

---

*AHR Forum*  
The Rise and Fall of an International  
Counterculture, 1960–1975

---

JEREMI SURI

IN *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE*—BETTY FRIEDAN’S 1963 attack on domesticity—the author describes how she “gradually, without seeing it clearly for quite a while . . . came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the outward appearance of wealth and contentment, Friedan argued that the Cold War was killing happiness. Women, in particular, faced strong public pressures to conform with a family image that emphasized a finely manicured suburban home, pampered children, and an ever-present “housewife heroine.”<sup>2</sup> This was the asserted core of the good American life. This was the cradle of freedom. This was, in the words of Adlai Stevenson, the “assignment” for “wives and mothers”: “Western marriage and motherhood are yet another instance of the emergence of individual freedom in our Western society. Their basis is the recognition in women as well as men of the primacy of personality and individuality.”<sup>3</sup>

Friedan disagreed, and she was not alone. Surveys, interviews, and observations revealed that countless women suffered from a problem that had no name within the standard lexicon of society at the time. They had achieved the “good life,” and yet they felt unfulfilled. Friedan quoted one particularly articulate young mother:

I’ve tried everything women are supposed to do—hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, joining committees, running PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it, but it doesn’t leave you anything to think about—any feeling of who you are. I never had any career ambitions. I love the kids and Bob and my home. There’s no problem you can even put a name to. But I’m desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality.<sup>4</sup>

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who commented on the ideas and arguments in this article. This list includes, among others, Thomas Borstelmann, Chen Jian, Frank Costigliola, John Gaddis, Petra Goedde, Maurice Isserman, William Jones, Peniel Joseph, Martin Klimke, Melvyn Leffler, Douglas Little, Fredrik Logevall, Brenda Gayle Plummer, Andrew Rotter, Ruud van Dijk, Jeremy Varon, and Odd Arne Westad. I am grateful for the guidance provided by the anonymous reviewers and superb editorial staff at the *American Historical Review*.

<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York, 1983), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–68. For an insightful analysis of Friedan’s writing and advocacy, and the limits of her vision for social change, see Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of “The Feminine Mystique”: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, Mass., 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Adlai E. Stevenson, “A Purpose for Modern Woman,” *Women’s Home Companion*, September 1955, 30–31, excerpted at [http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch32\\_04.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch32_04.htm) (accessed December 7, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 21.

These were the words of the counterculture emerging within the United States, Western Europe, and many other societies during the middle 1960s. Existential angst was not unique to the period, but it became pervasive in a context of heightened promises about a better life and strong fears about the political implications of social deviance. Ideological competition in the Cold War encouraged citizens to look beyond material factors alone, and to seek a deeper meaning in their daily activities. Many women, however, did not feel freer in the modern kitchens that U.S. vice-president Richard Nixon extolled as a symbol of capitalist accomplishment.<sup>5</sup> Many men did not feel freer as they went to their daily jobs in the large-scale industries that underwrote the costs of new global responsibilities. Many students did not feel freer as they attended mass institutions of higher education, particularly universities.<sup>6</sup> An international counterculture developed in response to dissatisfaction with the dominant culture of the Cold War. On the model of Friedan's writing, it gave voice to criticisms of the basic social assumptions—about work, marriage, and family—connected to the politics of the era.<sup>7</sup>

The claims of the international counterculture were not unique. Many of the criticisms of patriarchy, racism, injustice, and imperialism that they voiced had long histories—histories that 1960s activists benefited from, whether they acknowledged them or not. Many of the strategies that they employed—community organizing, nonviolent demonstrations, public spectacle and humor, and selective terror—also had strong antecedents. The aims and techniques of the counterculture were radical, but also traditional. They deployed a very usable political past.<sup>8</sup>

The international counterculture also reflected many decades of cultural rebellion within Europe and North America. Bohemian subcultures in large urban communities had, at least since the early twentieth century, nurtured groups of young artists who challenged the standard etiquette and aesthetics of “Western civilization.” Modern art, literature, and music emerged from these communities, as did new personal habits. Sexual liberation and the social uses of new drugs became identifying characteristics for these cultural groups. Their behavior embodied political dissent, but it centered more directly on cultural rebellion and experimentation.<sup>9</sup>

In the decades after World War II, cultural rebellion became common again in

<sup>5</sup> On the famous Khrushchev-Nixon “kitchen debate” of 1959, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York, 2003), 416–418.

<sup>6</sup> See Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 88–130.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roszak popularized the term “counter culture” in his book *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y., 1969). My use of “counterculture” draws on Roszak, but places it in a broader historical and geographic framework.

<sup>8</sup> See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York, 2002), esp. 341–365; Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1998), esp. 275–322; William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1991), esp. 111–176; James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–74* (New York, 1996), esp. 10–60, 375–457.

<sup>9</sup> The literature on this topic is, of course, enormous. See, among many others, Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago, 2002); Venita Datta, “A Bohemian Festival: La Fête de la Vache Enragée,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 2 (April 1993): 195–213; Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, N.J., 2007), 207–330; Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 201–219; Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York, 2000); Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York, 1979).

urbanized industrial societies—capitalist and communist—where groups of young citizens articulated feelings of “alienation.” Rock music, beat poetry, and abstract expressionist art voiced common criticisms of how the pressures of social conformity destroyed individualism. Through these media, and others, many European and American youth sought to reassert their individuality and their connection to something they viewed as “nature,” as opposed to the “unnatural” industrial world advertised around them. Similarly, advocates of free living, free love, and free drugs claimed that they were returning human beings to the pursuit of pleasure, rather than state-manipulated wealth and power. By the early 1960s, these cultural critiques had attained widespread public recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. They were oppositional, but they were not overtly politically threatening—at least not yet.<sup>10</sup>

What made the international counterculture of the 1960s unique was its social composition and its geographic breadth, expanding considerably on its cultural antecedents. Unlike prior movements, this one included thousands of self-defined participants from the most visible and privileged parts of society. They were more explicitly politicized than their bohemian predecessors. Young college students, in particular, studying at institutions designed in a Cold War context to train the next generation of state leaders, rejected not just the policies of their elders, but the very assumptions upon which their elders had built their authority. These were not the dispossessed demanding more access to resources, or the cultural fringe searching for freedom, but the empowered questioning their own power. The international counterculture had an intensely self-critical quality that its proponents defined as “authenticity”; its detractors viewed it as suicide.<sup>11</sup>

The search for “authenticity” against established habits of power spread with astonishing speed across societies. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency was overwhelmed in late 1968 to find that countercultural activities were evident and politically disruptive on every continent. The CIA’s report to the president on “Restless Youth” described a “world-wide phenomenon” that had undermined allies such as West Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Dissent was also causing internal conflict in the so-called “Communist Bloc” (especially Czechoslovakia, Poland, China, and the Soviet Union) and disorder in “third world” societies (Argentina, Chile, Egypt, and Tunisia, among others).<sup>12</sup> Prior moments of revolution had had an international quality, but the simultaneity of countercultural activities in so many societies in 1968 made that year seem unprecedented in promise and peril for those living through it.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For excellent accounts of the connection between cultural criticism in the 1950s and the international counterculture of the 1960s, see Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America’s Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York, 2006), esp. 44–71, 194–216; Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon—What Happened and Why* (London, 1976), 326–352; Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2005), 390–449; William Jay Risch, “Soviet ‘Flower Children’: Hippies and the Youth Counter-Culture in 1970s L’viv,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (July 2005): 565–584.

<sup>11</sup> On the importance of “authenticity,” see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York, 1998). On the alleged suicidal quality of the counterculture, see Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> CIA report, “Restless Youth,” September 1968, Folder: Youth and Student Movements, Box 13, Files of Walt W. Rostow, National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Tex.

<sup>13</sup> On this point, see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York, 2004).

These judgments were, of course, exaggerated. For all of its radicalism, the international counterculture had many limitations. Dissent was evident in many societies, but its bark was often worse than its bite. How much of a difference did it make to have protesting students on the streets? They caused immediate disruptions, but did they change much? Was the counterculture more a creature of the media, as Todd Gitlin argued, than a grassroots social force?<sup>14</sup> The hegemony of political conservatism in so many societies after 1968 has reinforced these doubts.<sup>15</sup>

The international counterculture was, in fact, complicit in many of the elements of society that it criticized. It was not a call for revolution, despite its rhetoric, as much as it was a movement for rapid and personal reform within existing social and political structures. This is what Rudi Dutschke meant by his famous dictum about the “long march through the institutions.”<sup>16</sup> Recent historians have picked up on this, and they have emphasized the “spirit” of 1968 more than the politics—the transformed daily behaviors and interpersonal interactions that emerged during this period. Young people started to dress differently, they began to talk differently, and, yes, they had sex differently during the 1960s. The old ways never returned. Gerd-Rainer Horn convincingly shows that this “liberating” moment endured as the counterculture became part of mainstream youth and adult culture.<sup>17</sup> It soon became a commodified touchstone of prosperity. Gerard DeGroot reminds readers that these changes were far less organized than the movements themselves. To understand the international counterculture, he contends, we must avoid the urge to ascribe coherence to the era. We can have no grand narratives of 1968.<sup>18</sup>

In this context one must, however, distinguish the counterculture from various other resistance movements. Many citizens residing in colonial and postcolonial territories had long opposed the great power politics that, in their eyes, contributed to imperial domination over their societies. Nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru in India, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam were not part of the counterculture because they never accepted the basic institutions that were connected to it—the Cold War universities, the corporate media, and the dominant international political allocations of power. The same could be said for many domestic actors within Western societies, particularly early civil rights activists. Although figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., supported the basic tenets of liberal democracy, others—including Robert F. Williams in the United States and Frantz Fanon in Algeria—did not. They were not part of the counterculture because they advocated full-scale revolution. Social and political change was not enough for

<sup>14</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980).

<sup>15</sup> See especially Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Rudi Dutschkes Tagebuch, 17. Juni 1967, in Dutschke, *Mein langer Marsch: Reden, Schriften und Tagebücher aus zwanzig Jahren* (Hamburg, 1980), 70; Ingo Cornils, “‘The Struggle Continues’: Rudi Dutschke’s Long March,” in Gerard J. DeGroot, ed., *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (New York, 1998), 104–112.

<sup>17</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford, 2007), 1, 231–238.

<sup>18</sup> Gerard J. DeGroot, *The Sixties Unplugged: An International History of the Decade of Myth and Madness* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), esp. chap. 1.

them; they wanted to destroy society and rebuild it from the ground up. That was much more than countercultural activists stood for in practice.<sup>19</sup>

THE ENORMOUS INFLUENCE OF THE COUNTERCULTURE derived from its powerful presence within mainstream society. By the middle of the 1960s, Friedan's problem with no name had become a focus of discussion among leading journalists, intellectuals, and even policymakers. Unlike the third world nationalists or domestic radicals whom one could dismiss as extreme figures, the suburban housewives, corporate employees, and college students who questioned basic social assumptions were core political constituencies. They were the future of each society—the people whom leaders claimed to serve. These “children of a generally affluent generation—West or East,” according to CIA director Richard Helms, were “deeply engrossed in the search for some newer means of arriving at moral values.” “For the moment,” Helms warned President Lyndon B. Johnson, “they seem to have settled on a reaffirmation of the dignity of the individual. Most commentators agree that Society's values are in flux; if this is so, restless youth are symptomatic of a deeper current than their numbers alone suggest.” The president's special assistant for national security affairs, Walt Rostow, affirmed this judgment, pointing to the “conflict of ‘ardent youth’ and big machines, causing increasing numbers of young people to ask: ‘Where do I fit?’”<sup>20</sup>

These sentiments were widely shared across societies. As early as 1960, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer lamented what he called the “most important problem of our epoch”—the “inner political” weakness and superficiality of daily life in the Cold War. East-West rivalries and the nuclear arms race encouraged what he derided as an empty “materialism.” He longed to reawaken public interest in what he called the “Christian” belief in the simple devout life, free from military tensions, superficial consumerism, and impersonal bureaucratic institutions.<sup>21</sup> One of Adenauer's rivals and successors, Willy Brandt, shared this perspective. In September 1968, when he served as West German foreign minister, Brandt observed that “Young people in many of our countries do not understand why we, the older ones, cannot cope with the problems of an age dominated by science. Not force, but reason alone, can give them an answer.” Brandt argued that peace between Cold War rivals

<sup>19</sup> See Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000); David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Notes of Cabinet Meeting, September 18, 1968, and Attachment A, Folder: Cabinet Meeting, 9/18/68, Box 15, Cabinet Papers, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Tex. Martin Klimke offers an excellent discussion of these materials and the Johnson administration's views of the counterculture: *The “Other” Alliance: Global Protest and Student Unrest in West Germany and the United States, 1962–1972* (Princeton, N.J., forthcoming), chaps. 5–6.

<sup>21</sup> Konrad Adenauer an dem Herrn Staatssekretär, December 9, 1960, Ordnung III/50, Adenauer Nachlaß, Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus, Rhöndorf, Germany. See also *Ansprache des Bundeskanzlers auf dem Festakt anlässlich der 10. Sommertagung des Politischen Clubs an der Evangelischen Akademie, Tutzing, July 19, 1963* (Unkorrigiertes Manuskript), 02.31, 1963/Band 1, Reden, Interviews, Aufsätze, Adenauer Nachlaß; Adenauer Rede in der Freien Universität, West Berlin, December 5, 1958, 16.25, 1958/Band 2, Adenauer Nachlaß; Maria Mitchell, “Materialism and Secularism: CDU Politicians and National Socialism, 1945–1949,” *Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 2 (June 1995): 287–307.



FIGURE 1: Civil rights marchers in Madison, Wisconsin. Courtesy of the UW-Madison Archives.

was necessary for restoring domestic tranquility among a young discontented generation of citizens.<sup>22</sup>

Soviet leaders had similar concerns about the evidence of growing public disillusionment, despite the repressive control over information in their country. The official Soviet youth journal, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, called attention to problems with the “psychology of contemporary young people.” These young citizens had apparently lost the combination of pervasive fear and intensive nationalism that had motivated conformity, and even public enthusiasm, during the years after the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> A public survey conducted by Soviet authorities in 1964 revealed that more than four out of every five students refused, despite severe threats, to heed the leadership’s call for the cultivation of “virgin lands” and other patriotic communist projects. Government leaders, particularly KGB director Yuri Andropov, became obsessed with the regime’s domestic vulnerabilities.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Speech by Willy Brandt at the Conference of Non-Nuclear States in Genf, September 3, 1968, Box 288, Egon Bahrs Nachlaß, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, Germany. See also Bahr Entwurf für *Christ und Welt*, February 1965, Box 9B, *ibid.*; Bahr an Brandt, November 15, 1966, Box 352, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, April 27, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> “Molodezh ukhodit iz kolhozov v goroda,” December 1, 1964, Box 80-1-497, Fond 300, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Open Society Archives, Central European University, Budapest,

An uprising by citizens in the Georgian city of Novochoerkassk confirmed these fears. On June 2, 1962, local workers, joined by their families and area youth, seized Communist Party headquarters and the central police station. They demanded reduced food prices, better work conditions, and, most significant, a change in political leadership. In the eyes of many protesters, local authorities were out of touch with the needs and wants of society. They enforced an ideological order that contributed to growing public discontent. To control unrest in Novochoerkassk and its “spillover” into other areas, the Soviet army deployed brute force, killing sixteen civilians and injuring many more as soldiers fired into crowds of demonstrators. Soviet leaders put down the protests, but they never recovered from the anger and resentment inflamed by these events.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the violence, the citizens who challenged established authorities in the Soviet Union, West Germany, the United States, and other countries lived better lives than prior generations had. These were privileged men and women who had unprecedented access to consumer goods, education, and leisure time. They also lived relatively secure lives, even in communist societies, generally free from the domestic terror of the Stalinist years in the Soviet Union and the deprivations of economic depression in the United States and Western Europe. This was a revolt, in many cases, of the privileged against the leaders who conferred privileges. Such a judgment should not detract from the seriousness or the meaning of the demonstrations. Privileged people can also be progressive actors. The deeper point is that young citizens in the 1960s could organize and protest, as their elders often could not, because their social conditions were so much more secure.

The counterculture was not about material needs. It focused on unrealized spiritual and ideological demands that citizens believed were being stymied by the Cold War and its dominant leaders. Competition between capitalism and communism limited the perceived space for creative programs that combined or subverted the two systems. Foreign interventions also diverted resources and energies from domestic reforms. Most damning, the inherited logics of military and diplomatic strategy gave legitimacy to a group of Cold War “wise men,” while undermining the respectability of innovative political leaders who were not “present at the creation.”<sup>26</sup>

The experience of World War II and its aftermath provided figures from that generation with a political gravity that younger citizens acknowledged but also resented. Students for a Democratic Society in the United States was one of many

---

Hungary. See also “Molodezh Sovetskogo Soiuz,” November 5–6, 1962, Institute for the Study of the USSR, Munich, Box 80-1-497, Fond 300, *ibid.*; Michael Scammell, ed., *The Solzhenitsyn Files: Secret Soviet Documents Reveal One Man’s Fight against the Monolith*, trans. under the supervision of Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (Chicago, 1995), esp. xvii–xxxv. For a superb discussion of the “Soviet Sixties,” see Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007), 163–191.

<sup>25</sup> For the best account of the events in Novochoerkassk, see Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novochoerkassk, 1962* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), esp. 1–127. On the legitimacy crisis confronting Soviet leaders in the 1960s, see Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 163–191; Jeremi Suri, “The Promise and Failure of ‘Developed Socialism’: The Soviet ‘Thaw’ and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964–1972,” *Contemporary European History* 15, no. 2 (May 2006): 133–158.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the Cold War “wise men,” see Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York, 1986). The penetrating phrase “present at the creation” comes, of course, from Dean Acheson’s memoirs, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, 1969).

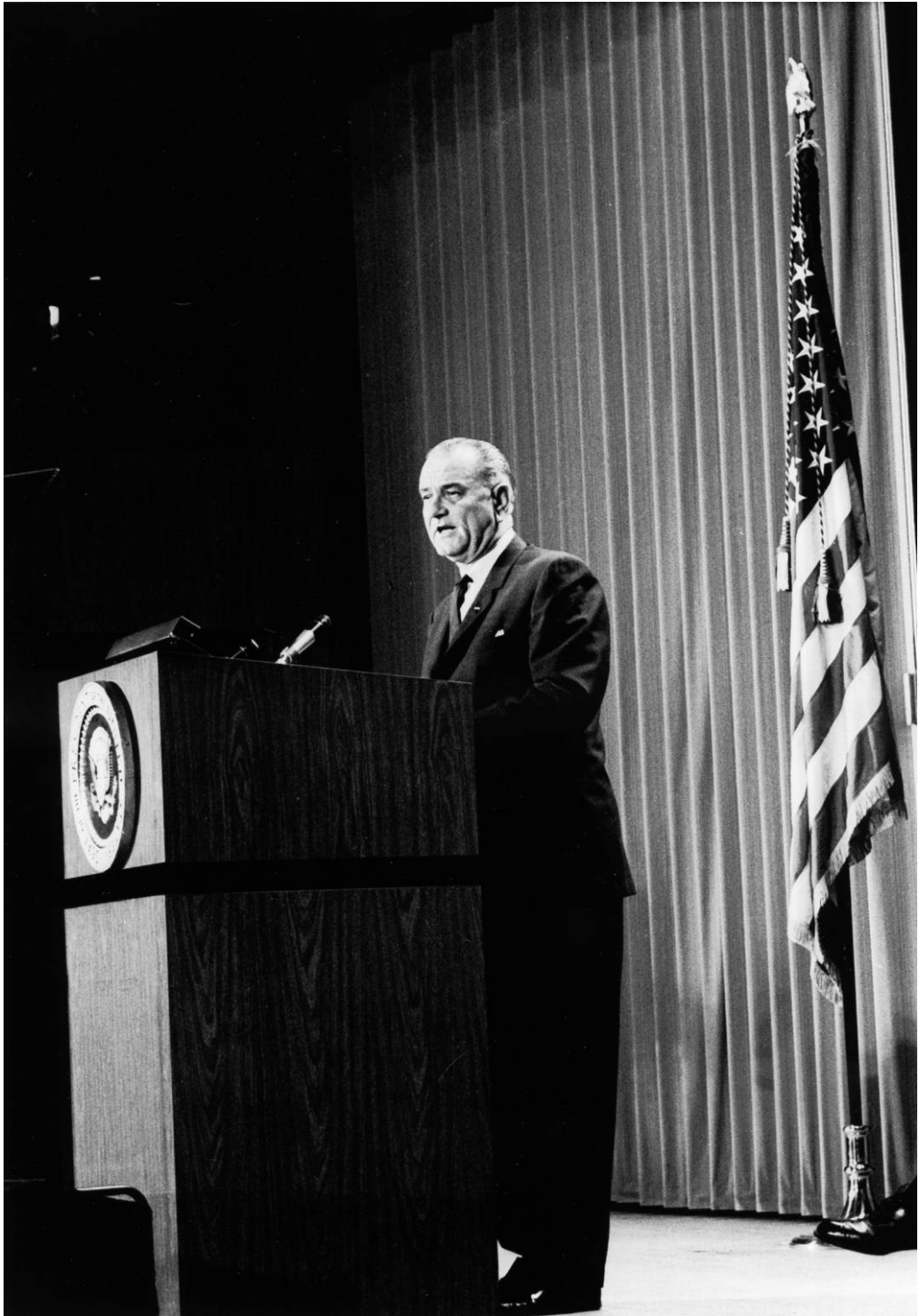


FIGURE 2: Lyndon Johnson delivering a speech at Johns Hopkins University, April 7, 1965. LBJ Library Photo by Yoichi Okamoto.

groups to proclaim that the world faced new challenges—civil rights, nuclear arms control, decolonization, and others—that the elder statesmen, for all their experience, were unprepared to address. According to this argument, the “wise men” emphasized toughness rather than peaceful cooperation. The “wise men” focused on military power, not social change. Most of all, the “wise men” were part of a conservative old culture of suits and big band dances, not a new culture of jeans and rock ’n’ roll. The “wise men” sought to preserve their way of life against challenges from within; the new men and women sought to transform basic assumptions about politics, foreign policy, and daily life. The new men and women also sought to consume a popular culture of personal freedom more fully, without the traditional restrictions imposed by an inherited culture of self-control and public discipline. Dissent was ideological, and it was fun.<sup>27</sup>

Dissent from within the mainstream shook the foundations of political power, but it did not bring the walls tumbling down. Quite the contrary, widespread protests elicited new acts of political reinforcement by leaders around the world, often in collaboration with one another. This is the paradox of government stability in the late 1960s amid so much internal unrest. In fact, not a single major government was overthrown by protesters in 1968. Almost every government leader was traumatized by the demonstrations, but also inspired to take strong countermeasures. This, in part, is how political conservatism, rather than the New Left, became hegemonic in the 1970s. The counterculture’s mainstream roots raised expectations for extensive political reform, but those expectations were ultimately a victim of the coercive leverage exerted by the figures who dominated the mainstream and the resources at its disposal. Rapid political change required something much more akin to social revolution than what the international counterculture could offer.<sup>28</sup>

PRIVILEGED CITIZENS, BENEFITING FROM improved material lives, had rising social and cultural expectations. Relative stability and prosperity encouraged increasing demands. The political moderation that supported stability and prosperity came under attack for its very moderation. This is precisely what Alexis de Tocqueville meant a century earlier when he pointed to the perils of reform after decades of war and deprivation. The promise of a better life encouraged growing demands among an educated generation of men and women that gradual social improvement could not sustain. Suburban wives had much more than their mothers, but it was not enough. West German students lived more secure lives than their parents, but it was not enough. Soviet laborers had better working conditions than their predecessors, but it was not enough. Citizens blamed their leaders, not their unrealistic expectations, for the limits in their lives.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York, 1962), esp. 1–9; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York, 1987); Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Suri, *Power and Protest*, 213–259; Jeremi Suri, “Détente and Its Discontents,” in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 227–245.

<sup>29</sup> On the role of affluence, not deprivation, in the counterculture, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford, 1998), esp.

These popular frustrations were not only a reaction to the Cold War. They were inspired by Cold War rhetoric and encouraged by Cold War leaders—often the same figures the counterculture would later attack. Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev offers the best example of this dynamic. In his famous “secret speech” of February 1956, he exposed the horrors of Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union and legitimized freer public expression. Khrushchev explained that the fear and terror of prior years, accompanied by a vicious Stalinist “cult,” were “a serious obstacle in the path of Soviet social development.”<sup>30</sup> Excessive repression had undermined communist ideals, and it had weakened the Soviet Union in its competition with the United States. Losing its best minds to the Gulag, Moscow could not hope to match Western creativity. The Soviet Union needed to encourage limited new freedoms for the sake of Cold War competition.

Following this logic, Khrushchev temporarily opened up the communist system, encouraging more innovation and achievement. He disbanded the Gulags, sending prisoners home with amnesty so they could contribute to society. He created new “science cities” where scholars could conduct research with generous resources and freer access to information than they had enjoyed before. Most significant, Khrushchev allowed authors, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to publish literature that he believed would discredit the Stalinist past and inspire new hope. “In the last years,” Khrushchev explained, “when we managed to free ourselves of the harmful practice of the cult of the individual and took several proper steps in the sphere of internal and external policies, everyone saw how activity grew before their very eyes, how the creative activity of the broad working masses developed, how favorably all this acted upon the development of economy and culture.”<sup>31</sup> Khrushchev promised that his program of openness—“the thaw,” as many referred to it—would produce the first truly communist society. It would “erase the essential distinctions between town and country and later on between mental and physical labor.”<sup>32</sup>

Khrushchev’s policies allowed more freedom for Soviet citizens, and they catalyzed popular expectations. He expected to strengthen Soviet rule through these means. Instead, he nurtured a dissident counterculture. Free of Stalinist terror, citizens could congregate and share their criticisms of the regime. They could organize low-level resistance, often by refusing to follow orders or by dropping out of mandatory activities. Most troublesome for Khrushchev and his colleagues in the Kremlin, citizens felt empowered to question the basic legitimacy of the regime. Solzhenitsyn, the former Gulag prisoner whose writing Khrushchev initially approved for publication, made the Gulag into a metaphor for the Soviet Union as a whole. One

---

80–95. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856; repr., Paris, 1952), esp. 226–231.

<sup>30</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, Special Report to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, February 24–25, 1956, translated by the U.S. State Department, reprinted in Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, intro., commentary, and notes by Edward Crankshaw, ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston, 1970), 612–613.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, “Report on the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” October 18, 1961, trans. Soviet Novosti Press Agency (London, 1961), 23. See also Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 270–299, 507–528; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 123–162; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York, 2006), 138–157, 241–262.

of his protagonists, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, employed the existential language that became a hallmark of the counterculture, and its attacks on leaders such as Khrushchev:

Shukhov stared at the ceiling and said nothing. He no longer knew whether he wanted to be free or not. To begin with, he'd wanted it very much, and counted up every evening how many days he still had to serve. Then he'd got fed up with it. And still later it had gradually dawned on him that people like himself were not allowed to go home but were packed off into exile. And there was no knowing where the living was easier—here or there. The one thing he might want to ask God for was to let him go home. But *they* wouldn't let him go home.<sup>33</sup>

The public circulation of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and the enormous attention that it drew, inspired countless other attacks on Soviet authority from scientists, students, and ordinary citizens. Zhores Medvedev, a Soviet biologist who criticized the regime, called Solzhenitsyn's writing "a literary miracle" that had "everybody" talking.<sup>34</sup> "It has become clear," one reader of *Ivan Denisovich* explained in 1962, "that since the appearance of Solzhenitsyn's book we will never again be able to write as we have done till now."<sup>35</sup>

The government-authorized publication of Solzhenitsyn's book reflected the Cold War pressures on Khrushchev to encourage creativity and some public openness. The work's reception, however, undermined Khrushchev's purposes—namely the protection of his authority and the strengthening of the communist system. Cold War politics, in this sense, created a contradictory Cold War culture. The attempt to ensure power through openness undermined power. The pressures on leaders to encourage innovation undermined leaders. International Cold War competition created space for the emergence of widespread dissent, even in communist societies.

Khrushchev's predicament was emblematic, but hardly unique. In West Berlin—the strategic center for Soviet-American conflict—a similar dynamic took shape. At the end of the Second World War, the United States and the newly created Federal Republic of (West) Germany collaborated to sponsor a self-consciously democratic school: the Free University. Unlike its German counterparts, this institution encouraged student governance. It also emphasized experimental courses and approaches to teaching. The Free University set a new model for post-fascist education in Germany, and it also served as a showcase for the freedom and dynamism that the sponsoring governments intended to display in West Berlin. The Free University was part of a cultural "magnet" strategy, designed to encourage citizens living under repressive communist rule to embrace liberal capitalism. In the unique context of West Berlin—where citizens from the eastern and western halves of the city could interact before the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961—this involved the direct attraction of East German men and women through the Free University. Between 1949 and 1961, more than a third of the students attending the institution were

<sup>33</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. H. T. Willetts (1962; repr., New York, 1991), 178.

<sup>34</sup> Zhores A. Medvedev, *Ten Years after Ivan Denisovich*, trans. Hilary Sternberg (New York, 1973), 4, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Gregori Baklanov quoted in Cornelia Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent*, trans. Susan Hecker (New York, 1972), 67. For more evidence of Solzhenitsyn's enormous influence among Soviet citizens, see Leopold Labedz, ed., *Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record*, enlarged ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 1973).

citizens of the communist state.<sup>36</sup> Democratic education at the Free University helped to subvert communist authority. The freedom and wealth on display at this institution encouraged disgruntled East Germans—particularly the young and ambitious—to defect to the West. In the late 1950s, more than one hundred communist citizens fled to the Federal Republic each day. Many of them were enrolled at the Free University.<sup>37</sup>

The most famous of these student refugees was Rudolf “Rudi” Dutschke. He came from the East German province of Brandenburg. The communist government had barred him from higher education when he refused to participate in mandatory military service during the late 1950s. As a consequence, Dutschke attended the Free University—the only postsecondary institution from which he was not barred. In 1961 he fled to West Berlin, continuing his studies in sociology, philosophy, and political science at the Free University.<sup>38</sup>

Dutschke’s defection was a Cold War victory for the West, but it also produced a profound challenge to Cold War policy. By the second half of the 1960s, he had become a leader of student protests against the West German government, American influence, and what he called the elements of “fascism” built into capitalist democracy. He condemned the Federal Republic’s conservative political culture, its support for repressive foreign regimes (especially the shah’s monarchy in Iran), and Bonn’s association with the brutal U.S. war in Vietnam. In his diary, Dutschke expressed his desire to create a “third front,” a counterculture, to challenge the dominant capitalist and communist authorities.<sup>39</sup> Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and idealized images of brave Vietnamese peasant fighters became inspirational symbols for a revolution against not just established political leaders, but the basic habits of society. Dutschke proclaimed a “historic opening” for a global “emancipatory struggle and national self-determination.”<sup>40</sup>

Dutschke’s words articulated the frustrations of many young educated citizens throughout Western Europe who wanted more idealism and less association with Cold War ventures in Vietnam and other venues. In February 1968, ten thousand people from various U.S.-allied countries attended a student-organized “Vietnam Congress” at the Free University, designed to mobilize participants for “solidarity” and “revolutionary struggle.” Public protests spread throughout the continent, employing the “third front” rhetoric of Dutschke and others.<sup>41</sup>

In the United States, public demonstrations focused on the Vietnam War and

<sup>36</sup> See James F. Tent, *The Free University of Berlin: A Political History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), 1–176. On the American “magnet” strategy in Europe, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif., 1992), 235–237; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York, 2005), 64–69.

<sup>37</sup> Alexandra Richie, *Faust’s Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York, 1998), 715–716.

<sup>38</sup> See Ulrich Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke: Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 1993); Gretchen Dutschke, *Wir hatten ein barbarisches, schönes Leben: Rudi Dutschke, eine Biographie* (Cologne, 1996); Bernd Rabehl, *Rudi Dutschke: Revolutionär im geteilten Deutschland* (Dresden, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Rudi Dutschkes Tagebuch, 17. Juni 1967, 70.

<sup>40</sup> Dutschke, “Rebellion der Studenten” (1968), in Dutschke, *Mein langer Marsch*, 68–69. See also Jeremi Suri, “The Cultural Contradictions of Cold War Education: The Case of West Berlin,” *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (April 2004): 1–20.

<sup>41</sup> Dutschke, *Mein langer Marsch*, 122, 71–72. See also Gerhard Bauß, *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin* (Cologne, 1977), 95; Bernd Rabehl, *Am Ende der Utopie: Die politische Geschichte der Freien Universität Berlin* (Berlin, 1988), 256–268.

civil rights, but they also employed the attacks on Cold War “imperialism” and “fascism” that animated the counterculture in Western Europe. Anti-war protesters on university campuses throughout the United States looked to third world revolutionaries for examples of “liberation.” Advocates of Black Power took inspiration from nationalist movements in Africa that attacked the foreign and domestic “colonialism” of white rule. Dutschke’s “third front” became the solution of choice for citizens struggling with the frustrations of unfulfilled expectations during a decade of unprecedented social improvements.<sup>42</sup>

For all the violence in Vietnam and other parts of the third world, the international system had become more stable and less prone to nuclear crisis in the 1960s. For all the continued racism in the United States and other societies, laws and attitudes had, in fact, changed in powerful ways to protect traditionally disenfranchised groups. This was significant progress, encouraged by Cold War competition. In their desire to make their societies stronger, more creative, and more attractive, leaders worked to make their societies better. Promises of reform in this ideologically overheated environment, however, mobilized citizens beyond the aims of their leaders. Solzhenitsyn’s readers and Dutschke’s followers were empowered by the Cold War reforms they condemned as insufficient. The Cold War provided space for the counterculture at universities, in public literature, and in other social settings. It even encouraged a counterculture that showcased freedom and creativity.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, creativity had turned to revolt in nearly every major state. The countries most deeply penetrated by the Cold War confronted pervasive dissent and disaffection, especially among the young. Attempts by leaders to mobilize their publics for domestic reform and international competition had produced spiraling domestic contention and aspirations to international solidarity among critics. The Cold War had globalized a set of ideological debates, and now a cohort of ideological dissidents.<sup>44</sup>

HERBERT MARCUSE, A GERMAN ÉMIGRÉ to the United States who became one of the most recognized philosophers of the counterculture, articulated and promoted the common revolt against Cold War authority. He described what he perceived as the “genuine solidarity” among “young radicals” that drew its “elemental, instinctual, creative force” from guerrilla fighters in the third world and the Chinese Cultural

<sup>42</sup> For some of the many excellent new studies on the connections between civil rights, Black Power, and third world liberation movements, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2006), esp. 68–94, 276–295; Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), esp. 244–273; Brenda Gayle Plummer, “Introduction,” in Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 1–20; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), esp. 148–222; Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), esp. 135–221; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), esp. 203–248.

<sup>43</sup> On the encouragement of the “rebel” image as a symbol of American freedom in the Cold War, see Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham, N.C., 2005), esp. 1–51.

<sup>44</sup> This point follows the analysis in Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. 110–206.

Revolution, not the traditional centers of influence. Western claims of progress had, according to Marcuse, lost their popular appeal.<sup>45</sup>

Drawing on his earlier studies with the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Marcuse's argument was cultural in two senses. First, he contended that modern "industrial society" repressed personal happiness. Deconstructing the ideological architecture of both Soviet communism and Western liberal capitalism, he emphasized how the state-directed pursuit of material abundance prevented the free and "natural" exploration of individual fulfillment. Disciplined "civilization," according to this argument, denatured human beings, denying their basic sexual instinct—what Marcuse called, borrowing from Sigmund Freud, "Eros."<sup>46</sup>

Marcuse condemned the "one-dimensional thought and behavior" that dominated all Cold War thinking.<sup>47</sup> "Does not the threat of an atomic catastrophe which would wipe out the human race," he asked, "also serve to protect the very forces which perpetuate this danger? The efforts to prevent such a catastrophe overshadow the search for its potential causes in contemporary industrial society . . . We submit to the peaceful production of the means of destruction, to perfection of waste, to being educated for a defense which deforms the defenders and that which they defend."<sup>48</sup>

If a repressive cultural apparatus inscribed the Cold War in modern society, Marcuse believed that escape could come only from a cultural revolt. This was the second and more explosive part of his argument. In rhetoric and image, it affected many citizens who never read a word of his prose. Marcuse advocated the "free development of human needs and faculties."<sup>49</sup> In his utopia, technology would find use in abolishing poverty, not extending the risks of destruction. "Socially necessary labor would be diverted to the construction of an aesthetic rather than repressive environment, to parks and gardens rather than highways and parking lots, to the creation of areas of withdrawal."<sup>50</sup> Marcuse called for renewing humanity through a rejection of bombs and machines, and an embrace of art and sex. Aesthetic and bodily experimentation would manifest a "great refusal" and stimulate a powerful "radical imagination."<sup>51</sup>

In the late 1960s, Marcuse also associated artistic and sexual liberation with violence. He expressed admiration for peasant revolutionaries in Vietnam, the Congo, and other parts of the third world whose actions became cultural capital for "turning the wheel of progress to another direction."<sup>52</sup> "The spread of guerrilla warfare at the height of the technological century" was, Marcuse wrote, "a symbolic event: the energy of the human body rebels against intolerable repression and throws itself

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, 1969), 86, 88.

<sup>46</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955; repr., Boston, 1966), esp. 21–54, 197–221; Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York, 1958), esp. 169–170.

<sup>47</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964; repr., Boston, 1991), 12; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 197–221.

<sup>48</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xli.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 220–221.

<sup>50</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 63; Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 44–45. See also Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London, 1984), 174–189.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Marcuse, "Political Preface 1966," in Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xvii.

against the engines of repression.”<sup>53</sup> He observed “a strong element of spontaneity, even anarchism,” in third world rebellions. It was a “sensitivity against domination: the feeling, the awareness, that the joy of freedom and the need to be free must precede liberation.”<sup>54</sup>

The hypermasculine revolutionary raising his weapon against the ghost-faced great powers was a culturally emotive image of rebellion, now given powerful intellectual legitimacy by the philosophical language of the Frankfurt School. Most protesters did not read Marcuse closely, if at all, but he became an international advertiser for romantic ideas of liberation through sex and violence. He provided the philosophical text for the Che Guevara posters that pervaded radical communities by the end of the 1960s. One contemporary observer described Marcuse’s radical celebrity:

I was standing in the midst of a noisy, happy crowd of students in an auditorium at Brandeis [University], waiting for a concert to begin, when word suddenly came up the line: Marcuse’s here! At once there was a hush, and people divided themselves up to clear a path. A tall, erect, vividly forceful man passed down the aisle, smiling here and there to friends, radiant yet curiously aloof, rather like an aristocrat who was a popular hero as well . . . The students held their breaths and gazed at him with awe. After he had got to his seat, they relaxed again, flux and chaos returned, but only for a moment, till everyone could find his place; it was as if Marcuse’s very presence had given a structure to events.<sup>55</sup>

In his attention to the connections between cultural liberation and violence, Marcuse was on to something. The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed escalating violence in many societies. Nearly everywhere, established authorities found themselves under siege. National leaders could not travel within large sections of their own countries, for fear of embarrassing protests and personal attacks. Local figures—mayors, businesspeople, and teachers—confronted unprecedented challenges from citizens, customers, and students. Drug usage and crime rose across communities.<sup>56</sup> British foreign secretary Michael Stewart captured the sense of widespread domestic upheaval when he confided to his diary: “The 10:pm television news presents a depressing picture.” “The great difficulty of the world,” Stewart lamented, “is the moral deficiencies of what should be the free world . . . Germany distracted, France selfish, ourselves aimless, U.S.A. in torment.”<sup>57</sup> The CIA confirmed this dark assessment, predicting: “The social and political malaise that underlies much of present-day dissidence will not be speedily cured; there are, in fact, striking parallels between the situation today and the conditions of cynicism, despair, and disposition toward violence which existed after World War I and which later helped produce Fascism and National Socialism on the Continent.”<sup>58</sup>

The turn to violence among members of the counterculture, and their opponents,

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>54</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 89.

<sup>55</sup> Marshall Berman, Review of *One-Dimensional Man*, *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 617.

<sup>56</sup> For the data on the cross-national increase in crime during the late 1960s, see Ted Robert Gurr and Erika Gurr, “Crime in Western Societies, 1945–1974,” <http://dx.doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR07769> (accessed December 1, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Michael Stewart, handwritten diary, April 17, 1968, Box STWT 8/1/5, Churchill Archives Center, Churchill College, Cambridge, England.

<sup>58</sup> CIA report, “Restless Youth.”

in various societies created nightmarish premonitions. It also severed many of the connections between moderate leaders and critics who had supported political reform in prior years. In place of the collaboration between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and President Lyndon Johnson, open war among the supporters of figures such as Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael and southern segregationist George Wallace dominated the years after 1967. Violent altercations, riots, and even acts of terrorism engulfed major cities across the United States, Western Europe, and other parts of the world. Cultural dissent produced domestic bloodletting and death. The violence of foreign wars in Vietnam and other venues had now come home.<sup>59</sup>

This descent into violence, although shocking, was the extension of the debates begun earlier in the 1960s. If the dominant Cold War culture was stagnant and repressive, as critics claimed, it had to be destroyed and replaced. Overcoming the stubborn resistance of entrenched figures required force. Public violence appeared as a necessary tool to unseat violent oppressors. This is where the image of peasant revolutionaries in Vietnam looked so appealing. This is where the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in China, initially triggered by Mao Zedong, offered inspiration. Here was a society violently turning itself upside down to eradicate vestiges of an old culture. Here was a society that made violence a purifying force, cleansing itself of “backward” traditions. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was, in fact, one of the most brutal and self-defeating political enterprises of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup> Its shrill attacks on established wisdom, however, made it attractive for those seeking to change the basic relations between citizens in society. Herbert Marcuse was only one of many to point to China as a model for “liberation.”<sup>61</sup>

Countercultural groups formed in the early 1970s that treated violence as a means for proving cultural authenticity in an international environment filled with lies. Putting one’s life (and the lives of others) on the line demonstrated a depth of personal courage and truthfulness that these critics claimed Cold War society lacked. Instead of working with the “machine” for personal benefit, intelligent young men and women pledged to place their bodies, literally, on the gears—to stop the normal functioning of society with their blood. The Weather Underground embodied this idealization of violence in the United States. Formed in 1969 to promote an “armed struggle” against capitalist society, the group declared the need for “a movement that fights, not just talks about fighting.” The Red Army Faction emerged in West Germany as a more deadly counterpart. First organized in 1970, it proclaimed: “We will not talk about armed propaganda, we will do it.”<sup>62</sup>

These two groups, and similar groups in other countries, mixed countercultural politics with paramilitary behavior. They lived communal lifestyles, but they enforced military discipline. They called for political openness, but they violently attacked their critics. They tried to appeal to the public, but they were prepared to kill in-

<sup>59</sup> On the discourse surrounding the “war at home,” see Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 292–336; Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York, 1991), esp. 569–648.

<sup>60</sup> See, among many recent books, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford, Calif., 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, viii.

<sup>62</sup> Quotations from Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, Calif., 2004), 21.



FIGURE 3: National Guard troops on the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus, 1969. Courtesy of the UW-Madison Archives.

nocent, even sympathetic, citizens in the pursuit of their cause. This is the point at which some rebels turned into petty terrorists. This is also the point at which violence grew from a tool for resistance into a defining element of the counterculture. It took on symbolic value as a total rejection of standard, “civilized” authority. It became a marker of status for a small group of men and women who came to think of themselves as guerrilla fighters, battling to save society from itself.<sup>63</sup>

This domestic terrorism elicited firm reactions from state authorities and their supporters. They deployed overwhelming force against what they perceived as an apocalyptic threat—violent revolution from within, and domestic terrorism against innocent civilians. State authorities also discredited violent critics by denying them obvious influence on policy. The United States continued to fight in Vietnam, despite resistance at home, for another four years. The Soviet Union ordered an invasion of Czechoslovakia to repress the reforming government there, despite strong opposition to such a move within the Eastern Bloc. The West German government maintained its close partnership with Washington, despite widespread anti-American sentiment. Countercultural violence sparked a backlash that raised resistance to change in both domestic and foreign policy.<sup>64</sup>

The backlash was often much more violent than the initial countercultural attacks. The August 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago offered the most publicized evidence for this dynamic. As groups such as the Youth International Party (“Yippies”) converged on the city to condemn mainstream politics, and the Democratic Party’s continued support for the Vietnam War in particular, local police prepared to attack the protesters. Abbie Hoffman and other countercultural critics

<sup>63</sup> See the excellent analysis of this point in *ibid.*, esp. 196–289.

<sup>64</sup> See Suri, *Power and Protest*, 213–259.

mocked and provoked the police, but the response by law enforcement was out of proportion to the instigation. Mayor Richard Daley mobilized his entire police force, as well as National Guard soldiers, for demonstrations that never included more than seven thousand protesters. Determined to preempt countercultural violence, the Chicago police attacked the crowds with nightsticks and other implements. They did not wait for the young men and women in the streets to become disruptive. State authorities violently crushed a perceived threat from politically engaged citizens.<sup>65</sup>

Events in Chicago mirrored the expansion of police powers in West Germany and other democratic societies. Countercultural disorder created a perceived “emergency” that justified violent, often undemocratic, reactions. Police forces entered university campuses, business offices, and private homes to search for evidence of brewing conspiracy. Domestic intelligence agencies—most notoriously the FBI in the United States—increased their surveillance of suspected individuals. Washington, D.C., West Berlin, Paris, and Mexico City came under virtual martial law during periods of heightened unrest, as regular army soldiers walked the streets to ensure order. The violent backlash against the counterculture militarized daily life in the Cold War.<sup>66</sup>

In the communist countries, where politics were already militarized, the domestic deployment of armed forces also expanded. Chairman Mao Zedong had initiated the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China. As the country careened into chaos during the late 1960s, however, he turned to the People’s Liberation Army to restore order and ensure his continued power. Mao used the military to repress the Red Guards he had sent into the streets. Despite his earlier calls for breaking traditional institutions, he warned in 1968 of emerging “anarchy.” To reverse this course, he affirmed that “the army is the fundamental pillar of the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>67</sup>

The Soviet Union never returned to the terror of the Stalinist years, but under the leadership of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, the KGB stepped up its efforts to identify, discredit, and eliminate dissident voices in the early 1970s. The Kremlin’s tolerance for domestic criticism diminished as the regime grew more anxious about internal unrest. Brezhnev, in particular, relied on the image of a strengthening Soviet military to bolster his legitimacy (including countless medals he awarded himself) and protect communist authority. The counterculture attacked militarization, but ironically, it inspired more of the same.<sup>68</sup>

IF LEADERS PROMISING TO “PAY ANY PRICE” and build communism dominated the early 1960s, figures pledged to “law and order” shaped the early 1970s. President Richard Nixon popularized the phrase in the United States, but his counterparts in West

<sup>65</sup> See the balanced and evocative book by David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> See Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 2005), 162–178; Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, Kans., 1999), 153–183; Suri, *Power and Protest*, 164–212.

<sup>67</sup> *People’s Daily* editorial, March 1, 1968, in Jerome Ch’en, ed., *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography* (New York, 1970), 152; Simon Leys, *The Chairman’s New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, trans. Carol Appleyard and Patrick Goode (New York, 1977), 106–107.

<sup>68</sup> See Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Sem’ vozhdai: Galereia liderov SSSR*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1995), 2: esp. 41–42; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 192–226; Suri, “The Promise and Failure of ‘Developed Socialism,’” 150–158.

Germany, the Soviet Union, and other countries used similar terms. In the wake of the counterculture, leaders rebuilt their authority around commitments to restore rationality, reasonableness, and domestic peace. As best we can tell, this is what a “silent majority” of people wanted in many societies, following years of upheaval and violence. Nixon captured this sentiment in his inaugural address of January 20, 1969. Addressing “America’s youth” and “the people of the world,” the new president argued: “We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another—until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices.” “For all our people,” Nixon continued, “we will set as our goal the decent order that makes progress possible and our lives secure.”<sup>69</sup> Nixon’s words received favorable attention at home and abroad, including in China, where Mao was seeking to rein in the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and open relations with the United States.<sup>70</sup>

“Law and order” was not just a reaction to disorder and upheaval. It represented a widespread and deep-seated response to the events of the late 1960s that was much more than a counter to the counterculture. It opened a new “culture war” by rejecting *both* the standard ideological rhetoric of the Cold War and the oppositional claims of figures such as Betty Friedan, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Rudi Dutschke. In place of these polarities, a powerful spiritual discourse emerged that invoked the fundamentalist language of Armageddon and salvation in defense of family and country. Reacting to what one scholar calls the “cultural disorientation” of the late 1960s—especially the sexual revolution—religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson emerged as prominent oracles for citizens who longed to return to something they identified as “normal” in a world undergoing dizzying change. Evangelical religious institutions proliferated, offering easy access and strong advocacy for basic “family values.” As activists turned against traditional political institutions, the largest evangelical Protestant denomination in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention, witnessed an astronomical 23 percent growth in its membership. A popular quest for moral certainty in public professions of religious faith strongly accompanied demands for law and order on city streets.<sup>71</sup>

The rise of Christian fundamentalism was not exclusively a creature of the political right, but it had a strong bias in that direction within both the United States and Western Europe. If the politics of the left—“old” and “new”—had promised steady social progress through state-based reforms, the Christian-infused right of the 1970s pointed to the mess these programs had created, and the need for a return to

<sup>69</sup> Richard Nixon, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1969, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Richard Nixon, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1971–1975), 1: 1–2. On the “Silent Majority,” see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J., 2006), esp. 225–323; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York, 2008), esp. 445–523; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge, La., 2000), esp. 324–414; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2001), esp. 23–117.

<sup>70</sup> See “Mao Zedong’s Comments on an Article by Commentator of *Renmin ribao* and *Hongqi*, January 1969,” translated in *Cold War International History Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998): 161; “Mao Zedong’s Speech at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party’s Ninth Central Committee, 28 April 1969,” *ibid.*, 164–165.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Boyer, “The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism,” in Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound*, 29–51. See also Matthew D. Lassiter, “Inventing Family Values,” *ibid.*, 13–28.

basic beliefs. Christian fundamentalist groups and their political allies used newspapers, magazines, radio, and television to advocate a simple message of salvation through God, family, and nation. For politicians—many non-Christian and non-devout—this rhetoric served as an effective magnet for votes from anxious and disgruntled citizens. A decade after 1968, the so-called “neoconservatives” in the United States tapped into this sentiment when they promoted a political program that hinged upon the evangelical imagery of a “born again” “morning in America,” and a candidate—Ronald Reagan—who in 1976 and 1980 rejected both the liberal promises of the Democratic Party and the Cold War cautions of mainstream Republicans. Reagan turned the contested memories of the 1960s into fodder for a cultural program that self-consciously fused Christian fundamentalism with neoconservative politics.<sup>72</sup>

Christian fundamentalists and neoconservatives told activists such as Betty Friedan that they were indeed mistaken to expect happiness in Cold War suburbia. They were also wrong to pursue an alternative form of liberation. Instead, they should accept their lives as they were, and protect their families against worse possibilities.<sup>73</sup>

THIS WAS THE CONTEXT FOR THE FOREIGN POLICY of détente in the 1970s. Scholars of détente generally point to the importance of near nuclear parity and a general balance of power in bringing the United States and the Soviet Union to embrace more stable relations. They also point to the growing rift between Moscow and Beijing, and the opening this created for Washington to position itself between these two states. American desperation to end the Vietnam War surely contributed to détente as well, encouraging citizens and leaders in the United States to accept a less ideologically strident foreign policy.<sup>74</sup>

President Richard Nixon and his special assistant for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger, embraced these strategic transformations and attempted to turn them to the United States’ advantage. They sought to use improved great power relations for more effective leverage over local events around the globe, with less direct American force. This was the basis for the “Nixon Doctrine,” designed to avoid making countries “so dependent upon us that we are dragged into conflicts such as the one that we have in Vietnam.”<sup>75</sup> Amid powerful domestic and allied dissent against American interventions, détente was an attempt to compensate for internal

<sup>72</sup> See Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974–2008* (New York, 2008); James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), esp. 1–149; Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, N.J., 2007), esp. 205–266; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), esp. 234–258.

<sup>73</sup> See Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound*, 71–89; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), esp. 212–242.

<sup>74</sup> See Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 2004), esp. 55–67; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 192–226; Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York, 1989), esp. 52–74; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 272–341; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C., 1994).

<sup>75</sup> Richard Nixon, Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen, July 25, 1969, in *Public Papers of the*



FIGURE 4: Richard and Pat Nixon at tea with Zhou Enlai, February 1972. Courtesy of Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace.

weakness with diplomatic acumen. It was a reaction to domestic pressures for peace and fears of continued Cold War militarization. “We were,” Kissinger explained, “in a delicate balancing act: to be committed to peace without letting the quest for it become a form of moral disarmament, surrendering all other values; to be prepared to defend freedom while making clear that unconstrained rivalry could risk everything, including freedom, in a nuclear holocaust.”<sup>76</sup>

In his memoirs, Kissinger immediately turns from this description of *détente* to a discussion about the need to “outmaneuver” domestic dissent—from “liberals” who wanted to see more commitment to peace and reform in American actions, and “conservatives” who demanded stronger confrontation with communism.<sup>77</sup> Political leaders in West Germany, Great Britain, and other states faced similarly dichotomous pressures. The counterculture’s attack on Cold War assumptions, and the backlash against this challenge, inflamed these debates. The domestic violence and extremism of the period made it difficult to build bridges between points of view.

*Presidents: Richard Nixon*, 1: 548. For a fuller statement of the “Nixon Doctrine,” see Nixon, Annual Foreign Policy Report, February 18, 1970, *ibid.*, 2: 118–119.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 1254.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 1255.

In contrast to their predecessors, leaders in the 1970s had to formulate international policy as their authority was being deeply contested at home. Nixon and West German chancellor Willy Brandt, two of the most powerful international leaders of the 1970s, both resigned from office because of domestic scandals, inflamed by public distrust of leaders. The making of détente reflected the unmaking of the Cold War consensus. Elite politics were transformed by the transnational consequences of the counterculture.

Kissinger admitted this. When asked in 1971 “where the administration wants to end up after four years,” he invoked both the crisis of values and the new international environment that characterized the period. “This administration came into office when the intellectual capital of US postwar policy had been used up and when the conditions determining postwar US policy had been altered,” he explained.

We had to adjust our foreign policy to the new facts of life. It is beyond the physical and psychological capacity of the US to make itself responsible for every part of the world. We hope in the first term to clear away the underbush of the old period. In the second term, we could try to construct a new international settlement—which will be more stable, less crisis-conscious, and less dependent on decisions in one capital.<sup>78</sup>

The “underbush of the old period” included the assumptions about omnipotent power that the counterculture condemned. Constructing a “new international settlement” meant applying “law and order” to foreign policy, providing a framework for rationality, reasonableness, and moderation in the relations between societies—despite contrary pressures at home. Frequent “back-channel” communications between leaders would encourage cooperation, establish basic norms for international conduct, and insulate policy from domestic interference. This was an effort, Kissinger and Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin agreed, to make international civility “irreversible.”<sup>79</sup>

The two superpowers formalized their commitment to international “law and order,” rather than revolutionary change, in the Agreement on Basic Principles—officially “The Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”—signed in Moscow on May 29, 1972. The document spoke explicitly about “rules of conduct” that would ensure “peaceful coexistence” and avoid any “dangerous exacerbation” of relations.<sup>80</sup> It encouraged consultation among state leaders, and it diminished the importance of ideology, nationalism, and other moral claims. The Agreement on Basic Principles aimed to silence Cold Warriors and countercultural critics at the same time.

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Fellows of the Harvard Center for International Affairs, December 7, 1971, Kissinger Transcripts, Digital National Security Archive, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&res\\_dat=xri:dnsa&rft\\_dat=xri:dnsa:article:CKT00401](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:dnsa&rft_dat=xri:dnsa:article:CKT00401) (accessed December 1, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, et al., Moscow, October 24, 1974, 11:00am–2:00pm, Folder: 11/74, Japan, Korea, USSR, Box A6, Kissinger-Scowcroft Files, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich. See also Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, et al., Moscow, October 26, 1974, 7:10pm–10:20pm, *ibid.* These two documents are also reprinted in William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York, 1998), 327–355.

<sup>80</sup> “Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” May 29, 1972, reprinted in *U.S. Department of State Bulletin* 66 (June 26, 1972): 898–899.

In addition to basic strategic considerations, détente represented an effort to build a new culture for international affairs. It was the foreign mirror of domestic change. Internal discontent and disorder forced leaders to reconceptualize their foreign policy aims and capabilities. Challenges to assumed Cold War values motivated policies that did not hinge on traditional ideological claims. Men such as Kissinger and Dobrynin feared the backlash as much as the counterculture, and they worked to craft a new middle ground. They emphasized “law and order” in the international system. They attempted to isolate policy from public influence. They defined themselves against both the counterculture of the late 1960s and its opponents. Neo-conservatives would later condemn détente for its moral obtuseness, but they shared its desire to rescue cultural authority from domestic dissent.<sup>81</sup>

BETTY FRIEDAN’S FAMOUS ATTACK ON DOMESTICITY was about more than feminism. Her words captured an emerging revolt against authority around the world. Unlike most prior resistance to the dominant Cold War ideas and policies, this rebellion came from within—from the universities, the literary circles, and even the bedrooms of mainstream society. This was Friedan’s central insight. Those who appeared to benefit most from the politics of the time were dissatisfied. They were empowered, because of their social centrality, to demand more. They were motivated, because of their rising expectations, to reject cultural limitations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, an international counterculture, composed of numerous local groups, exposed the problem that had no name. The counterculture did more than just challenge existing authority; it also questioned the basic assumptions about the “good life” that underpinned social order. The Cold War policies condemned for stagnating social change actually encouraged and legitimized this counterculture. State leaders sponsored education and innovation for more effective competition against international adversaries. They also made broad ideological claims that they could not fulfill. Citizens, particularly privileged young citizens, now had the means and the motivation to challenge their leaders for failing to meet their stated goals. In nearly every major society, men and women asked why government policies had not produced the promised outcomes, why their country was falling short. A wide spectrum of citizens—from street protesters to communist dissidents—questioned not just the competence of their leaders, but also their values.

This was the central contradiction of the Cold War between 1960 and 1975. The pressures for international competition enabled domestic contention. As states built external strength, they diminished their internal cohesiveness. Scholars frequently treat the social history of the counterculture as something separate from the political history of the Cold War, but the two were, in fact, deeply intertwined. Cold War ideas, resources, and institutions made the counterculture. The counterculture, in turn, unmade these ideas, resources, and institutions. The backlash against the counterculture furthered this process by contributing to widespread violence and division. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Cold War became more stable in traditional areas of great power conflict, but it grew more disruptive within societies.

<sup>81</sup> See Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), esp. 197–248.

Although the counterculture did not revolutionize the world, it exerted a powerful influence on Cold War policies. Leaders abandoned grand ideological projects and turned to promises of “law and order” and spiritual renewal. At home and abroad, they emphasized rationality and reasonableness. Détente rejected the old political assumptions as well as the radical calls for something new. The international counterculture was both a product of the Cold War and an agent in its transformation.

---

**Jeremi Suri** is Professor of History and Director of the European Union Center of Excellence at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is the author of three books: *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (2003), *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (2007), and *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (2007). He has received numerous awards for his research and teaching. In 2007, he was recognized by *Smithsonian Magazine* as one of America’s “Top Young Innovators” in the Arts and Sciences. Professor Suri is currently writing an international history of foreign interventions in the last century.