On the cover of Mad Magazine’s December 1970 issue, at the tail end of what has come to be known as the long 1960s, Alfred E. Newman stands grinning in a raccoon coat and saddle shoes, gripping a pennant that reads “Beat State.” The always out-of-place mascot is oblivious to the frothing mob of filthy, angry young people who clamor behind him. A related gag appears in one panel of a five-page spread on “The Lighter side of ... The Revolutionary Movement”: while most of the panels feature angry longhairs – jokes are made both on their behalf and at their expense – one features two wholesome college students who are being interviewed by a journalist. When the kids insist that “the Revolutionaries are only a very small minority,” the journalist turns to his assistant and whispers, “Cut the mike, Bill! These are a bunch of likeable kids! They’re not news!!”

Youth at any time, the magazine suggests, is never as monolithic as we imagine. From a much greater historical distance, Jane and Michael Stern’s charming pop ethnography Sixties People counteracts such narrowing effects by offering a more diverse range of 1960s icons than the square and the militant longhair. They catalogue such figures as “Perky Girls” (Twiggy, Goldie Hawn on Laugh-In, Marlo Thomas’s That Girl); “Young Vulgarians,” who adopted the style of the working-class “hoodlum baroque” that persisted from the 1950s into the 1960s; and “Surfers, Twisters, and Party Animals,” who “yearned to escape the status quo” and yet were more likely to “chug a keg of brew, blast ‘Louie, Louie’ on the stereo, [and] lie out in the sun until [their] hair turned blond” than to attend protests.²

Yet whatever the media magnification, the youth culture linking both student radicals and the counterculture is central to what we mean when we invoke that capacious term “the 1960s.” Mad’s own relentless coverage of such figures from the mid-1960s onward constitutes just one archive chronicling the development of a distinct, oppositional youth culture. In this chapter, I will argue that this youth culture was influenced and inspired by the model of charismatic leadership, idealism, and personal authenticity that its
members associated with John F. Kennedy, both during his presidency and in the aftermath of his assassination. My analysis focuses on two key sectors of this sprawling culture: the largely middle-class white college students who participated in a range of causes and movements and whose political consciousness was raised by their observation of and, sometimes, participation in the civil rights movement, and those young people – also often white and middle class – who identified with the extra-political ideals of the counterculture. I focus more narrowly on the men in these movements, men who identified with Kennedy and imagined themselves as charismatic leaders in their own right. In this sense, while concerned with the sometimes grandiose self-understanding of the young men in the student Left and the counterculture, I hope to articulate the role that the image of Kennedy played, as an icon of charismatic masculinity, in the marginalization of women in 1960s youth. In both cases, I develop my claims through a look at the rhetorical underpinnings of specific texts linked to representative figures and movements – respectively, the early Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) of *The Port Huron Statement,* and the psychedelic movement as described by Timothy Leary in a 1968 account of a 1960 encounter with the poet Allen Ginsberg. I also draw at length on two important speeches by John F. Kennedy – his inaugural address of 1961 and his speech upon being nominated by the Democratic Party as their presidential candidate in 1960 – that were widely viewed as central to the shaping of his public persona.

The qualities of the Kennedy persona are not merely well known; they are clichés. Examining the cover of *Life* magazine from 1953 featuring the not yet married Jack and Jackie, David M. Lubin sums up JFK’s early image as one of “Youth. Freshness. Teeth.” By the time he was president, “millions of people throughout the world felt as if they knew Jack Kennedy. He appeared frequently in their living rooms, brought there almost daily by newspapers, magazines, radio and television . . . Observers in America and beyond experienced a rapport with Kennedy, whose aura was that of someone remarkable yet reassuringly familiar.” Glamour, youth, charisma, vigor, and idealism are all terms that continue to dominate descriptions of Kennedy, no matter that their accuracy has been seriously called into question by accounts of his constant and debilitating illnesses, the corrupt deployment of his father’s fortune, and his own practice of a political pragmatism that often shaded into cynicism. But if Kennedy’s influence on youth culture seems as undeserved as his reputation as a man of youthful vigor, we might also add that his appeal to this group was often largely subterranean. He was not so much embraced as a hero as he was internalized as a model. This chapter thus addresses a paradox: that a pragmatic, hawkish U.S. president, one who drew the United States into conflict with Vietnam,
became an iconic figure of the 1960s youth culture committed to freedom from oppression and bureaucracy. 6

Nowhere was Kennedy’s image as a charismatic man of revolutionary action and high principle more influential than among the white, predominantly male student activists who served as the public face of the emergent youth movement. This is not to say that Kennedy was universally or even widely admired among those who appear to have taken up his persona with such force. While he positioned himself as an inspiring alternative to Eisenhower era complacency, Kennedy was deeply pragmatic in his politics. His career in the Senate established him as a staunch anticommunist, albeit one with adequate liberal bona fides in domestic policy to eventually gather the support of Stevenson holdouts at the Democratic National Convention. But Kennedy’s persona and, often, his rhetoric stood in contrast to his hawkishness on both budgets and communism. Not only was Kennedy the youngest president in living memory to occupy the White House; his assassination before the end of his first term suspended his image in the popular imagination as a figure of martyred youth and idealism. Ramparts, the leftist monthly, was among the first magazine to publish conspiracy theories about the assassination, which it did alongside writings from such luminaries of Third World revolution as Che Guevara and Eldridge Cleaver. Although the decades since have brought careful documentation of Kennedy’s role in militarizing the nation’s involvement in Vietnam, in the immediate years after his death it was Lyndon Johnson who emerged – and has remained – as the grim face of the unpopular conflict. Kennedy was in death granted the sincerity of his idealistic rhetoric, in a way that would likely not have survived a full term and the evaluative scrutiny that a full-blown reelection campaign would have brought.

Yet it was not merely Kennedy’s relative youth that allowed him to function as an icon for the youth movements of the 1960s. His status as a charismatic Irish Catholic outsider to the narrowest definitions of the American ruling class; his image as a man of action who transcended the constraints of organizations and institutions (enhanced by his reputation as a war hero and by his writings about heroism); and his rhetorical yoking of the revolutionary spirit of the Third World to both the United States and, by extension, his person: all enabled an associative link between Kennedy and the newly independent peoples to whom he appealed. It is Kennedy’s symbolic status as a kind of homegrown charismatic revolutionary leader that is at the heart of his otherwise perplexing appeal to the student Left. In linking Kennedy’s lasting impact on student activists to the glamour and idealism of the Third World’s struggle against imperialism, I am following the lead of Leerom Medovoi, who has suggested that “Kennedy, through his election in 1960 to
the presidency, came to figure American freedom in a very particular fashion to the Cold War world. Kennedy’s youth, his off-white ethnicity as an Irish Catholic, and his self-presentation as an independent leader resembled in noticeable ways the . . . ‘young,’ largely non-white, newly independent nations of the globe.”

Lest the thread connecting Kennedy’s Irish American Catholicism to the people of the Third World seem too thin a strand to travel so far, it’s worth recalling the frequency and force with which this racial logic of associative transvaluation came into play. Normal Mailer’s “Superman Comes to the Supermarket,” a profile that appeared in *Esquire* magazine (under the title “Superman Comes to the Supermart”) just before the November election, refers in one section title to “The Hipster as Presidential Candidate.” Mailer invokes Kennedy as the latest incarnation of the “White Negro” he celebrated in his infamous 1957 essay in *Dissent*. In Kennedy, Mailer senses a break with the WASP establishment. Michael Szalay’s elegant parsing of the apparent contradiction of the term “white Negro” is helpful here: “while Mailer’s hipsters look white, they are in the process of becoming something other than a group of ‘whites.’ But crucially, in becoming ‘Negro,’ they change that identity such that it describes neither external markers nor inherited traits, but instead a set of performable dispositions.” Mailer is, indeed, interested in such dispositions, although in Kennedy they are not wholly divorced from that which is inherited. In “Superman,” Mailer praises Kennedy’s political machine, likening it to “a crack Notre Dame football team . . . never dull, quick as a knife, full of the salt of hipper-dipper, a beautiful machine.” Kennedy, in other words, may have played football for WASP-dominated Harvard – albeit intermittently and unsuccessfully, given his many illnesses – but Mailer sees him as inextricably tied to the Irish Catholic Notre Dame. Kennedy’s Irishness is capable not only of turning him into a Notre Dame man but, more miraculously, into a kind of white Negro. As Mailer has it, this conventional candidate with “his good, sound, conventional liberal record, has a patina of that other life, the second American life, the long electric night with the fires of neon leading down the highway to the murmur of jazz.” To return to Medovoi’s argument linking JFK to the peoples of Asia and Africa, Kennedy’s Irish Catholicism was, in being associated with American blackness, structurally aligned with aspirations for freedom across the decolonizing world: “Like youth, the ‘Negro’ became a potent ideological figure for the post-colonial character of a free United States. If youth figured America in its newness, as a young nation akin to those of the Third World, then blacks signified America as a space for the achievement of racial emancipation.”
Kennedy’s legacy as an actual supporter of and ally to the civil rights movement is complex and contested. Dr. King and other civil rights leaders saw in him a fair-weather friend of limited moral courage, but he was nonetheless widely perceived as an ally, a view that was solidified in the period immediately after his assassination. Cathy Wilkerson remembers that, during the time when she was active in the Swarthmore Political Action Club (SWAC) and the Committee for Freedom Now (CFCC) in an effort to improve the conditions of a 95 percent black school in Chester, Pennsylvania, Kennedy was “mythologized in many poor black households. His death was seen by many, in the immediate aftermath, as the martyrdom of a white ally to the civil rights movement. Within weeks, almost every household I entered in Chester had a picture of Kennedy on display.” Kennedy’s self-assessment is adequately summed up in his comment, after being pressed by Eugene Rostow, the dean of the Yale Law School, to offer more vigorous public support for the movement in 1961, “Doesn’t he know I’ve done more for civil rights than any President in American history?” But with civil rights as with Third World anti-imperialism, a chasm remains between Kennedy’s actual political record and the valence of his persona and rhetoric as they were taken up by the activist wing of the youth culture. Even among these more politically attuned young people, Kennedy’s charisma and apparent authenticity, combined with his rhetoric on behalf of personal freedom and responsibility, were seen as inspiring and influential.

To make sense of the power of JFK’s emancipatory rhetoric upon youth culture, we can start with the most enduring phrase of his short presidency. In his 1961 inaugural address, Kennedy exhorted Americans to reconfigure their citizenship in terms of service and sacrifice: “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” This familiar chiasmus is followed by another, less well remembered, that frames such patriotic service as part of an extra-national effort in the name of freedom: “My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.” This closing pivot to the newly independent and emerging nations of the Third World invites Americans to think of themselves as in structural solidarity with (noncommunist) mankind, and vice versa. In making this comparison, Kennedy returns his audience to his description of Americans, in the middle part of the speech, as “the heirs” of “the first revolution.” Kennedy’s most memorable gesture at self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation is thus only fully understood when placed in an international context, one that frames the United States as an older sibling whose success in achieving independence from the repressive European powers can be imitated by the decolonizing world.
Not quite a year and a half later, SDS distributed *The Port Huron Statement*. SDS was in 1962 oriented toward an ecumenical socialism founded upon participatory democracy, and had yet – in these years before the Gulf of Tonkin resolution – to become focused on ending U.S. involvement in the conflict in Vietnam. The final document, drafted by Tom Hayden months earlier and then revised at the SDS National Convention in Port Huron, Michigan, was ambitious in its breadth. Nuclear weaponry and the defense industry, environmental degradation, U.S. imperialism, civil rights, economic justice, university curricula, culture, and administration: all are subject to an analysis that aims to be comprehensive and philosophically consistent. This complex agenda is bound together by an explicit articulation of the “values” of sacrifice and the commitment to emancipatory freedom that directly recalls Kennedy’s inaugural address. In one of its central statements of principle, the statement asserts that the members of SDS “regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love,” as well as “unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity.”

The passage builds to its own Kennedyesque chiasmus: “This kind of independence does not mean egoistic individualism – the object is not to have one’s way so much as it is to have a way that is one’s own.” This way leads inexorably, as does Kennedy’s vision, to an ideal of action and sacrifice on behalf of a universalized mankind whose freedom is under threat.

Although SDS understood itself at this moment as filling a moral vacuum left vacant by the political establishment, the statement nonetheless positively contrasts political leadership in the United States with that abroad. Early in the statement the authors note that “unlike youth in other countries we are used to moral leadership being exercised and moral dimensions being clarified by our elders.” The apparent contradiction is clarified by SDS’s analysis of an inadequately visionary political culture: “To be idealistic is to be considered apocalyptic, deluded. To have no serious aspirations, on the contrary, is to be ‘toughminded’ . . . All around us there is astute grasp of method, technique – the committee, the ad hoc group, the lobbyist, that hard and soft sell, the make, the projected image – but, if pressed critically, such expertise is incompetent to explain its implicit ideals.” If this seems to critique Kennedy’s own political pragmatism, or the circle of technocrats in his administration, it also sounds a theme from Kennedy’s self-presentation as an alternative to Eisenhower era complacency. Indeed, a major part of the appeal of Kennedy’s rhetoric of service is that it presents an alternative image of the American. No longer the passive and emasculated suburban consumer, the American is enabled, in his commitment to global freedom and human betterment, to escape the institutions that would otherwise entrap him.
Indeed, as much as *The Port Huron Statement* is nominally organized around participatory democracy, its real leitmotif is the authentic, empowered, masculine individual. While we might expect it to emphasize interdependence, cooperation, and collaboration, *The Port Huron Statement* declares, “The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image or popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic . . . one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved: one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.” The centrality of the charismatic man of action to this vision was powerful enough to shape the first histories of the organization. James Miller, in the introduction to his indispensable history of SDS, explains, without seeming to be aware of the contradiction, “The form that I have chosen is biographical. By focusing narrowly on the experience of a few young radicals who ratiﬁed *the Port Huron Statement* and took its political vision to heart, I have hoped to recapture, from the inside, some of the excitement and sense of adventure that made the idea of participatory democracy come alive in the sixties.” Later scholars have sought to correct for this focus, insisting that “[It] is highly problematic to make age, whiteness, and student status the deﬁning characteristics of the New Left; however unintended, the consequence is to put those white youth at the center of the narrative, with other movements at the margins . . . The typical local leader of the antiwar or Civil Rights movements was a middle-aged woman or a Protestant minister, not a college student.” The inﬂuence of the charismatic narrative is equally apparent in the repudiations of a predominantly white, male radicalism that began appearing near the decade’s end. In the critiques from women who had worked behind the scenes in radical groups, it was the Kennedyesque man – now revealed for his sexual predations and hunger for power in the name of idealism – that came under scrutiny.

In a reﬂection on *The Port Huron Statement* published in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Dissent*, Michael Kazin suggests that what the statement offered was not a contradiction, but a creative fusion of “two types of ideological advocacy that are often viewed as antagonists: ﬁrst, the romantic desire for achieving an authentic self through crusading for individual rights and, second, the yearning for a democratic socialist order that would favor the collective good over freedom of the self.” This fusion, I would argue, was less stable than Kazin’s analysis would suggest, as is well testiﬁed to in the complaints among female activists, black militants, and international allies. At the very least, Kazin’s argument helpfully reminds us that Kennedy’s inﬂuential presentation of himself as a charismatic man of action was hardly sui generis. It can be placed narrowly in the “romantic” American tradition
Kazin traces back to the abolitionist movement or, broadly, in the context of a patriarchal “Great Man” theory of history. Without gainsaying those contexts or others, what allows us to trace this thread in 1960s youth culture to Kennedy specifically is its insistent turn to the language of sacrifice in the name of an emancipatory freedom that is threatened not so much by direct tyranny as by the lure of complacency and prosperity. It is relief from this very particular postwar danger that Kennedy’s charisma and emancipatory rhetoric promises.

In offering this reading of The Port Huron Statement, my point is not to enshrine either that document or SDS at the center of either the New Left or the youth culture. One might reasonably look at other movements or speeches – Mario Savio’s famous speech at Berkeley about “the machine” comes to mind – for evidence of Kennedy’s influence. Many later SDS-ers, such as the so-called Action Faction of future Weathermen, thought the statement tepid and specifically called it out as too steeped in American liberalism. Yet even these more radical groups bear the mark of Kennedy’s influence. The Yippie Manifesto’s call for “Every man a revolution!” is, on its face, a call for participatory revolution from the ground up, but it is counterbalanced by the ongoing centrality of Hoffman and Rubin as the charismatic faces of that revolution. In his 1988 documentary, Growing Up in America, Morley Markson returns to the figures who had earlier been at the center of his 1971 documentary, Breathing Together: Revolution of the Electric Family. Like Miller’s seminal history of SDS, Markson’s project is organized biographically, with each segment structured around footage devoted to the charismatic leaders in their prime. Hoffman, in particular, is shown at his magnetic best. With his masses of black curls, large, dark eyes, dimpled chin, and a regional accent just as marked as – although less idiosyncratic than – Kennedy’s own distinctive intonation, Hoffman looks like a Kennedy for the counterculture. He stands at a blackboard and riffs, “We think, if you ask us, how is the government going to be brought down, or lost in the shuffle, as we tend to put it, our motto is ‘Ask not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you.’ ” Hoffman makes it clear that he doesn’t approve of this anti-service philosophy – he calls it another version of the “gimme, gimmes” – just as his charismatic persona is not a repudiation of Kennedy but an appropriation of him.

The language of freedom was pervasive not just among the avowedly political student Left, but also among those sectors of the youth culture that sought a freedom they understood to transcend the merely political: it’s no accident that “Free Love,” a term that was once associated with radical critiques of marriage practices in the nineteenth century, has come to serve as an enduring shorthand for the ideals of the counterculture. Among these
groups, the model of freedom inspired by Kennedy is inflected differently; he is important less as a figure who embodies the emancipatory vitality of the emerging Third World than as one marked by his symbolic transcendence of institutions and hierarchies. Kennedy nowhere more deliberately forged this aspect of his image than in his speech upon receiving the Democratic Party’s nomination for president at its 1960 convention in Los Angeles.

This is the famous “New Frontier” speech, in which Kennedy uses his location at the westernmost edge of the continental United States to transvalue the imperial ideology of Manifest Destiny into a program of independent-minded exploration of new symbolic terrain: “I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be pioneers on that New Frontier.” Kennedy in this speech casts the New Frontier as a drama in which bold men cast off older modes of thinking and governmentality in order to revivify the nation. And in voting for him, Kennedy suggests, Americans could partake of this renewed pioneering spirit:

That is the question of the New Frontier. That is the choice our nation must make – a choice that lies not merely between two men or two parties, but between the public interest and private comfort – between national greatness and national decline – between the fresh air of progress and the stale, dank atmosphere of “normalcy” – between determined dedication and creeping mediocrity.

Kennedy here presents himself not just as a figure of youthful energy, but as a champion of resistance to a repressive political establishment. He figures not just himself but the Democratic Party as a whole as under attack from entrenched powers. Invoking Richard Nixon, Kennedy draws a sharp contrast between his approach and that of his likewise young opponent:

The Republican nominee-to-be, of course, is also a young man. But his approach is as old as McKinley. His party is the party of the past. His speeches are generalities from Poor Richard’s Almanac. Their platform, made up of left-over Democratic planks, has the courage of our old convictions. Their pledge is a pledge to the status quo – and today there can be no status quo.

Kennedy also drew on this rhetoric of resistance in addressing his Roman Catholicism, answering those who feared that a Catholic President would be in thrall to Rome by insisting, “It is not relevant what pressures, if any, might conceivably be brought to bear on me. I am telling you now what you are entitled to know: that my decisions on any public policy will be my own – as an American, a Democrat and a free man.” Here Kennedy brilliantly recasts his Catholicism as a test of and testament to his ability to
transcend the tyranny of entrenched and enervated institutions, turning a potential liability into another testament to his individualism.

The neoimperial language of the frontier, drawn in part from Kennedy’s electoral rhetoric, was not just the province of foreign policy: it was also central to the psychedelic movement from the outset. Proponents of LSD and other hallucinogens believed that these drugs would enable the exploration of the “new frontiers” of human consciousness. But even more pervasive was the influence of Kennedy as a figure who resisted the status quo and the institutions that maintain it. Timothy Leary, the charismatic figurehead of the psychedelic movement, offers in his 1968 book, *High Priest*, an origin story of both the psychedelic movement and his own emergence as a leader capable of transcending obsolete hierarchies, conventions, and social structures. The chapter entitled “Turning on the World” details the events of a day in November 1960, a few months after Kennedy’s “New Frontier” speech, when Allen Ginsberg came to Leary’s home to take psilocybin capsules. The chapter offers twinned narratives of bold leadership and the casting off of repressive institutions via the actions of Leary and Ginsberg. It begins with a historical overview, one in which Leary looks back on himself as torn between multiple factions. At the time he recalls, Leary was a lecturer in psychology at Harvard, and he begins by noting, “By the fall of 1960 there was in existence an informal international network of scientists and scholars who had taken the psychedelic trip and who foresaw the powerful effect that the new alkaloids would have on human culture.”

Yet even among this innovative group of forward thinkers, Leary detects a divide between the truly visionary and those who want to play it safe. Among the “turned-on doctors,” many preached cautious advances from within existing institutions and procedures:

There were those who said work within the system. Society has assigned the administration of drugs to the medical profession. Any non-doctor who gives or takes drugs is a dope-fiend. Play ball with the system. Medicine must be the vanguard of the psychedelic movement. Any non-medical use of psychedelic drugs would create a new marijuana mess and set back research into the new utopia.

These Nixonesque figures, who pretend to leadership but remain mired within the stultifying structures of the past, are crucial to Leary’s narrative of his own journey from meek follower to bold leader. Leary describes the pressure he was under to maintain such respectability: “I had been visited by most of the psychedelic eminences by this time and was under steady pressure to make the psychedelic research a kosher-medically-approved project. Everyone was aware of the potency of Harvard’s name. Timothy, you are...
the key figure, said Dr. Al Meyner . . . But the message was clear: Keep it respectable and medical.” 31

It is at this historical moment that Ginsberg makes a strategic appearance. Any chance that respectability will be maintained is shattered by the appearance of “the secretary-general of the world’s poets, beatniks, anarchists, socialists, free-sex/love cultists.” Ginsberg, in this description, is a kind of turned-on Kennedy: at once the wielder of institutional power – he is “secretary-general” – but one who does so in the name of a transformative challenge to the status quo. Although Leary portrays what follows as a kind of marvelous historical accident – the explosive product of Ginsberg’s visionary insight and the power of psychedelics themselves – there’s ample evidence that Leary invited Ginsberg to his home precisely in the hopes of harnessing this well-connected ally for his cause. 32 Soon after taking his capsule, Ginsberg, now high, is visited by Leary, his self-appointed spiritual adviser. Although snippets of the I Ching and Tolkien have already been interspersed through the chapter, after Ginsberg begins tripping his capitalized exclamations are added to the mix. The first of these come when Leary checks on Ginsberg for the first time:

He was lying on top of the blanket. His glasses were off and his black eyes, pupils completely dilated, looked up at me. Looking down at them they seemed like two deep, black wet wells and you could look down them way through the man Ginsberg to something human beyond. The eye is such a defenseless, naïve, trusting thing. PROFESSOR LEARY CAME INTO MY ROOM, LOOKED INTO MY EYES, AND SAID I WAS A GREAT MAN. THAT DETERMINED ME TO MAKE AN EFFORT TO LIVE HERE AND NOW. – Allen Ginsberg. 33

The capitalized section, like all that follow, appears to quote Ginsberg in the moment, although such a reading is complicated by the fact that later capitalized sections include quotes from “Howl” and “America.” Only this initial capitalized section is explicitly attributed to the poet. In this first direct entrance of Ginsberg’s voice into the chapter, the authority of his trip – and that of the well-connected and (in)famous poet himself – is rendered as something produced by Leary: he plays nominating convention to Ginsberg’s Kennedy. The chapter builds to the moment when, having fully taken on the pioneering authority granted him by Leary in speech (“A GREAT MAN”) and writing (“the secretary-general”), Ginsberg decides he must call “KHRUSHCHEV, KEROUAC, BURROUGHS, IKE, KENNEDY, MAO TSE-TUNG, MAILER, ETC.,” so that they can come to Harvard for “A SPECTRAL CONFERENCE OVER THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSE.” 34 After failing to get the operator to connect him to Khrushchev, he settles for calling Kerouac instead.
Despite the local failure of Ginsberg’s vision – which even Leary presents as inspired farce – the incident is central to Leary’s narrative of the movement’s emerging authority and notoriety. Leary tells how Ginsberg develops the revolutionary plan that they had been unable to construct the night before: “And so Allen spun out the cosmic campaign. He was to line up influentials and each weekend I would come down to New York and we’d run mushroom sessions.” On the one hand, Leary suggests that “this fit our Harvard research plans perfectly.” But he also describes it as part of something much bigger: “Allen’s political plan was appealing too . . . The bigger and better men we got on our team the stronger our position.” By the end of the chapter, Leary has been propelled, by Ginsberg and by his own insufficient instincts for caution, into a leadership position in the psychedelic vanguard. By the time an anthropology grad student who had been present at the house during Ginsberg’s trip spreads rumors of what he saw and unleashes institutional disapprobation against Leary, the researcher has all but left Harvard behind. He decides that “from this evening on my energies were offered to the ancient, underground society of alchemists, artists, mystics, alienated visionaries, drop-outs and the disenchanted young, the sons arising.”

By 1968, the image of the “sons arising” looks backward at both President Kennedy and Allen Ginsberg. But it also gestures toward the legions of young people who heard Ginsberg chant and Leary intone his famous slogan – “Turn on, tune in, drop out” – at the 1967 “Human Be-In” in Golden Gate Park. As one attendee described it, the Be-In “presented a new world,” one that was “new and clean and pastoral.” While the recollections of less-starry-eyed participants in the scene belie the vision of utopia realized, such rhetoric suggests the way in which Kennedy’s language of the new frontier, and the charismatic leadership that was at its center, proved both useful and inspiring to the counterculture.

Only a few years later, of course, the scene was dead. George Clinton’s psychedelic funk band, aptly named Funkadelic, titled their 1970 album with a witty phrase – “Free Your Mind . . . And your Ass Will Follow” – that presciently anticipated the shift of the frontier of freedom to the bedroom and the dance floor. But if the youth movements that had come to define “the 1960s” were in deep decline, Kennedy’s influence was not. Insofar as Kennedy’s appeal lay in his promotion of a charismatic personal authenticity at odds with the constraints of organizations and institutions, he also, ironically, became an important figure to the right in the decades following Watergate. Kennedy’s presidency and its aftermath gives birth to a structure of feeling that would allow the liberal Kennedy and the conservative Reagan to emerge as the most popular presidents of the twentieth century.
In an interview from *Growing Up in America*, Jerry Rubin conjures the sudden collapse of the movement in the early to mid-1970s: “I mean, there was just a day in 1973 or '74 when my phone book just became outdated. Everybody, everybody’s phone was disconnected. Everybody had moved to the country, or had cut off their hair and joined their father’s business, or gone back to school; it was just, like, unbelievable.” Rubin, like Ginsberg with *his* address book after he fails to reach Khrushchev, pulls himself together. After a stint on Wall Street, Rubin pursues a Kennedyesque course to the very place Funkadelic looked toward: the dance floor. His *New York Times* obituary – Rubin was fatally struck by a car in 1994 – fills us in on his last years of success, before he was reduced to marketing a powdered drink mix called Wow!: “By 1985, Mr. Rubin’s soirees at the Palladium on East 14th Street were bringing together thousands of networkers. ‘I don’t like to use the word, but every Yuppie in New York comes,’ he told an interviewer.”

NOTES

5 Ibid., ix.
7 Ibid., 168.
10 Ibid.
11 Medovoi, “Cold War American Culture as the Age of Three Worlds,” 179.
12 See Douglas Field’s chapter in this volume.
17 Ibid., 12.
18 Ibid., 10.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 11–12.
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Free the World and Your Ass Will Follow

22 Van Gosse, Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.
24 Growing Up in America (Dir. Morley Markson, Cinephile, 1988).
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 329.
31 Ibid., 330.
32 Peter Conners, White Hand Society: The Psychedelic Partnership of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg (San Francisco: City Lights, 2010).
33 Hayes, Smiling through the Apocalypse, 333.
34 Ibid. 334.
35 Ibid., 337.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid. 338.
39 Growing Up in America.
40 Ibid.