A Moment in the Sun: Music, Culture, and the Rise and Fall of the Haight Ashbury Counterculture

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Introduction

From 1964 to 1967, the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco experienced one of the most significant and short-lived cultural moments of twentieth century America. From its relative vacancy as an underdeveloped area to its streets overflowing with thousands of people during the 1967 Summer of Love to its rapid decline into chaos, violence, and hard drug use, the Haight Ashbury’s profound changes from 1964 to 1967 have influenced the history of the San Francisco and the United States as a whole. The Haight Ashbury counterculture represented a collage of cultural radicalism that rose out of a reaction to the mainstream of Cold War American society and sought to rebel in ways completely disconnected from traditional notions of political protest (like sit-ins and confrontational marches). Members of the counterculture renounced consumer capitalism enabled by a mass culture based on consumption and materialistic living; instead, they pursued communal living, personal empowerment, and cultural decentralization. The community also produced some of the most iconic music of the 1960s, with the likes of Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, and the Grateful Dead all originating in the neighborhood. During the 1967 Summer of Love, mass media sensationalized the Haight Ashbury, causing thousands of people to flock to the neighborhood. This overwhelmed the demographic capacity of the community and played a major role in the counterculture’s destruction. In addition to the population influx, it was ultimately the same forces the counterculture sought to protect against-capitalist commodification, mass media, and mass culture—that brought an end to the Haight Ashbury community.

This work analyzes the development of the Haight Ashbury hippie counterculture over each step in its progression and traces how its cultural identity and music both impacted the
trajectory of the neighborhood and reacted to its various phases of existence during the 1960s. My historiographical analysis of the Haight Ashbury counterculture synthesizes how historians have thought about the counterculture from the years immediately following its existence to more recent scholarship. As many historians have noted, the complexity of the Haight Ashbury and the context of the 1960s has created an inconsistent historical understanding of the era. In his 1984 book *The Haight-Ashbury: A History*, Charles Perry writes that “the Haight-Ashbury explosion of 1965-67 was perhaps the most written-about and least understood event of the sixties.” This is due to the widespread fame that the community achieved and the commonly-held, oversimplified ideas about what the counterculture actually was. Much more than notions of flower children, LSD trips, and tie-dye, this work explores the key cultural tenets of the Haight Ashbury counterculture, including how the counterculture constructed its identity through the borrowing and appropriation of numerous indigenous symbols and traditions. Music and musicians played major a role in constructing the hippie identity in the Haight Ashbury and an analysis of the musical community is necessary in understanding the trajectory of the community during its short lifespan.

Regarding primary sources, this work relies heavily on the complete collection of the *San Francisco Oracle*, a local “psychedelic” newspaper that operated between 1966 and 1968, publishing ten issues filled with essays, artwork, music reviews, poetry, and numerous contributions from leading figures in the counterculture. Allen Cohen founded the *Oracle* in 1966 and the newspaper quickly rose to prominence as the artistic and cultural centerpiece of the counterculture. Featuring poetry, essays, artwork, and interviews with key community leaders,

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the *Oracle* charted the course of the counterculture from 1966 until 1968. Cohen compiled the collection and his reflections featured in the book constitute an important source for my analysis. Additionally, this work relies on news articles from *Rolling Stone* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Berkeley Barb*, the *Globe and Mail*, and other regional and national news outlets. Most of these articles are from the University of California Santa Cruz special collections and archives. Videotaped interviews with counterculture participants as part of the San Francisco Public Library’s *Haight Ashbury Oral History Project* also play a vital role in grounding the thesis. The memoir of Rosie McGee, a member of the counterculture and close friend of the Grateful Dead, also proves valuable as a primary source. Lastly, the second chapter leans heavily on songs as primary sources in order to discuss the music of the Haight Ashbury community.

The first chapter defines the counterculture, analyzing what the community believed and how it drew from a multitude of cultural perspectives to construct its identity. The second chapter concerns the music of the community, featuring analyses of specific songs to investigate the various musical threads of the Haight Ashbury. Lastly, the third chapter discusses the Haight Ashbury’s rapid descent from a colorful and experimental community into a neighborhood rife with chaos and violence.

Although many have argued that the participants in the counterculture who “listened to psychedelic rock music, smoked pot, dropped acid, read non-Western spiritual texts, and had multipartner sexual relationships” thought they were fighting against the repression of mainstream society, such formulations are telling examples of historians framing the counterculture as part of a direct clash with American society.² This dialectical approach has

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dominated the historiography of the Haight Ashbury and forces an assessment of the success or failure of the counterculture in fighting against, and changing, the mainstream. In order to escape the confines of this approach, it is necessary to recognize that the counterculture was more concerned with negation than opposition and embraced a unique form of cultural radicalism that warrants a thorough analysis.³

³ Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 14.
Historiography

After the hippie counterculture developed and subsequently deteriorated in San Francisco’s Haight Ashbury neighborhood between 1964 and 1967, historians looked back on the neighborhood’s moment of cultural radicalism through different lenses depending on their personal biases and the social biases of the time period in which they were writing. Nadya Zimmerman, a leading scholar on the topic, notes that when people hear a song from 1967, they immediately identify it with the Haight-Ashbury District and connect it with a culture of peace, love, and flowers. However, “it is only in retrospect that the San Francisco counterculture, with a complex intersection of diverse musical discourses, gains a kind of homogeneity.”\(^4\) Reactionary rhetoric, an obsessive focus on drug use as the end-all be-all of the movement, and quickly disparaging the hippies of San Francisco for the Haight Ashbury’s decline all marked early attempts to analyze the counterculture.\(^5\)

One of the earliest scholarly works that attempted to delve into the hippie counterculture was Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counterculture (1969)*. Roszak asserted that the countercultural moment of the Haight Ashbury was a social spasm by certain members of society in response to the consequences of the industrial revolution.\(^6\) These consequences included anomie, spiritual emptiness, and a disconnection from nature. For Roszak, the hippie counterculture in San Francisco strongly opposed the cultural and ideological norms of the time period, especially the corporate dominance of industrial society.\(^7\) Specifically, Roszak

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recognized that if protesting racial inequality, the war in Vietnam, and crony capitalism required “old-school politicking,” the counterculture’s emphasis on spirituality, mysticism, drugs, and a communal sense of being represented a new way to critique mainstream society from a culturally radical perspective.\textsuperscript{8} This early attempt at examining the hippie counterculture also sowed the first seeds of later scholarship that would note the irony of mass media and capitalist consumerism eventually destroying the Haight Ashbury community.

The first of such a current of scholarship emerged a year later with Craig Karpel’s “Das Hip Kapital” published in 1970 in \textit{Esquire} Magazine. Karpel saw the initial power of the counterculture diminished by its eventual embrace of the commodification of hippie symbols, clothing, artwork. Additionally, Karpel was one of the first scholars to discuss how music executives and other opportunists capitalized on the “hippie ethos” of the counterculture, selling it as a commodity to consumers.\textsuperscript{9} He credited these “hip capitalists, for turning the counterculture into an over-the-counter-culture.”\textsuperscript{10} This notion of consumerism causing the counterculture’s downfall is discussed further in chapter three.

Later, Todd Gitlin’s 1987 work \textit{The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage} formed a crucial piece of the historiography of the American 1960s. In the book, in which he analyzed the progression of left wing protest and radicalism, he commented extensively on the hippie movement as it developed and diminished. Although he praised the hippies’ courage, potency, and ideals, he criticized the lifestyle of the hippies, believing that their pursuit of immediate pleasure and gratification steered the movement towards hedonism.\textsuperscript{11} Beyond this, he

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\textsuperscript{8} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 12.
\textsuperscript{10} Karpel, “Das Hip Kapital,” 185
enumerated significant complaints against the counterculture that would shape the historiographical narrative of the time period from its publication onwards. He wrote: “[the hippies] were not only willing to be marginal, they felt there was a kind of nobility in being devoted to the public good in an unconventional way.”  

In this sense, Gitlin perceived the counterculture as a privileged few that chose to turn the other cheek instead of taking concrete action to change the status quo. Overall, these critiques helped spark the trend in the historiography of the Haight Ashbury of making a distinction between the inherently political ambitions and ideals Berkeley’s Vietnam War protests and the escapist, disconnected cultural radicalism demonstrated by the hippie counterculture in the Haight Ashbury.

In the 1994, historian David Farber’s *The Sixties: From Memory to History* was a key piece of scholarship that served as a valuable anthology of scholarly articles written about the 1960s. Viewing the hippies as cultural radicals disconnected from the more politically-inclined movements of the 1960s, Farber argued that the hippie counterculture was a uniquely cultural rebellion that “sought to politicize issues...that liberals thought were outside the domain of public life.”  

For the Haight Ashbury, clothing, lifestyle, sex, music, and every facet of everyday life became a form of protest. Instead of forming picket lines and marching on Washington, the radical way the hippies lived their lives became their voice of protest. As part of this anthology, historian Terry H. Anderson examined the counterculture from a business-centered perspective, asserting that the Haight Ashbury hippie movement spawned a multitude of entrepreneurs that made money from the commodification of the counterculture (selling t-shirts, clothing,

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accessories, and memorabilia). Additionally, Anderson noted the extreme profitability that the movement and sale of marijuana, LSD, and other drugs central to the counterculture provided to these “countercultural opportunists”.

Regarding music, historian George Lipsitz viewed the counterculture through a musical lens in his work, *Who’ll Stop the Rain?: Youth Culture, Rock ’n’ Roll, and Social Crises*. Lipsitz noted the important tie-in of the hippie counterculture with the feminist movement, using Janis Joplin as his mode of analysis. He argued that the cultural openness of the Haight Ashbury hippie culture allowed Joplin, Jefferson Airplane’s Grace Slick, and other key female musical and cultural leaders to project their “strong and assertive stories from a female point of view.” Specifically, Lipsitz highlighted the idea that this cultural openness allowed outsiders like Janis Joplin to transcend their personal history (in her case, a conservative, Christian, Texas upbringing) and mold a new identity for herself in the Haight Ashbury hippie counterculture. Significantly, Lipsitz also highlighted how closely countercultural music became intertwined with capitalism and commercial interests and presented this as another important factor in the downfall of the hippie movement’s transient moment in the sun. Examining the musical and cultural roots that formed the basis for countercultural music, Lipsitz exemplified an important trend in the recent historiography of hippie music (and often rock music in general): discussing the indebtedness that musical artists like the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and others, owed to black musical culture.

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17 Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain?”, in Farber, 217.
Writing later in the 1990s, Robert Bork was a key voice of the neo-conservative historical perspective that critiqued the counterculture of the Haight Ashbury. Citing proceedings from the French Revolution to the 1890s, Bork asserted that the hippie counterculture fundamentally concerned freedom and resulted from boredom that was exacerbated by the affluence of post-WWII America and the inception of the 1950s American suburban life. Bork contended that the cultural radicals of the 1960s were on a quest for sensation during a time of boredom and disillusionment enabled by unprecedented comfort and affluence. Speaking to the process of socialization, he revealingly remarked: “every new generation constitutes a wave of savages who must be civilized by their families, schools, and churches.” Given this perspective, it is unsurprising that he held a dim view of the counterculture, asserting that the hippies were glorified hedonists. Later historiography would critique Bork’s assertions that countercultural rock was nihilistic and destructive, turning to arguments that the music of the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, and others embodied actionable ideas that many chose to follow during the late 1960s. Additionally, leftist historians derided Bork’s oversimplification and dismissiveness towards the morality of the Haight Ashbury counterculture, claiming that they were not rootless hedonists but rather spiritually-rooted people who sought community.

2000s scholarship tended to feature more consideration on how viewing the San Francisco counterculture from different lenses, whether they be musicological, historical, political, sociological, or anthropological, could yield a wide variety of interpretations. Leading historian Nadya Zimmerman argued that the Haight Ashbury counterculture, contrary to many popular opinions of escapism and amoral chaos, had specific and concrete goals that it sought to

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achieve. Zimmerman insightfully noted that no matter which direction critiques of the 1960s hippie counterculture come from, academics have always examined the counterculture in opposition with the mainstream. In this sense, dialectical descriptions have shaped the field of 1960s historiography, but assigning who or what are opposing one another differs from each analysis to the next. Because scholars treated the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam protest movement from the historiographical perspective of the question: “what did they accomplish,” they lumped the counterculture movement, (which did not actively engage in the same types of direct protest) together with these movements and often purported it to have accomplished nothing. As Zimmerman observed, for better or worse, this is a key consideration of the historiography of the Haight Ashbury. As such, a more appropriate and more open-ended question would be about why the counterculture did little to affect change.

More recent scholarship, most notably by Patrick Burke and Nadya Zimmerman, attempted to explore how racial dynamics played into the Haight Ashbury counterculture. In Burke’s analysis of a Jefferson Airplane blackface performance, he argued that the performance was a key example of an overarching trend in 1960s white rock: white musicians casting themselves as political revolutionaries by portraying an “idealized” version of African American identity. Nadya Zimmerman furthered this notion by pointing out that “the counterculture conceived of itself as a risk-taking outlaw culture, and it shaped that self-image by trading upon symbols of racially-charged outlaw cultures in the Bay Area - namely, the Black Panthers.”

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21 Zimmerman, Sixties Synergy, vii.
22 Zimmerman, Sixties Synergy, 156.
23 Zimmerman, Sixties Synergy, 17.
25 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 30.
Zimmerman brought a strong argument to the table by exposing the racial artifice of the overwhelmingly white hippie community in the Haight Ashbury and showed how the counterculture appropriated African American cultural symbols while generally refusing to engage in political protests or take part in the Civil Rights movement. A valid critique, this thesis argues that the counterculture hid behind this veil of nominal support while drawing heavy influence from African American music and culture.
Chapter 1: Defining the Counterculture

In the words of Allen Cohen, editor of the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic newspaper *The San Francisco Oracle*, the preeminent newspaper of the local hippie community, “the community was an artist's’ bohemia, and seed pod which was destined to catch the wind and blossom throughout the world.”\(^{26}\) Since the end of World War II and throughout the 1950s, the Haight Ashbury neighborhood was a middle class neighborhood in the geographic heart of San Francisco. North Beach, a haven for the San Francisco Beat Generation, had experienced a police crackdown and many of its leading figures relocated to the Haight because of the neighborhood’s relative vacancy, low rent, and opportunity for communal living in large Victorian houses. By 1963, the stage was set for the Haight to bloom.

The growth of the counterculture did not happen overnight, however, and was only made possible by a gradual stream of people moving from all over the Bay Area and the United States. Not everyone who moved to the Haight Ashbury for cheap rent sought to take part in the development of a counterculture, but many of those who moved to the neighborhood for this purpose heard from word of mouth and radio about the development of a free-thinking and community-oriented area. Remembering the construction of a community identity in the Haight Ashbury, George Hunter, a member of The Charlatans rock band remarked that “it really didn’t happen overnight. There were so many of these little indications showing up. You’d drive around the Haight and gradually you saw more and more of these people.”\(^{27}\) In this sense, the movement grew organically in its early years as people gradually streamed into the neighborhood. In a

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Hunter S. Thompson wrote: “as many as half [of the Haight Ashbury residents] are refugees from Berkeley and the old North Beach scene, the cradle and the casket of the so-called Beat Generation.” Here, Thompson assessed that a large proportion of the hippies coming to the Haight Ashbury in its early days were former members of the Beat generation of the 1950s, including Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, who contributed numerous poems to the San Francisco Oracle and other community publications. Thompson also claimed: “the other half of the hippy population is too young to identify with Jack Kerouac...Their average age is about 20, and most are native Californians...The majority of beatniks who flocked into San Francisco 10 years ago were transients from the East and Midwest.” In his analysis of the developing community in the neighborhood, Thompson drew a clear distinction between the two demographic halves of the Haight Ashbury: the people that moved from the Beat movement into the Hippie movement were often from outside California, while the young generation streaming into the Haight Ashbury were a primarily in-state, local group. Remembering his days in the neighborhood, community member Richard Honigman recalled: “the Haight Ashbury was a very strange mixture of people with spiritual consciousness...but 90% of the people were there partying and having a good time.” For Honigman, although there were ideological leaders, most of the Haight Ashbury community was there to party and enjoy themselves. Regarding race, according to the 1960 U.S. Census, less than ten percent of the Haight Ashbury was...

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29 Thompson, “The Hashbury is the Capital of the Hippies,” para. 3.
non-white in 1960. The neighborhood only became whiter as former members of the Beat generation and younger white people with the privilege and desire to move to the Haight Ashbury flocked to the neighborhood from 1965 until the collapse of the counterculture in 1968 and 1969. In their 2015 book, California: A History, Andrew Rolle and Arthur C. Verge noted that San Francisco’s hippie population primarily consisted of young people with enough privilege to evade the draft. On the other side of the same coin, a disproportionate number of those who served in the military during the Vietnam War came from disadvantaged families and minority groups. Remembering the community members of the Haight Ashbury, longtime resident Lonnie Bouchee Eberich recalled: “no one worked. We worked but everyone was half employed...somehow it was all covered...yeah it was all covered.” The fact that members of the community could choose to not work or work part time yet “it was all covered” reflected the privilege and middle-upper class nature of the neighborhood’s residents.

In a phenomenon he termed “Dionysius Rising,” Cohen saw the early notions of the Haight Ashbury counterculture as connected with the poetry and prose of the Beat Generation, the painting of Abstract Expressionists, and the birth of psychedelic rock music. For Cohen, these developments emerged from the American yearnings for liberty and rebellion during a time of great generational change. This boundless freedom and hope manifested itself in the music of the Grateful Dead, one of the Haight Ashbury’s most iconic bands. A piece in Rolling Stone

33 Rolle and Verge, California: A History, 322.
magazine described the scene at one of the band’s shows as “the best musical gathering in months...the Grateful Dead began a set that ran for four hours or so with scarcely an interruption...people were handing each other flowers, joints. The Dead played continuously, a flowing, improvisatory set.”\textsuperscript{35} The author’s emphasis on the band’s improvisation and a musical “flow” represented the core of countercultural music: mirroring the Haight Ashbury’s radical way of life with joyful, playful, and improvisation-driven music.

Similarly, Cohen experienced the energy of the movement as “buried, unconscious energies that could not be confined. They celebrated the primacy of the individual and the experience of the body as universe center.”\textsuperscript{36} This return to primacy and nature formed a centerpiece of the counterculture’s ideology. Herman Eberitzsch III, a resident of the community, echoed this sentiment in an oral history interview: “[the movement] was going away from technology...it was going more to the soul, more to the heart, more to the reality of what is inside of human beings.”\textsuperscript{37} In order to think differently about human truth, the community drew from a fusion of western occult philosophies, eastern meditative philosophies, “the sensibilities of the Afro-American ghetto culture with its improvised jazz and marijuana high,” and the ancient tribalism of the oppressed American Indian.”\textsuperscript{38} The predominantly white, middle-class hippie community in the Haight often appropriated these cultural cross-currents to construct its radical identity.

\textsuperscript{35} Bert Kanegson, “Celestial Synapse at the Fillmore,” \textit{Rolling Stone}, April 5, 1969, para. 4. University of California Santa Cruz Special Collections and Archives, MS332, Series 4, Box 1.
\textsuperscript{36} Cohen, \textit{The San Francisco Oracle}, xxiv.
\textsuperscript{37} Herman Eberitzsch III, “Haight Ashbury History at the San Francisco Public Library,” interview by Rebecca Nichols, \textit{Haight Ashbury Oral History Project}, summer, 2005, video, 9:10, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUjnRig1wpo&list=PLGpyl74NnE17iigU45OFNj2M33bW_aqu8&index=15}.
\textsuperscript{38} Cohen, \textit{The San Francisco Oracle}, xxiv.
At the same, Harvard University psychologists Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner conducted experiments with LSD that became highly publicized and gave rise to Leary’s famous support for using the drug as a means of “turning up” and gaining access to higher levels of consciousness. In an interview for the Haight Ashbury Oral History Project, resident Eric Levin remembered: “it was a time of rejecting the lifestyles of our parents. As we got our minds blown with the drugs, it helped us to reject these other values of war, and money, and conventionality.”

For Levin, LSD and other mind-expanding drugs were the key to innovating a new way to live outside of the mainstream and outside of the values of his parents. Viewing these drugs as a key link between the intellectuals and artists of the late 1950s Beat Generation, Cohen recalled that “the rebellion, insight, and visionary experiences of the artists of the late 50s would now come wholesale to anyone who wanted or needed to get out on the edges of the only frontier left in America - their own mind and their own senses.”

In this sense, the free-thinking precedent set by the San Francisco Beat generation of the 1950s cleared a path for the counterculture to flourish. Remembering the early days of the counterculture, participant George Michalski recalled: “we were all like pioneers. We had no role models...We were all jumping off the cliff together and didn’t know if there was a parachute underneath...Who know what the whole lifestyle would do to you.”

This sense of experimentation and newness propelled the counterculture in its formative days. For Michalski and other participants, there

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40 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxiv.

was a sense of camaraderie in trying to live outside of mainstream society in a way nobody had done before.

Protesting Without Protest

As historian Nadya Zimmerman noted, the complexity of the 1960s is often lost in the “mythologizing” of the decade in national memory. The San Francisco Bay Area became a unique microcosm through which to analyze how the Haight Ashbury hippie community fit into the national situation of the 1960s. Within the Bay Area, Berkeley served as the center of the Civil Rights movement, with U.C. Berkeley students participating in both Vietnam War protests and protests associated with the national Civil Rights Movement. Just across the bay to the east, Oakland became the geographic center of the Black Panther Party seeking to challenge police brutality against African Americans in Oakland and throughout the country.

On the other side of the bay, the Haight Ashbury community did its best to avoid confrontational protest that it considered a part of the mainstream and therefore unviable. The community sought to escape “the anxiety of confrontation - that only bad news is worth communicating; that there is only them and us, and them is the POLICE and US is always persecuted.” The Haight Ashbury counterculture, according to Cohen, was seeking a form of social development and expression that would “make the seemingly endless class and culture clashes obsolete.” In particular, this community imagined the creation of a new transcendental humanity in a society free of war and racism. For the hippies, this could only be achieved through means completely outside of the mainstream. Instead of engaging in political radicalism, protests, and direct confrontations of injustice like the activism in Berkeley and the Oakland, the

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42 Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 3.
Haight Ashbury instead pursued cultural radicalism and rebellion through living completely disconnected from the trappings of contemporary American life. They “felt the world changing in more ways than the confrontational political dualisms of left and right, us and them.” In order to accomplish this, the counterculture embraced an “anything goes” attitude as a key component of the movement. The counterculture valued nonalignment, negation, and dissociation from the mainstream by never strictly defining what a hippie is or does. The community’s leaders, Cohen included, sought to promote an image of a unique, detached, and free community that was distinct from the mainstream, not against it.

In a 1967 issue of The Globe and Mail, a Canadian national newspaper, the author attempted to understand the newfound culture of psychedelia in the Haight Ashbury. Speaking particularly to music, the article emphasized this “anything goes” attitude of the counterculture: “I don’t think any one San Francisco sound exists. There are so many people there all doing their own thing. There’s a feeling, a philosophy though...that feeling is freedom.” In this sense, concert-goers and participants experienced this profound freedom of people “doing their own thing” that would define the cultural scene in the Haight Ashbury.

In a countercultural “Declaration of Independence” published by the Oracle in its inaugural issue on September 20th, 1966, the leading poets and artists of the budding counterculture began to define the existence of the community in the Haight. Using the general structure and some of the wording of the American Declaration of Independence, these leaders desired that members of the community “cease to recognize the obsolete social patterns which

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45 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxv.
46 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 20.
have isolated man from his consciousness and to create with the youthful energies of the world revolutionary communities of harmonious relations.” These obsolete social patterns included conventional means of protest present throughout the Bay Area and the country at large. Another key difference that flowed from this was the “anything-goes” mindset of the counterculture. Not a confrontational anti-establishment movement, it “attracted people who sought, on the whole, to disengage from mainstream society, not to transform it.” In this sense, the Haight Ashbury community hoped to create a completely separate society from American norms.

Instead of the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness posited by Jefferson in 1776, this declaration of independence saw the establishment of “certain inalienable rights, that among them are: the freedom of body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness.” This proclamation of rights contrasted sharply with the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement and other conventional protest movements for its inclusion of bodily pleasure, joy, and the expansion of consciousness through exposure to drugs and unconventional belief systems. Beyond the declaration, the first issue of the *Oracle* attempted to define the counterculture developing in the Haight in print articles throughout the issue. This identity-forming issue also emphasized the separation of hippie protests from the norm. Writing the words that would be made famous by the public appearances of Timothy Leary, *The Oracle* claimed that “the quickest, healthiest most effective way to change our society is to turn on, tune in, drop out!”

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49 Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 5.
“Turning on” meant reaching enhanced levels of consciousness through LSD, marijuana, or “spiritual practices.” “Tuning in” meant paying attention to the injustices implicit to contemporary American society while “dropping out” meant completely disengaging from conventional ways of living in 1960s America. By turning on, tuning in, and dropping out, the cultural rebels in the Haight could mount a non-confrontational and completely isolated form of social protest. The changes they supported had more to do with changes in everyday behavior, and in putting more loving values into everyday life rather than working for more theoretical collective action. If it was “perhaps less avowedly politically radical than the all-for-one...hymns of yore, it was undeniably a hell of a lot more fun.” Barry Melton, the founder and lead guitarist of rock band Country Joe and the Fish, underscored this notion. In a later interview discussing the band’s early music, he explained that “it wasn’t simply political commentary...we were talking about weed right on the first record...by the second record, we were singing the LSD commercial. So we were overt. Not simply politically overt, sociologically overt.” This distinction between political and sociological protest differentiated the counterculture from other movements in the 1960s that engaged primarily in direct political protest. Reviewing a 1966 live show put on by the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, John Morgan concluded: “politics belong to a middle-aged, whiskey-drinking group. The new politics, which excludes civil rights marches and Viet Nam demonstrations, since these are within the framework, grows from a new psyche.” The framework he referred to was the conventional

55 John Morgan, “The rock is acid at party given by the Grateful Dead,” *Record-Searchlight*, October 19, 1966, para. 10. The *Record-Searchlight* was a local publication in nearby Redding, California. University of California Santa Cruz Special Collections and Archives, MS332, Series 4, Box 1.
forms of protest available within the mainstream. In the Haight Ashbury, the best way to protest was not picketing or marching, but attempting to live completely outside the parameters of mainstream American society.

These desires were initially brought to bear at the Love Pageant Rally, “the first public outdoor rock concert.” Allen Cohen, the editor of the *Oracle*, played a major role in organizing the event, which occurred on October 6th, 1966, the day LSD became illegal in California. Speaking to his idea for this event that would mark an early harbinger of the coming Summer of Love and numerous future concerts, Cohen remarked that, after watching a violent protest against the San Francisco Police Department, he “saw the futility of this endless confrontation with authority and decided that we needed to invent a new mode of celebration that would energize change more than anger and hate engendering confrontations.”

Featuring Big Brother and The Holding Company with Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead, the Love Pageant Rally set the performative tone of the counterculture. It also firmly established its roots in seeking a non-confrontational alternative to the typical protests of the time. With hundreds of people bringing “flowers, flutes, drums...personal saints and gurus,” the Love Pageant Rally was a performative example of another key facet of the counterculture: the use and appropriation of other cultures’ iconography and beliefs as an exotic alternative to Christian-dominated American life of the 1960s.

**Cultural Exoticism in the Haight**

Leaders of the counterculture, often self-identifying as experts in foreign spiritual systems, appropriated their limited understanding of such systems in order to force their

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integration into the cultural framework of the Haight. Specifically focusing on Native American traditions, Hindu Spirituality, and African American iconography, the predominantly white, middle-class members of the counterculture borrowed from these traditions as a means to escape from 1960s America.

One path through which to achieve the ideal countercultural life outside of the trappings of the modern world was embracing the “high” life. In a 1967 interview, David Crosby of The Byrds and later Crosby, Stills, and Nash spoke to commonly-held notions of what the “high” life meant to those in the counterculture. In responding to the question of what made him “high,” he replied: “I get high a lotta different ways...on music, a lot on making love...on Buddha and Christ and Shiva and Krishna and Mohammed and everybody.” For Crosby, an indiscriminate mix of drugs, music, sex, non-Western spiritual figures and everyday spirituality gave him the kind of countercultural disconnect with modern America that the Haight Ashbury community sought to achieve. Whether or not Crosby fully understood the teachings of the personal spiritual “gurus” he mentioned is questionable but his interview shed light on the pervasive countercultural enthusiasm to indulge in non-Western and non-mainstream spirituality, sexuality, and cultural traditions. Another telling example of how community leaders in the Haight Ashbury saw a mixture of non-Western spirituality with LSD and other drugs as the ideal way to “escape” from society was a poem titled “Renaissance or Die” by the influential Beat poet and countercultural icon Allen Ginsberg. In the poem, Ginsberg proposed that “everybody who hears my voice...try the chemical LSD at least once, every man, woman and child over 14 in good health….I am in effect setting up moral codes and standards which include drugs, orgy, music,

57 David Crosby in Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 56.
and primitive magic as worship rituals.\textsuperscript{58} Beyond the questionable safety of Ginsberg’s propositions, his support for the practice of ancient forms of Indian, African, and Asian cultures fused with the use of LSD represented a typical example of the Haight Ashbury countercultural mixture. In order to free themselves from western society at all costs, members of the community engaged in a diverse mix of drug use and non-Western spirituality that often partially represented or blatantly misrepresented the authenticity of the cultural others from which they were borrowing.

For a 1967 profile of the Haight Ashbury hippie community written for the \textit{Atlantic}, Mark Harris visited the neighborhood, writing: “hippies wore brilliant Mexican \textit{chalecos}, Oriental robes, and red-Indian headdress. They dressed as cowboys...they wore Nazi swastikas...knowing, without knowing much more, that the swastika offended the Establishment, and no enemy of the Establishment could be all bad.”\textsuperscript{59} By costuming themselves in a wide array of outlaw and anti-establishment identities, the members of the counterculture sought to collect perspectives from all over the world, forming them into a conglomerate of anti-mainstream identity. As seen here, this sometimes meant unintentionally embracing problematic iconography or appropriating the traditions of other cultures with which the hippies had no authentic experience.

Countercultural interpretations of Buddhism fit in with numerous other non-Western ideologies unfamiliar to the predominantly white and middle-class counterculture. In a similar vein to the appropriation of Hindu spirituality, self-proclaimed “gurus” simply took whatever


aspects suited their personal wishes and criticized or ignored other aspects that were more confusing or less relevant to the Haight Ashbury community. In a piece titled “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution,” San Francisco poet Gary Snyder criticized traditional Buddhism because it ignored and accepted whatever political tyrannies it found itself under. From Snyder’s perspective, a more “ideal” form of Buddhism that could better suit the ethos of the Haight Ashbury must contain a deep concern with the need for radical social change.60 A telling example of the cultural synthesis typically embraced by countercultural thinkers seeking to integrate non-Western ideology into the Haight Ashbury, Snyder also wrote that “the mercy of the West has been social revolution. The mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self-void. We need both.”61 According to Snyder, traditional Buddhism was incomplete because it failed to address the need for radical social change that the counterculture hoped to create. This example highlights the tendency to borrow the parts of a certain belief system that best fit the goals of the counterculture. Overall, this practice created a “hybrid” belief system of half-baked ideology that uprooted the ideas of another culture and molded them to fit the Haight Ashbury.

In representations of Hinduism, members of the counterculture engaged in similar processes of applying cultural traditions to the Haight Ashbury. One of the reasons Hinduism and other systems of Indian spirituality appealed to the counterculture was the problematic belief that “India appeared to have dropped out of the global power struggle, exemplifying on the world stage what Timothy Leary had advised the counterculture to do.”62 This belief proved

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62 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 88.
problematic because it was based on the inaccurate assumption that, because India was not aligned with the United States or the Soviet Union in the bipolar world of the Cold War, it explicitly stood for nonalignment.\textsuperscript{63} For the hippie community in the Haight Ashbury, India directly contrasted Vietnam, which was a two-sided, highly political entity being torn apart for ideological, political, and military reasons.

In the fourth issue of the \textit{Oracle} which primarily featured an interview with LSD “guru” Timothy Leary, poet and painter Bob Simmons spoke to his experience practicing yoga as a way to expand his consciousness.\textsuperscript{64} Specifically, he sought to apply the meditation, yoga, and chanting of Hinduism to extraordinary experiences with LSD. He wrote: “acid is an expanding catalyst, a searchlight, a bathysphere...isn’t this what we experience when we group together, form circular mandalas and chant?”\textsuperscript{65} By connecting Hindu spiritual practices and the use of LSD as a means to achieve the countercultural “high” of transcendence, Simmons constructed a hybridized adaptation of Hinduism that would fit into the pervasive ethos of the counterculture. Some spiritual leaders in the Haight Ashbury noted this cultural gap between Hinduism and the neighborhood community. Richard Alpert, a Harvard psychologist who worked with Timothy Leary in his early research and experimentation with LSD, claimed that “the Haight-Ashbury is...the purest reflection of what is happening in consciousness at the leading edge of our society.”\textsuperscript{66} Interestingly, he questioned the adaptability of Hindu teachings into the counterculture community which, to its members, still existed as an island surrounded by

\textsuperscript{63} Zimmerman, \textit{Counterculture Kaleidoscope}, 88.
mainstream western culture: “we westerners can ever take on a master...this is an interesting question...master roles really don’t fit into Western culture.”⁶⁷ Referring to spiritual masters like Meher Baba,⁶⁸ Alpert acknowledged the inherent difficulty of molding Hindu beliefs to fit the spiritual needs of the counterculture.

The Haight Ashbury community strongly desired to fit notions of Native American identity into the counterculture. Posters, poems, artwork, and clothing often featured Native American symbology. One facet of this widespread appeal was that representations and allusions to Native Americans were often means by which white Americans could “have their cake and eat it too.”⁶⁹ These idealized notions of “Indians” signaled spiritual and environmental purity yet they are “fundamentally American.”⁷⁰ In particular, members of the Haight Ashbury counterculture considered themselves as cultural reincarnations of Native Americans. In a commonly held “creation myth” of the hippie idea, the mainly white counterculture directly connected itself to the “last remaining heroes of the Indian Nations.”⁷¹ This reincarnation of “the American Indian,” however, “has been born out of the ashes of World War II, rising like a Phoenix, in celebration of the psychedelic zeitgeist of this brand-new..age.”⁷² Through this process, the predominantly white counterculture could connect to non-mainstream, non-modern cultural ideals and embrace them as strains of primordial wisdom that existed before and outside modern America.

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⁶⁸ Mehar Baba was a leading spiritual guide of the counterculture and was seen as an avatar, or the material appearance of a deity on earth by many including Pete Townshend of The Who.
⁶⁹ Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 8.
⁷⁰ Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 8.
The Human Be-In on January 14th, 1967 represented a prime example of how the counterculture borrowed Native American iconography to connect with a non-Western yet authentically American belief system. Recognizing the philosophical split between the anti-war and free speech movement in Berkeley and the hippie movement, countercultural leaders felt the need to connect two of the major 1960s movements in the Bay Area through a unification event. Branded as the “Human Be-In” by the Oracle, the event would take place in the polo fields of Golden Gate Park less than a mile from the center of the Haight Ashbury. The phrase “human be-in” plays on the notion of “human being,” a concept that resembled the impetus behind other “-in” events of the era like sit-ins and bed-ins. Organizers urged participants to “be in,” to be present in the moment, to be involved, and to be individuals living in the now. Unlike other “-in” events associated with particular actions or protests, however, countercultural leaders asked participants to simply exist and be. In order to publicize the event, its leaders aimed to cast a wide net, drawing an audience of hippies and participants in other movements throughout the Bay Area. The event featured psychedelic bands Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, and Quicksilver Messenger Service as well as poets Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Lew Welch, and Lenore Kandel. In addition, Timothy Leary famously instructed everyone to “Turn on, Tune in, and Drop out,” words printed originally in an early issue of the Oracle. In a poem titled “Dropouts Delight,” an anonymous author claimed that Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, and Gandhi were all dropouts. Asserting that each of these figures had dropped out of the ideological environment in which they were born

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73 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxxii.
74 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 7.
and incorporating generally inaccurate historical explanations, the author defended Leary’s notion of dropping out as a form “positive regression and disintegration.” For the community, dropping out was the only way to fully disengage from the ills of society.

Incorporating a scattered array of images and symbols, the Human Be-In predominantly featured countercultural representations of Native American iconography. The poster announcing the event advertised it as a “POW-WOW: A Gathering of the Tribes” and featured a four-fingered claw grasping two lightning bolts and a central image of Native American man on a horse (see appendix). By advertising the event as a “pow-wow,” Allen Cohen and the other organizers made a direct reference to Native American iconography, appropriating the concept of a pow-wow to fit their needs in channeling the exotic. The two lightning bolts symbolized the united power of the Haight Ashbury counterculture and the Berkeley political protest against the establishment of 1960s America. The main figure in the poster holds a hollow-body electric guitar, a variety commonly used for jazz and blues, to complete the fusion of Native American and African American-coded symbols. The figure wears tattered animal skins covering his whole body, and his face is painted extremely dark with long, wild hair, giving him an animalistic character. This stereotyped idea of a Native American man reflected the community’s deep unfamiliarity with the complexity of Native American identity and revealed their tendency to appropriate it. This poster confirmed the counterculture’s insatiable appetite for other cultures and, as an overwhelmingly white population, groups they did not belong to.

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An attempted unification of the political radicals centered in Berkeley and the cultural radicals of the Haight Ashbury, the *Oracle* claimed that the Be-In was a “union of love and activism previously separated by categorical dogma and label mongering.” The theme of identifying the gathering as a Native American “pow-wow” continued in the poetry of local countercultural leader Leland Meyerzove. In his “Psalm Upon The Gathering of All Tribes,” he wrote that “the tribes shall become one and no more shall they weep, but rejoice in the re-birth of man...break down the babel of tongues, and dance to love.” This mix of the Native American symbol of a gathering of the tribes combined with the biblical theme of “babel” and “tongues” represented the unique and often incompatible fusion of cultures that coexisted in the mind of the Haight Ashbury. An article in the *Berkeley Barb*, a weekly underground newspaper from across the bay in Berkeley, explained the event: “the two radical scenes...both see is that [they] are under a big impersonal stick called The Establishment...The San Franciscans didn’t want to play that game anymore; it doesn’t work, they said, and the non-verbal modes of expression tell it where it’s at.” In this article, the author attempted to paint the “be-in” as a coming together ceremony of Berkeley’s political protesters and the Haight Ashbury’s social-cultural protesters. One concert-goer’s experience revealed what actually happened at the Human Be-In: “it is very uncomfortable to go and hear the elders and realize that they have very little to say...Our generation has not yet learned how to organize on a scale that has 10,000 people...the hippies presented...a mostly local cast doing things that hadn’t been thought out.” Written from the

perspective of a *Berkeley Barb* writer and outsider to the Haight Ashbury community, the author emphasized his displeasure with the event. For him, a successful “gathering of the tribes” did not occur at all, and the event highlighted the unpreparedness of the hippie community for a large-scale movement. On the other side, Haight Ashbury community member Rosie McGee recalled hearing one of the Berkeley activists speak at the Be-In: “anti-war exhortations from radical activist Jerry Rubin...were heartfelt, but strangely out of place. It wasn’t the message that seemed counter to the time and place...but his angry and long-winded delivery put many people off.” For McGee and other Haight Ashbury residents, the Be-in was their first direct interaction with the strongly political Berkeley community across the bay. Her reaction underscored the hippies’ aversion to “angry” political protesting, even if they agreed with the anti-Vietnam message in theory.

Although the 1960s did not have the same notions of political correctness common in contemporary American society, much of the language and symbols used to represent the beliefs of other cultures often verged on nations of Western superiority and non-Western primitivism, as evidenced by the Human Be-In poster. Despite this, it was not the intention of the counterculture to mock the beliefs of other cultures; many participants saw significant value in learning about and embracing foreign ideas of spirituality and culture. Even with the best intentions, many artistic and cultural products of the Haight Ashbury were incomplete bastardizations of authentic cultural traditions and belief systems that were manipulated to fit into the unique fabric of the counterculture’s spiritual pantheon. An important example of this phenomenon was the work of influential figures Alan Watts and Gary Snyder who, in their support of “organic original

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82 Rosie McGee, *Dancing with the Dead: A Photographic Memoir* (Rohnert Park, Tioli Press and Bytes, 2013), 88.
intelligence” found in “primitive societies,” claimed that this intelligence was based on experience and vision, not abstract thinking. In essence, Watts and Snyder supported the notion that members of the counterculture should explore alternative forms of spirituality and cultural existence but, in doing so, labeled such belief systems as primitive and lacking in intelligence. In this example, because the “organic original intelligence” sought by Watts and Snyder was endemic to “primitive societies,” a member of the generally white, middle-class, American hippie movement need not use their abstract thinking. This belittling of the other cultures’ belief systems was not the only way in which writers and artists expressed notions of cultural primitivism and exoticism; many also engaged in this process as a means to determine relative primitivism among non-Western cultures. By considering some cultural systems as superior or less primitive than others, the counterculture often engaged in the very sort of ethnocentrism and western dominance they were attempting to escape. In an essay comparing the ideologies of Hinduism with Native American spiritual traditions, Gary Snyder wrote: “The Comanche or Sioux demand that everybody go out and have his vision and incorporate and ritualize it within the culture. Then a society like India, a step more civilized, permits some individuals to have these visions.” Evidenced here, Snyder clearly placed foreign cultures in a hierarchy, with India “a step more civilized” than the Comanche or Sioux in this case.

In African American representations in the Haight Ashbury counterculture, the same exoticism and appropriation pervaded numerous forms of hippie art but was particularly notable in the music of the counterculture. In a similar vein to other musical movements of the 1960s, white musicians in the Haight Ashbury often cast themselves as revolutionaries by embodying

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83 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxxviii
idealized visions of African American identity.\textsuperscript{85} In the white-dominated music scene of Haight Ashbury psychedelia, many bands conveyed inconsistent notions of black identity in which African Americans were simultaneously presented with insensitive stereotypes and upheld as examples of American authenticity. This sort of cultural presentation, in which the non-white group was both demeaned and praised was a common theme in countercultural representations of other cultures. Just as ideas from Hinduism were belittled as “primitive” and molded to fit the consuming needs of the counterculture while simultaneously being praised as a pure form of human spirituality, notions of African American identity were also held in this no-mans-land of cultural presentation. While there were numerous examples of blatant racism in the counterculture’s presentation of African American iconography, all-white groups like Jefferson Airplane did genuinely appreciate for the African American musical tradition from which they often drew influence. Patrick Burke, an influential musicologist whose work often focuses on race in rock music, noted that “Jefferson Airplane’s references to black culture and politics were multifaceted and involved both condescending or naïve radical posturing and sincere respect for African American music.”\textsuperscript{86}

The counterculture preached racial integration, nominally supporting the efforts of the nearby Black Panther Party across the bay in Oakland, yet disregarded these ambitions when it came to the Haight Ashbury community itself. While “supporting” the Black Panther Party and the Civil Rights movement from afar, the counterculture itself proved to be more separatist than integrationist when it came to questions of racial identity and diversity within the community. Instead of integrating other racial identities into the counterculture on one end or supporting

\textsuperscript{85} Burke, “Tear Down the Walls,” 61.
\textsuperscript{86} Burke, “Tear Down the Walls,” 61.
segregation on the other, the Haight Ashbury instead nominally opposed segregationist policies but was not ready to fully integrate other races into its overwhelmingly white community. Zimmerman noted that “the counterculture had little interest in being equal, or reconciling in any way, with other groups...the hippies of the Haight deliberately adopted a ‘virtual poverty’ as part of an outsider, alienated youth charade.” For the members of the Haight Ashbury community, one of the best ways to confront the monolithic power of mainstream American society in the 1960s was to embrace images of the “outlaw” from leaders of the Black Panther Party to subvert and disconnect from conventional protest activities while refusing to participate in the activities themselves. While violence erupted across the bay in Oakland between protesters and police forces throughout the late 1960s, the Haight Ashbury community stayed safe and isolated in their little pocket of San Francisco, proclaiming the good in the work of Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, and numerous other Black Panther leaders. The Diggers, an activist and street theater group that provided food, water, and other living supplies to the community at many Haight Ashbury events, released a free pamphlet that provides a telling example of hippie perspective toward the Black Panther Party: “Subvert the social-economic-political roles prescribed by advanced bourgeoisie society itself...this work...is rooted in...projects of social erosion which are non-participatory in the parent system...exemplified by the rapidly emerging political consciousness of the black people in the US, as expressed in the Black Power movement.” This pamphlet, distributed by the Diggers in 1968, highlights how the counterculture appropriated the notions of “outlaw” identity, fighting back against the status quo, and being self-sufficient outside the confines of mainstream society while remaining far removed from actively

87 Zimmerman, *Sixties Synergy*, 158.
participating in racial politics. By tying themselves to the “projects of social erosion” as exemplified by the actions of the Black Power movement, the Diggers brought the rhetoric of this movement to the Haight Ashbury without defining the need for direct action in solidarity with it. A 1967 issue of *The Black Panther* (the newspaper of the Black Panther Party) summarized the party’s beliefs relating to hippies as “allies.” The author, Bob Avakian, observed: “middle class people...who oppose the worst excesses of American imperialism - the genocidal war in Vietnam and the brutal oppression of black people - only come face to face with the military power...when they hold a demonstration...as soon as the demonstration is over, these people return to their relatively privileged position.” The article went on to contrast the position of the African American community with the ‘privileged position’ of white activists. The newspaper asserted that, for African Americans, “police repression is a fact of everyday existence. The black community...a dispersed colony within the United States, is occupied territory.” While the Haight Ashbury counterculture looked to the struggles and activism of the Black Panther Party for inspiration, the party itself recognized the significant socioeconomic and racial differences underscoring the experiences of each group. From the perspectives of the BPP, the members of the Haight Ashbury counterculture and Vietnam protestors could claim to support the efforts of the party and oppose the discrimination against African Americans, but at the end of the day could always return to their privileged position in society. Instead of actively participating alongside the Black Power Movement, the San Francisco counterculture chose to watch from the safe haven of the Haight Ashbury, insulating themselves from tangible political change.

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This left room for the Hells Angels, an overtly racist motorcycle gang, to play a role in the counterculture by providing security at numerous counterculture events and community gatherings. The Hells Angels were primarily white and male motorcycle gang that started in San Bernardino, California and spread throughout the state and the country. Although it seems ludicrous that such a gang would find a home as part of the counterculture, the San Francisco hippie community and the Angels did share some commonalities that allowed them to skirt around their ideological differences. Both groups considered themselves outlaw communities living apart from mainstream America, commonly consumed drugs, and shared a hatred for the police and the powers that be.\textsuperscript{91}

The Angels first entered the counterculture by befriending Ken Kesey, an early countercultural leader and author\textsuperscript{92} who commonly invited them to his house in the Santa Cruz Mountains for “Acid Tests,” which consisted of days-long parties featuring LSD, marijuana, and sexual escapades. The Angels took quickly to Kesey because he had just been busted for marijuana possession, which certified him as a “good person” in the Angels’ eyes.\textsuperscript{93} By 1965, the Angels had become infamous celebrities in California. Journalists became fascinated by the fringe organization and pieces in \textit{Life} magazine and the \textit{Saturday Evening Post} romanticized their “alienated identities” and spoke of them as part of “the generation in revolt” that also included the hippie community. Considering the violent crimes\textsuperscript{94} and racist ideologies held by many members of the Hells Angels, the fact that they managed to weave themselves into the fabric of the San Francisco counterculture exposed the often-problematic “everything goes”

\textsuperscript{91} Tom Wolfe, \textit{The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test} (New York: Picador Reading Group Guides, 1968), 169.
\textsuperscript{92} Kesey authored \textit{One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest} in 1962 and was considered a link between the Beat Poets and the Hippies.
\textsuperscript{93} Wolfe, \textit{The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test}, 169.
\textsuperscript{94} I discuss one of their most infamous crimes in Chapter 3.
nature of the Haight Ashbury community. Its indirect negotiation of racial identity and politics allowed for “a white racist outlaw group to be a real presence on the streets, a black racist outlaw group to be lauded in imagery, and somewhere in between, a peace-loving, non-racist, non-participatory counterculture to thrive.” The Haight Ashbury community chose to draw inspiration from the African American “outlaw” group, the Panthers, while inviting the Angels into the neighborhood.

By not directly engaging with African American communities in the Bay Area, the Haight Ashbury counterculture left ample room for the exoticism of African American identity. Historically, white communities have often used stereotyped visions of African American identity in order to construct their own identity. As noted scholar George Lipsitz pointed out, the use of “people of color as sources of inspiration...for whites...and the white fascination with certain notions of primitive authenticity among communities of color...all testify to the white investment in images that whites themselves have created about people of color.” Although this tendency manifested itself in a variety of strains, the use of African American musical traditions and motifs to code for outlaw images and anti-establishment identity was a key aspect of the music of the Haight Ashbury.

A specific example of the appropriation of African American tradition in countercultural music was the album *I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die* by the Haight Ashbury psychedelic band Country Joe and the Fish. This album, which featured numerous sections of free improvisation in songs like “Eastern Jam” and “Masked Marauder,” highlighted the tendency of psychedelic

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95 Zimmerman, *Sixties Synergy*, 163.
music to appropriate the improvisation and free-form nature of jazz and blues structures. In order to capture the “personal freedom through collective catharsis”**98 endemic to African American modal jazz, these songs mimicked the experimentation of influential jazz artists like John Coltrane and Miles Davis with non-Western song forms and Indian modes.**99 In a 1968 interview, Country Joe McDonald, lead singer of the band, remarked that “we don’t want to play songs anymore. We want to improvise. There is a different relation between people and a band that improvises.”**100** This yearning for improvisation and African-American coded musical tendencies inspired many of the Haight Ashbury artists, especially the Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin. Reviewing a 1966 concert at the Fillmore West (less than two miles from the Haight Ashbury) that featured both jazz groups and San Francisco rock bands, jazz critic Ralph Gleason noted the compatibility of the two styles of music. Writing about the Grateful Dead’s headlining performance, he claimed: “Pig Pen**101** made it into a one-man blues project. He sang for almost 20 minutes, stabbing the phrases out into the crowd like a preacher, using the words to riff like a big band, building to climax after climax.”**102** Gleason, a noted and successful critic who was white, saw no issue in the Grateful Dead drawing from the African American musical tradition of the blues and singing to the crowd like a preacher. He concluded that the show “managed to combine the jazz and rock worlds into one swirling mass of color which wrapped everything up as though we were all encased in a giant plastic bubble hurtling through space.”**103** As evidenced in Gleason’s words here, many members of the predominantly white counterculture approved of

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98 Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 81.
100 Country Joe McDonald in Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 81.
101 Ron “Pig Pen” McKernan was a founding member of the group.
103 Gleason, “All That Jazz and Rock Paid Off,” para. 10.
and enjoyed white bands like the Grateful Dead channeling blues and jazz influences in their music. In this sense, the community’s ignorance of appropriation and desire for exotic cultural forms allowed the bands of the Haight Ashbury to draw from communities to which they did not belong.

Beyond musical representations, the cultural and living practices of the predominantly white counterculture incited justified anger in minority communities living in adjacent neighborhoods to the Haight Ashbury. In particular, the predominantly African American and Hispanic community of the adjacent Fillmore neighborhood often regarded the Haight as a sort of cruel mockery. Many Fillmore residents “dreamed of attaining entry in to the very material world the hippie children had casually-and provincially-repudiated.”

For non-white communities near the Haight Ashbury, the counterculture was an example of affluent white people choosing a life of poverty that they could escape at any time by rejoining mainstream society. This perspective critiqued the counterculture as an example of a middle-class white culture appropriating a facade of oppressive circumstances that other groups have had to suffer with throughout history. While thousands of hippies had the privilege to “turn on, tune in, and drop out,” and receive acceptance back into mainstream America when they were finished, the same could not be said for residents of the nearby Fillmore, which generally featured residents of color and families of lower socioeconomic status. In his 1967 piece “The Flowering of the Hippies,” *Atlantic* writer Mark Harris critiqued the hippies’ refusal to commune with African American residents of the Haight Ashbury and nearby neighborhoods: “the burdens of the Negroes of the district were real. Negro tenants desired the attention of the health department,

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104 Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle in Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 180.
desired the attention of agencies whom hippies monopolized with appeals for food and housing.”

In this sense, the hippies’ self-chosen lifestyle of marginal poverty and communal living often redirected resources bound for their African American neighbors. Harris concluded: “The needs of the Negroes...appeared to Negroes a great deal more urgent than the needs of white middle-class hippies who had dropped out of affluence to play games of poverty in San Francisco.” By playing these “games of poverty” to experiment with an exotic and alternative way of living, the counterculture appropriated the real living situation of many of its neighbors.

This practice of borrowing and appropriation that the counterculture engaged in was a defining aspect of the unique community that formed in the Haight Ashbury. By culturally juxtaposing non-Western and Western symbols, spirituality, and music, it created an escape from the rationality and rigidity of the Western status quo by “affirming an Eastern irrationality through exoticism.” Significantly, there was always a safety net for members of the counterculture because embracing alternative ways of being did not require abandoning access to mainstream power. In this sense, the counterculture imported unfamiliar cultural ideas in part because the predominantly white and middle-class demographics of the community provided them the privilege of leaving the Haight and returning to mainstream America at their leisure.

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106 Harris, “The Flowering of the Hippies,” para. 45.
107 Harris, “The Flowering of the Hippies,” para. 45.
108 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 83.
109 Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 83.
Chapter 2: The Music of the Haight Ashbury

The music of the San Francisco counterculture served as a fundamental cultural, political, social, and artistic element of the Haight Ashbury community. One cannot think of the revolutionary music that came out of the counterculture without conjuring images of Jimi Hendrix lighting his guitar on fire, Janis Joplin’s powerful presentation of the blues at the Monterey Pop Festival, and the Grateful Dead playing community shows to a packed Haight Street during the 1967 Summer of Love. In his review of the Monterey Pop Festival for the jazz publication *DownBeat* magazine, Barry Hansen wrote: “the lineup of artists was heavily biased in favor of the West Coast...the organizers sought continually to present the most artistic and creative aspects of rock, scrupulously avoiding the products of high-pressure commercialism.”

The festival, which took place a hundred miles south of San Francisco in Monterey, featured many of these “west coast” artists from the Haight Ashbury community. Thousands of hippies made the two-hour journey to see Janis Joplin, The Who, and many other performers. In Hansen’s review in the jazz-oriented *DownBeat*, he appreciated the anti-commercial theme of the festival, and, undoubtedly coming from a jazz perspective, noted that the artists involved presented the “most creative” side of rock available at the time. Remembering the role of music in the counterculture, resident Eric Levin recalled: “there was a feeling one oneness and love amongst the people there...you’d feel it most during concerts, like when Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead shut off Haight Street...you would feel the love.” As evidenced here, rock music provided much of the community cohesion between residents of the Haight Ashbury.

This chapter examines how the music of the counterculture supported the anything-goes ethos of the Haight Ashbury community, reflected its core tenets, and drew from various musical traditions to create a collage of musical and cultural flavor. In this sense, the music of the Haight Ashbury was a bricolage: a construction from a diverse range of cultural and musical perspectives that sometimes sought to expand the consciousness of the listener, sometimes represented a benevolent effort to genuinely grapple with the ideas of another worldview, and almost always became a half-baked, inauthentic assimilation of a foreign object into the overwhelmingly white and middle-class counterculture.

Musical Exoticism: Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit”

Grace Slick, the lead singer of the Great Society and later Jefferson Airplane, remembered the musical performances of the Haight Ashbury as a hodgepodge of cultural eclecticism: “as you walk onto the dance floor, you have the feeling you’ve just entered seven different centuries all thrown together in one room...electronics and Indians, disco balls and medieval flutes...the howl of an amplifier and the tinkling of ankle bracelets...This is the American dream.”¹¹² As the music of the Haight Ashbury seeped into national and international airwaves on FM radio and through records, the rest of the world heard the psychedelic sounds of the San Francisco counterculture and got a taste of its reality.¹¹³ Although this melting pot of musical exoticism allowed listeners the freedom to retreat from mainstream reality to the comfort of the insular countercultural community in the Haight Ashbury, “it also meant that the counterculture was, to some degree, complicit in the...neo-colonialist policies” that were making Slick’s notion of the American dream possible.¹¹⁴ The counterculture could enjoy this “sample

¹¹² Grace Slick in Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 60.
¹¹³ Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 60.
¹¹⁴ Zimmerman, Counterculture Kaleidoscope, 60.
platter” of cultural forms because of its privileged position inside of the most prosperous cities in the U.S. and the world. Instead of protesting and fighting against these “neo-colonialist policies” that the community purported to despise, the community could indulge in its benefits, making itself complicit. As the U.S. continued the war in Vietnam and its cold war aggression around the globe, the counterculture could afford to stand idly by. By attempting to escape the mainstream of Cold War America through musical exoticism and the appropriation of numerous cultures, the Haight Ashbury tied itself to the very privileges it was trying to escape.

Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit,” which appeared on their 1967 album *Surrealistic Pillow*, provides a telling case study of a countercultural song produced in the musical and artistic community of the Haight Ashbury. Written by Grace Slick before her time with Jefferson Airplane, the song is a striking example of a piece of the counterculture being expressed in musical form and reaching mainstream popularity across the United States. To provide some context on Jefferson Airplane, the band became the house band of the Fillmore Auditorium (the most well-known venue in San Francisco at the time) in 1966.115 Slick herself grew up in an affluent part of Palo Alto, graduated college and supposedly broke ties with her previous band, the Great Society, because “they were enthralled with the sounds of tablas and sitars and considering going to India.”116 Historian Nadya Zimmerman noted that many people involved in the Haight Ashbury counterculture decided to stay at home and enjoy a “pluralistic, countercultural construction of the East”117 instead of exploring it themselves.

The song begins with the bass playing a repeated bolero-style motif that would have been instantly recognizable for the countercultural listener of the time. Accompanied by a

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military-style marching snare drum, the bolero ascends in half-steps, building tension in the anticipation of Slick’s vocal entry. According to Zimmerman, by 1967 “Maurice Ravel’s Bolero had become standard listening fare as light classical music on AM radio stations and in movie soundtracks.”\footnote{Zimmerman, \textit{Counterculture Kaleidoscope}, 66.} The lyrics, which were written by Slick after an experience with LSD, describe a scene with themes from Lewis Carroll’s \textit{Alice in Wonderland} and make reference to the LSD pills themselves as key elements of the psychedelic hallucination: “one pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small. Go ask Alice, when she’s ten feet tall. When the men on the chessboard get up and tell you where to go. And you’ve just had some kind of mushroom and your mind is moving slow.”\footnote{\“White Rabbit,\” Spotify, track 10 on Jefferson Airplane, \textit{Surrealistic Pillow}, RCA Victor, 1967.} By connecting her LSD trip with the “mainstream” images of \textit{Alice and Wonderland} and the popular musical idea of Ravel’s \textit{Bolero}, Slick managed to create a piece of musical psychedelia that, although existing in the unfamiliar and extremely personal world of an LSD trip, was instantly recognizable and relatable to an audience in the Haight Ashbury and the rest of the America. Because these two popular elements had become a sort of musical cliché by 1967, Slick allowed the FM radio listener to be “in the know” with the thematic content of her work. Despite the fact that \textit{Alice in Wonderland}, a work by a British author, and \textit{Bolero}, a French composer’s notion of the Andalusian flamenco tradition of southern Spain, were not exotic objects in and of themselves, Slick connected the bolero musical theme to an Eastern, hallucinogenic exoticism: “During an acid trip...I realized I had an almost eerie affinity for anything Spanish. In fact, I discovered that I could jam in the Eastern flamenco tradition easier than I could sing in the Western twelve-tone scale.”\footnote{Grace Slick in Zimmerman, \textit{Counterculture Kaleidoscope}, 67.} Beyond the subtle racism of Slick in her natural “affinity” for eastern flamenco traditions, the opening of \“White Rabbit\”
highlights its exoticism by presenting itself as a piece loosely associated with the often-orientalized music of Southern Spain.

During the 1960s, the symbol of flamenco as a vehicle for Spanish strength, exoticism, and cultural heritage was used by the Franco regime as a means to attract foreign tourism from the United States and Europe. As a result, the image of Spain supported by the Franco regime and widely accepted in Europe was an orientalized image in which Spain was the charming yet underdeveloped “other” to mainstream post-world War II Europe. Within Spain, flamenco was the musical expression of this orientalized “core” of Spain supported by images of Andalusian gypsy culture and Spain’s rugged and passionate authenticity. In this sense, 1960s Spain occupied a shaky middle ground between developed Europe and the Islamic world as a result of Franco’s campaign of auto-orientalization. With this campaign, historian Christina Civantos noted that Franco sought to take advantage of Spain’s unique position in between notions of the European “West” and the Muslim “East” to propagandize the country to the rest of Europe and the Spanish people. In this sense, “Spain [was] at once orientalized and orientalizing” itself. 121

With the Haight Ashbury occupying a similar position of self-orientalization, it is unsurprising that Jefferson Airplane would make an explicit musical reference to a commonly-held notion of Spanish exoticism and present it with the well-known cultural symbol of *Alice in Wonderland*. With “White Rabbit,” Jefferson Airplane gave audiences an “Eastern” and “Orientalist” discourse with which they were already familiar.122

This notion of adopting the otherworldly or the exotic as a means to negate and disengage from the mainstream parental generation was a key aspect of the counterculture and was

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121 Christina Civantos, *The Afterlife of Al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives*. (Binghamton: State University of New York Press 2017), 32.
reflected in its music. In its effort to disconnect with the mainstream by embracing alternative or exotic forms of culture and music, Jefferson Airplane and numerous other Haight Ashbury bands engaged in a form of orientalization explained by Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Said asserted that dominant (Western, predominantly European or American) groups shape and use exoticized conceptions of the East (or the other) to fit their sociopolitical needs. As a result, he argued, orientalism was a way for imperialistic cultures to transform political reality into the aesthetic.\(^{123}\) This framework applies itself well to “White Rabbit,” as Jefferson Airplane, in a similar manner to hegemonic imperialist countries painting exoticized pictures of subject peoples, used the bolero rhythm and familiar images of *Alice in Wonderland* to construct an ominous and tension-filled experience of a bad trip on LSD. By embracing an exotic alternative to mainstream American music in the Spanish flamenco tradition, Jefferson Airplane managed to create a form of musical rebellion to the hegemonic culture of Cold War America.

**Assimilating African American Musical Culture: Big Brother and the Holding Company’s “Summertime”**

Many Haight Ashbury artists and musicians drew from African American musical traditions and cultural symbols. In order to legitimize the counterculture, the predominantly white and middle-class community living in the Haight Ashbury used racially-marked signifiers to code for images of exoticism, naturalness, and authenticity.

Haight Ashbury bands like the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Country Joe and the Fish, and Jefferson Airplane all drew heavily from blues music in their playing in the latter half of the 1960s. With many of their live performances occurring in the

Fillmore Auditorium, just East of the Haight Ashbury, these bands frequently featured the most famous “old guard” African American blues artists as openers before their white, psychedelic take on the blues. Just as elsewhere in the United States, black artists like B.B. King, Muddy Waters and Little Walter were under-compensated for their performances while white bands like the Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin’s Big Brother and the Holding Company received enormous compensation for these performances. In a sad and ironic twist of fate, “the young [white] kids who’d learned their licks from older black players could parlay their music into a level of fame and fortune the originals could never have.”\textsuperscript{124} In defense of his blues-infused guitar playing that propelled the Grateful Dead to international stardom, Jerry Garcia often claimed that his interpretation of the blues, and the way he played it, was his own. Garcia was undeniably a musical genius; he defined his own distinct “sound” on the guitar over the course of his career with the Grateful Dead and with his numerous solo projects. Regardless of this, it is important to critically consider how Garcia (and other artists) interpreted the blues, a black-coded musical genre that originated long before the 1960s. In a 1967 interview with rock critic Ralph Gleason, Garcia claimed that “the ideas I’ve pulled from blues musicians and from listening to blues are from my affection for the blues which is like since I was a kid.”\textsuperscript{125} Because he and other countercultural musicians did not live out the experiences that defined the blues sound of many African American artists both before and after the 1960s, the blues-infused music of the Haight Ashbury served, in Zimmerman’s view, as a “window-dressing...with symbols of ‘authenticity’ and ‘originality’...appropriated by the musical counterculture.”\textsuperscript{126}


\textsuperscript{125} Jerry Garcia in Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 167.

\textsuperscript{126} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 167-168.
Big Brother and the Holding Company formed in 1965 in the Haight Ashbury, with Joplin joining as lead singer in 1966. Her strong voice and passionate performances marked the band’s music. In her memoir, Rosie McGee recalled watching Joplin perform at the Monterey Pop Festival: “once they went onstage, she grabbed the microphone with authority and had the audience by the gut the moment she opened her mouth and let loose that voice of hers.”

Joplin’s famous voice drove the band’s cover of George Gershwin’s “Summertime,” which appeared in his 1933 folk-opera *Porgy and Bess*. Covered numerous times before 1967 by jazz artists John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis, and blues singer Billie Holiday, Janis Joplin and her band “brought” the song into the Haight Ashbury musical community with Big Brother and the Holding Company’s recording of the song. The song begins at a slower tempo than the original recording, leaving more room for Janis Joplin’s shrill vocals to cut through the empty rhythmic space left available by the slower tempo. Instead of the instrumentation playing in harmony with the singer (at the same time) like in Gershwin’s original recording, Joplin and guitarist James Gurley “trade space,” a common musical device used in the blues in which the singer sings a line and the guitarist (or any instrumentalist) plays a line to respond to the singer and “fill the space” left in between the vocal melodies. This harkens back directly to the playing of later blues artists like Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, and B.B. King, artists with whom Janis Joplin and the other members of Big Brother and the Holding Company were familiar. In addition to this device, Joplin’s vocal timbre and approach signal the “authentic blues.” Specifically, in this song and many of her other works, Joplin harkens back to Bessie Smith, one of the earliest female blues singers. With aggressive, shrill vocals, Smith projected power into

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127 McGee, *Dancing with the Dead*, 99.
her stories of being a member of the African American working class during the 1920s and 1930s.

Joplin also approached the lyrics of the song in a distinct manner. Instead of singing Gershwin’s original lyrics of “Summertime, an’ the livin’ is easy. Fish are jumpin’ an’ the cotton is high. Oh, yo daddy’s rich an’ yo’ ma is good lookin’. So hush little baby don’t you cry,” Joplin opts for an alternative lyrical approach clearly coded as an ornamentation of the African American blues tradition. Instead, she sings “Summertime, time, time, child, the living’s easy. Fish are jumpin’ now, and the cotton lord, cotton’s high, lord so high. Your daddy’s rich and your ma’s so good looking babe (she’s lookin’ good now). Hush baby, baby, baby, baby, no no no, no don’t you cry, don’t you cry.” In this first verse, it is clear that Joplin is using many of the typical elements employed by African American blues singers that came before her to embrace the “outlaw” persona of the blues singer and bring a classic piece from a folk opera into the counterculture. By altering the first phrase to emphasize and repeat “time” twice and adding in the phrase “lord so high” after the second line, Joplin adds a “bluesy” feeling to her vocal performance through her use of traditional blues techniques (connecting it to symbols of religiosity and gospel music). In the third line, Joplin adds a response (she’s lookin’ good now) to the call of “your ma’s so good lookin’ babe” to harken back to the call and response nature of many blues standards. To end the first verse, Joplin repeatedly calls “baby” and “don’t you cry” as a further means to add emphasis and blues imagery to her performance. As historian Nadya Zimmerman notes, “the technique of re-emphasizing a particular word or phrase is most common

130 Zimmerman, Sixties Synergy, 182.
in African American cultural practices.”\textsuperscript{132} She hangs on the “now” and “cry” at the end of both lines and inflects her vocal pitch to follow the harmonic pattern of the guitar and other backing instruments. Taken together, it is clear that Joplin was indebted to the blues as a source of artistic inspiration, techniques, and material.

To her credit, Joplin worshipped the blues and “paid for half of a headstone for Bessie Smith’s grave”\textsuperscript{133} among other actions. Because the counterculture itself looked to African American traditions as inspirations for its construction of an anti-mainstream ethos, Joplin’s use of blues-coded musical devices was a key reason she enjoyed a high level of popularity within the Haight Ashbury. Through her musical creations and personal identity within the counterculture, Joplin “constructed her persona out of counterculturally acceptable racial signifiers.”\textsuperscript{134} Taken as a telling example of countercultural music, Big Brother and the Holding Company’s “Summertime” also presented a harbinger of the end of the Haight Ashbury’s moment in the sun. But just as Big Brother and the Holding Company separated soon after \textit{Cheap Thrills}, the counterculture, rife with racial and cultural contradictions like those in “Summertime,” would quickly lead to its destruction.\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{Music, Drugs, and Hendrix: “Purple Haze”}

Drugs, and the experience of consuming drugs, was one of the defining aspects of the Haight Ashbury, and one that played a major role in the art and music produced from 1965-1969. Although it is easy in retrospect to view the San Francisco counterculture as a “drugged out” community that was destined to destroy itself as a result of its drug use, this thesis takes a more

\textsuperscript{132} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 183.
\textsuperscript{133} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 184.
\textsuperscript{134} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 186.
\textsuperscript{135} Zimmerman, \textit{Sixties Synergy}, 194.
interpretive perspective to thoroughly understand how drugs like marijuana and LSD fit into the musical landscape of the Haight Ashbury community.

Many historians cite the transition of rock from music to a form of true art\textsuperscript{136} as central to the evolution of rock music in the latter half of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{137} As a vital part of this transformation, the rock artists of the Haight Ashbury counterculture wrote about drugs’ actual impact on brain chemistry as well as the cultural aura and mysticism that surrounded drugs like marijuana and LSD. Many participants in the counterculture consumed drugs while listening to music, seeking to attain a higher form of consciousness completely outside of the American mainstream of the 1960s. The musicians of the Haight Ashbury began to place an increased emphasis on the visual aspects of musical performances and recordings. Because hallucinogens like LSD heightened the visual senses in the user, bands began performing with the now-famous colorful, moving visuals commonly associated with images of “hippie music.”\textsuperscript{138} This contributed to the aura and mystique surrounding LSD that served to aestheticize the drug use of the counterculture. Beyond live performances, many musical artists in the Haight Ashbury turned to unusual and innovative studio techniques, featuring the heavy use of special effects, electronically altered voices, distorted instruments (especially the electric guitar), and rapid

\textsuperscript{136} “True Art” is defined as art that is created for the satisfaction of the artist, and to draw an emotional response from the listener/viewer/consumer. Before the 1960s, rock music was critiqued as a form of “mass music” that represented a corrupting force of pop culture craze among youths and did not contain the artistic and emotional depth of classical or jazz music.

\textsuperscript{137} Deena Weinstein, \textit{Rock ’n America: A Social and Cultural History} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 112.

\textsuperscript{138} Weinstein, \textit{Rock ’n America}, 113. The Grateful Dead pioneered a new manner of performance called “The Wall of Sound” that featured hundreds of speakers to provide some of the highest sound fidelity at the time. Most contemporary concert setups today draw from this innovation. In addition, the Dead often experimented with visuals of lights shining through oil droplets, another aspect of their pioneering performances.
spanning between the stereo channels to connect their music to the experience of consuming drugs.\textsuperscript{139}

Jimi Hendrix’s work between 1967 and 1968 contained many of these themes. Although he was raised in Seattle and lived most of his life in England playing guitar for Curtis Knight and other British rock artists, Jimi Hendrix was intimately connected to the Haight Ashbury counterculture. He embraced many core beliefs of the Haight Ashbury community and performed at the Monterey Pop Festival of 1967, one of the most consequential events in American musical history and the first large music festival in the U.S.

Widely considered the greatest guitarist of all time, Hendrix constantly innovated on the instrument of the electric guitar, pushing it to its sonic limits and using advanced studio and performance technologies in tandem with his virtuosic playing to create a mesmerizing spectacle of psychedelic blues rock. Because of his legendary status in American musical history, it is easy to forget that Hendrix was not from another planet or heaven itself but was an African American man. Hendrix became one of the few black musicians to perform as part of the psychedelic vanguard of bands (Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane), instead of opening for them like most of the older, African American musicians from the previous generation. In part because of his African American identity, his tendency to write about experiences familiar to the Haight Ashbury community (drug use, sex), and his breathtaking and inventive guitar playing, it is no surprise that Hendrix became a countercultural icon in San Francisco and beyond.

\textsuperscript{139} Perone, \textit{Music of the Counterculture Era}, 24.
His 1967 debut album *Are You Experienced* formed a key component of the Haight Ashbury musical soundtrack and made overt references and strong statements on drug use, sexuality, and Hendrix’s experience as an African American performing amidst a sea of white countercultural musicians. Musically, Hendrix used the wah pedal (a pedal controlled by the foot while performing live that alters the frequency of sound coming through the amplifier and creates a sound similar to a human voice or baby crying), channel panning (panning a recorded song back and forth between the right and left stereo channels to create a disorienting and chaotic effect on the listener), distortion (overdriving an electric guitar amp to create the rough, loud, aggressive sound commonly associated with rock music), and the whammy bar (an addition to the electric guitar that allowed Hendrix to “bend” the pitch of notes higher or lower and create his iconic performances of the Star Spangled Banner) to creatively address notions of drug use and sexuality in his songs. This exploration of technological amplification as a source of new sound qualities combined with his virtuosic playing and improvisation made Hendrix’s unique musical approach an important facet of the musical counterculture.¹⁴⁰

Hendrix’s debut album *Are You Experienced* and the song “Purple Haze” demonstrate how his musical work simultaneously fit into the counterculture and critically examined it. Starting with the album title *Are You Experienced*, Hendrix created a double entendre that would define his music and his artistic contributions to the Haight Ashbury counterculture. At first glance, the album refers to a question asked between romantic partners about the sexual experience of the other party. At a deeper level, however, Hendrix also invites the listener and his audience in the counterculture to consider if they have had a comparable experience to

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Hendrix growing up as an African American man in Seattle with an abusive relationship with his parents, service in the armed forces, entering the music industry, struggling with numerous forms of addiction, and facing the racial barriers to mainstream success as a black performer in America. In this sense, Hendrix questioned the predominantly white, middle-class crowds that he performed for in the Haight Ashbury and at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, asking them to consider if their “experience” justifies their association with outlaw iconography and an anti-capitalist, anti-status quo perspective.

“Purple Haze” begins with a pulsing bass line and guitar riff that seem to incessantly pound in the listener’s ears. These powerful opening bars could be understood as “musically analogizing the raised perception of one’s heartbeat during an acid trip or the literal intensification of the heart pounding during sex.” Hendrix’s lead guitar enters next with an iconic line augmented by the power of the whammy bar and expressive vibrato (a technique in which the guitarist “moves” the fretted note back and forth with their fingers to create oscillations in the pitch of the note). In combination with Hendrix’s heavy use of distortion, the song begins powerfully. This introduction serves to give the listener an inside look into the mind of someone experiencing an LSD trip. Through Hendrix’s expressive guitar playing, vocals, and otherworldly voices and noises interjecting into the mix throughout the song, the listener is privy to the protagonist’s internal world, sharing in the mental, emotional, and physical transformations enabled by the drug.

Lyrically, Hendrix opens the song with a first verse of “Purple Haze was in my brain, lately things don’t seem the same, actin’ funny but I don’t know why, ‘scuse me while I kiss the

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141 Zimmerman, *Sixties Synergy*, 203.
sky.” The listener is let into the world of the protagonist who, after taking LSD, seems to have an open mind to the trip they are beginning. Even though the protagonist is “actin’ funny but I don’t know why,” a scary scenario for some, they feel liberated and in a moment of transcendence, exclaim “’scuse me while I kiss the sky.” This verse is a telling example of the tendency of counterculture music to fetishize the experience of being on LSD and the seemingly superhuman abilities and ecstasy that came with it. Recorded in the months after the Monterey Pop Festival, the “Purple Haze” Hendrix is referred to is a certain type of LSD handed out during the festival called “Monterey Purple.” Despite that fact that having a “bad” trip was a real and common occurrence, most psychedelic music of the counterculture stayed on the positive side of the “trip,” glorifying the mental freedom and self-exploration that came with an LSD experience.

Hendrix’s second and third verses in “Purple Haze,” however, do seem to address some of the negative effects of an LSD trip. Hendrix sings the second verse as “Purple Haze all around, don’t know if I’m coming up or down. Am I happy or in misery? Whatever it is, that girl put a spell on me.” This verse begins to elicit some of the feelings of tension and confusion that typically come with a trip on LSD. By questioning if they are “happy or in misery,” the protagonist is aware of the possibility that their trip could turn out poorly and cause them mental misery. Despite this tension, the protagonist is certain of the magical impact of a girl during his trip. This link between sexual experiences and the high of a drug trip was as common connection in the psychedelic music of the Haight Ashbury, as both the experiences of drugs and sex were often elevated to levels of extreme spiritual significance. By the third and final verse, the protagonist is seriously immersed in their LSD trip and their disorientation and confusion is

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amplified. Hendrix writes: “Purple Haze was in my eyes, don’t know if it’s day or night, you’ve
got me blowing, blowing my mind, is it tomorrow or just the end of time?” Repeating the
confusion of the protagonist as a means of emphasis, the song ends lyrically (although the
instruments continue with distorted interjections of oo’s and loud breathing from Hendrix) with
the protagonist considering the possibility that they had reached the “end of time” during their
trip. The protagonist does not seem too concerned with this possibility as the “end of time” is
casually considered a valid reality next to “is it tomorrow.” This sort of terrifying confusion
faced many LSD users in the Haight Ashbury and provided a stark contrast to the unbalanced,
positive portrayals of the drug in psychedelic music.

After the third verse, the song ends with Hendrix’s characteristic wild and virtuosic guitar
improvisations. These bits of guitar brilliancy combined with his use of distortion, extreme
dynamics (soft phrases interspersed with extremely loud moments), and feedback from the
amplifier all fit the chaotic landscape of the song by providing a quality of timelessness
associated with drug-induced hallucinations. Originally, the song was even longer and
contained many more verses before it had to be trimmed down for radio play. Hendrix remarked:
“you should hear the real ‘Purple Haze,’ it has about ten verses. But it goes into different
changes.” Despite the radio format of the time limiting his creative expression, Hendrix was a
prolific innovator, with his creativity expressing itself in all facets of his music. Famously,
Hendrix performed as the second to last act at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival with one of the
most expressive musical performances of the counterculture. During the performance, Hendrix

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146 “Purple Haze,” Spotify, track 1 on Jimi Hendrix, Are You Experienced, Olympic Studios, 1967.
147 Zimmerman, Sixties Synergy, 204.
148 Elizabeth Blair and Jesse Wegman, “The Story Behind ‘Purple Haze,’” on All Things Considered, NPR,
September 18, 2000.
played the guitar with his tongue in an overt gesture simulating oral sex, between his legs “as if masturbating” and ended his performance by pouring lighter fluid on the instrument and incinerating it, throwing the charred remains to members of a stunned audience. Through this performance, along with numerous others throughout the late 1960s, Hendrix made explicit the long-standing link between sex and rock music. Despite the legendary reputation of this performance today, critics attacked Hendrix for the blatant sexuality and racially-tinged nature of his performance at the festival. One white critic dubbed him a “psychedelic Uncle Tom.” In response to these critiques, Hendrix replied that “I don’t care man. I don’t care anymore what they say anymore. It’s up to them if they want to mess up the evening by looking at one thing...because all that is included man. When I feel like playing with my teeth, I do it, because I feel like it.” In this sense, “Purple Haze” represents a fascinating example of Hendrix’s eclectic fusion of LSD, the blues, sexual tropes, and theatrical virtuosity.

Protesting Vietnam: Country Joe and the Fish’s “I-Feel-Like-I’m Fixin’-to-Die-Rag”

Counterculture music in the Haight Ashbury also sought to protest the war in Vietnam. For many soldiers and draftees, San Francisco was the last stop in the U.S. on the way to Vietnam. Many members of the armed forces had a short stopover in San Francisco, during which it was common for them to visit the Haight Ashbury, which had become local spectacle and tourist attraction by the late 1960s. The Bay Area protest scene became a sort of middle ground, occupying the space between the U.S. and the faraway jungles of Vietnam. For the Haight Ashbury counterculture, the Vietnam War epitomized the imperialistic greed of the U.S.

151 Blair and Wegman, “The Story Behind ‘Purple Haze’”.
152 Blair and Wegman, “The Story Behind ‘Purple Haze’”.
at the cost of the Vietnamese people and ran directly contrary to the non-violent, free-love ethos of the hippie movement. Additionally, the specter of the draft represented a direct threat to the Haight Ashbury community, as many of the young members were conscripted as part of the draft. Some reluctantly shipped out to Vietnam while many ran from authorities or served prison sentences for draft-dodging. The Vietnam War was a huge factor in the experience of the late 1960s, and it is unsurprising that it factored into the music being created in the Haight Ashbury.

Rock group Country Joe and the Fish formed in 1965 when Country Joe McDonald and Barry “The Fish” Melton met in Berkeley. Before they started the band, McDonald served in the U.S. Navy for three years and Melton volunteered during the 1964 Freedom Summer. The band quickly gained local notority and released a record to distribute at Vietnam War protests at the University of California, Berkeley campus. Becoming a fixture of the Haight Ashbury music scene, Country Joe and the Fish released their most famous song, “I-Feel-Like-I’m Fixin’-to-Die-Rag” later in 1965. This song became the local anthem for anti-Vietnam War protests.

An ironic take on the Vietnam War, the song features dark humor and pessimistic satire to express its discontent with the current situation. Musically, the song follows the rhythm and beat of a traditional folk song with a marching tempo and walking bass line. Without the lyrics, the song sounds like a carousel song at an amusement park. This musical projection of happiness serve to contrast with the dark lyrics and heavy message of the song. The composition and instrumentation reflect the theme of dark humor by featuring random interjections of “wahoo!”, “whoopie!” and other humorous moments to highlight the irony of the happy-sounding song with

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154 The Freedom Summer was a volunteer-driven campaign that sought to register African American voters in Mississippi.
dark lyrics. One concert-goer and reviewer remarked that Country Joe McDonald “cracked up the audience with his hilarious and outrageous...song, delivered deadpan...Joe displayed...how he can reach an audience in a straightforward, good humored way - something which was always a hallmark of the Fish.” This good-humored and sarcastic approach to the heavy topic of the Vietnam War provided an emotional break for the audience while making a strong case against the numerous institutions that the band felt was behind the war effort.

Lyrically, the song blames American politicians, Wall Street, and the Military-Industrial Complex for the Vietnam War, citing capitalist greed as the root cause of a purposeless war. The chorus of the song features marching counts interspersed with dark satire: “And it’s a 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 a five, six, seven, Open up the pearly gates, Well there ain't no time to wonder why, Whoopee! We’re all gonna die.” By rhyming the lyrics and singing over a joyful chord progression, the song uses satire to address the grim and terrifying reality of soldiers dying in Vietnam for a war that begs the question “what are we fighting for?” In the third verse, Country Joe and the Fish discuss the Military-Industrial Complex as the root cause of the U.S.’s involvement in Vietnam: “come on Wall Street, don’t be slow, Why man, this is war au-go-go, There’s plenty good money to be made, By supplying the army with the tools of its trade, But just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb, They drop it on the Viet Cong.” In addition to

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156 “The Fish Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag,” Spotify, track 1 on Country Joe and The Fish, I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die, Vanguard Studios, 1967.
157 “Country Joe and the Fish, Grateful Dead, Sha Na Na,” Cash Box, October 11, 1969, 1. University of California Santa Cruz Special Collections and Archives, MS332, Series 4, Box 1.
159 “The Fish Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag,” Spotify, track 1 on Country Joe and The Fish, I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die, Vanguard Studios, 1967.
blaming Wall Street greed for the consequences of the war, the band also plays on the fear of nuclear annihilation and the prospect of “dropping the bomb” that pervaded American society during the Cold War. With other verses that follow in a similar vein, “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag” epitomized the anti-Vietnam aspect of countercultural music.

**Folk, Nature, and the Grateful Dead: “Morning Dew” and the Irony of Technology**

Formed in Palo Alto in 1965, the Grateful Dead quickly rose in the Haight Ashbury community as one of San Francisco’s most distinctive and well-known bands during the late 1960s and beyond. Their musical figurehead was Jerry Garcia, a San Francisco native who played bluegrass banjo and folk guitar throughout the first half of the 1960s. García’s father was a professional musician and part of a musical family from Galicia in northern Spain. Shortly before forming the Warlocks, the band that would become the Grateful Dead, Garcia traveled through the American South in 1964 to tape bluegrass bands. Unsurprisingly, bluegrass became a driving factor in much of the Grateful Dead’s music, with Garcia “translating the fluidity and jazz-folk synthesis of bluegrass...to electric psychedelia, the bands harmonies bearing the stamp of high- lonesome multipart bluegrass vocal party.”

By bringing bluegrass and folk-rock influences into the Haight Ashbury music scene, the Grateful Dead grounded the psychedelic and blues-infused rock that would define the counterculture in softer, minimalist folk that was driven by improvisation and made possible by the heavy use of studio and performance technologies. Although they often covered and wrote songs with the traditional folk themes of romantic landscapes, pastoral life, and reverence of nature, the band’s success was made possible by their

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consistent investment in advanced technologies to enhance both their studio and live performances.

A telling example of the Dead’s reliance on technological media as a staple of their music occurred during a 1969 performance in Santa Barbara, California. Detailed in a 1969 issue of Rolling Stone magazine which featured a piece about the Dead as a cover story, the band stormed offstage after the “slick, Hollywood-type” promoter would not allow them to set up their intricate PA system as desired. After a few minutes onstage, a furious Jerry Garcia shouted “Sorry! But we’re gonna split for a while and set up our own PA so we can hear what the fuck is happening.” He then ripped the chord from his guitar and stormed offstage. Backstage, in earshot of Michael Lydon who wrote the piece for Rolling Stone, Garcia explained to his bandmates that “this is the Grateful Dead man, we play with twice the intensity of anybody else, we gotta have our own system. The promoter screwed us, and we tried to make it, but we just can’t.” This episode highlights the fact that, despite the creative and virtuosic playing of Garcia and the rest, the Dead were highly dependent on the use of technology to enhance the sound quality and effects necessary to create the music they, and their countercultural audience, wanted.

The Grateful Dead managed to simultaneously present music that echoed the simple, nature-based themes of American folk music, harnessed the tradition of African American blues, and used cutting-edge technology to “pschedelize” it for the countercultural audience. Historian Nadya Zimmerman notes that the band “had to take extreme measures with their image in order

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to balance the extent to which they indulge in cutting-edge musical technology. They traded upon the ambiguous relationship between commercialism and technology, with elaborate natural referents as their bargaining chips.”¹⁶⁵ With songs like “China Cat Sunflower” and “Sugar Magnolia,” the Dead sought to conjure images of idyllic nature and natural purity, despite their heavy dependence on technology to shape their sound.

As a vehicle of analysis, this section explores the Grateful Dead’s song “Morning Dew” which appeared as a B-side on their 1967 self-titled album *The Grateful Dead* as an example of their musical tendency to bring elements of traditional folk music into a psychedelic sound in order to resonate with the Haight Ashbury community. Ironically, the expensive cutting-edge musical technology enabled by the band’s overwhelming success played a key role in shaping the band’s joyful, pastoral, and community-based image.

Originally written by Canadian folk singer Bonnie Dobson in 1962, the song describes a post-apocalyptic scene after a nuclear holocaust from the perspective of a folk song. In the original recording, Dobson uses the sparse and acoustic instrumentation of the acoustic guitar, violin, and tambourine to create a bona-fide folk song with ominous lyrics reflecting the Cold War reality of American life in the 1960s.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, the Grateful Dead’s cover of the song features an extremely high-tech arrangement of instruments including a driving and shimmering electric guitar, prominent percussion and bass lines, and a long, winding guitar solo played by Jerry Garcia to round out the back end of the song.¹⁶⁷

Musically, the Grateful Dead used a variety of musical techniques to simultaneously present the song as an authentic folk tune and a psychedelic experience for the listener. Significantly, instead of playing the song in the key of B-minor as Dobson played it, the Grateful Dead play the song in D-major, with a chord progression of D-major, C-major, G-major, D-major for the majority of the song. Instantly recognizable, this chord progression only featuring three chords directly ties the song to the American folk and bluegrass traditions in which the progression is commonly used. Choosing to use this chord progression as a means to ground the song in the American folk and bluegrass traditions, the Grateful Dead’s use of distorted electric guitars, long improvisational sections, and a sophisticated amplification system mark the Dead’s stark departure from the folk norm and entrance in the Haight Ashbury counterculture. The lyrics “walk me out in the mornin’ dew my honey, walk me out in the mornin’ dew today” echo a longing for untouched nature common in the American folk tradition. In the case of this song, this longing is now impossible after the annihilation of nuclear holocaust and the protagonist laments “where have all the people gone my honey...I guess it doesn’t matter anyway.” These lyrics expose a significant irony in the Grateful Dead’s performance of “Morning Dew” and their contradictory ethos as whole. While supporting the communal, back-to-earth drive of the Haight Ashbury positioned the Grateful Dead as countercultural heroes, their long winding improvisations (to provide the soundtrack for an LSD trip), use of expensive musical technologies to create a high-tech psychedelic folk hybrid, and long-enduring commercial success long after the fall of the Haight Ashbury reveal how the Dead profited from the very systems they sought to oppose.

Michael Lydon cut to the heart of this dichotomy in his analysis of the Dead in his 1969 piece for *Rolling Stone*, which, as an upstart San Francisco publication started in 1967, played a major role in publicizing the counterculture’s music. Discussing the Dead’s attempt to bridge the musical and technological gap between folk and psychedelic rock, he wrote: “rock and roll could be making your own music for your friends - folk music in a special sense. Sort of, but it didn’t really work...The central reason is that rock is not folk music in that special sense. The Machine...is not a foreign growth on rock, but it’s very essence.” In this excerpt, Lydon connected rock with “the machine” of modern technologies like the electric guitar, light shows, amplification, and cutting edge effects.

Overall, the music of the Haight Ashbury provided the sonic landscape to a community with lofty goals but rife with contradictions. Countercultural artists used elements of blues, folk, bluegrass, soul, and many other musical traditions as tools to construct the collage of countercultural music that would define the Haight Ashbury for years to come. While producing some of the most memorable and creative music in American history, the artists of the Haight Ashbury also revealed the significant ideological cracks in the counterculture that would lead to its demise.

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Chapter 3: The End of the Counterculture

From 1967 to 1970, the Haight Ashbury counterculture rapidly deteriorated. In a sudden and violent series of events, the Haight Ashbury transformed from a hippie haven of musical and artistic freedom into an overcrowded wasteland rife with hard drugs and violence. Given the seemingly spontaneous and organic growth of the Haight Ashbury community from 1965 to 1967, it is unsurprising that the counterculture deteriorated just as quickly. This chapter explores the numerous factors that destroyed the counterculture in San Francisco. It examines how the uncontrollable influx of people during the 1967 Summer of Love, the mass media’s co-option of the counterculture, and the consumerist commodification of the hippie idea pushed the cultural and ideological cracks in the community to a breaking point.

Overpopulation

From a demographic perspective, the short few blocks that make up the Haight Ashbury neighborhood could never have sustained the population burden that came with becoming a national media sensation. A small neighborhood of nineteenth century Victorian-style houses and small shops next to Golden Gate Park, the Haight Ashbury was underpopulated until the first members of the counterculture began moving into the area in 1964 and 1965. As the hippie movement picked up steam throughout 1966 and into 1967, the Haight Ashbury had filled up, with bands, artists, and young people from all over the U.S. moving into the Victorian houses. Images of the Grateful Dead performing to an endless sea of people on a packed Haight Street or the monumental crowd gathered in Golden Gate Park for the Human Be-In all attest to a neighborhood reaching its demographic capacity (see appendix for image).
In 1966, the Haight Ashbury community began receiving national news attention, which reached a peak after the Human Be-In of January 1967. After this event, which featured numerous bands performing and Timothy Leary giving his famous speech advising the youth of America to “Turn on, tune in, drop out,” the events and community of the Haight Ashbury became a subject of national intrigue. Even the children of Ronald Reagan, the leader of the 1960’s political backlash against Haight Ashbury,172 felt the mystical pull of the San Francisco counterculture. Reagan, who asserted that hippies “dress like Tarzan, have hair like Jane, and smell like Cheetah”,173 forcefully aligned himself in right-wing opposition to nearly everything the counterculture stood for. In contrast, Patti Reagan, his daughter, wanted to escape the family mansion in the Pacific Palisades of Los Angeles and experience the freedom and revolution that was occurring up the Pacific coast. She recalled: “In 1966, when I was fourteen-just as I was longing to be older and run off to the Haight and plait flowers in my hair...everything I believed in and wanted in those days was just out of reach.”174 Although she never was able to realize her ambitions and visit San Francisco during the brief life of the counterculture, Patti Reagan embodied the national phenomenon of fascination and intrigue with the Haight Ashbury community.

When local countercultural newspapers like the San Francisco Oracle and the Berkeley Barb began announcing plans for the Summer of Love to occur throughout the Bay Area, national media outlets began popularizing the Haight Ashbury and spreading word of the coming Summer throughout the U.S. and the world. Adding fuel to the fire, Scott McKenzie’s song “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)” was released on May 13th, 1967 as an

174 Patti Reagan in Talbot, Season of the Witch, 95.
instant success, reaching number four on the Billboard Hot 100. With an upbeat and light instrumentation and lyrics such as “if you’re going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair...summertime will be a love-in there...all across the nation such a strange vibration...people in motion,” the song became the anthem of the coming Summer of Love and magnified the national obsession with the Haight Ashbury. “Love-in,” in a similar manner to “Be-In,” referred to the sit-in movement occurring throughout the U.S. as part of the Civil Rights movement.

In order to prepare for the massive amount of people flowing into the neighborhood, the Council for the Summer of Love, a council made up of numerous Haight Ashbury organizations, including the San Francisco Oracle, formed during the spring of 1967. This council, despite its attempt to brace for the coming Summer, was woefully unprepared for the coming population maelstrom that was going to hit the Haight Ashbury. In a 2017 oral history interview, Haight Ashbury resident Lonnie Bouchee Eberich remembered: “on the radio, they said this is the Summer of Love, and people are coming to San Francisco and you need to open up your homes and invite people in.” As word spread that there was going to be an influx of people coming to the neighborhood, community members like Eberich recalled that the Haight Ashbury did not have enough space to house these people, and that community groups had to reach out to residents to provide housing to the Summer of Love attendees. Remembering the media attention of the mass media in the winter and spring before the Summer of Love, founder and editor of the San Francisco Oracle Allen Cohen remarked: “The Haight-Ashbury was a gigantic media

magnet, and now we would drown in the media flood. It would never be the same.”

This national publicity focused on the Haight Ashbury and the coming Summer of Love ensured that the neighborhood would become the preeminent symbol of the counterculture. The huge influx of media attention, which Cohen termed “the be-in media blitz,” brought the Haight Ashbury to the center of America’s consciousness. Tens of thousands of visitors from around the U.S. and the world flocked to San Francisco, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* estimated that approximately 100,000 people entered the tiny neighborhood during the Summer of 1967. These people, who, according to Cohen, were “on a pilgrimage to see what was happening,” heard about the Summer of Love through FM radio stations and news media, flooded the neighborhood to such an extent that “just about every group or organization the Haight had developed to deal with the influx had dissolved, burnt out or divided under the strain.”

As Cohen recalled, this massive influx destroyed numerous Haight Ashbury institutions that held the counterculture together including community welfare organizations, free clinics, and food distribution groups.

This massive migration of people all flocking to see the spectacle of the Haight Ashbury counterculture brought on the destruction of the counterculture. Bringing preconceived expectations about hippies and the countercultural community, these visitors were generally “imitation” or “plastic hippies” who sought free sex, free food, free dope, or free housing and generally did not engage with the ideology or cultural foundations of the counterculture.

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181 Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 82.
Instead, they were interested in partaking in the “essence” or “hippie identity” of the Haight Ashbury that had been filtered to them through the mass media. Far from immersing themselves in an authentic, truly alternative countercultural experience, these visitors’ quest to indulge in “sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll mimicked the reification of lifestyle and appetite for consumption embedded in mainstream American culture.”

Ironically, by seeking the artificial indulgences of the counterculture propagated by American mass media, these “participants” who flooded the Haight Ashbury were nothing more than consumers who directly represented the mainstream the counterculture was trying to escape. Remembering the Summer of Love, resident Rosie McGee wrote in her memoir: “stories about the Haight-Ashbury...sold lots of magazines and newspapers...many people across the country planned their summer vacations around coming...In the ensuing crush, the neighborhood people quietly retreated to the background, or just moved out.”

As evidenced by McGee’s firsthand account, the mass media drew people from all over the country to the neighborhood, forcing many community members out. As the Haight Ashbury community collapsed, thousands of former residents steamed out of the neighborhood to seek refuge in Marin, Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and other nearby towns. The 1970 census recorded this demographic shift as the primarily-white members of the counterculture fled the neighborhood. The 1960 census revealed that less than ten percent of the Haight Ashbury was non-white, with the largest minority being Asian-Americans. By 1970, African Americans made up 24% of the

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183 McGee, Dancing with the Dead, 91.
Haight Ashbury, a stark contrast to the mid 1960s, when the white counterculture dominated the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{185}

**Commercialization**

Paradoxically, one of the most potent forces that destroyed the counterculture during and after the Summer of Love was the rampant commercialization of hippie music, art, drugs, and ideology. Commercialization was the process by which the social and cultural artifacts of the Haight Ashbury hippie identity (flowers in hair, peace signs, tie-dye, Native American symbols, “free love” t-shirts) became commodities and memorabilia to be consumed rather than thought about or negotiated. The early Haight Ashbury scene had been characterized by its members’ active production of cultural forms such as music and art.\textsuperscript{186} After fleeing the counterculture to reside in Boise, Idaho, one Oracle contributor coined the process of tourists streaming into the neighborhood to get a piece of the counterculture as “the plastic deluge.” This “deluge” swallowed the Haight Ashbury community, drowning it in plastic trinkets and commodities formed out of artificial representations of the community’s famous symbols. Once created, however, these forms became cultural commodities to be passively consumed by the new national audience and mass media that had set its sights on the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{187} As a result of the media projecting its impression of the counterculture throughout the world, the small community of cultural radicals that lived in the Haight Ashbury before the Summer of 1967 became a shallow cliché of fun, “free love,” and indulgence. Because of this commodification


\textsuperscript{186} Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 99.

and hollow impersonation of the Haight Ashbury hippie lifestyle, America no longer had to grapple with the radical cultural ideologies presented by the counterculture.

Before the Summer of Love, crime did not play a major role in the Haight Ashbury, with police generally adopting a laissez faire attitude toward the hippies and the community generally existing in peace. This changed, however, as more violent drug dealers entered the neighborhood, seeking to profit from the Summer of Love. In an article written following the murders of two marijuana dealers in the Haight Ashbury in August 1967 during the height of the Summer of Love, Allen Cohen wrote: “all energy and thought forms devoted to commercial dope game...produce hell. Let’s disengage ourselves from the commercialization and the bottomless desire for more...DO NOT BUY OR SELL.”

Taken as a sign that the “flower power” embodied by the Haight Ashbury counterculture was rapidly fading, with mainstream capitalist greed replacing it, Cohen specifically discussed the commodification of marijuana. In contrast to the early months of the hippie community in which the shared use and distribution of drugs was a staple of the community’s anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, the new visitors to the neighborhood brought the capitalist norms of mainstream America into the Haight Ashbury. During the fall of the counterculture, drugs became popular commodities to be bought, sold, and consumed as part of the open market. Although marijuana was not completely free and communal before the Summer of Love, this escalation to violence as a result of the commercial sale of the drug highlights one facet of the commercialization that would strangle the

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189 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xlv.

190 Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 93.

counterculture. Remembering the disintegration of the Haight Ashbury, resident Herman Eberitzsch III recalled: “all of the profiteers came in with the drug scene and all made their money...and things got bad. The idealism was gone.”192 This passage highlights the commercialization of the drug scene, just one example of how business opportunists looking to sell the counterculture for consumption lead to its demise.

**Hard Drugs**

Another phenomenon that ensured the destruction of the Haight Ashbury counterculture during and after the 1967 Summer of Love was the increased sale, consumption, and violence related to hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines. In the earlier days of the counterculture before this catastrophic flood of media and people poured into the neighborhood, marijuana and LSD were the overwhelmingly common and available drugs of choice. LSD became the drug icon most closely associated with the Haight Ashbury due to its hallucinogenic qualities and role in helping the hippies expand their perspectives and consciousness during acid “test” or trips. Haight Ashbury community leaders, along with much of the neighborhood residents, believed these drugs to be consciousness “expanders” that helped the user gain insight and wisdom only attainable in an expanded state of being. On the other hand, they considered heroin, methedrine, and other methamphetamines to be “anti-consciousness” drugs. Remarking that “the presence, use and abuse of methedrine and heroin... became a problem in the Haight,” Allen Cohen recalled: “we looked upon heroin as an anti-consciousness drug, because it’s addictive properties and expense would turn a person away from his goodness for the sake of his

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habit.” In this sense, the hippie community drew an interesting distinction between drugs that were positive, physically harmless, even therapeutic, and drugs that were harmful to the human body or mind. The addictive and mind-destroying (instead of mind-expanding) qualities of these harder drugs made an irreparable impact on the Haight Ashbury counterculture.

Remembering the Haight Ashbury before the influx of hard drugs, former resident Lonnie Bouchee Eberich recalled: “everyone could just hang out and it was a really, actually, happy time. The big drugs didn’t come in until a couple years later.” In this sense, Eberich’s interview confirms the fact that the influx of “big drugs” marked a sudden change of course for the community that ended the “happy time” before the spread of hard drugs. David Sandberg, a Haight Ashbury resident and poet who became a victim of methamphetamine’s descent on the neighborhood community, wrote a poem which appeared in the Oracle shortly before his death from an overdose. Sandberg wrote: “I don’t know what I’m saying half the time; don’t know what it’s all about and run screaming thru labyrinthine corridors of my cell body...grasping at flashes of light which are bloody fish, which disappear as I reach out for their lantern cave like eyes.” This heartbreaking poem revealed the human consequences that accompanied the rapid spread of methamphetamines and other hard drugs into the Haight Ashbury community.

The fact that the cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines taking over the Haight Ashbury scene were highly addictive compared to marijuana and LSD helped them take root and spread

193 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxxiv.
194 Cohen, The San Francisco Oracle, xxxiv.
rapidly, infecting thousands of community members during the Summer and Fall of 1967. In his article titled “Death of a Hippie, Birth of a Freeman,” Oracle founder and writer Allen Cohen recalled that “hard drugs had infiltrated the area and the veins of some of the best.” Janis Joplin struggled with numerous addictions during her time in the Haight Ashbury, tragically passing away from a heroin overdose at age 27 in 1970. Additionally, Jerry Garcia, the leader of the Grateful Dead, became a user of hard drugs as a result of this influx and struggled with off-and-on addiction for many years until his death in 1995. Cohen’s remarks clearly pointed to the fact that these drugs tended to infiltrate the veins of many of the counterculture’s most visible artists, musicians, and leaders that the thousands of residents in the Haight Ashbury community looked to. With these icons falling to the influences of hard drugs, it is unsurprising that the moral ethos of the counterculture subsequently fell apart.

**Death of the Hippie Ceremony**

As a reaction to the “media generated hippie,” the influx of “plastic hippies,” and the violence and chaos that engulfed the Haight Ashbury during the Summer and Fall of 1967, the San Francisco Diggers, a community activism and street theater group that provided free food and basic necessities to the community, staged a ceremonial march called the “Death of the Hippie.” Explaining the purpose of the Diggers, founder and leader Peter Coyote remembered: “we wanted to question store-ness...When it wasn’t a business and people were doing something just because they felt like it...it forced you to take responsibility for being coerced or remaining coerced.” For Coyote, the Diggers was a way to express his most radical ideas and put them into practice. In establishing the Diggers, he recalled thinking: “if you have a fantasy, take

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This optimism and drive to dismantle the concept of paying for goods propelled the Diggers throughout the counterculture. In the “Death of the Hippie” ceremony, the Diggers, and their loyal following of Haight Ashbury insiders, marched a coffin filled with hippie paraphernalia and flowers down Haight street and into Golden Gate Park. According to Cohen, who knew the leaders of the group well, recalled that the Diggers were “appalled by the spotlight of the media on the Haight, and eager to attract it at the same time.” This dual consciousness of countercultural leaders was a key reason why the counterculture was so fragile and eventually dissolved in San Francisco. In his memoir, Peter Coyote remarked: “from our point of view, freedom involved first liberating the imagination from economic assumptions of profit and private property...then living according to personal authenticity.” In this sense, the Diggers wanted to completely disconnect with capitalist notions of private property and seek the vague notion of personal authenticity. With these goals, the group also sought public attention to attract people to join them, as Coyote stated earlier in the interview. Because of this desire for publicity, the Diggers played a role in causing the community’s destruction as it drowned in the media spectacle and overpopulation of the Summer of Love.

The Diggers put up hundreds of pamphlets for the event which read: “Funeral Notice: Hippie in the Haight Ashbury District of this city, devoted son of mass media. Friends are invited to attend services beginning at sunrise, October 6, 1967.” Through this highly publicized event, the Diggers wanted to signify the death of the media-generated hippie, and blame mass

199 Coyote, “Interview by Etan Ben-Ami,” para. 25.
201 Peter Coyote, Sleeping Where I Fall: A Chronicle (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), 61-62.
media as the direct creator of the fetishized version of the hippie that contributed to the Haight Ashbury’s downfall. The fact that the Diggers heavily publicized this event reveals the key irony of the countercultural leadership: seeking publicity for their alternative approach to life in the 1960s, they could not escape the overwhelming media attention even when attempting to ceremonially distance themselves from the images of the hippie cliché. Ron Thelin, the owner of the Psychedelic Shop, a central storefront on Haight Street and epicenter of community engagement, helped organize the “Death of the Hippie” event with the Diggers. In an interview with the San Francisco Chronicle, Thelin made strong remarks about what the ceremony meant for mainstays of the Haight Ashbury community that lived in the area before the disastrous Summer of Love: “it must all go - a casualty of narcissism and plebian vanity...Haight-Ashbury was portioned to us by the media-police, and the tourists came to the zoo to see the captive animals, and we growled fiercely behind the bars we accepted, and now we are no longer hippies and never were.”

In this fiery rebuke of the media’s fetishization of the counterculture, Thelin compared the original inhabitants of the Haight Ashbury to captive zoo animals meant to be observed as spectacles rather than people seeking an alternative way of life.

In response to the “Death of the Hippie” ceremony, Allen Cohen created a collage in the next edition of the Oracle titled “Death of a Hippie - Birth of a Free Man,” In the collage, which featured a lyric essay, Cohen wrote: “behind all illusions of order, civilization, law, and...rhetoric, the anarchic, natural, wild condition of body exists...the body and being of man is all fountains of youth and heavenly apparitions.”

Cohen’s piece reflected a sense of optimism

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in the face of the disillusionment and frustration with the media appropriation of the hippie community in the Haight Ashbury. Both Cohen’s piece and the Digger’s pamphlet contained a sense of optimism and faith in the countercultural ideology of escaping the “illusions of order” of mainstream society and establishing touch with the “wild condition”. In a similar manner, the Digger’s pamphlet pointed toward a “rebirth” of the genuine and authentic hippie elsewhere outside of the confines of the now-decadent Haight Ashbury.

A significant turning point in the history of the Haight Ashbury counterculture, the 1967 “Death of the Hippie” ceremony marked the most famous and highly-publicized instance of the leaders of the pre-Summer of Love Haight Ashbury responding to the ruinous downfall of the neighborhood. Above all, the “Death of the Hippie” meant a concession of the geographic space of the Haight Ashbury to the chaos and violence manufactured by the mass media and the thousands of plastic hippies that flocked to the Haight Ashbury in order to get a taste of the fetishized images of the hippie community. The population influx radically transformed the neighborhood, shifting it into the mainstream spotlight. After the Summer of Love, the Haight Ashbury hardly resembled the place it had been a mere twenty months earlier. Commercial storefronts catering to tourists replaced many of the smaller neighborhood merchants while runaways “huddled in doorways panhandling for spare change.”

In addition, people prowled the streets at night, seeking free sex or drugs, some looking to stage confrontations with police who patrolled the area with increasing frequency. After the Death of the Hippie Ceremony on October 6th, 1967, the original community leaders would flee the Haight Ashbury to pursue

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their countercultural ambitions elsewhere. The neighborhood fell further into a period rife with hard drugs and violence.

“I Know You Rider”: Music of the End of the Counterculture

Many countercultural artists responded to this descent into the maelstrom through their music. Dave Stevens, a writer for the Stanford Daily, reviewed the Grateful Dead’s 1969 album Live/Dead. Citing the greed of music promoters and executives as the cause of the musical counterculture’s downfall, he wrote: “the vitality and the inventiveness that were the musical expression of our scene will be a memory. It’s been dying for two years now, and that’s too long a final spasm.”207 Recognizing the fall of the music scene parallel to the rest of the counterculture, Stevens nonetheless gave the Dead’s new album a raving review. He claimed that the album was “a nearly flawless vinyl reproduction of...the original feeling we might have had a few years ago about what was happening here, the feeling you still find yourself carrying around like a secret hope.”208 He argued that it harkened back to the energetic start of the counterculture, where creativity flowed freely and the “that feeling” was in the air. For Stevens, the album seemed to be an escape from the current state of chaos in the Haight Ashbury, looking back on better times. Similarly, in a Birmingham, U.K. college publication review of the Dead’s 1969 album Aoxomoxoa, the author writes: “Aoxomoxoa is their best recording effort to date. It captures the life style and mood of a scene which has long since dissipated.”209 In these reviews, the authors praised the music, but made it clear that their enjoyment came from the nostalgia for the early days of Haight Ashbury scene.

207 Dave Stevens, “The Dead Are Alive - Are We,” The Stanford Daily, August 15 1969, 5. University of California Santa Cruz Special Collections and Archives, MS332, Series 4, Box 1.
208 Stevens, “The Dead Are Alive - Are We,” 5.
The Dead encapsulated this tumultuous time in their song “I Know You Rider”. A traditional blues song that evolved from Blind Lemon Jefferson’s 1927 single titled “Deceitful Brownskin Blues,” “I Know You Rider” has been adapted by numerous artists throughout the twentieth century and became a staple of the Grateful Dead’s touring repertoire.

Lyrically, “Deceitful Brownskin Blues” traces the plight of a young African American woman imprisoned for murder. According to John and Alan Lomax, a father-son pair of folk music chroniclers, “an eighteen-year old black girl, in prison for murder, sang the song and the first stanza of these blues.”\(^{210}\) The veracity of this claim is unknown, and despite the lack of clarity and vague understanding of the song’s origins, the piece undoubtedly conveys powerful emotions of sadness, regret, conveyed with the brutal honesty, sincerity, and bluntness characteristic of the blues.

In the only recording of the song, Blind Lemon Jefferson accompanies himself with an acoustic guitar, plucking the strings with his fingers.\(^{211}\) The song follows a swing pattern, a common feature of blues music in which the musical beats are not played evenly, and instead of a constant flow of evenly spaced beats, the music follows tight groupings of two beats, with a longer space between each set of two (think of the two-pump action of a human heartbeat, or a slow-moving train). With a swaying tempo similar to a walking pace, Blind Lemon Jefferson sings with loud outbursts of lyrics following a melancholy melodic pattern that underscores the troubled nature of the lyrics and the situation of the song’s protagonist. With each verse structured as a stanza of three phrases, Blind Lemon Jefferson empathizes with the troubles and sorrows of the song’s protagonist by inserting lyrics about his own “blues” that he feels and


experiences. He sings: “I been worried and walkin’, walked till my feet got soakin’ wet, I commence to walkin’, walked till my feet got soakin’ wet, Tryin’ to find good home, mama, man, I ain’t found one yet.”\textsuperscript{212} With numerous other verses similar to this one, Blind Lemon Jefferson reveals the troubles he faces and laments his sorrow for the listener. Albeit with different lyrics and a vastly different situation, the Grateful Dead embody a similar ethos in their countercultural lament, “I Know You Rider.”

The Grateful Dead’s version only shares one verse in common with “Deceitful Brownskin Blues”: “the sun will shine in my back door some day, the sun will shine in my back door some day, March winds will blow all my troubles away.”\textsuperscript{213} In “Deceitful Brownskin Blues,” the stanza instead ends on a rougher note with “I’ll have one more drink, gonna drive these blues away.” Interestingly, most of the other verses, instead of pure lament and sorrow, end their three-part stanzas with more optimistic and hopeful lines that serve to express the grit and autonomy of the narrator. In the Grateful Dead’s version of the stanza, the narrator is hopeful that “March winds” will blow all their troubles away while in “Deceitful Brownskin Blues,” the stanza ends with the narrator turning to alcohol as a means to numb their sorrow.

As opposed to the vast majority of their live recordings of “I Know You Rider” which featured a fast, upbeat, and straight feel (as opposed to the traditional blues swing), in early performances of the song during the collapse of the counterculture, the Grateful Dead took the song at a slower tempo with a swing feel very similar to “Deceitful Brownskin Blues.”\textsuperscript{214}

Additionally, the earlier versions involved a much simpler and acoustic-centered instrumentation of acoustic guitars, vocals, and light percussion as opposed to the electric guitar-focused later versions which included multiple keyboards, guitars, and a driving percussive beat. Creating a destitute, melancholy sound reflective of the destruction occurring in the Haight Ashbury, the Dead directly harken back to Blind Lemon Jefferson’s traditional, stripped-down, and powerful performance of “Deceitful Brownskin Blues.”

Most importantly, the early performances of “I Know You Rider” also included a direct reference to the chaos enveloping San Francisco as the final verse of the song. The verse proclaimed: “I’d rather drink muddy water, sleep in a hollow log, I’d rather drink muddy water, sleep in a hollow log, Than stay here in ‘Frisco, be treated like a dog.” Following the three-line verse structure of Blind Lemon Jefferson, the Grateful Dead lament their treatment as the counterculture deteriorated. With the influx of the thousands of plastic hippies that accompanied the Summer of Love, the Grateful Dead could be referring to the fetishization of their band as a key icon of the “San Francisco Experience” in this verse.

By the start of the Summer of Love, albums by Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, and the Grateful Dead had all reached “the top ten in San Francisco and were beginning to chart nationally.” The rapid success of these albums ensured that the “San Francisco Scene” of musicians would reach millions of Americans and propelled the Grateful Dead and other bands into a mainstream spotlight they never anticipated. With this success, Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir and the rest of the band became celebrity objects to be consumed by the American masses on vinyl

LPs, posters, and memorabilia.\textsuperscript{218} This trend ran directly counter to the ideology of the San Francisco hippie musical community. For the Grateful Dead, “the root basis of their relationship [with the audience] was that of a partnership of equals, of companions in an odyssey.”\textsuperscript{219} In the early days of the Haight Ashbury community, when the band was just getting its footing as a community band for the neighborhood, the band members did not view themselves as any different from the audience members that watched them perform in Golden Gate Park, on Haight street itself, or in their home at 710 Ashbury Street. With the national spotlight that came with the commercialization and massive popularity of the Haight Ashbury, the Dead undoubtedly felt alienated from the tight-knit audiences and community that they had grown accustomed to before the Summer of Love. A 1969 article on the Grateful Dead that appeared in \textit{Rolling Stone} magazine remarked: “what San Francisco started has become so diffuse, copied, extended, exploited...it has become invisible...it is hard to remember when it was all new...when only real freaks had their hair down past their shoulders.”\textsuperscript{220} This yearning for the early days of the counterculture combined with sadness for what the Haight Ashbury had become mirrored the sentiment that the Dead conveyed on “I Know You Rider.” As new fans of the band from all over the country and the world came to their shows to consume their music and mystique, a passive audience took the place of the local community shows that came before.\textsuperscript{221} This new audience built on mainstream consumerism was no longer participating in the creation and reinforcement of the of the Haight Ashbury’s original sense of equality and community.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{218} Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 95.  
\textsuperscript{219} Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 95.  
\textsuperscript{220} Lydon, “The Grateful Dead,” 15.  
\textsuperscript{221} Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 95.  
\textsuperscript{222} Jowett, “Welcome to Psychedelia,” 95.
Although it is impossible to know perfectly the intent of the Grateful Dead when writing and performing “I Know You Rider” during this period, the song undoubtedly mourned the destruction of the Haight Ashbury counterculture by presenting a cover of a traditional blues piece with similar emotional contents.

The Grateful Dead continued releasing music and touring through the death of bandleader Jerry Garcia in 1995. They have experienced enormous success far beyond the limits of the short-lived Haight Ashbury counterculture partially due to their musical versatility and cult following, and partially as a result of their embrace of the sometimes-kitsch countercultural ethos as a key foundation of their music and image. By emphasizing a “deadhead” community among fans and a “utopian alternative society” as key aspects of their live performances, the Grateful Dead could “carry the torch” of the Haight Ashbury community for decades after its collapse. Through this lens, the chorus of “I Know You Rider” which is made up of the three-line stanza of “I know you rider, gonna miss me when I’m gone. I know you rider, gonna miss me when I’m gone. Gonna miss your baby, from rolling in your arms” could be the band bidding farewell to the burning remains of the counterculture and the “San Francisco Scene” and moving on both musically and physically.

Violence: The Altamont Speedway Free Festival

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223 “Drugs, Community Relations, and the Police” exhibit part of Dead Central, University of California Santa Cruz Special Collections and Archives.
224 Ironically, the fetishized symbols and collective memory of the Haight Ashbury counterculture continued to serve the Grateful Dead even after the collapse of the community and to this day. The image provided by the media lasted longer than the physical community.
226 The Dead moved out of their house on 710 Ashbury Street to Marin, a picturesque county north across the Golden Gate Bridge.
At the end of their 1969 U.S. tour, the Rolling Stones sought to capitalize on the famous, if fading, energy of the San Francisco counterculture. After events like the Human Be-In and the Monterey Pop Festival reached worldwide acclaim, the Stones wanted to set up a free concert of their own in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. City officials, however, knew that a Rolling Stones crowd would strain park facilities, so the venue shifted to Altamont Speedway, a massive motorsports track in the remote hills of the East Bay. After consulting with the preeminent legends of the San Francisco counterculture, the Grateful Dead, the Stones hired the Hells Angels to provide security. As historian David Talbot remarked: “that’s the way it was done in San Francisco: no cops, no professionals, just the badass bikers whom the longhairs always kept wanting to be their heroes.” In addition to the Hells Angels, the San Francisco Diggers also helped set up the concert by using their influence as countercultural leaders. By this point in late 1969, the Diggers (and the Haight Ashbury community as a whole) had been losing members to drug overdoses, violence, and a constant flow of the original community out of San Francisco. Peter Coyote, one of the Digger’s leaders, recalled the difficulty in setting up the concert and the event spiraling out of control before it even started. Coyote remembers: “we tried to warn the Stones before Altamont, but they were too rich... and there was too much flow of multinational capital to listen to us...they were planning to make a fortune off the movie rights, for trying to put on a phony free concert.” This critique of the Rolling Stones’ money-driven and poorly-timed entrance into the crumbling San Francisco hippie scene would ring true. The concert was a disaster, a funeral pyre for the counterculture that would leave four dead and destroy the Haight Ashbury community for good.

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229 Peter Coyote in Talbot, *Season of the Witch*, 137.
As a horde of 300,000 people descended on the remote speedway on December 6th, 1969, a helicopter flew the Rolling Stones from San Francisco across the bay to Altamont. As the helicopter descended over the dust bowl of Altamont Speedway, it must have looked like the end of the world. The massive crowd, and the Hells Angels in charge of policing the stage, were all consuming speed, acid, alcohol, and fights were breaking out in the chaos. During the Rolling Stones’ set, an African American teenager named Meredith Hunter, who was at the concert with his white girlfriend, was murdered by numerous Hells Angels in an unprovoked and undoubtedly racist attack.

Rolling Stone, a magazine that had gotten its start documenting the San Francisco counterculture, released a comprehensive report on the Altamont Speedway disaster with numerous eyewitness interviews and photographs. The magazine interviewed an eyewitness standing near Meredith Hunter during the attack, and the witness’ (although they chose to remain anonymous for fear of violent retaliation from the Hells Angels) firsthand account provided a brutal glimpse into the hippie community in freefall: “[the hells angel] reached over and grabbed [Meredith Hunter’s] ear and yanked on it...he shook loose and the hells angel hit him in the mouth. As he tried...to run from the hells angel...four others jumped on him.” As he was being beat up, Hunter pulled out the gun he had been carrying on him as a last resort to make the assault stop. One member of the gang reacted immediately, spinning Hunter around and knifing him in the back. The other Hells Angels flocked to the fallen Hunter, kicking him in the face, and

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230 Talbot, Season of the Witch, 137.
smashing him over the head with a metal garbage can.\textsuperscript{233} The eyewitness recalled that Hunter, as he was being kicked in the face, “muttered some words. He said ‘I wasn’t going to shoot you.’ That was the last words he muttered.”\textsuperscript{234} As the chaos erupted in front of the stage, Rolling Stones’ singer Mick Jagger and guitarist Keith Richards attempted to stop playing to help Hunter receive medical attention. In response, a Hells Angel stuck a gun in the guitarist’s ribs and told him to start playing or he was a dead man. The Angel later recalled that, after the threat, “he played like a mother-fucker.”\textsuperscript{235} In her memoir, Rosie McGee remembered her experience at Altamont. Already having a bad trip from a stranger’s LSD, she recalled: “I looked up into the face of a snarling Hells Angel with an animal skin on his head, and I was completely lost in the psychedelic horror of it all...Right in front of the stage, I witnessed flailing pool cues and blood flowing from various victims.”\textsuperscript{236} In this ungodly moment, a motorcycle gang and a foreign band looking to cash out on the remnants of the Haight Ashbury community music plunged the counterculture into chaos.

The Hells Angel who murdered Meredith Hunter, Alan Passaro, was later acquitted by jury on grounds of self-defense. Three more people lost their lives during the Altamont Speedway Free Concert, including two in a hit-and-run car accident, and another by LSD-induced drowning in a nearby irrigation canal. \textit{Rolling Stone} concluded their thorough analysis of the disaster at Altamont with a telling diagnosis of the violence: “Altamont was the product of diabolical egoism, hype, ineptitude, money manipulation, and, at base, a fundamental lack of concern for humanity.”\textsuperscript{237} Altamont was the explosive product of inserting the most

\textsuperscript{233} Talbot, \textit{Season of the Witch}, 139.
\textsuperscript{234} Bangs, “The Rolling Stones Disaster at Altamont,” para. 10.
\textsuperscript{235} Sonny Barger in Talbot, \textit{Season of the Witch}, 139.
\textsuperscript{236} McGee, \textit{Dancing with the Dead}, 196-197.
\textsuperscript{237} Bangs, “The Rolling Stones Disaster at Altamont,” para. 31.
popular rock band at the time into the deteriorating San Francisco counterculture. This concert, born out of greed and hoping to use the former authenticity of the Haight Ashbury community as a guise, was doomed to fail before it began. In a music review for the *Vancouver Sun*, Alf Strand differentiated the Stones from the Haight Ashbury bands by claiming that the band was “a straight rock ‘n’ roll British group” in an article about a violent concert that the band played at the PNE Forum in Vancouver. Discussing a recent Grateful Dead concert at the same venue, he viewed the San Francisco scene as a uniquely peaceful and love-oriented community, writing “the scene is peaceful, man, following the hippies’ scripture of total non-violence...there wasn’t a single incident amid the wafts of incense. When the flower children blossom out, the only assault is on the ears.” Written in 1966 before the collapse of the Haight Ashbury community, Strand’s review revealed a clear contrast between the Stones and the music of the San Francisco counterculture. Given that the Bay Area hippie community was in a fragile state by the time of the Altamont Speedway Concert, it is unsurprising that the concert resulted in disaster. By dragging more than a quarter-million people to a remote speedway in the East Bay and hiring the violent and notoriously racist Hells Angels, the Rolling Stones and concert organizers lit the powder keg that would explode, leaving four people dead and burying the dreams of the Haight Ashbury once and for all.

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Conclusion

The Haight Ashbury counterculture represents a unique moment in history when a wide array of factors came together to put a tiny neighborhood in the heart of San Francisco on the map of history for generations to come. Conjuring images of peace signs, rainbows, and flowers, the Haight Ashbury was infinitely more complex than what popular culture and collective memory make it out to be. Instead of being connected to the various protests occurring throughout the Bay Area and the country, the Haight Ashbury avoided confrontations and sought escapism more than anything else. Instead of pioneering a new form of rock music, the most famous bands of the Haight Ashbury drew heavily on existing musical traditions, many of them foreign to the musicians themselves. Despite its efforts to create a pluralistic space for exotic, alternative ways of life, the community tended to appropriate the cultures they looked to for inspiration.

Over the course of five years, the San Francisco countercultural community was a haven of experimentation, the cutting edge of popular music, an attempt at forging a new way of life, and a wasteland rife with violence and hard drugs. Its sudden explosion of color was met with an equally rapid descent into chaos. Some of the community’s major figures went on to lead famous lives. Peter Coyote became a successful actor and director. Others, like Janis Joplin and Jerry Garcia, tragically passed away from drug addiction. By attempting to live outside the confines of the mainstream and gain recognition in the process, the Haight Ashbury was always pushing the limits of its own capacity. When the mass media turned its spotlight on the community, and thousands of people descended on San Francisco for the Summer of Love, the Haight Ashbury
could not survive the “plastic deluge” and it became a kitsch and caricature to be consumed by the mainstream it hoped to escape.
Appendix

Figure 1: Human Be-In Poster
Figure 2: Grateful Dead performing to a packed Haight Street


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