

Beat Movement in American Society

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ABSTRACT

*The concept of the US nation and identity underwent a profound, irreversible transformation during the postwar era. The American economy had been severely impacted by the Great Depression in the 1930s, but the Second World War gave it new life. The USA rose to dominance as a global superpower, and Americans dominated the postwar era. achieved a level of independence and affluence for themselves that was unprecedented. The widely accepted beliefs of Freudian psychology emphasized each person's mental origin and importance, which also reflected the societal effects of World War Two. Second, in the years following World War II, gender concerns played a large social role in American society. Contributing significantly to the evolving notion of identity the Beat Generation is one of the most significant results of the history of literature and literary movements during the post-war era. Thirdly, this time period would be the birthplace of a brand-new movement in American literature, one that went against the conventions of composition and coincided with the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in 1957. The Beat Generation Literary Movement members worked tirelessly to expand the horizons of contemporary writing. At the core of our comprehension of the linguistic feature that the Beat Generation Literary Movement had created is the expression "to be on your own."*

Introduction.

'...and everything is going to the beat – It's the beat generation, it be-at, it's the beat of the heart, it's being heat and down in the world and like old-time lowdown and like in ancient civilizations the slave boatmen rowing galleys to a beat and servants spinning pottery to a beat... -Jack Kerouac

The Second World War revived the American economy after it had been severely damaged by the Great Depression in the 1930s. As a result, the United States of America rose to prominence as a global power, and during the postwar era, Americans experienced levels of personal prosperity and freedom that had never before been possible. Both the socioeconomic and cultural makeup of the nation had changed since the Second World War. The rise in the percentage of persons with higher education and the popularity of TV allowed common people to get knowledge "on their own," which ultimately led to their sophistication. The middle class can become more autonomous thanks to an abundance of amenities and spacious, beautiful suburban homes for consumerists. The widely accepted beliefs of Freudian psychology emphasized the uniqueness of each person and their profound significance. The birth control "pill" freed women from the rigid biological norms to which they had been subject their entire lives. For the first time in human history, the majority of people had a contented life and could assert that they

would have personal dignity in the hereafter.

2. Social and Cultural Repercussions of World War Two.

First, the societal effects of World War Two contributed to the resurgence of individuality. The impact of World War II and the Great Depression on America were extraordinary.

Because lifestyles had been constrained, societal transformation was urgently needed. Women were given the option to perform male jobs throughout the conflict. This chance shown that, in the absence of men, women were capable of performing "masculine" tasks. Nonetheless, while discussing gender issues during and after war, it is important to carefully consider the ongoing social antagonism between men and women.

Throughout the 1950s, gender concerns also played a large social role in American society. Men's and women's social duties returned to the stereotyped positions that each sex was once expected to perform during this decade. Contrary to the ethos of the time, women's roles in the workplace increased during World War II while males were engaged in combat. Women encountered difficulties in the economic environment after the war when veterans returned to their beloved homes. Due to the two million women who lost their occupations in the two postwar years, life was particularly difficult for women [Halberstam, 589]. Despite the fact that males started to return to the workforce, the women were soon compelled to assume their old societal duties as housewives. Women were now expected to be good housewives, good mothers, and decent wives after working throughout the war. The fact that many families made do with just one income remained constant. The fact that most families once again relied solely on the income of men and had no need for the women to work was not shocking in the traditional sense [Halberstam, 589]. America was prepared to "enjoy life" with Dwight David Eisenhower in charge of a country that was at peace and experiencing prosperity after the war was finished, the veterans of the war returned, and the country was at peace [Russell, 8]. This led to a severe housing problem when veterans returned to their homes. It was because no new homes had been constructed in almost 20 years¹. Two other outcomes of this crisis, however, are vital for comprehending the societal problems of the 1950s. Families were being compelled to relocate to the suburbs by the housing crisis.

This freshly developed neighborhood eventually attracted a wide range of families, from lower middle-class to upper class².

In reality, there were almost ten million homeowners by 1960³. Another outcome was the return to the conventional roles played by women before to the 1950s, which, according to Halberstam, led to the isolation of women by taking them out of the workplace and placing them with other women who were similar to themselves. "A new, even simpler period, the happy life without sweat, was in the house" [Halberstam, 496]. The author outlined the foundation of consumerism in an illustrative manner. There were numerous opportunities for women to remain at home in this new culture.

The postwar America happened to be defined as that „America had irrevocably changed“ [Russell, 8]. As well as gender issues, economic situation of the society contributed much to the social change, and the new movement „Beat Generation“ in the end. Before discussing the new generation, I would like to focus our attention to the social changes contributed to the origin of the Beat Movement. “Never before had there so total and dramatic a transformation of a portion of the landscape, so sudden an evolution in habits, not such a flowering of popular architecture.” J.B. Jackson⁴ , „considered to be America“s greatest writer on the forces that shaped the nation⁵”, obviously indicated in *Landscape Magazine* concerning the presentation of the automobile industry to the American Society that „Americans had the chance to experience the mobility for the first time thanks to vehicles“ [Bischoff, 39] This rapid pace of the technological advances of this period and its social, cultural and literary reflections would suddenly transform the

landscape in question after the Great Depression, and the new community would be established in this landscape. As was already mentioned, the development of the new settlements boosted the automobile industry. There had been a growing need for cars as people moved farther from city centers, places of employment, and educational institutions. The demand for vehicles was sparked by the need for this mode of mobility. In the 1950s, General Motors and other automakers produced about eight million brand-new vehicles annually. Even the General Motors employees were startled by this circumstance, according to Halberstam: No one at GM could ever have dared forecast such long-term profitability [Halberstam, 487].

Success begets success is the new mantra of modern affluence [Halberstam, 487]. General Motors' success is demonstrated by the fact that, of the 49.3 million cars registered at the start of the decade and the 73.8 at its conclusion, half were sold by GM.

3. The Beat Generation.

As was already indicated, the societal change gave rise to a new generation, the Beat. Teenagers were at the other end of the range. Thirteen million teens lived in the nation, according to Halberstam in *The Fifties*. These young people, who rebelled against their parents, made up the new generation. By this breaking, they were able to redefine themselves through music. Beginning with the revolutionary transition in American music in the 1950s, society underwent an unprecedented dramatic transformation, particularly in regards to issues of race and music, the latter of which was dominated by African-American performers. The new decade [the 1950s], as academics refer to it, is both a cultural revolution and "a fundamental challenge to the fixed color line in American popular music and entertainment." The new decade [the 1950s], as academics refer to it, is both a cultural revolution and "a fundamental challenge to the fixed color line in American popular music and entertainment." A growth in Black artists and their music might be considered this revolutionary period of the 1950s. The ideological blending of white artists, white audiences, black artists, and black audiences⁸ is a crucial phase in this problem.

Paul Lopes, an assistant professor of sociology, defined the viewpoint and the subject matter in terms of a brand-new musical genre called rock and roll [Lopes]. Pop, jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock & roll were all new genres of music that had "a rigorous color line" to them [Lopes]. It is universally appealing, and soon after it appeared, this "beat" became "hot" among youngsters. This kind of music is named after the lyrics to the famous blues song "My Baby Rocks Me with a Steady Roll". Rock & roll is spirited and helps "bring the music back to feet¹⁰," in contrast to the previous slow, mournful melodies that capture the difficult moments of the war. Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, and Chuck Berry rose to fame as Rock & Roll superstars and influenced people not only in America but also throughout the world. Elvis Presley was known as „the king of Rock and Roll.“ As it has already been stated, Rock and Roll had a powerful effect on society, but especially on the young generation. It is because they had a desire for rebellion. The way Paul Lopes vividly captures the actual scene of the 1950s' ideological mingling of artists within the context of this cultural movement—which Norman Mailer refers to as "The White Negro¹¹"—is remarkable. As "the White Negro," Mailer labels his new persona as a "hipster" and his new philosophy as "Hipsterism."

Nevertheless, in his gripping essay "White Negro" from 1957, Norman Mailer specifically employed the precise idea of the hipster. He gave a very thorough breakdown of the traits of the new rebellious guy. His eyes are wide open, and he exudes a rebellious instinct. According to David Kamp¹², the word "hip" comes from the Wolof verb "hepi" or "hipi," which means "to see" or "to open one's eyes," as stated in his essay on the White Negro Dilemma (*New York Times*, 2004). The hipster has his own cultural and social conventions that he created on his own, in addition to his awareness of what is going on around him. The American Existentialist is what Mailer refers to as this phenomenon. Existentialism's guiding principles assert that one develops moral and ethical standards through his decisions and deeds. There is no right or wrong until he

takes a decision, in accordance with his recently established norms. According to Mailer, there are other requirements for becoming an existentialist. He compared the following requirements: one must be able to feel oneself, one must be aware of one's aspirations, and one must understand the nature of one's dissatisfaction. In conclusion, "the individual" and existentialism have these things in common. The hipsters were independent-minded in one way or another. As it has already been mentioned, they desired to depart from uniformity. This youthful generation had not seen either the Great Depression or World War II, in contrast to the previous generation. Since the Great Depression, the economy was in upheaval. Teenagers of this new generation were exposed to rock and roll, which "forced them to question authority and their lives¹³." One may immediately conclude that the younger generation would not view life as ideal because they were disobedient, questioned everything, and did not make any preparations for the future. They would feel unsure, which would ultimately make society crazy: "Give them what they secretly want, and of course they quickly become panic-stricken" [Kerouac, Part 3, Ch. 5]. They distinguished themselves from the preceding generation, which is "what made the Fifties a turning point," and they eventually became the new social movement. The Beat Generation is one of the most important points in the literature and literary movements of the 1950s. The notion that "the nuclei of this literary and social phenomenon were three men - Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs" is perhaps difficult to dismiss [Russell, 7]. Moreover, the term "beat" was first defined by Allen Ginsberg in a 1982 edition of the journal *Friction* as coming from "a comment by Jack Kerouac, un-naming of his generation."

Ginsberg claimed that his generation was "nothing but a beat generation," equating it with the lost generation writers [Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald] [Ginsberg, 50-52]. Since the Beat Phenomenon "changed American society," the Beat Generation became the 1950s' most important concern. Another one of these "beats" was Allen Ginsberg. For him, being beat entails being completely spent, worn out, or else done. Beat was "related to adjectives like beatitude and beatific," according to Kerouac. Beat also refers to the depressing beats found in jazz, beatitude, or being blessed, while "beat up" refers to being fatigued or beaten up. It is also claimed that the word "beatitude" is the source of the word "beat." This group of individuals is known as the "Beat Generation." It alludes to a group of pals who collaborated on poetry and prose from the mid- to late-1950s [Ginsberg, Carr, Kerouac, and Burroughs are buddies]. Ginsberg also mentions the "broader effect of literary and artistic activity of poets, filmmakers, painters, authors, and novelists" who "refreshed the long-lived bohemian cultural legacy in America" [Ginsberg, 50-52]. Ginsberg sees the spiritual liberation, sexual revolution, freedom from censorship, decriminalization of drugs [partly referring to the previously mentioned birth control pills], development of R&B, spread of an ecological consciousness (respect for everyone regardless of race or color), and opposition to the military-industrial machine civilization as essential components of the beat generation. Beats inspired from jazz, eastern religions or from a bum life. Beat poetry was the most heterodox literary form in the United States of America; but the senses of patriotism remains. Ginsberg revolutionized the traditional poetry in his poem „Howl“ [1956]:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night.
Allen Ginsberg, *Howl, For Solomon, Part I*

The yearning for the independent work of art helped to shape the new generation in a certain way. The impulse to recreate life overrode the yearning for the independent work of art. On the Road, written by Jack Kerouac and published in 1957, teaches us about these topics. Kerouac refers to his three-week-long, richly varied account of his travels across America as "an improvisational Beat prose." Replication of wishes actually meant the duplication of the experience the writer himself had, according to Professor Amy Hungerford of Yale University,

who covers this in her lecture. On the Road by Jack Kerouac, which was published in 1957, "signaled the rise of a new movement in American Writing," to put it literally [Hopkins, 279]. In keeping with Hopkins' theories, Kerouac's On the Road, along with Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" in 1956, helped to ignite a counterculture in the avowedly conservative 1950s. Members of the Beat Generation Literary Movement made a concerted attempt to expand the possibilities for contemporary composition in opposition to conventional writing techniques. Two of the 1950s Beat Generation pieces of art are Kerouac's On the Road and Ginsberg's Howl. To exemplify this unique language: "'Man, I'm beat," meaning being without money and without a place to stay; „would you like to go to the Bronx Zoo?" „Nah, man, I'm too „beat." I was up all night," meaning to be exhausted, sleepless, wide-eyed perceptive, rejected by the society he was used to live in and to be on your own [one of the basis of this movement]. The phrase „to be on your own" is at the heart of our understanding of the aspect of the language that the Beat Generation Literary Movement had formed. What the language of the Beats intended to write was „to make the language totally autonomous, to separate from the world" [Hungerford, Lecture on Jack Kerouac at Yale University]. However, the notion of creating an autonomous work of art enabled us to deeply get in the Beats. Hungerford's phrase of autonomous work of art can be characterized through the term Ginsberg had already made. With his companions, Ginsberg desired for „liberation of words from censorship" [Ginsberg, 50-52]. Their desire for being free was obviously reflected through their works of art.

Conclusion.

In light of this, we may say that Kerouac's constant pursuit of knowledge forms the basis of how we interpret his work [Hungerford]. Interesting about this work is how Kerouac, Ginsberg, and his other "cool" buddies came to represent the 1950s cultural revolution.

Despite the negative effects of the Great Depression and World War II, sudden changes in habits and the emergence of new social communities could also be defined as the fact that, for the first time in American society, people experienced a rapid change in technological advancements in the 1950s, which had a profound impact on society on a social, cultural, and literary level. The 1950s' "cozy," "safe," and "secure" ideals led American culture to believe that the 1950s were the happiest decade. American society to feel that the decade the 1950s were the happiest time in America, cherished by all people leaving behind good memories. In addition to the affluence of the fifties, they were the Beats who became the voice of the younger generation of the Fifties who did not appreciate their parents' „fake optimism" anymore.

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