

# **The Hippies**

Hunter S. Thompson

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The best year to be a hippie was 1965, but then there was not much to write about, because not much was happening in public and most of what was happening in private was illegal. The real year of the hippie was 1966, despite the lack of publicity, which in 1967 gave way to a nationwide avalanche in *Look*, *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and even the *Aspen Illustrated News*, which did a special issue on hippies in August of 1967 and made a record sale of all but 6 copies of a 3,500-copy press run. But 1967 was not really a good year to be a hippie. It was a good year for salesmen and exhibitionists who called themselves hippies and gave colorful interviews for the benefit of the mass media, but serious hippies, with nothing to sell, found that they had little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming public figures. Many were harassed and arrested for no other reason than their sudden identification with a so-called cult of sex and drugs. The publicity rumble, which seemed like a joke at first, turned into a menacing landslide. So quite a few people who might have been called the original hippies in 1965 had dropped out of sight by the time hippies became a national fad in 1967.

Ten years earlier the Beat Generation went the same confusing route. From 1955 to about 1959 there were thousands of young people involved in a thriving bohemian subculture that was only an echo by the time the mass media picked it up in 1960. Jack Kerouac was the novelist of the Beat Generation in the same way that Ernest Hemingway was the novelist of the Lost Generation, and Kerouac's classic "beat" novel, *On the Road*, was published in 1957. Yet by the time Kerouac began appearing on television shows to explain the "thrust" of his book, the characters it was based on had already drifted off into limbo, to await their reincarnation as hippies some five years later. (The purest example of this was Neal Cassidy [Cassady], who served as a model for Dean Moriarty in *On the Road* and also for McMurphy in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.) Publicity follows reality, but only up to the point where a new kind of reality, created by publicity, begins to emerge. So the hippie in 1967 was put in the strange position of being an anti-culture hero at the same time as he was also becoming a hot commercial property. His banner of alienation appeared to be planted in quicksand. The very society he was trying to drop out of began idealizing him. He was famous in a hazy kind of way that was not quite infamy but still colorfully ambivalent and vaguely disturbing.

Despite the mass media publicity, hippies still suffer or perhaps not from a lack of definition. The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* was a best seller in 1966, the year of its publication, but it had no definition for "hippie." The closest it came was a definition of "hippy": "having big hips; a hippy girl." Its definition of "hip" was closer to contemporary usage. "Hip" is a slang word, said *Random House*, meaning "familiar with the latest ideas, styles, developments, etc.; informed, sophisticated, knowledgeable [?]." That question mark is a sneaky but meaningful piece of editorial comment.

Everyone seems to agree that hippies have some kind of widespread appeal, but nobody can say exactly what they stand for. Not even the hippies seem to know, although some can be very articulate when it comes to details.

"I love the whole world," said a 23-year-old girl in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, the hippies' world capital. "I am the divine mother, part of Buddha, part of God, part of everything.

"I live from meal to meal. I have no money, no possessions. Money is beautiful only when it's flowing; when it piles up, it's a hang-up. We take care of each other. There's always something to buy beans and rice for the group, and someone always sees that I get 'grass' [marijuana] or 'acid' [LSD]. I was in a mental hospital once because I tried to conform and play the game. But now I'm free and happy." She was then asked whether she used drugs often. "Fairly," she replied. "When I find myself becoming confused I drop out and take a dose of acid. It's a shortcut to reality; it throws you right into it. Everyone should take it, even children. Why shouldn't they be enlightened early, instead of waiting till they're old? Human beings need total freedom. That's where God is at. We need to shed hypocrisy, dishonesty, and phoniness and go back to the purity of our childhood values."

The next question was "Do you ever pray?" "Oh yes," she said. "I pray in the morning sun. It nourishes me with its energy so I can spread my love and beauty and nourish others. I never pray for anything; I don't need anything. Whatever turns me on is a sacrament: LSD, sex, my bells, my colors.... That's the

holy communion, you dig?" That's about the most definitive comment anybody's ever going to get from a practicing hippie. Unlike beatniks, many of whom were writing poems and novels with the idea of becoming second-wave Kerouac's or Allen Ginsberg's, the hippie opinion-makers have cultivated among their followers a strong distrust of the written word. Journalists are mocked, and writers are called "type freaks." Because of this stylized ignorance, few hippies are really articulate. They prefer to communicate by dancing, or touching, or extrasensory perception (ESP). They talk, among themselves, about "love waves" and "vibrations" ("vibes") that come from other people. That leaves a lot of room for subjective interpretation, and therein lies the key to the hippies' widespread appeal.

This is not to say that hippies are universally loved. From coast to coast, the forces of law and order have confronted the hippies with extreme distaste. Here are some representative comments from a Denver, Colo, police lieutenant. Denver, he said, was becoming a refuge for "long-haired, vagrant, antisocial, psychopathic, dangerous drug users, who refer to themselves as a 'hippie subculture a group which rebels against society and is bound together by the use and abuse of dangerous drugs and narcotics." They range in age, he continued, from 13 to the early 20's, and they pay for their minimal needs by "mooching, begging, and borrowing from each other, their friends, parents, and complete strangers.... It is not uncommon to find as many as 20 hippies living together in one small apartment, in a communal fashion, with their garbage and trash piled halfway to the ceiling in some cases."

One of his co-workers, a Denver detective, explained that hippies are easy prey for arrests, since "it is easy to search and locate their drugs and marijuana because they don't have any furniture to speak of, except for mattresses lying on the floor. They don't believe in any form of productivity," he said, "and in addition to a distaste for work, money, and material wealth, hippies believe in free love, legalized use of marijuana, burning draft cards, mutual love and help, a peaceful planet, and love for love's sake. They object to war and believe that everything and everybody except the police are beautiful."

Many so-called hippies shout "love" as a cynical password and use it as a smokescreen to obscure their own greed, hypocrisy, or mental deformities. Many hippies sell drugs, and although the vast majority of such dealers sell only enough to cover their own living expenses, a few net upward of \$20,000 a year. A kilogram (2.2 pounds) of marijuana, for instance, costs about \$35 in Mexico. Once across the border, it sells (as a kilo) for anywhere from \$150 to \$200. Broken down into 34 ounces, it sells for \$15 to \$25 an ounce, or \$510 to \$850 a kilo. The price varies from city to city, campus to campus, and coast to coast. "Grass" is generally cheaper in California than it is in the East. The profit margin becomes mind-boggling regardless of the geography when a \$35 Mexican kilogram is broken down into individual "joints," or marijuana cigarettes, which sell on urban street corners for about a dollar each. The risk naturally increases with the profit potential. It's one thing to pay for a trip to Mexico by bringing back three kilos and selling two in a circle of friends: The only risk there is the possibility of being searched and seized at the border. But a man who gets arrested for selling hundreds of "joints" to high school students on a St. Louis street corner can expect the worst when his case comes to court.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee, at the age of 78, toured Sand Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district and wrote his impressions for the London Observer. "The leaders of the Establishment," he said, "will be making the mistake of their lives if they discount and ignore the revolt of the hippies and many of the hippies' non-hippie contemporaries on the grounds that these are either disgraceful wastrels or traitors or else just silly kids who are sowing their wild oats."

Toynbee never really endorsed the hippies; he explained his affinity in the longer focus of history. If the human race is to survive, he said, the ethical, moral, and social habits of the world must change: The emphasis must switch from nationalism to mankind. And Toynbee saw in the hippies a hopeful resurgence of the basic humanitarian values that were beginning to seem to him and other long-range thinkers like a tragically lost cause in the war-poisoned atmosphere of the 1960s. He was not quite sure what the hippies really stood for, but since they were against the same things he was against (war, violence, and dehumanized profiteering), he was naturally on their side, and vice versa.

There is a definite continuity between the beatniks of the 1950s and the hippies of the 1960s. Many hippies deny this, but as an active participant in both scenes, I'm sure it's true. I was living in Greenwich

Village in New York City when the beatniks came to fame during 1957 and 1958. I moved to San Francisco in 1959 and then to the Big Sur coast for 1960 and 1961. Then after two years in South America and one in Colorado, I was back in San Francisco, living in the Haight-Ashbury district, during 1964, 1965, and 1966. None of these moves was intentional in terms of time or place; they just seemed to happen. When I moved into the Haight-Ashbury, for instance, I'd never even heard that name. But I'd just been evicted from another place on three days' notice, and the first cheap apartment I found was on Parnassus Street, a few blocks above Haight.

At that time the bars on what is now called "the street" were predominantly Negro. Nobody had ever heard the word "hippie," and all the live music was Charlie Parker-type jazz. Several miles away, down by the bay in the relatively posh and expensive Marina district, a new and completely unpublicized nightclub called the Matrix was featuring an equally unpublicized band called the Jefferson Airplane. At about the same time, hippie author Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 1962, and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, 1964) was conducting experiments in light, sound, and drugs at his home at La Honda, in the wooded hills about 50 miles south of San Francisco. As the result of a network of circumstance, casual friendships, and connections in the drug underworld, Kesey's band of Merry Pranksters was soon playing host to the Jefferson Airplane and then to the Grateful Dead, another wildly electric band that would later become known on both coasts along with the Airplane as the original heroes of the San Francisco acid-rock sound. During 1965, Kesey's group staged several much-publicized Acid Tests, which featured music by the Grateful Dead and free Kool-Aid spiked with LSD. The same people showed up at the Matrix, the Acid Tests, and Kesey's home in La Honda. They wore strange, colorful clothes and lived in a world of wild lights and loud music. These were the original hippies.

It was also in 1965 that I began writing a book on the Hell's Angels, a notorious gang of motorcycle outlaws who had plagued California for years, and the same kind of weird coincidence that jelled the whole hippie phenomenon also made the Hell's Angels part of the scene. I was having a beer with Kesey one afternoon in a San Francisco tavern when I mentioned that I was on my way out to the headquarters of the Frisco Angels to drop off a Brazilian drum record that one of them wanted to borrow. Kesey said he might as well go along, and when he met the Angels he invited them down to a weekend party in La Honda. The Angels went and thereby met a lot of people who were living in the Haight-Ashbury for the same reason I was (cheap rent for good apartments). People who lived two or three blocks from each other would never realize it until they met at some pre-hippie party. But suddenly everybody was living in Haight-Ashbury, and this accidental unity took on a style of its own. All that it lacked was a label, and the San Francisco Chronicle quickly came up with one. These people were "hippies," said the Chronicle, and, lo, the phenomenon was launched. The Airplane and the Grateful Dead began advertising their sparsely attended dances with psychedelic posters, which were given away at first and then sold for \$1 each until finally, the poster advertisements became so popular that some of the originals were selling in the best San Francisco art galleries for more than \$2,000. By this time both the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead had gold-plated record contracts, and one of the Airplane's best numbers, "White Rabbit," was among the best-selling singles in the nation.

By that time, too, the Haight-Ashbury had become such a noisy mecca for freaks, drug peddlers, and curiosity seekers that it was no longer a good place to live. Haight Street was so crowded that municipal buses had to be rerouted because of the traffic jams.

At the same time, the "Hashbury" was becoming a magnet for a whole generation of young dropouts, all those who had canceled their reservations on the great assembly line: the high-rolling, soul-bending competition for status and security in the ever-fattening yet ever-narrowing American economy of the late 1960s. As the rewards of status grew richer, the competition grew stiffer. A failing grade in math on a high school report card carried far more serious implications than simply a reduced allowance: it could alter a boy's chances of getting into college and, on the next level, of getting the "right job." As the economy demanded higher and higher skills, it produced more and more technological dropouts. The main difference between hippies and other dropouts was that most hippies were white and voluntarily poor. Their backgrounds were largely middle class; many had gone to college for a while before opting

out for the "natural life." An easy, unpressured existence on the fringe of the money economy. Their parents, they said, were walking proof of the fallacy of the American notion that says "work and suffer now; live and relax later."

The hippies reversed that ethic. "Enjoy life now," they said, "and worry about the future tomorrow." Most take the question of survival for granted, but in 1967, as their enclaves in New York and San Francisco filled up with penniless pilgrims, it became obvious that there was simply not enough food and lodging.

A partial solution emerged in the form of a group called the Diggers, sometimes referred to as the "worker-priests" of the hippie movement. The Diggers are young and aggressively pragmatic; they set up free lodging centers, free soup kitchens, and free clothing distribution centers. They comb hippie neighborhoods, soliciting donations of everything from money to stale bread and camping equipment. In the Hashbury, Diggers' signs are posted in local stores, asking for donations of hammers, saws, shovels, shoes, and anything else that vagrant hippies might use to make themselves at least partially self-supporting. The Ashbury Diggers were able, for a while, to serve free meals, however meager, each afternoon in Golden Gate Park, but the demand soon swamped the supply. More and more hungry hippies showed up to eat, and the Diggers were forced to roam far afield to get food.

The concept of mass sharing goes along with the American-Indian tribal motif that is basic to the whole hippie movement. The cult of tribalism is regarded by many as the key to survival. Poet Gary Snyder, one of the hippie gurus, or spiritual guides, sees a "back to the land" movement as the answer to the food and lodging problem. He urges hippies to move out of the cities, form tribes, purchase land, and live communally in remote areas. By early 1967 there were already a half dozen functioning hippie settlements in California, Nevada, Colorado, and upstate New York. They were primitive shack-towns, with communal kitchens, half-alive fruit and vegetable gardens, and spectacularly uncertain futures. Back in the cities, the vast majority of hippies were still living from day to day. On Haight Street, those without gainful employment could easily pick up a few dollars a day by panhandling. The influx of nervous voyeurs and curiosity seekers was a handy money tree for the legion of psychedelic beggars. Regular visitors to the Hashbury found it convenient to keep a supply of quarters in their pockets so that they wouldn't have to haggle about change. The panhandlers were usually barefoot, always young, and never apologetic. They would share what they collected anyway, so it seemed entirely reasonable that strangers should share with them. Unlike the beatniks, few hippies are given to strong drink. Booze is superfluous in the drug culture, and food is regarded as a necessity to be acquired at the least possible expense. A "family" of hippies will work for hours over an exotic stew or curry, but the idea of paying three dollars for a meal in a restaurant is out of the question.

Some hippies work, others live on money from home, and many get by with part-time jobs, loans from old friends, or occasional transactions on the drug market. In San Francisco, the post office is a major source of hippie income. Jobs like sorting mail don't require much thought or effort. The sole support of one "clan" (or "family," or "tribe") was a middle-aged hippie known as Admiral Love, of the Psychedelic Rangers, who had a regular job delivering special delivery letters at night. There was also a hippie-run employment agency on Haight Street; anyone needing temporary labor or some kind of specialized work could call up and order whatever suitable talents were available at the moment. Significantly, the hippies have attracted more serious criticism from their former compatriots of the New Left than they have from what would seem to be their natural antagonists on the political right. Conservative William Buckley's *National Review*, for instance, says, "The hippies are trying to forget about original sin and it may go hard with them hereafter." The *National Review* editors completely miss the point that serious hippies have already dismissed the concept of original sin and that the idea of a hereafter strikes them as a foolish, anachronistic joke. The concept of some vengeful God sitting in judgment on sinners is foreign to the whole hippie ethic. Its God is a gentle abstract deity not concerned with sin or forgiveness but manifesting himself in the purest instincts of "his children."

The New Left brand of criticism has nothing to do with theology. Until 1964, in fact, the hippies were so much a part of the New Left that nobody knew the difference. "New Left," like "hippie" and

“beatnik,” was a term coined by journalists and headline writers, who need quick definitions of any subject they deal with. The term came out of the student rebellion at the University of California’s Berkeley campus in 1964 and 1965. What began as a Free Speech Movement in Berkeley soon spread to other campuses in the East and Midwest and was seen in the national press as an outburst of student activism in politics, a healthy confrontation with the status quo.

On the strength of the free speech publicity, Berkeley became the axis of the New Left. Its leaders were radical, but they were also deeply committed to the society they wanted to change. A prestigious University of California faculty committee said the activists were the vanguard of a “moral revolution among the young,” and many professors approved. Those who were worried about the radicalism of the young rebels at least agreed with the direction they were taking: civil rights, economic justice, and a new morality in politics. The anger and optimism of the New Left seemed without limits. The time had come, they said, to throw off the yoke of a politico-economic establishment that was obviously incapable of dealing with new realities.

The year of the New Left publicity was 1965. About the same time there was mention of something called the pot (marijuana) left. Its members were generally younger than the serious political types, and the press dismissed them as a frivolous gang of “druggies” and sex “kooks” who were only along for the ride.

Yet as early as the spring of 1966, political rallies in Berkeley were beginning to have overtones of music, madness, and absurdity. Dr. Timothy Leary the ex-Harvard professor whose early experiments with LSD made him, by 1966, a sort of high priest, martyr, and public relations man for the drug was replacing Mario Savio, leader of the Free Speech Movement, as the number-one underground hero. Students who were once angry activists began to lie back in their pads and smile at the world through a fog of marijuana smoke or to dress like clowns and Indians and stay “zonked” on LSD for days at a time. The hippies were more interested in dropping out of society than they were in changing it.

The break came in late 1966 when Ronald Reagan was elected governor of California by almost a million-vote plurality. In that same November the GOP gained 50 seats in Congress and served a clear warning on the Johnson administration that despite all the headlines about the New Left, most of the electorate was a lot more conservative than the White House antennae had indicated. The lesson was not lost on the hippies, many of whom considered themselves at least part-time political activists. One of the most obvious casualties of the 1966 elections was the New Left’s illusion of its own leverage. The radical-hippie alliance had been counting on the voters to repudiate the “right-wing, warmonger” elements in Congress, but instead, it was the “liberal” Democrats who got stomped.

The hippies saw the election returns as brutal confirmation of the futility of fighting the Establishment on its own terms. There had to be a whole new scene, they said, and the only way to do it was to make the big move either figuratively or literally from Berkeley to the Haight-Ashbury, from pragmatism to mysticism, from politics to dope, from the involvement of protest to the peaceful disengagement of love, nature, and spontaneity.

The mushrooming popularity of the hippie scene was a matter of desperate concern to the young political activists. They saw a whole generation of rebels drifting off to a drugged limbo, ready to accept almost anything as long as it came with enough “soma” (as Aldous Huxley named the psychic escape drug of the future in his science-fiction novel *Brave New World*, 1932).

New Left writers and critics at first commended the hippies for their frankness and originality. But it soon became obvious that few hippies cared at all for the difference between political left and right, much less between the New Left and the Old Left. “Flower Power” (their term for the power of love), they said, was nonpolitical. And the New Left quickly responded with charges that hippies were “intellectually flabby,” that they lacked “energy” and “stability,” that they were actually “nihilists” whose concept of love was “so generalized and impersonal as to be meaningless.”

And it was all true. Most hippies are too drug-oriented to feel any sense of urgency beyond the moment. Their slogan is “Now,” and that means instantly. Unlike political activists of any stripe, hippies have no coherent vision of the future which might or might not exist. The hippies are afflicted by an

energating sort of fatalism that is, in fact, deplorable. And the New Left critics are heroic, in their fashion, for railing at it. But the awful possibility exists that the hippies may be right, that the future itself is deplorable and so why not live for Now? Why not reject the whole fabric of American society, with all its obligations, and make a separate peace? The hippies believe they are asking this question for a whole generation and echoing the doubts of an older generation.



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