A Turf of Their Own

The Experiments and Contradictions of 1960s Utopianism

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After WWII, the world had to adjust to new technologies, new scientific concepts, new political realities, and new social standards. While America was economically wealthy after the war, it still had to deal with extremely difficult social and cultural challenges. Due to these new aspects of life, there were increasing differences in both the interests and values of children and their parents, what we have learned to call the "generation gap". The "generational gap" between the youth culture and their parents meant a polarizing society, each hating and completely misunderstanding the other.

This eventually resulted in a highly political youth culture that was laterally opposed to the government. Through isolation, the counterculture began to develop new philosophies and new ways of thinking, and a huge part of that philosophy was the pursuit of a "Good Society", a utopian dream for world peace.

This element of counterculture society can be seen in the real world in events like the Woodstock Music Festival, in which over half a million people gathered together in common pursuit of this utopian dream. However, through the construction of this utopia, the counterculture set their expectations too high, and were dramatically shocked when the concert at Altamont only four months later ended in total disaster. In this way, we can see how 1960s utopianism – which defined the decade - ultimately doomed itself to failure.
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INTRODUCTION

Historical Problem

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about the 1960s is the way it is written about as if it were a failure. The radical thought of this time promised radical social and political change, and yet did not deliver it. As Hunter S. Thompson put it: “You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning ....And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave ....”¹

Todd Gitlin (one of the founders of the SDS) claims that one of the major reasons for the failure of the 1960s was that the members of the counterculture got old. This argument may seem odd, but Gitlin argues that with the aging of the new generation, they inevitably became the old generation and did not possess the freedom of spirit or situation that gave the New Left its radical edge: “…they were pulled away: attracted to the once forfeited, now alluring satisfactions of private life...Those whose political work was episodic in the first place were most likely to retreat to private life — all the more so as they ascended toward what the Hindus call the householding stage of life.”²

Bookchin in his discussion of the 1960s blames the Vietnam War with the failure of the 1960s New Left. He argues that the war forced the movement to move faster and more aggressively than it should have and thus provoked more enemies and strained its resources: "...ironically, it may have been the Vietnam War itself, so often regarded as its most important stimulus, that more significantly than any other factor prevented the 60s' movements from developing slowly, organically, and indigenously into lasting, deeply rooted American phenomenon, charged by a deeper sense of consciousness and a more historic sense of mission than it was to achieve."^3

To many, perhaps, that "historic sense of mission", that "sense of inevitable victory" was manifested almost completely in events like the Woodstock Music Festival in August of 1969. At this kind of event, we see forces of the counterculture actively creating their own societal norms and social institutions, taking care of themselves, and doing so in record numbers. It is easy to imagine, then, that the participants of these kinds of events might have felt they accomplished their revolution, and perhaps even their utopia. However, perhaps the most important aspect of Woodstock is that it was temporary, only a 3 day event. At events like Altamont, People’s Park, and San Francisco’s Summer of Love we see the counterculture attempting to once again capture their perfect world, with varying levels of success.

To many, the failure of the 1960s is that nothing changed. The 1960s promised radical change in all aspects of society, and seemed to be making progress but is

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eventually condemned. "For better or worse, none of the most vital dreams of the 1960s – whether they were of a beloved community, a color-blind society, a Great Society, a 'higher consciousness', an end to patriarchy, or freedom for the people of Vietnam – came to pass."\footnote{David R Farber and Eric Foner. \textit{The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s}. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994. Page 3} However, while the 1960s may have been highly idealistic, it cannot be denied that things were better by the end than they were in the beginning.

\section*{Historical Background}

The 1960s in America are highly romanticized by many, often thought of as the most liberal, free, and individualistic era in American history: "Perhaps no era in American history seemed more rich with the promise of freedom than the early- and mid-sixties. Its glow of optimism more moral than economic and more cultural than political..."\footnote{Bookchin. Page 249-250} Though the American political situation was extremely controversial and even conservative, the 1960s remain an icon for the birth of the New Left. Organizations and events like the SDS, Freedom Summer, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, and most importantly the Woodstock Music Festival are remembered not because they were so successful, but because they were unorthodox and fresh, and captured the imagination of popular culture (most notably Rock and Roll). At the same time, however, the late 1960s was a very difficult time in America, often remembered for the expansion of the Vietnam War, the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago (August 29, 1968), the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968),
the election of Richard Nixon (January 20, 1969), and the assassination of Robert Kennedy (June 5, 1968), bringing the optimistic era of the Kennedy's to a close.

By the 1960s, the economic and social benefits of the United State's victory in WWII were beginning to wear off, and problems that were forgotten about during WWII began to surface. In his article on the New Left, Alan Hooper talks about the hopes for post-WWII America: "...the material abundance of the 'affluent' societies like the US in the 1950s promised not only a 'peaceful, evolutionary transition to the new Utopia' but also of the radical energies and inclusive aspirations of early modernism..." However, material abundance and radical energies were not enough to overcome the cultural and political problems in American society. In Murray Bookchin's essay "Between the 30s and the 60s", he even goes as far as to say that the political unrest experienced during the 1960s was in fact a continuation of unrest that was felt in the 1930s European radicalism that had been postponed after WWII. It is natural, then, that the 1960s radicals would continue the socialist rhetoric developed in the 1930s when those issues once again became a problem.

The advances and availability of new technologies was also an extremely important factor in the social dynamics of the 1960s. Inventions like the television, the radio, and most importantly the transistor radio made portable music possible, something that had great significance to the youth culture, since it meant they could listen to their music away from their parents. In his book on the 1960s, Gerard DeGroot

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7 Bookchin. Page 7
argues that “Music that could be played out of earshot of parents could in turn be more daring. Transistor radios gave the baby boomers the facility and confidence to develop their own musical tastes”\(^8\), which of course resulted in the development of other kinds of tastes. The ability to listen to this music alone added to the stigma that rock was a bad influence, which of course made it all the more popular in youth culture. Technologies and products like these served to culturally distance the youth generation from the culture of their parent’s generation, resulting in a generation gap. This generation desired a new, fresh system that was custom built for the modern world, as opposed to pre-modern patriarchal systems that seemed more and more to be out-dated and archaic. Capitalism, republicanism, patriarchy, these were institutions of the older generation and seemed to the newer generation to have little or no relevancy in their modern world, a separation that Bookchin comments on in his essay:

Twice removed from the old leftist immigrants – and composed numerically of many young Americans of old ethnic backgrounds – they began to weave a uniquely American populist ‘agenda’ of their own – an 'agenda' that could influence Americans as a whole in the 'affluent' era of the sixties. This 'agenda' stressed the utopian aspects of the 'American Dream' as distinguished from economic aspects... (Italics in original)\(^9\)

This redefinition of values meant that the youth generation of the 1960s had completely different priorities, interests, tastes, and values than did their parents, some of whom had lived through WWII and some of whom were immigrants new to the United States. This meant that they were deeply entrenched in the 'system' of American


\(^9\) Bookchin. Page 249
affluence, and often conservative in comparison to their children. This “generation gap” resulted in the formation of a national youth culture that was unified by media (television and radio), consumerism (fashion and records) and eventually by political discontent (mainly the Vietnam War). This kind of radical thought had its roots in the redefinition of values that followed American economic success following WWII and the 1950s: “In the chaotic 1960s marketplace of new ideas, new products, and new responsibilities, a great many Americans — and not just radical protesters — were challenged to find new rules and understandings by which to live. Americans questioned the rule makers and rule enforcers who formally and informally governed their lives. Specific events in the 1960s — like those associated with the civil rights and liberation movements, the failed war in Vietnam, and the chaotic violence that engulfed America's cities — sprang from America's cultural values, national economic and political system, and international role.”

By this, Bookchin is arguing that it was in part because of the national climate that these events were possible, not the other way around.

It was to this atmosphere that the New Left was born, a political party that desired a change from the old system. The New Left was informed by radical authors like Herbert Marcuse, and was employed by young radical activists. In his article “A Politics Adequate to the Age: The New Left and the Long Sixties”, Alan Hooper goes so far as to say:

More fundamentally, however, and of continuing relevance to the critique of both systems [capitalist and communist] as they entered their ‘modernising’ phases of the 1960s, was the sense that state-led and ‘planned’ industrial societies were not only incapable of addressing old grievances — especially those of race, sex, and class — but that the solutions they could offer simply entailed patters of social relations which were dispiriting and dehumanizing.

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10 Bookchin. Page 251
In this sense the New Left questioned modernity in its elite-led modernising mode, counterposing to its massification of society and its pluralist politics a more radical sense of the modern, involving the search for new forms of political community and popular participation.  

The Vietnam War was a unifying force for the youth because they were being drafted to fight and die in a war that none of them understood or agreed with.

And it’s one, two, three
What are we fighting for?
Don’t ask me, I don’t give a damn,
Next stop is Vietnam.
And it’s five, six, seven,
Open up the pearly gates,
Well there ain’t no time to wonder why,
Whoopee! We’re all gonna die...

This song by Joe McDonald was performed to massive cheers at Woodstock. Always sung in a half angry, half comical voice, the songs upbeat melody and sound lend irony to its words, and is a classic protest song, describing the state of confusion (“...there ain’t no time to wonder why...”) and destitution (“we’re all gonna die”) experienced by draftees. Vietnam was essentially a Cold War proxy battle, and while the establishment was very anti-communist the youth culture was enamored of new socialist systems and thought, seen by many as a viable alternative to the American system with which they were so dissatisfied. In his book on the 1960s, Dominick Cavallo titles one section about Vietnam “The Origins of Discontent”, and lays out clearly how the Vietnam War inspired many young people who may have otherwise been apolitical to join the new left and the

11 Hooper, 16
counterculture protest tradition:

As the war dragged on in stalemate year after year, despite the optimistic predictions of military and civilian officials, it caused many Americans of all ages to question the wisdom, even the integrity, of their leaders. And it prompted a legion of young people either to "drop out" of society altogether and join the counterculture or display their alienation from mainstream society by selectively adopting elements of the hippie lifestyle.\(^\text{13}\)

Vietnam was the main site of outrage on behalf of this new youth generation and it is this issue that is most vehemently condemned by organizations like the SDS and the Weather Underground. Vietnam was often used as a touchstone for political radicals as an example of the hypocrisy of the American government in their ideas and manifestos on the downfall of the American system and the creation of a new society. These documents were often extremely provocative and violent:

All over the world, people fighting Amerikan imperialism look to Amerika's youth to use our strategic position behind enemy lines to join forces in the destruction of the empire...The parents of 'privileged' kids have been saying for years that the revolution was a game to us. But the war and the racism of this society show that it is too fucked-up. We will never live peaceably under this system.\(^\text{14}\)

This is a publication called the Weather Underground (a section of the splintered SDS), a group that gained a militant reputation after claiming responsibility for the 1970 bombing of the New York City police headquarters. Here we can see that, while somewhat immature, the rhetoric of this time is extremely provocative and angry, and completely committed to their cause. Later in this publication, the Weatherman


threatens to destroy a "symbol or institution of Amerikan injustice". The spelling of "Amerika" even seems to allude to a german spelling, perhaps hoping to excite readers with their anti-patriotic sentiments.¹⁵ This kind of radical thought seems to claim that a new social, economic, and political paradigm is needed, and that the old system should be and soon will be abandoned.

No where is this conflict more apparent than in the institution of the SDS. The Students for a Democratic Society was a nation-wide student organization that to many represents the spirit of the New Left. Degroot writes that the "SDS sought to sweep away the sterile hypocrisy of the older generation, replacing it with a new, dynamic, people centered system — an amalgam of European socialism, Jeffersonian democracy, and the participatory democracy of the Greek city-state."¹⁶ The group was wildly radical and gained national prestige and importance with their numerous demonstrations, protests, and even violent actions. The SDS was forcefully opposed by the American administration, most notably the FBI who infiltrated and subverted several chapters of the SDS for purposes of disruption and prosecution. Government action was not, however, limited to the SDS. The US government was extremely harsh in its dealings with members of the counterculture, most famously the imprisonment of John Sinclair (a leader of the New Left organization the White Panthers) for 10 years over a small drug conviction. ¹⁷

While the 1960s are extremely popular in modern memory, they are also the source of a considerable amount of criticism and disappointment. The 1960s are

¹⁵ The Weather Underground, pg 511
accused of making promises it didn't keep, promises that were developed in the highly radical rhetoric of many of the New Left organizations. The late 1960s in particular was a very difficult time in America, remembered for the expansion of the Vietnam War, the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago (August 29, 1968), the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968), the election of Richard Nixon (January 20, 1969), and the assassination of Robert Kennedy (June 5, 1968), bringing the optimistic era of the Kennedy's to a close.

Sources

In this thesis, I will use a number of different types of sources. Possibly the most interesting of these are the films, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*. These movies are interesting for different reasons. *Woodstock* is an interesting movie because, due to the pacing of the event, it seems like a chaotic shoot. Very seldom do shots seem preplanned or organized in any conventional motion picture sense, lending the illusion that the camera-man (and the viewer) is just another attendee of the festival. *Gimme Shelter*, on the other hand, is heavily planned and produced. Almost all of the footage comes from onstage or backstage (as opposed to wandering the grounds) and deals almost entirely with the artists. While *Woodstock* interviews normal people and wanders throughout the audience, the footage from *Gimme Shelter* is focused almost entirely on the story of the Rolling Stones and their role as rock stars. In Robert Rosenstone's *Visions of the Past*, he talks about the affect of personality on documentary film:

Another major type of history on film comes under the label of documentary. Yet whether it is the film compiled of old footage and narrated by an omniscient voice (the voice of history), a film that centers on talking
heads, either survivors remembering events or experts analyzing them, or some combination of the two, the historical documentary – just like the dramatic feature – tends to focus upon heroic individuals and, more important, to make sense of its material in terms of a story that moves from a beginning though a conflict to a dramatic resolution.\textsuperscript{18}

It is this aspect of the films that I find most interesting. While one could argue that these films are more a collection of music videos than an actual feature, these movies were meant to be viewed completely, and taken as one piece of information. Neither movie has any kind of story or resolution, concentrating solely upon the events and its audience.

I will also be using a large number of newspaper and magazine articles, most notably Rolling Stone Magazine. Rolling Stone is used extensively in this thesis because it was the first mainstream counterculture publication, and was one of the first publications of this kind to be accessible all over the country. It was founded in San Francisco in 1967 by Jann Wenner (who is still editor and publisher) and music critic Ralph J. Gleason. Since its inception, Rolling Stone has been the premiere journal for countercultural issues, and did a full spread on each of my case studies. In addition, I will also use several local papers from around the country.

Though I will not be using it a great deal in my argument, I will also be including visual sources, mainly photos and posters from the various events I will discuss. These items are valuable because, as published images connected to the event, they often constitute a great deal of public memory about a certain event. In particular, some of the images from Woodstock are iconic enough to not even be included in the text and some

of the images from People’s Park - while lesser known – invoke strong emotional responses.

Personal accounts of events will also be used, both from the organizers and elites from these events and from normal people attending the events. Of particular note is Todd Gitlin, one of the founders of the SDS. His book *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* is a general account of the 1960s, and in particular I use his experiences at Altamont and People’s Park. Though Gitlin does offer commentary, these sources are meant to be taken as primary.

AN QUARIAN EXPOSITION: 3 DAYS OF PEACE AND MUSIC

The Event

The Woodstock Music and Arts Festival took place on the farm of a man named Max Yasgur\(^1\), in a town called Bethel which is actually located about 40 miles southwest of Woodstock, NY, a town that was famous in the music industry for its use by musicians like Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, and the Band. Bethel is farmland and fields, which is an important part of why the festival was so successful. While Woodstock is important because it represented a coming together of people, it was equally important that the event be separated (both culturally and physically) from mainstream society. Pastoralism, or more accurately anti-urbanization, was an important aspect of counterculture ideology, and a feature that many institutions and events of the 1960s shared. In this context, Max Yasgur quickly became a farmer-hero to the attendees of

\(^1\) Image 3
the concert, particularly due to his part in the success of the festival. The festival was originally to be held in Woodstock, NY (hence the name), but when ticket sales began to reach record numbers during the summer before the festival, the local government of Woodstock revoked the festival's permit. A few weeks before the festival was set to be held, they still had no venue at which to have the concert. Against the wishes of his town, Max Yasgur agreed to let the concert happen on his property, sympathizing with the cultural discrimination he felt the concert producers were being subjected to by the town governments. Yasgur even got on stage and welcomed the audience formally, saying "You people have proven something to the world today. You've proved that over half a million kids can come together and have 3 days of music and fun, and nothing but music and fun, and I God bless you for it!"\(^{20}\)

Perhaps one of the most fascinating parts of the Woodstock festival was the way in which it was organized, or perhaps more accurately the way in which it was not organized. The names and faces most associated with the creation of Woodstock are of four men who were in their twenties at the time of the festival: John Roberts, Joel Roseman, Artie Kornfield, and Michael Lang, and the latter two deeply immersed in the ideology and lifestyle of the counterculture.

Hailed as "The Founder of Woodstock", Michael Lang was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1944, and graduated from NYU in 1967, when he moved from New York to Florida and opened a 'head shop', a store that sold hippie merchandise, music, and drug paraphernalia. His store was shut down by law enforcement after being accused of being a communist (Lang was the first counterculture figure in the area and the first to

open a head shop in Florida), however, and Lang soon returned to New York City, where he began his career as a music promoter, his first big show being the Miami Pop Festival. At the time, Lang was known as an all-out hippie who smoked constantly, thought Bob Dylan could solve all the world’s problems, and wore his abundantly curly hair past his shoulders.\(^{21}\) Lang was the spirit behind the Woodstock experiment, and was looked at as representative of the hippie culture by the producers and organizers of the culture, and was sometimes described as ‘mystical’\(^{22}\).

Perhaps more grounded in reality was the equally famous Artie Kornfield, who along with Lang is considered a founder of Woodstock. At the time when he met Lang, Kornfield was a VP at Capitol Records, in charge of ‘contemporary’ music (Rock and Roll), and was considered one of the first “heads” (a term used to describe members of the hippie subculture, referring to ‘potheads’) to successfully make it to bureaucratic status in the music industry, which is possible why Lang approached him. He and Lang quickly became extremely good friends, Kornfield helping to support Lang during his time of economic instability. If Lang was the spirit of Woodstock, Kornfield was the backbone, and provided all the contacts and necessaries to pull something of this size off\(^{23}\).

However, none of this ever would have been even considered were it not for John Roberts, who was the money of the venture. The Roberts family was wealthy, and on his 21st birthday Roberts inherited $250,000, which he and his friend Joel thought to


\(^{22}\) Mokower. Pg 27

\(^{23}\) Mokower. Pg 29
invest. John had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and had a job as a researcher on Wall Street, but was looking for something to do before starting his formal career: “There wasn’t quite the urgency in the sixties to plug yourself into something every minute of the day...today you go from educational achievement to educational achievement to job to advancement, and so on, and there is no breathing space. In the mid-sixties, you could take some time out and figure out a rational plan. No one succeeded in doing that, but we all succeeded in trying to do it anyway.”

To Roberts, then, the Woodstock venture was perhaps one final adventure for his youth, though he in no way suspected where this journey would eventually take him.

Michael Lang and Artie Kornfield had the idea of a music festival to be held in Woodstock, New York. It was then that they saw an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* run by John Roberts and Joel Roseman that read “Young men with unlimited capital looking for interesting and legitimate business ideas.” Lang and Kornfield responded, met with the pair, and eventually the four of them came up with the idea for what would become the Woodstock Music Festival, an event that later became synonymous with 1960s culture and Rock and Roll.

Lang and Roberts were the two driving personalities that resulted in the creation of the Woodstock Festival, but one other organizer is worth mentioning, if only for symbolic purposes. Chip Monck was a lighting technician that was hired by Lang and Roberts for the construction of the stage who inadvertently became the Master of Ceremonies for the festival, announcing each band and doing public service.

24 Mokower. Pg 22
announcements, such as the famous: “It’s a free concert from now on...That doesn’t mean anything goes, what it means is that we’re going to be putting the music up here for free. And the people footing the bill for this are going to take a bath...a big bath.”

Monck, along with others, benefited from his role in the Woodstock festival when he would later be contracted to help organize the Altamont Concert, or “Woodstock West”, which will be discussed in depth later.

What inspired this phenomenon? What would prompt the dozens of individuals who worked for 9 months to suddenly make this huge multi-million dollar festival free? In part, there was really no choice in the matter, since fences were constructed in haste (due to several re-locations of the site after town officials learned about the number of attendees) and often overrun. However, there was certainly more to it than simple logistics, or the entire festival could simply have been cancelled. What motivated the organizers of this event was not the money, but the event itself as having importance to their generation and their personal lives.

The events that took place on Max Yasgur’s farm between Friday August 15th and Sunday August 18th were known in national headlines as a complete disaster, newspapers around the country proclaiming starvation, squalor, and chaos: “Hippies Mired in Sea of Mud”²⁶, “Greenberg Terms Festival ‘Disaster’”²⁷, and “Emergency Grips Rock Festival Town”²⁸ being examples. However, to the attendees of the festival, it was

²⁵ Wadleigh 0:36:25
known as "An Aquarian Explosion: 3 Days of Peace and Music", which was the billing that ran all summer advertising the event. The term 'Aquarian' was meant to signify the beginning of the Age of Aquarius, a new celestial era that was supposed to bring change and rebirth to the world, and was immortalized in the musical *Hair*, specifically in the song "The Age of Aquarius" (1968). Separate and apart from celestial meaning, the participants in the Woodstock Music Festival certainly saw that the world was changing, and perhaps saw Woodstock as the first step towards the creation of a new culture and society that was designed with the new values of the counterculture in mind.

**The Myth**

Perhaps the most famous material from the festival is the documentary movie that was made alongside its production, eventually titled *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music*. *Woodstock* was a landmark film for several reasons, only a few of which are relevant to my thesis. *Woodstock* pioneered the multi-screen music videos that are popular today, and its artistic contributions to documentary film-making are numerous. However, it is Wadleigh's interviewing style that is most interesting in terms of historical evidence. Most of the 3-hour movie consists of footage from the stage, but in between songs are segments of variant length that consist of interviews and arbitrary footage of both the producers and the attendees. Due to the massive distances involved and poor planning of the event in general, there is basically no structure to these interviews, and the people being interviewed seem very genuine. It is clear that few questions were pre-
planned, and that the interviews are in fact coincidental, sometimes happening in the back of a car or in the grass on the side of the road. This spontaneity, I believe, brings a level of honesty to the film that could not be easily created.

While an extremely famous movie, few people watch *Woodstock* as a documentary experience, because the most popular segments are the music videos, not the interviews. Though everyone is familiar with certain shots or videos from the film, very few have sat down and watched the film from beginning to end. In fact, *Woodstock* presents a very different event from the one imagined by modern fans through cultural memory. One of the most important things that the film offers to a student of this period is a realistic representation of how much this event has been romanticized by modernity and how many ideas that we think of as purely 60s counterculture were in fact not so clear-cut at the time, that in fact there was considerable disagreement and conflict even within the counterculture community. One risk of trusting this film is the danger of bias on the part of Wadleigh, who was in fact working for and paid by Woodstock Ventures, not to mention the fact that the movie was edited and finished almost a year after festival occurred, by which time the event was already in the early stages of idealization. However, it is my opinion that those dangers are neutralized by the general scale of the event and chaos of the filming process, which I hope were so extreme that little control could be exercised by one person.

While *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music* primarily consists of music videos and interviews with the producers of the concert, one of the most gripping segments is a 20 minute interview with two attendees that spontaneously takes place on the side of the road to Woodstock the day before the festival. The young man's name is Jerry, and
the young woman is nameless. This interview is an extremely interesting look at the lives of teenagers and the relationship they have to their parents. This generational gap is very important to understanding the political and social situation in America at this time, especially in the context of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Jerry, in particular, is very eloquent about the idea that he and his father have very different priorities. "...he can't understand why I didn't play, you know, he's saying 'Why aren't you playing the game? Here's all this opportunity, here are all these things which have so much value'. But they're only valuable to him, and he can't understand why they don't have value to me." The generational gap between the veterans of the great depression and WWII and their children is a topic that has been explored extensively by several scholars of the 1960s, and this concept is exemplified in Jerry's conflict with his father. His companion talks about not being able to communicate: "...but I can't communicate to them about anything important, because like my mother is really, uh, lives in a lot of pain because she's sure I'm gonna go to hell, you know? I can't tell her that it just doesn't exist for me, you know? So I can't communicate with them on those levels..." This was a scenario that was shared by many at the time, possibly due to the philosophy developed during the 1960s that had the effect of a cultural change that older generations could not accommodate.

While the film takes place entirely at the festival, there are parts of the film which do mockingly note the existence of the outside world. One of the most interesting of these, I think, is a reading of a newspaper through the PA system, in which the MC reads: "The "Daily News"...in rather large headlines still costing 10 cents: 'Traffic uptight

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29 Wadleigh, Woodstock. 1:07:00
This video is interesting because it shows the misrepresentation of Woodstock at the time of the festival. Just as this generation felt misunderstood by the current 'system', the event was grossly misunderstood by the media and the American population in general. The film also has footage of the immense lines at the phone booths at which the media turnaround was initiated. There are several shots of people arguing with their parents about how the festival is not a natural disaster, and it was these phone calls that led parents to call television stations complaining that the coverage was not accurate, because they had just talked to their children who said everything was fine, which eventually led to the media turnaround. Later, news headlines read: "Aquarian Explosion: Messy, Not Violent", "Merchants Praise Hippie Behavior", and even "Minister Sees God's Hand in Aquarian", all of which were a major public opinion turnaround.

A significant portion of the film also depicts the reactions of the townspeople of Bethel, which to say the least are varying. Most seem annoyed and upset by the crowds and noise, but quite a few praise the attendees for their polite behavior, even so far as to be arguing violently among themselves, some attacking the festival and some defending it. In the *Rolling Stone* article, the townspeople of Bethel respond positively: "'Notwithstanding their personality, their dress, and their ideas, they are the most corteus, considerate and well behaved group of kids I have ever been in contact with in my whole life'...The areas main switchboard had almost buckled from 500,000 long-distane calls Friday, and, with awe in her voice, a local operator reported that

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30 Wadleigh, *Woodstock*. 1:12:42
31 Wadleigh, *Woodstock*. 2:14:00
32 The Times Herald, Middletown New York, August 18 1969
33 Wadleigh, *Woodstock*. 2:38:00
'every kid said thank you'...

Other than compliments from the townspeople and praise for the bands, the majority of the *Rolling Stone* article is dedicated to assigning this event with both historical and cultural importance: "No one in this country in this century had ever seen a 'society' so free of repression. Everyone swam nude in the lake, balling was easier than getting breakfast, and the 'pigs' just smiled and passed out the oats. For people who had never glimpsed the intense communitarian closeness of a militant struggle — People's Park or Paris in the month of May or Cuba — Woodstock must always be their model of how good we will all feel after the revolution." Clearly, the events and atmosphere of Woodstock struck a chord even within the counterculture community as having particular importance.

**Historical Significance**

One of the most fascinating aspects of 1960s counterculture was their basis in intellectual thought and modern political philosophy, most notably the reverence held for authors like C. Wright Mills and later Herbert Marcuse, who called for a reorganization of society that was not based in the commercialism and consumption of the 1950s:

The so-called consumer society and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments,

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34 *Rolling Stone Magazine*, September 20, 1969, page 23

engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a "biological" need (1969).³⁶

This new kind of philosophy was soaked up by the new youth that was defined by being part of the baby boomer generation, many of whom were antagonized by conservative WWII veterans teaching at most universities. Mills also talks about the historical relevance of gatherings just like Woodstock in his essay *The Mass Society* (1956), in which he outlines the transition from “the public” to “the mass”: “Out of the little circles of people talking with one another, the larger forces of social movements and political parties develop; and the discussion of opinion is the important phase in a total act by which public affairs are conducted.”³⁷ The attendees and organizers of Woodstock (many of whom attended nearby colleges) were familiar with these concepts, and it is clear that they might have seen social and political relevance to what happened at the festival. Such ideas were welcome to this generation, who felt that they were no longer part of the public, or at least separate from the decisions being made that often resulted in their death (via the draft): “This assumption has been upset by the great gap now existing between the underlying population and those who make decisions in its name, decisions of enormous consequence which the public does not


even know are being made until well after the fact."\textsuperscript{38} Rhetoric such as this is part of the desire by this generation to have a social revolution, a change from the values of their parent's generation.

While there can be no doubt that the participants at Woodstock were aware of these ideas, one cannot assume these concepts were present at the event. Though the event was free, there were many things about it, and Rock and Roll culture in general, that were far more materialistic than they liked to believe: "In the 1960s, Americans also spotlighted – as they indulged in – the moral chaos an unbridled consumerist ethos could produce. In the 1970s, increasing numbers of Americans joined in the relatively uninhibited search for individual pleasures and self-indulgent lifestyles that consumer capitalism seemed to promise and which many young people had so publicly explored in extralegal and often amoral fashion in the 1960s."\textsuperscript{39} Simon Firth argues in his essay that the consumption of Rock and Roll products were both its downfall and its road to immortality: "The San Francisco operators, in contrast, emerged from within the new audience itself, and so disguised the exploitation involved in the rock marketplace in the name of 'the rock community.' The political significance of this was not that rock was coopted, but that the terms of its cooptation were concealed. Pop commercialism was so blatant that pop fans could never forget their consumer status; rock fans, by contrast, could treat record-buying as an act of solidarity."\textsuperscript{40} Music represented the ideals of the

\textsuperscript{38} Mills, "The Mass Society", page 77

\textsuperscript{39} Farber and Foner. Page 267

1960s counterculture movement, and to many it is its lasting accomplishment, perhaps somewhat obscuring the more ugly aspects of the decade. Firth even goes as far as to say that Rock's cheery optimism was in fact born out of the desperate and dark times that were the 1960s in an attempt to create a good environment, if only in the lines of their songs.

This phenomenon is also available for view in the Woodstock event. In the Rolling Stones coverage, the author says “Beneath the practical problem of maintaining order was the principle contradiction of the festival: how to stimulate the energies of the new culture and profit thereby, and at the same time control them. In a way, the Woodstock venture was a test of the ability of avantgarde capitalism at once to profit from and control the insurgencies which its system spawns.”

If Rock and Roll was betrayed by its commercial nature, it is also its legacy and its continuation from the 1960s to the present. The commercialization of Rock was not only found in record sales and artist's contracts but in the very continuation of the culture. For example, the Woodstock festival would never have been even considered if it had not been seen as commercially viable. The fact that the event ended up losing money does not conflict with the fact that Rock and Roll's infrastructure (the bands, the agents, the venues) were motivated not by some indistinct sense of utopianism, but by profits. However, it is due to this commodification of Rock and Roll that 1960s culture retains its political and cultural significance. In her essay on the marketization of the 1960s, Wendy Wheeler says "The lure of the commodity does not lie simply in its utility (although very often that is part of its attractiveness), but in the way in which it stands in
for something that seems to perpetually to elude us... The commodity like any fetish, has an auratic quality; in it we glimpse, all unknowingly, the power of an identity which seemed once to be in the world, and which now seems estranged from it and hopelessly fragile.”

Though undermined by the commercialism of the music industry, Woodstock nevertheless certainly has social importance as a non-commercial event. The fact that it is free was what made the event so accessible to so many people, but it was the actions and attitudes of the attendees that Woodstock gains its historical importance. Over 400,000 people attended the festival, and at the time this was the largest gathering of people ever assembled. The New York Freeway was shut down, the site was proclaimed a disaster area by the governor, and musicians had to be flown in on helicopters because the road was littered with abandoned cars. Despite the chaos and confusion that was the festival, however, people at Woodstock still managed to get along, help each other, and have a good time. Wavy Gravy, the leader of the Hog Farm, was flown in on a private jet along with his commune family by the organizers of Woodstock, and were tasked with simply helping feed the hungry people and take care of the people having bad drug experiences. In an announcement onstage during the concert, he explained that they would be organizing breakfast in bed for the attendees of Woodstock that were spread out over a mile square of farmland. “There’s going to be

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42 Image 1
good food and we're going to get it to you. It's not just the Hog Farm, either. It's everybody; we're all feeding each other. We must be in Heaven, man! There is always a little bit of Heaven in a disaster area."

How and why something like this could happen (and in a time with no cell phones or internet) is a very complex question that both historians and concert promoters have been asking themselves since, and has never been fully answered. What did it represent? Was it really just a concert with music, or were there overtones of something far more significant? Lang in particular is very eloquent about his hopes for the festival and the world in general: "This is the beginning of this kind of thing...to be able to see, all here, this culture and this generation, away from the old culture and the old generation, without cops, without guns, without clothes, and it's been working, its been working since we got here...and its gonna continue working no matter what happens when they go back to the city, no matter what happens."43 What exactly Lang expected from these people is unclear. It is possible that he is referring to successful separation of the crowd from mainstream society, a society that very few people attending the concert would have much respect for. And while future attempts to recreate the experience of Woodstock have been largely unsuccessful, there can be no doubt that Woodstock set a certain example and precedent for counterculture society, one that would inform other counterculture events in its attempt to create a temporary utopian society.

43 Wadleigh. 1:38:45
DISASTER AT ALTAMONT

The Event

Due to the amount of attention Woodstock received in the media, the event was well-known and already mythologized as a Rock and Roll symbol only a few weeks after its end. Due to the commercial nature of the music industry, this meant that another festival needed to be immediately planned, following the recipe of the first: namely, that the concert should be free of charge. The comparison between Woodstock and Altamont was inevitable due to the many similarities between the events, and is, I argue, the main reason that it is considered such a disaster. The attendees, the artists, and the media were all expecting another Woodstock, perhaps proving the system created at Woodstock could work, and was imagined to be some sort of socialist system with loose organization, inspired by the principles of the counterculture. Norma Coates argues convincingly on the nature of the Altamont concert and the music industry in general:

The idea that rock performers owed something more to their audience, not vice versa, bears interrogation. That the performer merely owed what any performer owed the audience, an evening of entertainment delivered well, is in Gleason’s view insufficient. His comments belie an expectation that rock stars behave differently and be less concerned with worldly rewards than other performers, as well as the denial that rock, and rock stardom, are ultimately business enterprises. Deena Weinstein has noted that rock criticism was founded on an art–commerce binary, consistent with a ‘myth of romantic ideology’.

Todd Gitlin calls the Rolling Stones “countercultural heroes”. “One reason the Stones and Jagger were very sensitive about money was that they had been adopted by the New Left as musical revolutionary spokesmen, supplanting even Dylan and certainly taking over from The Beatles.” Jagger even makes use of this role on film in *Gimme Shelter* when he breaks up a fight and quiets down the crowd through the use of his personality. In this light, one can see how a free concert, headlined by counterculture heroes, and taking place in San Francisco - the “psychic home of the American counterculture” - would be highly glorified by the members of the counterculture to the point where anything less than perfection would be a disappointment. Michael Lydon articulates this feeling in his personal account of his experiences at Altamont:

> It isn’t that the morning is not a groove; it is, friendly enough and loose. But...but what? There is too much of something; is it the people, the dope, the tension? Maybe it is the *wanting*, the consecration, not just of flesh, but of unfulfilled desire, of hope for (or is it fear of) deliverance...Have we jammed ourselves together on these sere hills miles from home hoping to find a way out of such masses? If that is our paradox, is Altamont our self-made trap?

In her essay “If Anything, blame Woodstock”, Norma Coates described the concert and its portentous events, as well as the reaction of counterculture media and the mythologizing of Altamont into an icon of the end of the 1960s era. Coates describes

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47 Coates, page 64
Altamont as "the evil twin of Woodstock"\textsuperscript{49}, and the comparisons between the events are numerous and well known. Altamont took place only four months after Woodstock, when the publicity for Woodstock was finally resolving into what would undoubtedly be Rock and Roll legend. After the cultural and economic success of Woodstock, it was natural that there would be a high demand for another. This concept was mainly translated into the aspect of a free concert, because it seemed to many that this concept was what made Woodstock such an enlightened concept:

Moreover, the demand for free concerts by journalists after Woodstock made it difficult for the Rolling Stones, given their status as the world's leading rock group at the time, to refuse to give one. Rock performers, especially the Rolling Stones, were elevated to the position of avatars and spokesmen of the counterculture.\textsuperscript{50}

This manifested itself constantly in the Altamont media, most obviously in the poster for the concert, which headlined "The Rolling Stones present a FREE CONCERT (larger text)"\textsuperscript{51}. Though certain parties certainly did make money off of the event (most notably the film rights, which will be discussed later), it is clear that this advertising ploy was done in the context of the international success of Woodstock.

Several members of the staff at Woodstock were employed for the event, including Chip Monck (the stage contractor and impromptu MC) and Michael Lang. In fact, Lang even makes an appearance in the documentary made about the event, \textit{Gimme Shelter}. When asked about a last minute change in location, Lang responds "Well, we had a much bigger operation at Woodstock, and we did it pretty quick. I don't think we'll have much problem." The reporter then asks "Is this going to be Woodstock

\textsuperscript{49} Coates, page 59
\textsuperscript{50} Coates, page 59
\textsuperscript{51} Image 4
West?" and Lang replies, “Well, it’s going to be San Francisco.” Lang’s comments here confirm the use of the Woodstock name in the promotion of the Altamont concert, and though Lang refuses to directly call it ‘Woodstock West’, he does imply that it is the same sort of event. The promoters of Altamont even attempted to appropriate the iconic images of Woodstock and transplant them to Altamont in their attempt to manufacture lines of cars. In the *Rolling Stone* article on the concert, the author says “At 3 AM Saturday, KFRC announced that Woodstock was ‘Altamont East,’ and the public wants traffic jams, give ’em the biggest traffic jam ever, despite the fact that there were no traffic jams. You could drive at sixty-five miles an hour from Altamont to Livermore and back, twenty miles in all, with KFRC 610 on your car radio, informing you that traffic was backed up *twenty miles in either direction* and that access was completely closed off.”

Press for the event was varied, but *Rolling Stone* published a vicious article entitled “Let It Bleed: The Rolling Stone’s Disaster at Altamont”, and is condemning of both the event and its organizers:

Altamont was the product of diabolical egotism, hype, ineptitude, money manipulation, and, at base, a fundamental lack of concern for humanity...The 300,000 anonymous bodies huddled together on the little dirt hills were indeed an instant city – a decaying urban slum complete with its own air pollution. By the time the Stones finally came on, dozens of garbage fires had been set all over the place. Flickering silhouettes of people trying to find warmth around the blazing trash reminded one of the medieval paintings of tortured souls in the Dance of Death.

We can see that the expectations for Altamont in the aftermath of Woodstock were extremely high and were eventually met with total failure. Why and how this happened

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52 *Gimme Shelter*. 0:32:07
is a complex question, but the most common answer is very simple: the allocation of security to the notorious Hell's Angels motorcycle club. The Hell's Angels were an extremely violent gang were characterized by crime, rape, and a lack of respect for authority. Hunter S. Thompson immortalized the community in his Gonzo-journalistic account of his year living with the Hell's Angels: “The hard core, the outlaw elite, were the Hell's Angels... wearing the winged death's-head on the back of their sleeveless jackets and packing their "mamas" behind them on big "chopped hogs." They rode with a fine unwashed arrogance, secure in their reputation as the rottenest motorcycle gang in the whole history of Christendom."54 Famous in California for embodying a sort of counterculturalist nihilism, the Hell's Angels were also known to associate with celebrities like Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsburg and the Grateful Dead (who suggested that the Rolling Stones hire them for security at Altamont)55.

The Hell's Angels were paid $500 of beer, and were responsible for keeping people off the stage, but the event immediately became violent, the Hell's Angels assaulting attendees and musicians alike. Several of these incidents are captured on film in *Gimme Shelter*. Four people died at the festival, and over 30 were injured, but the worst of these was the case of Meredith Hunter, a young black man at the front of the stage who was stabbed and stomped to death during Rolling Stone's performance of "Under My Thumb" after a Hell's Angel saw him with a gun. A witness describes the event in the *Rolling Stone* article on the event: "...after he said 'I wasn't going to shoot you,' one of the Hell's Angels said, 'Why did you have a gun?' He didn't give him time to..."

55 "Let It Bleed: The Rolling Stones Disaster at Altamont" Page 24.
say anything. He grabbed one of those garbage cans, you know, one of those cardboard garbage cans with the metal rimming, and he smashed him over the head with it, and then he kicked the garbage can out of the way and started kicking his head in. Kicked him all over the place."  

This brutal attack was captured on film in the making of *Gimme Shelter*, and was actually used by the police to identify a suspect, but no one on stage seemed to be aware that it was happening, isolated on the stage.

Almost a year later, a Hell's Angel was indicted for the crime, though ironically he was already serving another prison sentence. ‘Sonny’ Barger, one of the founders of the Hell’s Angels, went on KSAN, San Francisco’s underground FM station the day after the murder: “We moved them people to save that bike. And, after that, they tried to destroy our bikes, and we're not gonna stand for it. And that made it personal...You know what? I'm a violent cat when I got to be. But I don't really want to be. But there ain't nobody gonna take anything I got and try to destroy it. Mick Jagger, he put it all on the Angels.”

**Media Coverage**

Though blame for the disaster that was Altamont was widespread, perhaps no one’s career was more immediately affected than that of the Rolling Stones, and in particular that of Mick Jagger as the face of the group. The Rolling Stone's role as the representatives of counterculturalism elevated them to the forefront of the movement, but also meant that the rebound from the failed concert fell on their soldiers. Though

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58 Gleason. *Aquarius Wept*. Paragraph 9
there can be no doubt that decisions by the Rolling Stones contributed to the nature of the concert, it was on the whole beyond the control of the performing musicians. "The idea that rock performers owed something more to their audience, not vice versa, bears interrogation. That the performer merely owed what any performer owed the audience, an evening of entertainment delivered well, is in Gleason's view insufficient."\(^{59}\)

Though numerous groups and individuals contributed to the production of Altamont, Hunter's death was always associated with the Rolling Stones. Much of this has to do with the media politics initiated by Ralph J. Gleason, a music executive and critic, and co-founder of *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Immediately after the concert, Gleason released several articles about the concert in several magazines, calling the Rolling Stones greedy and the concert a poorly-planned and violent disaster. *Rolling Stone Magazine* writers claimed that Hunter was killed while the Rolling Stones played "Sympathy for the Devil"; though this was false, it was too good of a story not to use, and *Rolling Stone* never corrected it. "Given that Hunter was a black man in a sea of white faces, listening to music arguably stolen from blacks by whites (remember that the Rolling Stones' version of 'Love in Vain' on Let It Bleed was originally credited not to Robert Johnson but to 'Payne'), there is poetic justice there, but to have him murdered during 'Sympathy for the Devil' is so much more fitting with rock narratives and its constructed outsider mystique. To this day, this inaccuracy is repeated in countless articles and lodged in the popular memory of events."\(^{60}\)

This yellow journalism was aimed at the Rolling Stones, and assigned all of the

\(^{59}\)Coates. Page 62.

\(^{60}\)Coates, page 67
blame to them. Never does Gleason in any of his articles mention Rolling Stone Magazine’s participation in the organization and advertisement for the event, but instead deflects to the Rolling Stones. In his article “More Questions for the Rolling Stones”, Gleason displays extremely biased journalism in his language and content: “Can the Rolling Stones actually need all that money? ...How much can the Stones take back to Merrie England after taxes, anyway? Paying five, six and seven dollars for a Stones concert at the Oakland Coliseum for, say, an hour of the Stones seen a quarter of a mile away because the artists demand such outrageous fees that they can only be obtained under these circumstances, says a very bad thing to me about the artists’ attitude towards the public. It says they despise their own audience.”

We can see from Gleason’s articles that while the role of rock star may have been an entertaining lifestyle complete with money, women, and fame, there is also a degree of responsibility on the part of these bands to deliver to their audience a very particular kind of experience, and if that experience is not achieved there can be massive backlash in both the career of the artists and the situation of counterculture society.

**Historical Significance**

It is probable that Gleason highlighted the mistakes and blunders of the Rolling Stones to distract attention away himself, or perhaps more broadly from the Rock industry as a whole. While the disaster at Altamont was certainly not good for the careers of the Rolling Stones, it was even worse for the future of Rock Concerts. “the

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actual event of Altamont tore the scales from the eyes of the rock public, revealing the violence, economic and spiritual as well as physical, that lay as much at the root of 'rock culture' as at that of mainstream culture." Altamont popped the bubble on the rock culture, and perhaps the 1960s as a whole concept. In truth, the concert was almost certainly not as bad as we imagine it to be. "Unlike others who were there who were struck from the start by the menacing atmosphere, the brooding ugliness and unsettling presence of the Hell's Angels, Marcia recalls nothing about being at Altamont that seemed threatening or ominous... 'I really did not experience anything weird that day, like evil vibes or danger,'"  

However, this does not change the fact of how Altamont is thought about in historical memory. It was the inverse of Woodstock, an embarrassment to the counterculture, and proof to the authorities that Rock and Roll was dangerous. As Gleason put it, "The event challenged the basic 'do-your-own-thing' ethic on which the whole of San Francisco music and hip culture had been based." It is for these reasons that Altamont has been engrained into the mythology of the 1960s. It was the counterculture's 'fall from grace' and was also extremely bad publicity for the counterculture and the New Left as a whole. While a music concert can only have impacts so far, Altamont had philosophical and political effects that would change the shape of American history.

As time progressed, the 'countermyth' of Altamont, as Ellen Willis

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62 Coates, 59
63 'Your Say'. Uncut Feature. Retrieved from http://www.uncut.co.uk/music/the_rolling_stones/special_features/34
64 Gleason, Aquarius Wept
(1999: 155) has described it, has itself become a myth, in the sense theorized by Roland Barthes (1972). The event is now drained of historicity, except in relation to its role as ‘the end of the sixties’ — a dubious claim given the many other contenders for that title. Instead, it stands in for the outlaw ethos inherent in the popular conception of rock’n’roll.\(^\text{65}\)

Through its expectations and infamy, Coates argues, Altamont managed not only to destroy itself but pervert an entire symbolism that had been established with the Woodstock Festival.

PEOPLE’S PARK: “A TURF OF THEIR OWN”

The Event

Possibly some of the most significant images and events of the 1960s are those associated with the student protests that ended violently, most notably the Kent State (May 4, 1970) and Jackson State (May 14, 1970) incidents in which a total of 6 students protesting the Vietnam War were killed, along with dozens of others being wounded. This event is one of the best examples of the government forcefully opposing the antiwar demonstrations, establishing to the counterculture and the world at large that if you protest enough, the government will shoot you. These events marked a high point for student radicalism in the 1960s in terms of influence and media coverage, but at the

\(^{65}\) Coates, page 58
same time seemed to also be the beginning of the end for the glory years of the 1960s, the end of any hope that the system American government to which the counterculture was so opposed could ever be changed.

The power of these events derived from the fact that represented to the American people the hypocrisy and determination of the government to suppress the counterculture, particularly in the context of war protesting. In both cases, the killings were instigated by the military in an attempt to disperse the crowd of protesters who in both cases were doing nothing particularly violent or threatening, merely collectively expressing their disagreement with the Vietnam War and the recent deployment to Cambodia. The fact that the military resorted to violence in a peaceful student protest to many represented all that was wrong with the government and military in general.

While these events and the politics that resulted from these events are important to understanding the 1960s, more relevant to my topic and argument is the riots in Berkeley on Thursday, May 15, 1969 and the subsequent military occupation. The story of People's Park is not nearly as well known as either Kent or Jackson State, possibly because it did not involve Vietnam war protesters. According to John Oliver Simon, in his account of the event, the lot that would eventually become people's park was once an "substandard" apartment building occupied mainly by "students and street people", a typical counterculture scenario. In the summer of 1968, the University acquired the building and land through eminent domain and demolished the building, "with the claim

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66 Image 2
67 Degroot, 54
that it had become 'a scene of hippie concentration and rising crime". After the demolition of the building, the lot went mainly unused for almost a year. The motivation to tear down the building was not, therefore, one of need or use, but rather a desire to deny it to the New Left/counterculture occupants.

Almost a year later, the lot was still unused and had become a muddy lot. At this point, a Berkeley counterculture local named Mike Delacour had the idea to convert the lot into a park: In his book on the 1960s, Todd Gitlin tells the story of how People's Park was created:

"...Mike Delacour conceived the idea of converting the grim space into a park, for in his view the street community needed a turf of its own, a public place for rock concerts and general rendezvous...he convened some hip freelance radicals to talk about the idea of a park, and they proved as enthusiastic as he. In a few days' time, with a few hundred dollars raised from Telegraph Avenue merchants, they carted in a truckload of sod and plants, and this small group - a 'revolutionary gang' indeed - proceeded to start digging People's Park in a corner of the vacant lot."  

The desire to have "a turf of its own", we can see, was a major part of the counterculture, and was a desire expressed almost universally amongst its members across the country. At Woodstock we see this occurring, albeit temporarily, as a result of several factors. We can also see the huge expectation for this kind of event ultimately unsatisfied at the failure of Altamont, and the historical significance of that event. At Berkeley, the lot (fast becoming a park), attracted wide popular attention and

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69 Gitlin. Pages 354-355
support: “Within days hundreds of people were working in this improvised utopia...On weekends, up to three thousand people a day came to carry sod, to plant, to install swings, slides, a wading pool...”\(^7^0\).

Four weeks went by without major incident, and though the University made noises of disapproval, no action was officially made. Almost immediately, the Park began to symbolize to those involved with it a kind of paradise for the counterculture. Perhaps one of the most interesting facets of this movement was the justification of it through claiming it in the name of the Costanoan Indians, the original inhabitants of the land. Shortly after the construction of the park, a local Berkeley activist named Frank Bardacke wrote a manifesto called “Who Owns The Park?” It is an extremely provocative document that traces the history of the land and its ownership through the University, who bought it from the government, who won it from the Mexican government, who took it from missionaries, who took it from the Castanoan Indians. How much of this information existed before the seizure of the park? Though this is unclear, there is no evidence that this motivation was present in the minds of Mike Delacour and his fellow ‘founders’ of People’s Park. In addition, there is to be found in this document a very powerful expression of aggression and determination on the part of the counterculture to protect and retain their park as a ‘turf of their own’: “Finally, some very rich men, who run the University of California, bought the land. Immediately these men destroyed the houses that had been built on the land. The land went the way of so much other old land in America - it became a parking lot. We are building a park on the land. We will take care of it and guard it, in the spirit of the Costanoan

\(^7^0\) Gitlin, 355
Indians. When the University comes with its land title we will tell them: ‘Your land title is covered in blood. We won’t touch it. Your people ripped off the land from the Indians a long time ago. If you want it back now, you will have to fight for it again.”71

People’s Park soon became to represent a center for the counterculture ‘revolutionaries’, a place dedicated to counterculture principles and goals. Like Woodstock, People’s Park became an example both to the public and to the counterculture group itself that there was an real alternative to ‘the Establishment’ system: “...As substance and sign of a possible participatory order as the living and hand-made proof that necessary institutions need not be overplanned, absentee-owned, hierarchical - as such the Park came to stand in many minds as one tantalizing trace of a good society, as the practical negation of American death, as a redemption worth fighting for.”72

Todd Gitlin titles his chapter on this event “The Fragile Paradise of People’s Park”, and while the park may have seemed like paradise to some, it was not to last. Though the main motivations in creating the park were for social space and a counterculture refuge, there can be no doubt that the counterculture’s protest of land ownership played a major part in the public understanding of the park, particularly in its symbolism as an alternative to ‘the Establishment’. Gitlin writes about what People’s park meant in terms of the counterculture clash with authority:

To the university administration, People’s Park was nothing more or less

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73 Gitlin. Page 353.
than a dare...Governor Ronald Reagan thought the way to deal with the revolutionaries - and please California crowds - was to crack down; he had been trying to centralize the regents' (and his own) power over the nine-campus university system. Pressure was mounting on Berkeley chancellor Roger Heynes to assert property rights and do something.  

On May 15, only 4 weeks after the construction of the park, Chancellor Heynes gave the order to shut the park down. Before sunrise, the police sealed off 8 square blocks around the park, put a fence around the area, and bulldozed the gardens. By noon, thousands had gathered to rally, led by Dan Siegel, the president of the student body. It was then that the true violence and conflict began. The crowd poured down Telegraph Avenue, breaking the windows of the Bank of America and opening a fire hydrant, and was soon met by a line of Alameda County sheriff's deputies. These deputies were armed with shotguns, and to everyone's surprise they opened fire on the rioters. (Why the police did this is a matter of contention, but the general consensus seems to be on thrown rocks). "For several hours they emptied their loads of birdshot and buckshot into the crowds, they shot people running away from crowds, they shot passerby and reporters, they fired at students simply walking around. After two rocks were thrown from a rooftop - neither coming anywhere close to any deputies, according to eyewitnesses - they shot into a group standing on the adjacent roof of the Telegraph Repertory Cinema, cutting down two men: an artist named Alan Blanchard, who was permanently blinded by birdshot, and a visitor from San Jose named James Rector, whose belly was torn apart by a load of buckshot. In all, at least fifty (by some accounts, at least a hundred) demonstrators were shot. Four days later, Rector died." 

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74 Gitlin. Page 356.
75 Image 5
76 Gitlin. Page 357.
Over the next few weeks, a remarkable thing happened in Berkeley and to its citizens. On May 16, Ronald Reagan sent 3,000 National Guardsmen armed with rifles and bayonets into the city. Martial law was declared over Berkeley, complete with a strict curfew and continuous helicopter flyovers throughout the day. Nearly 500 people were arrested over the next week and tear gas was deployed over both demonstrators and civilians alike. "Thursday the 22nd nearly 500 are herded into a parking lot and busted, then subjected to incredible humiliations at the concentration camp known as Santa Rita; when I see friends on their release the next day, they are whispering, shaken, and bent...Telegraph Avenue is closed off by barbed wire, machine guns are on the roofs..."\(^{77}\)

In addition, the National Guard used tear gas extensively in the situation, perhaps as often as everyday. Though People's park did not receive wide coverage, several local papers covered the event with extensive photographs, including several of helicopters dumping tear gas on entire city blocks. Gitlin goes so far as to claim "One day a National Guard helicopter flew low over a huge but peaceful campus rally and after a perfunctory warning blanketed the entire campus, all square mile of it (including the campus hospital and nearby schools), with tear gas."\(^{78}\)

An article was written for *Time Magazine* which pertained mainly to the legal ramifications of the event on the police officers who participated in the shooting. The article briefly outlines the events, namely the death of James Rector and the imprisonment of over 400 people and their subsequent abuse by the guards, giving

\(^{77}\) Simon. Page 471.
\(^{78}\) Gitlin. Page 358.
details from the FBI investigation that was not publicly known: "They took them by bus to a prison farm 25 miles away. Strutting among the prisoners, the sheriff's deputies punched, jabbed, clubbed and verbally terrorized their captives. 'Don't none of you move,' one deputy was quoted as saying. 'We shoot to kill here.' After hours of harassment, all were released, and charges were later dismissed." This persecution and harassment eventually led to an FBI investigation into the incident, which resulted in the indictment of 12 of the officers, facing charges of misusing their authority, a six thousand dollar fine, and a possible 11 year prison sentence.

The responses to this occupation of Berkeley were varied, ranging from fear to aggression. While many viewed it as a massacre, a large number also thought of the event as the start of a revolution. *The Berkeley Tribe*, an underground newspaper, ran a headline that read "JOIN THE NEW ACTION ARMY", and throughout the occupation and afterwards, there was a very militant section of the counterculture that proposed all-out revolution.

In the *Berkeley Barb*, Berkeley radicals published a 13-point "Berkeley Liberation Program", which became a major focus point for the right-wing campaign against the counterculture. The first point of the manifesto declares Telegraph Avenue "a strategic free territory for revolution", making it the official headquarters for the revolution. The second point has to do with the creation of their "revolutionary culture", meaning the promotion of art and theater. The third point transforms the school system from "the brainwashing, fingernail-cutting mass production of junior cogs for tight-ass America's

80 The Berkely Tribe. Berkely, California. May 15, 1969
81 The Berkeley Barb. Berkely, California. May 1969
old age home war machine" into a progressive, liberal education. These three points mainly set up the structure for their "revolutionary culture"; how, where, and why it should be instigated.

Though not extremely important, I think it is worth mentioning that in the location of Telegraph Avenue we see another assignment of importance to a place simply because it is seen as counterculture 'turf', and the importance of that too the counterculture. The fourth point is extremely radical and almost paranoid, and basically calls for the destruction of the University unless it undergoes radical change. "The University of California is not only the major oppressive institution in Berkeley but a major brain center for world domination...We will shatter the myth that UC is a sacred intellectual Institution with a special right to exist. We will change this deadly Machine which steals our land and rapes our minds, or we will stop its functioning." Points six, eight, nine, eleven, and twelve all have to do with the creation of a socialist system, both in terms of politics and society. Included in these points are the liberation of women, the transition to communal living and communal food, and the creation of a "people's government". Point seven protects the "liberating potential of drugs for both the mind and the body polit".

These various demands and ideas are interesting for a number of reasons. Perhaps one of the most interesting point of this whole document is that it never even mentions People's Park or any park projects. This does not comment on the importance of the park, but rather the degree to which the situation at the park to many was not simply about the park, but came to symbolize the entire 'Movement'. Possibly the strongest trend in the document is the idea of community, or perhaps more specifically
communal living. This was an important aspect of the 1960s that is evident not only in People's Park, but also in Woodstock and in the various communes established during this decade.

Though obvious, one of the most provocative aspects of the manifesto is summed up in the title for point number ten: “We will defend ourselves against law and order”. This point is interesting because unlike other incidents, this was a case of the government coming and taking proactive steps to affect change within this community (or perhaps more accurately to impede change). While the counterculture had traditionally been willing to resist the 'Establishment', this was perhaps the first incident when they could do so through protecting what they consider to be valuable. This kind of language results in an extremely polarized society, seeming to almost challenge the government: “States of emergency, martial law, conspiracy charges and all legalistic measures used to crush our movement will be resisted by any means necessary—from courtroom to armed struggle. The people of Berkeley must arm themselves and learn the basic skills and tactics of self defense and street fighting.”

In addition, the Third World Liberation Front, went so far as to send the “People of People's Park” a supportive letter, in which they sympathized with the suffering of the people and specifically 'Brother Rector', and further encouraging them to organize and fight back: “Come back organized, prepared to give as well as to receive – come back a million!”

However, the majority of people in Berkeley were purely non-violent, and this reaction to

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the government occupation ended up dividing the community just as the park had
unified it:

The defense of the park linked old-style upper-crust 'nature-lovers' with
Sierra Club mountaineers and political insurgents. But most of the park-
lovers were mild souls depressed and horrified by the bloodshed. The last
thing they wanted was to 'pick up the gun', and if that was what politics was
going to require of them now, many preferred to flee politics altogether. The
park that was supposed to fuse movement and counterculture ended up
driving a wedge between them.83

After 17 days, the National Guard withdrew from Berkeley, having successfully
protected the still-empty lot. The fence remained, though, and while the University
attempted to use the park for various purposes, none were successful. It was
designated first as an athletic field, but none of the students would use it. In addition,
the University tried to sell the land to any contractor for a very good deal, but no local
companies would take the contract.84

Media Coverage

Though not covered as well as Kent or Jackson State or the Chicago Riots, there
was certain coverage of People's Park in local papers. For instance, the Berkeley Barb,
in addition to the manifesto, devoted its entire May issue to the stories from People's
Park, with headlines like "How James Rector Was Killed", "In Cold Blood--", "Massive
Arrests On: The Big Lie", "Choppers Drop Gas On Rebels", and "Seven Days in May".
These reports mainly just report on the facts of the event, combined with a vicious anti-

83 Gitlin 360
84 "Pigs Park". In Bloom, Alexander, and Wini Breines. "Takin' It to the Streets": A Sixties
Establishment rhetoric. Perhaps the most impaction part of the argument, though, is the photography accompanying it. Because many of the employees of the paper were participating in the riots, they were able to capture the riots from the point of view of the people. In one provocative example, a photographer captured the image of a low-flying helicopter as it doused a huge crowd in tear gas from directly beneath it, invoking the fear the rioters must have felt.  

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Historical Significance

What about the People's Park event is important to understanding 1960s history? Possibly the most obvious answer to this question is in its relationship to the Kent and Jackson State killings. These events were similar in that they involved military violence against young civilian students of the counterculture. In addition, the visual iconography of the events is very similar, as well as very similar to that of the Vietnam War. People's Park, however, was very different from both Kent and Jackson State in several important ways. Perhaps one of the most important and most overlooked ways is the fact that the situation was fundamentally different in terms of the aims and objectives.

Kent and Jackson State were both active protests of something they didn't agree with, namely the Vietnam War. In other words, they were trying to affect change. However, in People's Park the protestors were not looking to win something from the Establishment, but rather keep something that they already had: “For the first time the white left and street movements have fought to defend something they made themselves rather than to win demands from the Authorities...Public need and vision

85 The Berkeley Barb

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collided with property. The friction between irrepressible need and immovable institutions ignited a war.\textsuperscript{86}

THE SAN FRANCISCO DIGGERs, COMMUNES, AND THE HUMAN BE-IN

Commune

Events like Woodstock, Altamont, and People's Park are excellent examples of 1960s utopianism, both because of their historical situation and their vast exposure in popular culture. For Altamont and Woodstock, at least, the participation of famous and successful musical groups like The Who, Janis Joplin, and the Rolling Stones meant that the events received national attention and vast numbers of people. The participation of large numbers of people as well as the national community lent more weight to these events and situated them as important historical events. However, as proved at People's Park, the 1960s phenomenon of utopianism was \textit{not limited} to these kinds of high-profile events. People all over the country were searching and creating these kinds of alternative environments for themselves and their friends, away from and separate from traditional 'Establishment' society.

There are numerous examples of these kinds of "intentional communities" from the 1960s, and the history of intentional communities goes back an extremely long time. One could argue that the first intentional communities were the establishment of monestaries by early Christians in an attempt to live a purely sacred life. The colonies founded by England in America could be considered the first geographic utopianism,

\textsuperscript{86} Simon, 468
religious puritans fleeing England in search of what they hoped would be a better, religiously free life. These groups splintered in America, some of whom retained the dream of a utopian life in the New World. Quakers, Amish, and eventually even Mormons all share aspects to their lifestyle and doctrine (particularly the isolation from mainstream society) that are somewhat utopian, along with many others. In the 1960s, new groups emerged with the rise of environmentalism. Instead of having religious motivation, these groups were motivated both by a desire to lead an environmentally-aware lives and a scorn for main-stream culture and society, or the Establishment.

In addition to philosophical and world views, these communes also became an escape for counterculture youth who often felt misplaced in mainstream society.

"...along the unofficial network of communes, that stretches from New England to California, something well over 10,000 out-and-out hippies as well as just generally disaffected young people are either settled or still shifting from one sort of community to another...Others, like Drop City, conceive themselves as 'decompression chambers' for over-urbanized kids fresh off the road."\(^{87}\) This was, I am sure, a huge part of the allure of the Woodstock event, because many parts of what made Woodstock so unique were qualities that it shared with this communal lifestyle: “Although local residents were reported to be demanding $0.25 for a glass of water and $1 for a loaf of bread and a quart of milk, on festival grounds, sharing what you had — whether a bonfire, an apple or a joint — was the order of the night. One hundred members of The Hog Farm, flown in from their New Mexico commune by the festival promoters, served brown rice and bean

soup from open vats...beyond the woods lay the Hog Farm encampment, an area of peaceful industry. It's members provided the most soothing refuge ..."88 Though dozens of examples of these kinds of groups exist, I will only discuss the most famous and most popular of these, the San Francisco Diggers.

The Diggers

The original Diggers lived in England in the 17th century, and were a small intentional community based on socialist agrarian life. In the 1960s, a group of actors living in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco began to organize the principles under which the Diggers would function. In 1968, they published the Digger Papers89, which outlined the principles and methods by which they would function. The essential idea was of a world in which everything is free: food, water, shelter, clothing, transportation, even entertainment. This would be accomplished through a variety of means, but the general idea was create a “free city”, composed of several “free families”, that would not be motivated by profit, but by sustainability and spiritual and physical health. “Our state of awareness demands that we uplift our efforts from competitive game playing in the underground to the comparative roles of free families and free cities. We must pool our resources and interact our energies to provide the freedom for our individual actions.”90 Through various institutions and philosophy, the Diggers hoped to attain a certain kind of utopia. In the manifesto, institutions are set up

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for everything from sanitation to free hospitals and schools.

Through a mixture of commune living, art, poems, and theatrical performance, the Diggers defined themselves as the ultimate expression of the counterculture philosophy, and used their symbolic role in demonstrations, protests, and "happenings" (the term coined by the Diggers for their improvised theater/activism) to influence and motivate the general public, or the members of the counterculture that were not fully committed. In Dominick Cavallo's book on the 1960s, he says

Although the Diggers of San Francisco were short lived, lasting barely two years, their impact upon the style and substance of counterculture protest during the second half of the decade was significant. As a historian recently noted, the Diggers were the "high priests of the counterculture". Their iconoclastic broadsides, free services, community events and guerrilla theater street happenings were emenated by cultural radicals later in the decade.91

San Francisco

It was not a coincidence that the Diggers were located in San Francisco. As Hunter S. Thompson put it,

"San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run ...but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant ..."92

For numerous reasons, San Francisco developed early in the 1960s as a

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major head of counterculture operations, in particular, the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. Why? A huge factor in this development was its importance as a city of music. In a survey of the San Francisco music scene, rock critic Richard Goldstein talks about the importance of the current music scene and how San Francisco is becoming the headquarters for Rock and Roll. "What really matters about San Francisco is what mattered about Liverpool three years ago. The underground occupies a pivotal place in the city's life. The Fillmore and the Avalon are jammed every weekend with beaded, painted faces, and flowered shirts."93 Perhaps one of the most interesting facets of the 1960s was this motivation to create a new world, a new system, even a new America. They felt a desire to create their own system separate from that of the older generation, which seemed motivated purely by war, greed, and power. Marianne DeKoven even goes so far as to title her book on the 1960s Utopia Limited, reflecting the desire by many in the 1960s of the formulation of a utopia, somewhere where all of the disaffected youths could, together, be at home and be normal.94 In his A Fiction of the Past, Cavallo says, "From its frenzied, chaotic and violent inception during the Gold Rush of the late 1840s, San Francisco (and the area surrounding its capacious bay) was a place where, as one historian put it, 'the bottom fell out' of nineteenth-century assumptions about moral order and progress."95 Combined with a sense of entitlement endowed by Americanism and "Manifest Destiny", San Francisco soon became a large city, where soon enough the first bohemianism was developed, and the roots of the

95 Cavallo, 104
Another reason that San Francisco became so popular to the counterculture was the amount of counterculture people here, and how fast it was growing. Goldstein quotes Bill Graham, manager of the Fillmore and the Jefferson Airplane, as saying, “The cops are aware of the number of heads here. The law thinks it will fade out, like North Beach. What can they do? To see a cop in the Haight...it’s like the English invading China. Once they own it, how are they going to police it?”

Thus due to the large number of people in San Francisco, and particularly in the Haight-Ashbury district, police were unable to police the drug use, which in turn persuades others to come. Soon enough, there is a self-perpetuating utopian phenomenon where San Francisco becomes the ‘homeland’ to counterculture. In addition, San Francisco media had a longer relationship with the counterculture than other places, the San Francisco Oracle running an article in 1966 that “welcomed a ‘new consciousness’ or ‘new subculture’ evolving within Western industrial civilization.” This new subculture is what would within the next few years evolve into the counterculture with which we are all so familiar.

The Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco wasn’t the only counterculture enclave, but it was the first and the biggest and the most photogenic...It served as both a literal and, far more often, a figurative destination for millions of young people who found themselves in the midst of a national debate about the meaning of the American dream that left most of them just confused.

As I discussed briefly earlier, there is a self-replicating aspect to the idea of San Francisco being the homeland of the counterculture, in that because so many like-

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96 Goldstein, 236
98 Farber, 169
minded people were there, there were events (namely music concerts like Altamont) that attracted these people together, further knitting them into one community. This culminated in the 1967 "Summer of Love", when over 100,000 people converged in the Haight-Ashbury district to celebrate counterculture and protest the Vietnam War. In his compilation of 1960s documents America in the Sixties – Right, Left, and Center, Peter Levy says "In the latter half of the 1960s, the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco came to embody hippie culture, with hundreds if not thousands of men and women migrating there to take part in the Summer of Love (1967). San Francisco, which had been the home of a thriving 'Beat' community in the 1950s, gave rise to numerous countercultural institutions, from Bill Graham's Fillmore West, a famous rock-music hall, to the San Francisco Oracle, one of many underground or independent newspapers that sprang up across the nation." Throughout the summer were various performances, demonstrations, and gatherings.

One of the more interesting of these was an event called the "Human Be-In", held near Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967, and billed as "A Gathering of the Tribes". Margaret Perry relates her personal experiences at the Human Be-In in the Summer of Love: "[I]t was the Polo Field itself that presented a new world. It was a medieval scene, with banners flying, bright and uncommitted; the day was miraculous, as days can be in San Francisco at their best, and the world was new and clean and pastoral....Dogs and children pranced around in blissful abandon, and I became aware of a phenomenon that still piques my curiosity: The dogs did not get into fights, and the children did not

99 Image 6
This event was organized by a man named Allen Cohen, who meant it to unify and consolidate the counterculture, and was billed as "A Gathering of the Tribes", and Cohen wrote to several underground newspapers to spread the word, calling it a way to "join together to affirm our unity, and generate waves of joy and conscious penetration of the veil of ignorance and fear that hides the original face of humankind." While this event may lack the historical significance of other events I research in this thesis, it is worth mentioning because it is one of the purest forms of utopianism. It was organized not for music or culture in general, but as a genuine community event to which over 20,000 people attended.

CONCLUSIONS

The economic and political developments after WWII (namely the boost in our economy combined with the discovery of numerous new technologies) changed both American society and American culture profoundly, a change that was felt most by the youth generation of the 1960s. The "generation gap" between this generation and their parents led to the separation and mutual alienation of two national cultures, the counterculture and mainstream society. This counterculture enfranchised itself in institutions like student protest movements (SDS, The Weathermen, The Diggers), the

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102 Allen Cohen letters. Online, retrieved at http://s91990482.onlinehome.us/allencohen/be-in.html
music industry (music executives like Artie cornfield as well as the numerous rock stars, song-writers, and producers), and communal living, its own interests and concerns and the development of a new culture and philosophy.

A major part of the philosophy of this counterculture community was the utopian desire for a new system or new society separate from that of the older generation which they feel to be hypocritical, unfair, and even amoral. These notions were exemplified and exacerbated by failures of the US government, most notably the Vietnam War. Events like Woodstock, Altamont, and People's Park are examples of that utopian concept brought to life for a limited amount of time, and also proved to the public the notion that this kind of utopian existence was – at least temporarily - achievable. This (in combination with outside pressure), resulted in stronger conviction for the counterculture and further alienation from mainstream society.

However, this utopianism that was formed in the imaginations of Woodstock festival attendees created a false dichotomy that, in the end, was impossible to fully achieve in any permanent way. The mythologizing of these events led people to believe that it was possible, perhaps even inevitable, that 'the revolution' would achieve its goals, when in reality utopian events like Woodstock were dependent on the inherent utopianism of counterculture thought. It was this projected expectation for some future 'better world' that resulted in people regarding events like Altamont and later the 1960s in general as a failure or disappointment, when in fact the 1960s were an extremely diverse time, full of various kinds of progress for liberal politics, civil rights, art, music, and culture.
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Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young
Flying Burrito Bros.
Image 5: People’s Park police Intervention
Image 6: The Haight-Ashbury District