

The new ideology of manifest destiny and freedom

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



The 1950s were a time of revitalization. They were a time of rebirth for the American people. World War II had ended and heralded the reinsertion and reintegration of thousands of service members into society. Working women who epitomized Rosie the Riveter and passed into the workforce along with their 12 million counterparts working when the US entered the war, saved the money they earned. Prior to the end of the war, there was not much to spend earned income on with the exception of war bonds. Afterwards, however, American industry expanded like never before.

The buying power offered to Americans expanded, as well. Goods that were not available during the war became readily accessible. This increased the job market and stimulated the economy. Not only that, but the returning soldiers helped the US experience a population boom helping to facilitate a spike in consumerism. Veterans were starting families and were in need of housing which the Levitt family began and perfected, building housing areas called Levitt-towns. People were increasingly more materialistic—shopping for wants and not just needs. It was truly the Fabulous Fifties.

Out of this time was born a generation of seeming radicals that fought against the agreed upon normalcy of the times. This 'Beat Generation' reimagined the ideals of Manifest Destiny and freedom because they wanted to be free to explore what was considered insanity by many but for them was artistic expression—a breaking free of conformist beliefs of the supposed American dream of materialism and gain. The Beat Generation or Beats, as they were sometimes called was a term coined by the author and member of this same generation Jack Kerouac during a conversation with fellow writer, John Clellon Holmes.

He clarified his phrase by saying beat “ meant being socially marginalized and exhausted—‘ beaten down’—and blessed—‘ beatific’ ” (“ Mid-1950s-1960s”, 2007). The term implied their generation was beaten down for their artistic nature and general deviance from mainstream behavior. Beatniks were labeled law breakers, troublemakers and rebel rousers and charged with being communists. In fact, in 1961 the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover claimed that the beatnik lifestyle was in the top three major threats to American society and way of life. Kerouac and other founders of the generation took offense to this accusation.

Their insistence was they merely wanted to be free to explore what may have been considered absurdity but really were searching for what they felt was missing in life. They were searching for a deeper meaning. They refused to be complacent just because the war had ended and the world was seemingly a better place. Things were not perfect just because the economy was on the rise. The war had not solved humanity’s problems and consumerism was just an empty shell for them. Therefore, this search for a higher self, took the form of experimentation.

Many of the Beats were openly homosexual or bisexual and freely experimented with their sexual natures. They aligned themselves with the culture of jazz musicians and the music they made. Jazz music followed no preordained rules. There were no wrong notes no matter how raw. The more noisy and discordant, the better and more real—emotional—it sounded. The Beats raged in their literature and poetry, sounding much like discordant peals of music echoing from the saxophone of a jazz musician, against those

who would suppress them. These feelings were elegantly detailed in the semi-mad ravings of Allen Ginsberg's poem Howl.

Like Ginsberg, many wrote under the influence of drugs like Benzedrine and marijuana, experimenting with them in order to achieve a state of transcendentalism. Gregory Stephenson (2009) explains it thusly, "The poet, for a visionary instant, transcends the realm of the actual into the realm of the ideal, and then, unable to sustain the vision, returns to the realm of the actual. Afterwards the poet feels exiled from the eternal, the numinous, [and] the super conscious. The material world, the realm of the actual, seems empty and desolate. The desolation the Beats felt was born from the feeling of being out of sorts and disconnected with a world no longer theirs. This made them howl. They howled, they cried out, they wailed and fought against a forced subjugation. And thus, refusing to be subjugated, they were ostracized. Thereby, making them howl more and inspiring the title of Ginsberg's poem. In analyzing the poem, it is clear Ginsberg wanted to accomplish two things. First, he wanted to exact an unmistakable and distinct delineation between those who fall under the Beatnik category and those they feel are the conformists of their time.

Secondly, he made it known that this was their declaration, it was their manifesto of freedom. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyes and high sat up smoking in the

supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz..." (1955).

The material world Stephenson speaks of and the fix Ginsberg speaks of correlates to the Beats movement centered on a lifestyle of a total rejection of this mainstream idea that one and one must always equal two, one must always know when the right time is to settle down, what constitutes a productive member of society, a person must write and speak in formalities, have a certain religion, wear what is acceptable and love who is acceptable in order to be accepted into society. They used alcohol and drugs to feel and then proceeded to write down what they felt, even if it was not in a formal order that made sense.

Therefore, " theacademiccommunity derided the Beats as anti-intellectual and unrefined...Established poets and novelists looked down upon the freewheeling abandon of Beat literature" (" The Beat Generation", 2013). Furthermore, this ' freewheeling abandon' applied to more than just the literature of the Beat movement, it applied to their psychical bodies, as well. American history was based on an idea of expansion, evidenced by a phrase coined in 1845 by editor, John O'Sullivan, called " Manifest Destiny".

Those that settled in the newly founded America believed " courageous pioneers...had a divine obligation to stretch the boundaries of their noble republic..." (" Manifest Destiny", 2013). And yet in the 1950s these ideals America was founded on came to a screeching halt despite the mass production and affordability of automobiles and the interconnectedness of cities by highways. People became complacent and began to settle down in

Post-World War II newly built homes in newly generated housing areas. The word of that era was conformity.

The houses were all built to a certain style; the yards were groomed in the same way; the people behaved in a manner as what was expected of them. The idea of buying a home and being stationary represented a large section of what the Beat Generation saw as conforming to a capitalist and consumer-based lifestyle. The Beats advocated a hobo type of lifestyle, rather than one weighed down by physical possessions. " These men...were attempting to escape what were perceived as the restrictive shackles of the nuclear family but...rejected the trappings of a settled bourgeois lifestyle and were geographically mobile" (McDowell, 1996).

So the romanticism surrounding Jack Kerouac's autobiographical book *On the Road*, which spoke to those in this generation and wanting to relate or understand them, also became the definition of the ideology of the Beat Generation. An ideology which said ' Life should be actively lived and you must make of it what you want, not what others tell you to want to make out of it'. It was about "...grabbing and doing it. It was about not wanting to stay somewhere and rooting, but rather going somewhere and making your own reality" ("*American Road*", 2011).

Kerouac epitomized this in his book: "...I left with my canvas bag in which a few fundamental things were packed and took off for the Pacific Ocean with the fifty dollars in my pocket. I'd been poring over maps of the United States in Paterson for months, even reading books about the pioneers and savoring names like Platte and Cimarron and so on, and the road-map was one long

red line called Route 6...I'll just stay on 6...I said to myself and confidently started...Filled with dreams of what I'd do in Chicago, in Denver, and then finally in San Fran,...I started hitching up the thing" (Kerouac, 1957).

He wondered and daydreamed about what he would do in those cities, but knew what he did not want to do. Kerouac's character, Sal, did not want to miss out on anything by becoming deadened, which is silently implied, had he joined the rat race and gotten a job. It was wasted energy. He "hated the thought of it...There were so many other interesting things to do [and meet]" (Kerouac, 1957). The ideals incarnate in his book through his characters were an open and honest free love of people, an enjoyment of the experiences that were happening in the now, and a meeting of the minds of all types and races of people. They were colorblind. And this was also new in a time when people who were different were excluded or called communists. In a time when Joseph McCarthy was initiating a 'Red Scare' and accusing citizens of being communists and Hoover's G-Men were illegally wire-tapping politicians and regular citizens alike, people had become overly suspicious of everyone. People were anxious to show militarism and an acquiescence to conform to what was inherently American. Yet, in spite of this, Beatniks marched to their own poetry and beliefs.

Ginsberg howled and Kerouac left on a holy trek to find a true inner consciousness, laden with real freedom and genuine spontaneity. Several times, Sal's character considered traveling elsewhere instead of his intended destination for no other reason than to see where the roads would take him or what or who would lie in that particular direction. Though most, if not all,

those in this beat generation originally came from a middle class background, they rejected it as being conformists and closed minded. “Conformity [to them] was born from fear of the political system” (“American Road”, 2011).

They were not afraid though they felt this overt obsession with conforming to an evil government and material possessions was killing the spirit and creativity found within. This idea was further cemented by Ginsberg statement of the best minds of his generation being destroyed. In the second part of Howl, Ginsberg continually mentions the name or entity “Moloch” and in the context he uses it, one can ascribe a negative connotation to it: “What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination? Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars...Moloch the heavy judger of men! Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the cast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments” (Ginsberg, 1957)! This entity “Moloch” no doubt represents all the things in American society considered to be the norm, but for the Beat Generation is stifling and oppressive.

Cement and aluminum were the utensils builders used to build homes like Levitt-towns and universities that inhibited free thinking and self-expression. He mentions unobtainable dollars because the pursuit of money and material possessions was a fleeting happiness. Once possessed, it is no longer desired. And everywhere they turned there was heavy judgment, except from their

own kind. The publishing and almost instant success of Jack Kerouac's book, *On the Road*, as well as the publishing of other Beat writers, like Allen Ginsberg, marked the beginnings of an evolutionary change.

The Beat Generation became a subculture that truly impacted America. Men and women—teenagers and young adults, were finding themselves increasingly disillusioned by a lifestyle that was centered on home and work. People were taking a page from Kerouac's life and hitting the road on a journey to find themselves and what meaning life really had for them. They were taking verses from Ginsberg's manifesto and "...bit[ing] detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication... (1957). Indeed, the Fabulous 50s brought with it trials and tribulations, materialism and consumerism, and in general, the earmarks of an American social way of being that is still prevalent today. But within that culture, a counterculture was also born whose inhabitants were not satisfied with the world as it was. They were not satisfied with what the world wanted to turn them into. They wanted to march to the beat of their own drum; to experience what was out there in the world and truly be liberated.

Born of this desire was the Beat Generation, the forebears of the hippies of the 1960s. They advocated a freedom and liberation of minds and bodies. They wanted to be liberated of all censor. They wanted the freedom to love hard and fast, to travel at will and forsake the idea that in order to be truly happy one had to engage in a rat race of empty labor for money and material possessions. The Beatniks reinforced and reimagined the ideals of

Manifest Destiny and chose to manifest their destiny of finding the freedom to be themselves and love it despite opposition.

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