

Cultural Daily

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Let's Reboot The Sixties!

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, November 16th, 2016

On the evening of November 8, 2016, in disbelief, I witnessed the map of the United States rapidly turn predominantly red. I, like everyone whom I know, went into shock! It appeared that everything which we hold dear had been suddenly consigned to the garbage heap. Donald Trump's negative revolution is yet to spread its wings; Noam Chomsky gives [an accurate early appraisal](#).

However, on reflection, I now see a different horizon offering the possibility of some hope and opportunity. For anyone who lived through The Sixties in this country and/or Europe, at that time, we witnessed a global social revolution that altered how we dressed, how we wore our hair, how we ate, how we regarded others: African Americans, gays, lesbians, transgenders and the disabled, how we regarded politics, how we regarded art, popular music, and...the list goes on amalgamating militancy with a program to reform societal mores. Women began challenging their role as sexual objects and household slaves. The neglected and disposed began to organize. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI harassed the reformers of all stripes, invaded their ranks, imprisoned some and murdered others. However, The Sixties values continue to resonate in the lives of most of the inhabitants of the world who are not living under oppressive regimes or who are not involved in conflict.

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As a consequence of Donald Trump's predatory presidency, which hopefully we will survive, I believe that we are on the threshold of another such societal upheaval because his actions and policies are spreading the seeds of change. All that one needs to do is study the faces of anti-Trump demonstrators. They are the New America: African American, African, Asian, Caucasian, Latin American, Native American – young, old, female, male, gay, straight, disabled and transgender. Just as in The Sixties, when dissatisfaction with social negativity expanded, today, anti-Trump actions will breed a whole new cadre of leaders.

The Sixties – Woodstock Nation – was a rebellion having its origins in the 1940s and 1950's United States. It was a period of bland conformity amalgamated with political repression and the threat of nuclear annihilation. In 1947, President [Harry S. Truman](#) signed United States Executive Order 9835, sometimes known as the "Loyalty Order." It established the first general [loyalty](#) program in the United States and was designed to root out [communist](#) influence in the [U.S. federal government](#). As President, Dwight Eisenhower echoed Harry Truman's Cold War policies and anti-Soviet Union rhetoric. He permitted Senator Joseph McCarthy to engage in his vicious

intimidation of creative people. *Point of Order!*, a 1964 documentary about the Senate Army–McCarthy hearings of 1954, recapitulates some of these sordid incidents.

J. Edgar Hoover, founding head of the FBI, investigated and punished non-conformity. His FBI harassed his targets, invaded their ranks and imprisoned some. Among his targets were: Hollywood filmmakers, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., leftist college professors and labor leaders.

The potential of mutual nuclear annihilation by the United States and the Soviet Union was viewed as a distinct possibility. The average American homeowner was encouraged to build a bomb shelter; public buildings were emblazoned with fallout shelter signs and assessed on their abilities to withstand nuclear shock.



Recommended bomb shelter design, 1958



Ubiquitous bomb shelter signs were in all public spaces, 1958

Post World War II America was suffused with paranoia and bland social behavior. Published in 1955, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* captured the mood of the nation—occupational stress and societal conformity—its theme being that the ubiquitous gray flannel suit became the hallmark of success. The novel’s protagonist does not want anything extraordinary out of his life. He strives to provide his family with a decent home, enough money to support them comfortably and a career



that won’t crush his spirit.

Published the following year, *The Organization Man* delineated the travails of a martini-soaked malcontent and his striving suburban wife. A central tenet of the book is that average Americans subscribed to a collectivist ethic rather than to the prevailing notion of traditional rugged individualism. A key point made was that people became convinced that organizations and groups could make better decisions than individuals, thus preferring to become a cog in a wheel serving an organization. More recently, “Mad Men,” considered to be one of the greatest television series of all times, updated these moribund experiences.

Collectively, these onerous conditions: boring rat race lives, diminution of individuality, collective paranoia and abnegation of ethical standards were the seeds of The Sixties social rebellion. Regarding the 1968 student strike at Columbia University, in the June 15, 1968 edition of Ramparts magazine, Tom Hayden wrote: “American educators are fond of telling their students that barricades are part of the romantic past, that social change can come about through the processes of negotiation. But the students at Columbia discovered that barricades are only the beginning of what they call ‘bringing the war home.’”

From my bookshelf:



With his “An Essay on Liberation” and others, Herbert Marcuse became a prophet of The Sixties revolutionaries. In his 1964 *One-Dimensional Man*, he talks of how, under the guise of law and order, the mass media misrepresented the student movement. Deja vu, fifty years later, we still struggle with the impact of the mass media on our social structure, distorting, witnessing and influencing public opinion.



In 1963, Frantz Fanon, progenitor of the Black Liberation Movement wrote in his *The Wretched of the Earth* that “The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute...We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs...Leave this Europe...Look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.”



In 1965, Malcolm X said, “I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being – neither, white black, brown or red; and when you are dealing with humanity as a family there is no question of integration or intermarriage. It is just one human being marrying a human being or one human being or another human being living around and with another human being.”



In 1969, Abbie Hoffman, an icon of the 60s anti-war movement and counter culture, said, “I’m guilty of a conspiracy all right. Guilty of creating liberated land in which we can do whatever the fuck we decide. Guilty of helping to bring WOODSTOCK NATION to the whole earth. Guilty of trying to overthrow the motherfuckin senile government of the U.S. of A... Enough of this bullshit! Light up your joint, inhale and proceed to the next song.”



In his 1971 book, *We Are Everywhere*. Written in Cook County Jail (Dedicated to the Weather Underground), Jerry Rubin, another icon of the 60s anti-war movement and counter culture, said, “The last place that you’ll find fairness is in a federal courtroom.”



In 1970, Eldridge Cleaver, a founder of the Black Panther Party said, “I am in favor of a Dictatorship of The Indians. It’s their land.” Also in 1970, Bobby Seale, another founder of the Black Panther Party said, “Many people did not understand that the very police who attempted to kill Huey (Huey P. Newton, another founder of the Black Panther Party) were controlled by the Democratic and Republican parties.

Beginning in 1969, Angela Davis was an acting assistant professor in the philosophy department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Although both Princeton and Swarthmore had tried to recruit her, she opted for UCLA because of its urban location. At that time, she was known as a radical feminist and activist, a member of the Communist Party USA, and an associate of the Black Panther Party.

Angela Davis gave her first lecture in Royce Hall at UCLA in October 1969.

The Board of Regents of the University of California, urged by then-California Governor Ronald Reagan, fired her from her \$10,000 a year post in 1969 because of her membership in the Communist Party. The Board of Regents was censured by the American Association of University Professors for their failure to reappoint Davis after her teaching contract expired. On October 20, when Judge Jerry Pacht ruled the Regents could not fire Davis solely because of her affiliations with the Communist Party, Davis resumed her post.

The Sixties was a period of political and social upheaval internationally. There were three major movements involving millions of people in the United States: the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and the Counter Culture described here.

(Featured image: Schoener family portrait, Grafton, Vermont, 1972)

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