set was America; the cast—the Merry Pranksters and anybody in their path. The vehicle was a 1939 International Harvester schoolbus laid out with bunks, a refrigerator, and a sound system amplified to blow your socks off. If the sound failed to make an impression, the bright, swirling Day-Glo paint job certainly would. A hole in the roof allowed the passengers an unimpeded view of the world.

The crew, in their long hair, costumes, masks, body paint, and irreverent swatches of American flag, looked as outrageous as the bus. Kesey financed the coast-to-coast acid bacchanalia with proceeds from his critically and commercially successful novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. That novel had featured Chief Broom, a precursor of the counterculture's fascination with Native Americans, and McMurphy, the rebel who blew the minds of the authoritarians who tried to suppress his irrepressible spirit. Along with Kesey, who called himself "the Swashbuckler," the crew included such acid luminaries as cameraman Mal Function, the Intrepid Traveler, Gretchen Fetchin the Slime Queen, Doris Delay, and at the wheel and fresh out of San Quentin prison, the amphetamine-chewing "holy primitive" of the Beats, Neal Cassady. On board to record the story of this antic odyssey was Tom Wolfe, a leading practitioner of the "new journalism." Unlike reporters whose traditions of objectivity prevented them from revealing themselves in a story, the new journalists and their experiences were the story. And this story of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters became *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, one of the bibles of the emerging counterculture.

After a stint as a laboratory guinea pig in which he sampled hallucinogenic and psychedelic drugs, Kesey had settled near the coast in La Honda. There, he continued to initiate a band of friends, faculty from nearby Stanford, beatniks, and dropout kids into the mind-bending properties of LSD. Never one short of words, Kesey described the early, uninitiated trips as "shell-shattering ordeals that left us blinking kneecap in the crack crusts of our pie-in-the-sky personalities. Suddenly people were stripped before one another and behold: we were beautiful. Naked and helpless and sensitive as a snake after skinning but far more human than that shining nightmare that had stood creaking at parade rest. We were alive and life was us."

In that outburst, Kesey captured the link between LSD and the cultural upheavals of the uncivil wars. First, Kesey had spoken of the idea of personal revelation and transformation. Most trippers thought that LSD had the power to liberate people from the repressive forms of society and return them to a state of nature. Drug-induced visions inspired transcendence to a higher creative and spiritual plain. LSD was not about thinking, but about feeling; it moved people into "the ever widening Present." In short, psychedelics had the power to remake consciousness and thereby redefine reality, or so Kesey and his Pranksters believed. There was a touch of neo-religious proselytizing in their enthusiasm for drugs. "The purpose of psychedelics," Kesey once commented, "is to learn the conditioned responses of people and then to prank them. That's the only way to get people to ask questions, and until they ask questions they're going to remain conditioned robots." Of course, with the Pranksters, you never knew when they were simply pulling your leg or, as Kesey put it, "fooling the masses."

No matter what higher purpose the Pranksters might claim, they were above all about fun. In July of 1964, they drove the bus into Phoenix to help the Republicans celebrate their convention. GOP conservatives were in the process of anointing Barry Goldwater while humiliating Nelson Rockefeller as a symbol of the eastern, internationalist liberal establishment. Imagine, then, the sight of the Merry Pranksters, decked out in American flag outfits and body paint, descending on these pillars of tradition. What planet had these aliens descended from? The sign on the back of their bus warned "Caution: Weird Load." The banner they waved announced, "A Vote for Barry Goldwater Is a Vote for Fun." Goldwater, while no stuffed shirt, was about as much fun as a glass of club soda.
Upon their arrival in New York City, cool Beat collided with hot Prankster as Cassady brought Jack Kerouac to meet Kesey and cohorts. All that West Coast madness—lights flashing, rock blaring, and an American flag-adorning sofa—was too much for Kerouac. Were they Communists? he asked as he folded the flag. He soon retreated to Massachusetts, where he lived with his mother. Tom Wolfe saw the meeting as a passing of the guard: "Kerouac was the old star. Kesey was the wild new comet from the West heading Christ knew where." So then it was on to Millbrook, where the eastern and western acid all-stars would meet for their first attempt to mind meld.

Millbrook, about seventy miles north of New York City, was the center of hunt country, where wealthy New Yorkers came to their weekend estates to ride to the hounds in the scenic hills of Dutchess County. At one of the grander estates, William Hitchcock had turned his mansion over to former Harvard professor Timothy Leary and a band of psychedelic experimenters called the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF). IFIF saw LSD as a means to achieve their goal of returning "to man's sense of nearness to himself and others, the sense of social reality that civilized man has lost." Leary first discovered psychedelics as a faculty member at Harvard, where students and faculty had participated in CIA-funded experiments in the 1950s. Leary's research dealt with psilocybin, the chemical agent in magic mushrooms. In 1960, he first tried psilocybin while on vacation in Mexico. The mushroom sent him on the "deepest religious experience" of his life. "I discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil—all lie inside my body outside my mind," he reported.

Back at Harvard, he became a combination of experimenter, missionary, revolutionary, and buckster. In his lab, he and his research team explored both the consciousness altering and religious effects of the drug. LSD proved far more potent, and to Leary's mind more "consciousness expanding," than psilocybin. It soon became a central part of his research agenda. He doled it out to almost any colleague or student who expressed an interest. One of his early converts was a prominent Washington socialite and wife of a senior CIA official, Mary Pinchot. Pinchot reported to Leary that through her, "top people in Washington are turning on." Among her romantic liaisons was the president of the United States, John Kennedy. It is not impossible that Kennedy, who apparently smoked dope in the White House and received amphetamine-laced injections from a New York doctor, also tried LSD. Certainly, both Harvard and the CIA came to question the loose way in which Leary administered his experiments. Eventually, both the government and the university began to restrict his use of either psilocybin or LSD. Leary countered that no one who had not experienced these drugs could properly judge the importance of his work or methods. As he once joked, "These drugs apparently cause panic and temporary insanity in many officials who have not taken them."

In May 1963, Harvard fired Leary's collaborator, Richard Alpert, when he defied a ban on giving LSD to students. Alpert was the first Harvard faculty member dismissed for cause in the twentieth century. Leary soon followed him out of the groves of academe. As a parting shot, he told reporters that LSD was "more important than Harvard" and spoke disparagingly of the university as "the establishment's apparatus for training consciousness contractors" for an "intellectual ministry of defense." The whiff of scandal in Cambridge caught the attention of major news media, for whom Leary provided an intriguing story. As they publicized his run-in with the university, they informed the nation about a drug that had entered America as a potential "truth serum" for the CIA. In fact, a CIA agent provided Leary with much of his experimental drug supply. Leary's indictment of Harvard, though not overtly political, had much of the same spirit that inspired the FSM at Berkeley a year later. Both challenged authority, chafed at arbitrary rules that restricted personal freedom, and flaunted convention. LSD and marijuana helped protestors pass the night in Sproul Hall during the FSM sit-in. And both movements involved members of the nation's elite dissenting from established cultural norms.

After retreating to Mexico and being expelled from there, Leary and IFIF settled in Millbrook. His group established as their goal the discovery and nurturing of the “deepest religious experience” of his life. "I discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil—all lie inside my body outside my mind," he reported.

The Pranksters descended on Millbrook. Their reception, while polite, was not especially warm. Leary never even appeared to greet them. In time, it became clear to the Pranksters that IFIF was in a different orbit. They found the academic tone incredibly stuffy. Goofing on The Tibetan Book of the Dead, they dubbed it "the trip." It lacked the frantic energy that drove the bus commune. Kesey's band preferred raucous rock to gentle contemplation. Where Leary turned on the elite, Kesey intended to democratize the acid trip. "It only works if you bring other people into it," he believed.

The Pranksters returned to the West Coast to launch the "electric Kool-Aid acid tests." Under pulsating strobe lights, with videos playing on the walls and the Grateful Dead improvising drug-induced rock, they initiated crowds of freaks into the world of acid. Kesey even invited the notorious Hell's Angels motorcycle gang to attend an acid clinic at La Honda. "We're in the same business," he told some
Angels. "You break people's bones; I break people's heads." While locals locked their doors and the police called in reinforcements, the event proved relatively mellow. Acid subdued the normally rambunctious bikers. For two days, they wandered about in a befuddled drug stupor, grooving on the gay poet Allen Ginsberg and nodding at Kesey's collection of professors and dropouts. This was the ultimate freak, without any of the cerebral restraints that alienated the Pranksters from the Millbrook scene.

Just as the New Left would emphasize action over analysis, so too Kesey and his initiates saw experience as an end unto itself. The acid tests were a combination of rock concert and dance hall party in which the audience was a critical part of the performance. The participants sought no special insight into the cosmos, though they were open to the possibility of spiritual transformation. Over time, many of the features of the acid tests would become ritualized and commercialized, but in the early years of the 1960s, the scene Kesey helped create was about spontaneity with no end in sight.

The Counterculture

Before 1967, few people outside the Bay Area knew much about the acid tests or the cultural revolution of which they were a harbinger. Most students who graduated from college before 1967 had an experience akin to that of the 1950s generation. They continued to do what students had traditionally done: go to football games, join fraternities and sororities, drink too much, and worry about careers and marriage. Surveys from that time indicate that the majority of young Americans generally shared the values of their parents' generation. Certainly, at major universities with adjoining progressive college towns, small groups of bohemian and radical students pushed beyond conventional cultural and political boundaries. They might read Herman Hesse, Freud, and Marx, listen to jazz, folk music, and acid rock, experiment with sex and drugs, organize political protest, or do all those things and more. All the same, the rebelliousness that defined the sixties remained on the fringe, except when the media focused on some particularly unexpected event like Greensboro sit-ins, Berkeley's free speech movement, or Leary's departure from Harvard. Only at those moments did the vast majority of young Americans begin to get an inkling that the times were changing in ways that began to prick their interest.

Between the free speech movement and the summer of 1967, the elements of the cultural upheaval percolated into the mainstream. Many parents and politicians began to see young Americans, certainly those under thirty, as a discreet political and cultural force. Whether marching for civil rights, protesting the Vietnam War, or engaging in outrageous behaviors, the young seemed increasingly determined to challenge authority and convention across a broad front. Most adults lumped all the rebels together into something they loosely identified as a counterculture, often mistaking a common preference for long hair, beads, outlandish clothes, and other badges of difference as the uniform of a coherent movement. But what many worried and outraged adults condemned as a movement led by long-haired hippie radicals (undoubtedly seduced by Communists) was in reality an amorphous trend spontaneously generated. It swirled around three poles: Black Power, the New Left, and the hippies. Individuals generally gravitated toward one of those poles but adopted styles and values from all three.

The criticism of hippies as dirty, degenerate, and depraved masked a subtext about race, social class, and gender. Youth behaviors upset the inherited order in all those categories. If you took the most negatively stereotyped groups in America in the early 1960s—Commies, blacks, the poor, and homosexuals—youth culture contained elements from all of them. Aggressive egalitarianism and rejection of the capitalist ethos and rock and roll. The ground occupied by the counterculture percolated into the mainstream. Many parents and politicians concluded, sometimes mistaking a subversive countenance and links to foreign movements.
Hippies distinguished between "drugs" and "dope." To them, "drugs" was a more inclusive term that covered substances that were both good and bad—from marijuana to heroin. "Dope" applied to those substances hippies favored—marijuana, LSD, peyote, psilocybin, hashish, mescaline, and even banana peels. Bad drugs included amphetamines (especially speed or methadrine), opiates (heroin, morphine, opium), and possibly cocaine, though that is where the line often blurred. Many hippies approved of all drugs; a few rejected them altogether. Generally, the distinction followed medical lines, with dope applying to the largely nonaddictive drugs. That meant that most hippies rejected alcohol, the establishment's drug of choice. Alcohol and the other addictive drugs tended to inhibit consciousness—in reality to make the user stupid. Good drugs or dope expanded consciousness and in that way helped promote a new mindset free of the acquisitive and repressive features of the old one.

The dope culture had several features that explained its appeal. Those who turned on discovered that dope enhanced the pleasures of food, sex, and music. Even more, dope appealed to rebels because its use flaunted authority. For decades, adults had warned the young of the perils of narcotics, a category in which they lumped soft drugs like marijuana and hard drugs like heroin. The antidrug movie Reefer Madness (1935) predicted that flirtation with dope would lead inevitably to a life of addiction and crime. As drug use became more popular, a shrill public outcry accelerated law enforcement efforts to repress the drug epidemic. As a result, the decision to smoke marijuana or drop acid was not just a deviation from convention, but a decision to break the law. Those who turned on joined a secret society that practiced its illicit rituals with shades down, windows open, incense burning, and towels across the door jamb to avoid detection. Loud music heightened the communal experience. That marijuana proved so much less potent or addictive than claimed only served further to erode the credibility of the authorities. As one DSM veteran observed, "When a young person took his first pull of psychoactive smoke, he . . . inhaled a certain way of dressing, talking, acting, certain attitudes. One became a youth criminal against the state."

Drugs posed a special problem for political radicals. Like hippies, many on the Left took up dope because it was fun and made a powerful antiestablishment statement. On the other hand, the dope culture was the antithesis of the revolutionary culture radicals envisioned, "the ultimate giggle," as one called it. Politics required discipline, organization, and action. Radicals discovered that after smoking dope, "the tension of a political life dissolved; you could take refuge from the Vietnam War, from your own hope, terror, anguish." So radicals and hippies coexisted in an uneasy relationship. The liberation aesthetics of the hippie universe was appealing for the spiritual freedom it conferred, but was too frivolous for those committed to the politics of liberation. Conversely, the discipline required of successful political action was too severe for the free spirits of the counterculture.

The tension between the political and cultural wings of the youth rebellion became evident at the Berkeley Vietnam Day rally in October 1965. The organizers
had planned an around-the-clock teach-in on the war and a protest march against the nearby military base. Among those asked to speak was Ken Kesey. None among the organizers knew anything about his politics, but they were certain that he shared their anti-establishment values. Besides, as a celebrity author and local legend, his presence would swell the crowd. Coinciding with demonstrations around the world, the rally attracted some 15,000 people. Kesey and the Pranksters prepared for quite another kind of event. They loaded the bus with guns and adorned it with swastikas, iron crosses, an American eagle, and other military symbols. They also recruited some Hell's Angels to escort their band. Cranked up on acid, they paradied off to Berkeley. As antiwar speakers warmed up the crowd for their march on the Oakland Army terminal, Kesey grew ever more impatient. He and the Pranksters found all this earnestness pathetic. Where was the fun and good humor? Why did these people take themselves so seriously? Didn’t the speaker up there have a resemblance to Mussolini, he asked one of the organizers.

When Kesey began to speak, the Pranksters plugged in electric guitars and began to tune up. What he had to say was not what the crowd expected to hear: “You know you’re not going to stop this war with this rally, by marching... That’s what they do... And that’s the same game you’re playing... their game.” As the stunned crowd tried to figure out if they had heard Kesey right, he pulled out a harmonica and began to play Home on the Range, backed up by the Pranksters doing an imitation of music. The crowd grew uneasy. Kesey finished his rambling speech, not with a call to march, but a call to nihilism: “There’s only one thing gonna to do any good at all... And that’s everybody just look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say... Fuck it.” The profanity stunned the crowd as its moral fervor drained away.

Politics was simply not Kesey’s thing; acid and goofing were. Leary may have been the media’s “Dr. LSD,” but Kesey was the messiah of acid. So, like a preacher, he organized the psychedelic equivalent of tent meetings, or what he called the acid test. As much as any emergent phenomenon of the 1960s, the acid tests anticipated the cultural style of what would become the era’s youth rebellion. That style was distinctly West Coast—part San Francisco bohemian and part Hollywood. The costuming was highly eclectic, mixing elements of buckskin and Indian paint, circus performers and harlequins, military and Salvation Army surplus, and Flash Gordon sci-fi. Multimedia sound and lights accompanied by the raucous music added to the sensory overload. Around 5 or 6 P.M., the folks would start dropping acid to prepare for a 9 o’clock party. Tom Wolfe described the scene at the last acid test: “a ballroom surreallyistically seething with a couple of thousand bodies stoned out of their everlovin’ braces in crazy costumes and obscene makeup with a raucous rock ‘n’ roll band and strobeoscopic lights and a thunder machine and balloons and heads and streamers and electronic equipment and the back of a guy’s coat pleading please don’t believe in magic to a girl dancing with four inch eye lashes so even the goddam Pinkerton guards were contact high.”

Wolfe makes a plausible case that the acid tests gave birth to the psychedelic look that defined the public perception of the counterculture. Poster art dominated by swirling Day-Glo paints often adorned the walls. The use of sound and light effects to complement the music made multimedia a counterculture staple. One critic defined acid rock as pioneered by groups like Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Jefferson Airplane, and the Grateful Dead as “turned on music” or “old-timey stretched out blues songs performed by people who were themselves stoned for the dancing and tribe-gathering pleasure of an audience that was likewise.” Rather than follow the usual concert format of two- to three-minute covers of well-known songs performed over four or five sets of eight songs, the Dead might play one of their own songs for ten to thirty minutes. They acquired the most exotic, state-of-the-art electronics, with which they produced the weird sounds and special effects that came to define acid rock.

The Dead could afford expensive gear not because of any commercial success: in fact, they often played for free. Rather, they had a financial patron who, as much as Kesey, any Freak, or any band, would make San Francisco an incubator for the counterculture. That was Augustus Owlsley Stanley III. Owlsley, as he was known, hailed from Kentucky, where part of his family’s fortune came from distilling bourbon. Though he was brilliant and from a distinguished family, his prep school expelled him from ninth grade for bringing alcohol to school. By age eighteen, he was on his own. After stints in engineering school and the Air Force, he migrated to the Berkeley area, where in the Kentucky tradition, he became a bootleg chemist. His first batch of LSD entered the market around the time Kesey began to plan the acid tests. Though LSD was not at that time illegal, Owlsley chose to live the life of a recluse. Occasionally, he would appear on the Freak circuit in Millbrook or at an acid test. That is where he heard the Grateful Dead and was so impressed he underwrote their early career.

Owlsley, for all his eccentricities, was too much the wise guy and too sophisticated to fit comfortably into the West Coast scene. Still, his product was revered by Owlsley whether he operated from the profit motive or out of reverence for LSD. He

![Molecular structure of LSD](image-url)
The popularity of his goods rested partly on quality and partly on mystique. To distinguish each batch, Owsley color-coded the tabs. Heads who believed each color had a particular quality had special affection for the blues—the perfect compromise between edgy greens and mellow reds. (In fact, the quality of Owsley's product resulted largely from its purity and uniformity.) An assistant captured the messianic spirit of their acid empire: "Every time we'd make another batch and release it on the street, something beautiful would flower, and of course we believed it was because of what we were doing. We believed we were the architects of social change, that our mission was to change the world substantially, and what was going on in the Haight was a sort of laboratory experiment, a microscopic example of what would happen world wide."

 Eccentrics like Owsley or charismatic gonzo's like Kesey had no trouble finding a following in the Bay Area. San Francisco had long attracted a mixture of political radicals, cultural bohemians, and crazies. In the late fifties, the Beats had gathered in the North Beach area, until a combination of gawking tourists, police harassment, and changing times had driven them out. Some had drifted across town to the Haight-Ashbury area, where run-down Victorian houses were available at low rents. There, they were joined by disaffected radicals and academics dropping out of Berkeley, a new generation of artists, writers, and musicians, and various street scenes, runaways, and social misfits. In Haight-Ashbury, they did not simply transplant the Beat scene, but produced the essence of the counterculture. Rejecting the Beats nihilism, the new generation celebrated good times and good feelings. Where the Beats gravitated toward downer drugs including heroin, the hippies favored hallucinogens, especially marijuana and LSD. The Beats had tended to isolate themselves and to gather in intimate little clubs; the hippies loved the community street and the spirit of medieval fairs. They often formed tribes or families for communal living. Members generally viewed sex as a source of pleasure and a means to engender goodwill between people. To that end, they encouraged nonexclusive sexual relations and open marriages.

But what most distinguished the hippies from the Beats was music. The Beats liked music for listening—folk, classical, and cool jazz. Hippies wanted to dance. On the night Kesey rained his rhetorical water on the Vietnam Day parade, an organization called the Family Dog threw a party for the people of Haight-Ashbury. The Family Dog party was the inspiration of Chet Helms, a defrocked Baptist minister who had fled the stifling conservatism of Texas for the freedom of the Bay Area. With him, he brought a raw blues singer named Janis Joplin. While Joplin hooked up with the local music scene, Helms promoted the antic notion that people should turn on and dance at rock concerts. So the Family Dog rented a large union hall off Fisherman's Wharf and invited the neighbors to what was called "A Tribute to Dr. Strange." Among those attending were radicals from the Vietnam Day demonstrations, neighborhood Freaks decked out in weird costumes, and a few zoned-out Hell's Angels. To entertain, the Family Dog invited a number of local bands, highlighted by the psychedelic sound of the Jefferson Airplane (pre-Grace Slick).

Those in attendance that night sensed that the forces of the Haight scene had converged into something powerful. Kesey's acid tests, Owsley's blues, and the Bay Area's rock underground had been unified with the neighborhood's motley bohemians to form what looked and sounded like a counterculture. Kesey saw in that gathering a way to further his quest to turn on the masses. Two months later, the Pranksters decided to throw a free three-day party called the Trips Festival. This bash was the apotheosis of the acid tests. The idea actually came from Stewart Brand, a biologist, who would pass on to fame and fortune by publishing The Whole Earth Catalogue, a guide to the goods and ideas critical to alternative lifestyles. Much of the organizing was done by Bill Graham, a refugee from New York. Graham was a veteran of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a group frequently busted by police for doing agitprop theater (inflammatory political theater) in public places. In that way, he had the respect of the heads (cultural rebels) and the fists (political rebels).

The Trips Festival was a coming-out party for Freaks and LSD—thousands showed up, everyone obviously stoned. For the first night, Brand chose the theme "America Needs Indians." The revelers displayed all manner of Indian and south western apparel, including one who advertised himself as "Under Ass Wizard Mojo Indian Fighter." The second night belonged to the Pranksters. At the center of the hall, they had erected a tower of platforms and pipes on which they arrayed the electronic gear used to produce the multimedia effects. Lights flashed, multiple movie-projectors shone on the walls, huge speakers blared, and women in leotards pranced about blowing dog whistles. Kesey observed all the madness from a balcony, dressed in a space suit to avoid detection. Jerry Garcia of the Dead, who performed at the festival along with Big Brother, struggled to find words for the three-day freakout: "Thousands of people man, all helplessly stoned, all finding themselves in a room of thousands of people, none of whom any of them were afraid of. . . . It was," he concluded, "magic, far out beautiful magic."

Spreading the Word

By January 1966, word of the "magic" brewing in San Francisco was spreading across the land. The sheer mobility of American youth guaranteed that no phenomenon as colorful and compelling as the counterculture would remain isolated. Hitchhiking, cheap youth airfares, travel to colleges and universities, and the rest less tradition of Americans encouraged movement from coast to coast. People who visited the Bay Area brought the word back across the nation. In addition, other bohemian communities around the country had subcultures of their own. Greenwich Village continued to spawn its own harder version of the ferment on the West Coast, though the scene there was livelier in art and theater than in music. Los Angeles and Austin, Texas, each produced new groups and hit songs. Perhaps the
closest rival of the Haight as a counterculture incubator was not in the United States at all. London had become the center of the mod phenomenon that produced its own distinctive counterculture.

No element did more to spread the word than rock musicians. Media innovations played a part in promoting that music revolution. The solid-state technology that made the modern computer possible also helped create smaller and less expensive radios and stereos as well as new recording and sound equipment. Until the early sixties, cheap 45 records dominated the pop music scene. Their short (2–3 minute) length suited the purpose of commercial AM radio. By playing more songs, stations appealed to a broader audience and hence attracted more advertisers. During the folk music phase of the early 1960s, many people acquired long-play 33-rpm equipment, previously favored for classical and jazz listening. The availability of a longer-play format allowed folk and rock performers to break out of the restrictive time limits of 45-rpm records.

FM radio also played a critical role. The FM band had a more limited range than AM but higher-quality reception. Most radio networks simply reproduced AM programming on their FM stations. In 1966, the FCC decreed that FM stations must have their own programming. Some responded by appealing to niche markets for jazz, classical, ethnic, or rhythm-and-blues. Garage bands, inspired by the Beatles and other British groups, filled one niche that opened in the mid-1960s. Since many garage bands like the Dead played their own songs to live audiences, their music tended to have a local following. Thus, the greater length of their songs disqualified them for AM top forty radio. As a result, few people outside the Bay Area actually heard acid rock before 1967. By then, a new breed of counterculture disc jockeys had begun to feature these groups on FM stations. They also featured music by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, or Bob Dylan, who had large followings with hip audiences. Since those audiences were primarily white, programming remained largely segregated. Hip stations played hip rhythm and blues, or what was by then known as “soul music.” With the exception of a slicker pop sound coming out of Detroit’s Motown, black performers were limited largely to stations targeted at black listeners.

Beginning in 1965, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and a host of other British-invasion bands began to introduce counterculture themes into mainstream popular culture. No one more powerfully addressed the sixties ferment or influenced the music of the era than Dylan. By the time he appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in the summer of 1965, he had emerged as the leading songwriter and performer of the folk music circle. Peter, Paul, and Mary had turned two of his songs, “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right,” into top forty hits. The political edge of songs like “Masters of War” and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” added to Dylan’s standing with leftist students and civil rights activists. His songs also captured the romantic yearnings and alienation prevalent in the emerging counterculture.

Several factors shifted Dylan from the world of folk music to both folk and acid rock, perhaps the single most defining style of the era. In the early sixties, Bay Area groups had begun to develop a folk-rock style with an acid twist. LSD also helped propel Dylan’s shift toward a rock sound. His initiation to acid occurred in early 1964, though he had been smoking dope well before then. A friend discovered the time had come to turn Dylan on. First trips are often harrowing, but, as his friend recalled, “actually, for Dylan. Everybody had a lot of fun. And if you ask me, it was the beginning of a new phase for Dylan. After that, his lyrics became more poetical and less political, more imagistic...”}

The Great Leap Forward | 21
explicit as Dylan urged his audience to "go get stoned." Some radio stations censored the song, along with the Byrd's "Eight Miles High."

Dylan and the Byrds connected folk rock to the pop audience that until then belonged largely to the Beatles. Into this circle came such groups as the Lovin' Spoonful, Simon and Garfunkel, Sonny and Cher, and Buffalo Springfield, who would dissolve and reform as Crosby, Stills, Nash, and (sometimes) Young. The Beatles, it just so happened, were headed that way themselves. Almost no popular cultural phenomenon in history equals the worldwide excitement the Beatles inspired. By the end of 1965, they had sold some 140 million records. Their songs continued to dominate the pop charts. A second movie, Help!, had substantial box office success. Frenzied crowds still swarmed around them on their concert tours. So enormous was their appeal that revenue from their music helped offset the British international trade deficit.

In 1965, the Beatles still performed largely catchy ballads, love songs, and danceable tunes within the standard 2-3 minute pop time frame. Their personal style, despite conservative objection to their longish hair and mod clothes, was relatively tame. They still wore matching suits during their concert tours. Adults liked them almost as much as teenagers did. Hip fans sometimes contrasted them rather snidely to major British rivals, especially the Rolling Stones, who by 1965 had begun to challenge the Beatles command of the pop charts. Where the Beatles seemed cuddly and cute, the Stones snapped and snarled. Their music was distinctly black, drawing heavily on Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Mick Jagger projected sexual ambiguity in a way that appealed to rebels and offended most adults. Their provocative pelvic thrusts and vomiting caused Ed Sullivan to issue a public apology after they appeared on his TV show. "I was shocked when I saw them," he confessed. Ironically, in private the Beatles were the more honestly low rent of the two groups. While the Beatles were honing their music in sleazy Hamburg clubs, the Stones were in college.

Acid affected the British music scene every bit as decisively as it did Dylan and the Bay Area bands. After a rather frightful introduction to LSD in early 1965, John Lennon soon began dropping acid routinely, and it began to show in his songwriting. Hints of the psychedelic mood began to surface on the Beatles' late 1965 Rubber Soul album. Several tracks, especially "Norwegian Wood," played with a sitar, and "I'm Looking Through You (Where Did You Go?)" evoked drug images, if only by double entendre and implication. By 1966, the impact of both drugs and Dylan were more obvious. On Revolver, the cover has a psychedelic image, the Beatles in dark granny glasses look decidedly hip, and they sing more bingly about drugs and alienation—as in Eleanor Rigby, with its refrain, "look at all the lonely people, where do they all come from." Even the seemingly innocent Yellow Submarine, which inspired a zany feature cartoon, was a sly allusion to amphetamines. As the Beatles became more countercultural, the Stones became more outrageous, appearing in full drag on one album sleeve. They, too, made drug imagery a central part of their music in such songs as "Paint It Black," "19th Nervous Breakdown," and "Lady Jane." British authorities eventually struck back by infiltrating a police informer into the Stones' inner circle and busting them for illegal possession.

Drug imagery and alienation were more a subtheme than a preoccupation of mass culture before 1968. Songs with conventional themes and styles still filled the charts. In the fall of 1965, a few DJs featured the battle of the two Barrys (McGuire and Sadler). Listeners voted on whether they preferred McGuire's sharply cynical "Eve of Destruction" (" Violence flarin', bullets loadin' / You're old enough to kill but not for votin')" to Sgt. Sadler's patriotic "Ballad of the Green Berets" (" Fighting soldiers from the sky"). Out of Motown came a succession of slickly produced, gospel influenced, rhythm and blues hits by groups like the Four Tops, the Temptations, and the Supremes. From 1965 to 1966, six straight Supremes songs reached number one. The Beach Boys continued to turn out their bright pop harmonies. Even "old blue eyes," Frank Sinatra, the teen idol of the 1940s, had his first million-selling record.

Backlash

Most Americans remained only vaguely aware of the cultural ferment in their midst as the Baltimore Orioles crushed the L.A. Dodgers in the World Series. Many had been dismayed when heavyweight boxing champion Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali and embraced the Nation of Islam. All the same, far more were concerned with whether Mr. Phelps would accept his impossible mission or Captain Kirk and the crew of the starship Enterprise would best the Klingons on the new Star Trek. In real life, NASA's Gemini launches achieved a series of successful space missions that brought the nation closer to realizing President Kennedy's promise to land a man on the moon before the decade was out. Enjoying a widespread prosperity, consumers lapped up such new products as Gatorade and Spaghetti Os. Kids bought Whamo superballs and tabletop slotcar racers. While the term "acid" did enter popular speech in 1966, so too did "beach bunny," "dove," and "hawk," and "integrated circuit" or "chip."

Word about LSD was not confined to rock musicians, drug gurus, and underground newspapers, however. As more Americans began to discover recreational drugs, the mass media publicized the acid scene. Rather than take a sober look at pharmacological and psychotropic issues, the media reacted with something akin to hysteria. "A Monster in Our Midst—A Drug Called LSD," ran one shrill headline. "Thrill Drug Wars Mind, Kills," raved another. Henry Luce, the influential editor of Time-Life magazines and an early experimenter with LSD, warned his magazine's readers that a person "can become permanently deranged through a single terrifying LSD experience." Two claims, neither validated, buttressed the case against acid. One was the notion of "flashbacks." Some medical authorities suggested that LSD induced psychotic states of mind that often resulted in violence. Worse yet, the episode could recur at any time in the future, in essence suggesting LSD induced long-term insanity. Then there was the worrisome claim that LSD caused permanent chromosome
damage. Those contemplating turning on now had to conjure the image of mutant children. Even after government scientists failed to substantiate that claim, they remained silent about their findings while the media issued dire warnings.

Once the media discovers an issue, can the politicians be far behind? By 1966, the Senate had begun hearings on legislation to deal with the “LSD problem.” That there was a serious public health issue requiring legislation was not so clear. LSD was still a fringe phenomenon, though its use was spreading. So the “LSD problem” was far more emotionally than statistically compelling. Classification of a substance as a drug is most often a cultural and political issue, not a pharmacological one. Those drugs most heavily stigmatized are those associated with the poor, ethnic minorities, or subcultures—for example, opium with Asians, cocaine with blacks, marijuana with Latinos and beatniks, and peyote with Native Americans. The substances that cause the most serious public health problems—alcohol and tobacco—have not been similarly proscribed because they are the drugs of choice of the dominant culture.

LSD created a special problem of demonization. Use and abuse was growing most rapidly not among dangerous minorities, but among children of the affluent white middle class. Once the media conflated drug use and political protest, politicians realized that by discrediting the drug culture, they could attack all the troubling currents flowing out of the counterculture. As Octavio Paz, a guru of mind-altering drugs, observed, “The authorities do not behave as though they were trying to stamp out a harmful vice, but as though they were trying to stamp out dissidence.” Noting the ideological zeal of the crusade against LSD, Paz observed that “they are punishing a heresy, not a crime.” Who was more of a heretic than Timothy Leary? And whose outrageous opinions were more likely than Leary’s to discredit the counterculture in the eyes of mainstream America? If not Leary, then how about Allen Ginsberg, an admitted homosexual? And if that did not suffice, why not introduce the public to Arthur Kleps, who called himself “Chief Boooho,” founder of the Neo-American Boooho Church? The Booohoos claimed for LSD the same sacramental role as peyote served for some Indians. A judge rejected that claim on the grounds that a group that used “Row, Row Your Boat” as its anthem could not be serious enough to qualify as a church.

These were the three “friendly” witness called by the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency headed by Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut. Dodd had earned his spurs in the McCarthyite congressional posse of the 1950s. Echoing earlier Red scare themes, Dodd specifically condemned the “pseudo intellectuals” (read Leary and Ginsberg) who associated drug use with “imaginary freedoms.” Imagine then how impressed the sanctimonious senators of the committee were when Kleps likened being born in America in 1948 to being “born into an insane asylum.” Or when he contended one expert who had denounced the idea that LSD was “mind expanding,” “If I were to give you an IQ test,” Kleps supposed, “and one of the walls of the room opened up giving you a vision of the blazing glories of the central galactic suns, and at the same time your childhood began to unmeld before your inner eye like a three dimensional movie, you would not do well on an intelligence test.” His inquisitors were neither persuaded nor amused. As Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain argued in their history of LSD, “it was a lot easier to discredit the radical cause if the rest of society could be convinced that those uppity radicals were out of their minds.”

Criminalization of LSD only added to the growing polarization of American society. Many of those in the counterculture embraced the spiritual and reforming possibilities Ginsberg and Leary claimed for psychedelics. Now those who dropped acid, even in search of spiritual uplift, would become outlaws. That put them in company with the martyrs of earlier religious inquisitions. And for those for whom acid was just a good high, criminalization only dramatized the hypocrisy of a society addicted to alcohol, tranquilizers, and nicotine.

**Coming Together**

C'mon people now

Smile on your brother

Ev'rybody get together

Try to love one another right now


Several historians have referred to the early period of the counterculture as a first wave. As this wave created, mind-altering drugs, sexual freedom, and the new sound of rock and roll unleashed a spirit of exuberance and hope. The lyrics to “Get Together,” popularized by the Youngbloods, captured the era’s vision of brotherly love. Many people, no matter how naively, believed that the counterculture might contain a blueprint for a more harmonious world. Official hostility only confirmed for cultural rebels that they had found a new way. They chose to ignore or at least discount corrosive forces working to undermine what they envisioned as a new world order dawning in the age of Aquarius. While they preached peace and love, the Vietnam War continued to escalate. As they tried to build egalitarian communities, racial violence rocked the nation’s cities. As they sought to expand their minds, authorities cracked down on drugs. But commercialism proved the most invidious of all the forces arrayed against them. Their efforts to build a more authentic society based on real human needs fell before the onslaught of American consumer culture that did so much to define and popularize it. The media, drug dealers, record companies, greedy landlords, fashion designers, and a host of consumer goods manufacturers discovered there was gold in them that countercultural hills.

A certain commercial streak had always coexisted with the counterculture’s free spirit. New lifestyles required accoutrements. Entrepreneurs opened shops to sell bongs, pipes, psychedelic posters, Indian bedspreads, Mexican serapes, records, vegetarian food, army-navy surplus, or love beads. These were mostly low-budget affairs, taking advantage of empty urban storefronts deserted in the suburban boom
of the fifties. As quickly as they sprouted, most hip businesses withered and died, the victims of the traditional forces of capitalism: lack of capital, excess competition, changing fashions, and slim profit margins. Hostile merchants pressured the city to enforce zoning regulations requiring expensive improvement. Hippie values—a lack of ambition, a militant attitude that made regular hours a problem, a spirit of sharing that included the ever-popular five-finger discount, and a desire to pursue more spiritual goals—contradicted sound business practices. One store, the Psychedelic Shop in the heart of Haight-Ashbury, embodied the uneasy balance between commercialism and spiritualism. Owners Ron and Jay Thelin made their store into a gathering place for LSD culture. Their shelves held any drug-related paraphernalia a head might desire. But the brothers were as concerned with promoting a way of life as with making money. They envisioned a neighborhood with "fine tea shops with big jars of fine marijuana and chemist shops with the finest psychedelic chemicals." A bulletin board offered a place to publicize local events. Most people came to the store just to hang out and talk or to buy and sell dope. Hippies generally viewed dope trafficking more as a service than as a business, though there was money to be made.

Every hip community had at least one underground newspaper, often distributed for free. The alternative press allowed hippies to document the biases and censure with which the mainstream media treated the counterculture. Underground papers gave the kind of attention to music and drugs that the commercial press lavished on sports and politics. Rolling Stone magazine turned music coverage into a huge commercial success. The magazine pioneered rock criticism, and through its stories word about new performers reached across the nation. A vibrant counterculture comic book industry produced such offbeat cartoonists as Robert Crumb of Zap Comix. In Detroit, musician John Sinclair joined other cultural activists to create Trans-Love Energies Unlimited, or what they called "a total tribal living and working commune." An underground newspaper called the Sun became a voice through which they promoted rock concerts, psychedelic art shows, and guerrilla theater. Police harassment drove the commune out to Ann Arbor, where it transformed itself into the White Panther Party, dedicated to subversion "by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets."

Consistent with that spirit was the array of free goods and services spawned by the counterculture. Free universities and alternative schools became commonplace. Hip legal aid clinics defended those busted for drugs. Volunteers staffed drug hotlines, mental health clinics, and treatment centers for such missteps as venereal disease, bad trips, and unexpected pregnancies. Food and clothing co-ops helped hippies survive almost without income. Communes offered housing, sometimes with a spiritual theme. Every street corner became a potential stage for musicians, jugglers, dancers, and improvisational theater. No group more flamboyantly proselytized the ethos of the free than the Diggers. "Every brother should have what he needs to do his own thing," a Digger manifesto declared. To that end, they proposed "Free Families" (ranging from Black Panthers to radical street gangs to love communities) who would "develop Free Cities where everything that is necessary can be obtained for free by those involved in the various activities of the various clans."

The group, offspring of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, derived its name from a seventeenth-century English radical agrarian cult. The original Diggers viewed money and private property as instruments of the Devil. Adopting an early-­mediaval attitude that made regular hours a problem, a Digger scene in the heart of Haight-Ashbury, embodied the uneasy balance between commercialism and spiritualism. Owners Ron and Jay Thelin made their store into a gathering place for LSD culture. Their shelves held any drug-related paraphernalia a head might desire. But the brothers were as concerned with promoting a way of life as with making money. They envisioned a neighborhood with "fine tea shops with big jars of fine marijuana and chemist shops with the finest psychedelic chemicals." A bulletin board offered a place to publicize local events. Most people came to the store just to hang out and talk or to buy and sell dope. Hippies generally viewed dope trafficking more as a service than as a business, though there was money to be made.

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The group, offspring of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, derived its name from a seventeenth-century English radical agrarian cult. The original Diggers viewed money and private property as instruments of the Devil. Adopting an early form of Communism, they squatted on the commons and gave free food to the poor until church authorities forced them against them. Around 1966, the new Diggers deserted the political scene in Berkeley to bring their own brand of free-wheeling Robin Hoodism to the Haight. The Digger scene was an "all for free" free-for-all. With money from Owsley Stanley and food liberated from stores or donated by sympathetic merchants, they operated a soup kitchen. Every day at four P.M. they provided a free meal to anyone who came to their corner of Golden Gate Park. They occasionally gave out free dope, "free" money, and "liberated" goods from their Free Store.

At the heart of the Diggers' activities was a form of performance art designed to put on the system. As dusk settled over the Haight one day, hundreds of street people climbed to the rooftops armed with rear-view mirrors the Diggers had picked up by thousands in the streets below. The police soon arrived to clear the crowds away and unwittingly became part of the performance. Reflecting the sunset was but one of many Digger-inspired "rituals of release" designed to reclaim "territory (sunset, traffic, public joy) through spirit." For the Diggers this was participatory theater, or what they described as "a poetry of festivals and crowds with people pouring into the streets."

Those who saw the Diggers as a hippie Goodwill misunderstood them. They were significantly older than most of the radicals and hippies, and several, like former junkie Emmett Grogan, had considerable experience with the criminal justice system. Unlike the New Left or the innocent spirits who drifted into Haight-Ashbury, the Diggers had no illusions that the system could be reformed. "Free" was not about charity, but a way to subvert the money game that dominated straight society. In a world of bounders and thieves, only an anarchist culture could liberate the human spirit from the shackles of the system. Nor did the Diggers share the hippie faith that acid would offer salvation by moving people to a better place. The Diggers liked acid, but as an end unto itself. "If transcendence was only possible when people could acquire life's essentials—food, clothing, housing, and art—from outside the system.

Unlike the Diggers, most elements of the counterculture welcomed publicity as a way to spread their message. Antiwar demonstrations were planned to maximize press coverage. Similarly, Timothy Leary and other drug gurus seldom shunned an opportunity for media celebrity. Many of the acid rock bands began to cover the fame and fortune that Dylan and the Beatles had achieved. The popularity of the Trips Festival inspired Bill Graham to book the Fillmore-Ballroom, where he staged regular light shows and dance concerts—free. Prior to them, most of the bands...
saw themselves much in the Digger spirit as community performers. They gave free concerts, where they played for drugs or just for the fun of it. Graham’s chief competitor, Chet Helms, tried to keep that spirit alive. He ran his concerts at the Avalon ballroom more like community socials. Since many people came for free, he could not always pay the performers. Not that they minded that much. The rapport between audiences and the band was a distinctive quality of the San Francisco music scene. Business skills and ticket receipts, however, gave Graham the upper hand in attracting top groups to the Fillmore. He could sign the big-name local bands because he was able to pay them. He also developed a direct line to the record companies. Many of the companies who had missed signing the Beatles and the other English invasion bands were determined to cash in on the new West Coast acid rock. But the bands that turned on San Francisco crowds often had to add new performers and a different sound to make successful records.

In such ways, an uneasy tension between community and commerce troubled the Haight, even as it planned the event that announced the counterculture to the world. That was the first “Human Be-in.” The moving spirit behind this communal gathering was Michael Bowen, an agent for a group called the Psychedelic Rangers. Bowen and the Rangers had close ties to the Oracle, an underground paper dedicated to Timothy Leary’s vision of an LSD nirvana. Together they percolated an idea to take the Trips Festival/acid test concept to a higher orbit of spiritual energy. They would call it a “gathering of the tribes.” In particular, they hoped to ease the tension between the heads and fists by turning the radicals on to LSD. In that way, as the Oracle put it, they would create a “union of love and activism previously separated by categorical dogma and label mongering.” To assist their efforts, they enlisted the help of Vietnam Day-organizer Jerry Rubin, a hardcore Marxist who had recently discovered the joys of acid. An underground press release, designed to alert the mainstream media, announced “Berkeley political activists and the love generation of the Haight-Ashbury will join together . . . to powwow, celebrate, and prophesy the epoch of liberation, love peace, compassion and unity of mankind.” Organizers secured a permit from the city to hold the Be-in on a polo field in Golden Gate Park.

At one end, they erected a small bandstand from which the entertainment—poetry, music, chanting, mime—would just happen. Beat poet Gary Snyder opened the day by blowing mellow tones out of a conch shell.

And the crowds came—some 25,000 people of all ages wandered by to be swept up in the good vibrations of doing and protesting nothing in particular. The Hell’s Angels were there to provide security and round up lost children. The scent of dope mingled with incense, while free acid, courtesy of Owlsley and the Diggers, flowed all day. An all-star lineup of hip gurus was on hand to bless the occasion. Timothy Leary, decked out like a Buddhist holy man in white pajamas, highlighted the celebration of acid. Leary understood how to preach to a stoned audience. He limited himself to pithy aphorisms about altered consciousness—“the only way out is in,” whatever that might mean. As the founder of the League of Spiritual Discovery (get it? LSD), he shared his two holy injunctions: (1) “Thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow man”; (2) “Thou shalt not prevent thy fellow man from altering his own consciousness.”

Many of those gathered found Leary’s brew of religious revival and psychedelic liberation old news. They had already entered or rejected the psychedelic revolution. The Diggers, in spite of themselves, catered the Be-in with free food and drugs. They resented the idea of an organized event with planned performances that distanced the crowd from participation. The elevated stage, they felt, spoke of the old hierarchical fashion with them-celebrities like Leary and Ginsberg-looking down on the rest of us. The media predictably had a field day. Seldom had they ever had an event so given to producing memorable images. All three networks sent camera crews and followed up with stories on the “flower children” and “love generation.” Herb Caen of the San Francisco Chronicle made perhaps the most enduring contribution when he called them all “hippies” and the label stuck. California governor Ronald Reagan, with his ear for Middle American sensibilities, scornfully dismissed a hippie as a person who “dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.”

The reaction of Helen Swick Perry captured a sense of what people experienced that day. As a mental health researcher from Berkeley, Perry welcomed the prospect of seeing the spirit of the Haight “up close and personal.” The crowds streaming into the park “all seemed enchanted, happy, and smiled like a welcoming committee, upon us as they trundled along with baby carriages and picnic hampers.” Each person, whether in costume or regular clothes, carried some sign of participation—“a young boy with a nasturtium behind his ear, a gray-haired woman with a flower tied on her cane with a ribbon.” Upon arriving, Perry was immediately struck that this corner of the park had been turned into a medieval fair, with banners streaming in the breeze. All day people gathered on their blankets, occasionally wandering to the stage to hear the music, the poetry, and the speeches. Sometime in the afternoon a parachutist drifted unannounced into the midst of the crowd. When it was over, the organizers asked the gathered tribes to leave the park clean” and they did, much to the amazement of the police. San Francisco’s finest had kept a benevolent eye on the event so given to producing memorable images. All day people gathered on their blankets, occasionally wandering to the stage to hear the music, the poetry, and the speeches. Sometime in the afternoon a parachutist drifted unannounced into the midst of the crowd. When it was over, the organizers asked the gathered tribes to leave the park clean” and they did, much to the amazement of the police. San Francisco’s finest had kept a benevolent eye on the

The Great Freak Forward
mayor of Berkeley on a platform of ending the war and legalizing marijuana. Across the country, antiwar activists in New York, led by Abbie Hoffman, among others, staged "Flower Power Day," meant to look like a Be-in to attract the hip community, but in reality a march against the war.

Ultimately the two communities could do little more than coexist. The New Left continued to respect the hippies’ “peace and love” ethos. And most of the New Left adopted the long hair, costuming, drugs, and antimaterialist lifestyles that became the outward manifestation of the counterculture’s dissidence. Hippies, for their part, shared much of the New Left’s political agenda, even as they rejected political activism. They opposed the war not by marching, but by refusing to participate. And they, too, were determined to change the world, though by private inaction rather than by public protest.

Most historians view 1968 as the year that defined the 1960s. They have used. Unfortunately, such conventional wisdom distorts the chronology of the era. To understand the uncivil wars that engulfed the nation, we must step back from the focus on 1968 and return to the summer of 1967. That is when the uncivil wars gripped the nation, as trends that had been developing in isolation began to merge into the mainstream of American life. In particular, the counterculture spilled from communities like Haight-Ashbury and Greenwich Village into college towns and cities across the nation. Black Power displaced nonviolent resistance as the cutting edge of the struggle for racial equality. Political activists, driven by both the desire for a greater voice on campuses and an end to the war in Vietnam, mobilized large numbers of dissidents. The uncivil wars began symbolically, on June 30, 1967, when President Johnson issued an executive order placing nineteen-year-olds at the top of the draft list. That decision guaranteed that baby boomers would bear the major burden of fighting the war in Vietnam. It also enlisted the energy of more young Americans in the antiwar and draft resistance movements. Then race riots exploded in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan. As violence escalated, President Johnson had to order federal troops into Detroit. The war in Vietnam compounded the tensions dividing American society. Great Society programs spent $50 per person on the war on poverty at home; the government spent $300,000 to kill each Vietcong (many of them noncombatant peasants). Between July and December, almost 5,000 Americans would die in combat. Senator William Fulbright, a leading critic of the Vietnam War, suggested that "each war [the war at home and the war in Vietnam] feeds on the other, and, although the president assures us that we have the resources to win both wars, in fact we are not winning either of them."

The link between escalating violence at home and in Vietnam was not lost on those seeking to end the war. Frustration rose as troop levels and casualties increased on both sides. In October, antiwar groups organized a week of draft resistance and a march on the Pentagon that brought somewhere around 50,000–100,000 protestors to Washington. Though publicly the administration discounted the march, in private many officials were impressed by the size and nature of the demonstration. Press Secretary George Christian saw it as a turning point—the beginning of the end for the Johnson administration. It troubled the president deeply and helped inspire Senator Eugene McCarthy to enter the presidential race as an antiwar candidate. So even before the ball fell in Times Square on January 1, 1968, the uncivil wars were fully engaged.