

Allen Ginsberg on Everything

Allen Ginsberg
Art Kunkin

1966

Copyright 1966 by the Los Angeles Free Press. Reprinted with permission.

“All a man wants is a home like a castle, all a man wants is peace at his door, all a man wants is a tree by his window...”

(A poem fragment tape-recorded by Ginsberg on the Los Angeles freeways)

Introduction by Art Kunkin

Last Friday I had a three hour conversation at the Free Press office with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, who are presently touring the country writing poetry, giving readings and meeting people.

The conversation extended over many subjects—from their experiences in India to their views on marijuana and LSD, Allen’s trips to and deportations from Cuba and Czechoslovakia, and their experience with the Hells’ Angels and Vietnam Day demonstrators in Berkeley.

Following are substantial excerpts from Ginsberg’s answers to my questions (we had our respective tape recorders pointed at each other) as well as a long poem which Ginsberg kindly offered to the Free Press for first publication.

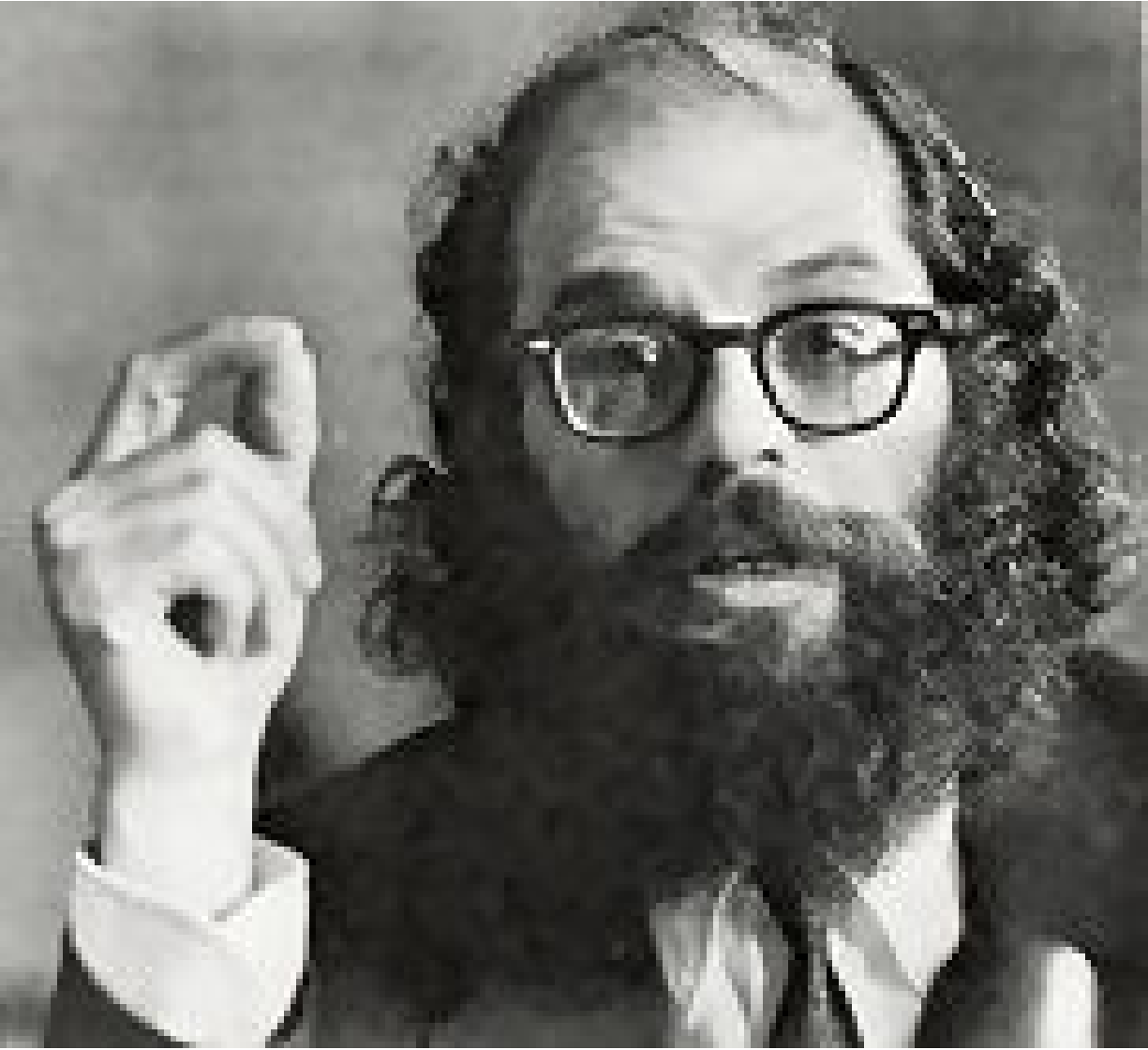
Ginsberg, famous for his poems “Howl” and “Kaddish,” is presently on a Guggenheim Fellowship. Because of the pressure of preparing this transcription for publication, he did not have a chance to check what follows for possible inaccuracies.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I haven’t published any book of poems since 1960 so whatever I have been doing isn’t well known unless people have been reading little magazines. What I have to say will be in a book of poetry which will be published in about half a year or a year...

A HUMAN UNIVERSE

I took a lot of LSD and Psilocybin previous to leaving for India and...well, I was in a slightly disordered state of mind. I thought it was absolutely necessary for me to drop dead in order to obtain complete enlightenment—for my ego to vanish entirely and for my person to vanish entirely and everything about me to vanish entirely in order to be perfect. At that point it was not a question of suicide exactly but it was a question for me of not knowing who



I was or what I should do...although I don't think this problem hit me as hard as it hit a lot of other people who did die as a result, not of LSD but of this general question.

Also, I wanted to see India, so I went and talked to all of the holy men I could find and presented them with my psychic crisis...Whenever Peter and I hit a city young poets whom we met would take us around and give us advice as to who to see among the holy men. We would also visit the burning grounds where, in most cities, the Shivites would congregate on Tuesday and Saturday nights for worship. We would all sit around smoking ganja (marijuana) and sing hymns of praise for whatever divinity they worshipped. India is polytheistic so there are many divinities to worship. What you do is choose whichever divinity appeals to your heart and give forth some manifestation of feeling, a song or a prayer. This specific form of prayer is called "mantra."

I went around and asked them what they thought about LSD and what I should do about my own impasse—which has nothing very much to do with LSD; it was my own problem because I got tremendous anxiety attacks (when using it) to the point where I couldn't take it any more. So I stopped using it about 1960 and finally decided to quit using it because it wasn't what I wanted. What I wanted was love or some kind of feeling in a human universe. The LSD was sort of human but I was getting big reptilian nonhuman scaly dragon cosmoses out of it which made me throw up and I didn't see why I should be intimidated by anyone's consciousness, even my own...

I've been taking LSD again but just on the condition that it not be obligatory. It was only after I got it off my back as something divinely hip to do, as something necessarily spiritually hip to do... Burroughs thinks it's awful. Burroughs thinks the Pentagon is poisoning all the synthetics and says everybody should make it without any drugs at all, with which I agree basically.

I don't think the drug scene is a very good scene ultimately. It is partly the legality problems and the anxieties caused by that. The anxieties that people get under drugs is 99 percent anxiety caused by the persecution of the drugs, by the activity of the narcotics bureau, the Pure Food and Health administration or whatever government agency is out to suppress the expansion of consciousness...

In India pot is legal and I smoked a great deal of it without any of the pot jitters or paranoia I get here...I'm referring to pot and LSD. I'm not referring to methedrine, which I disapprove of, or junk. I think methedrine is a plague, anti-social. It has some uses in limited moderate use if anyone is sensible or wise or mature enough to use it but not to take it all the time. It's socially disruptive. It doesn't lead to social cooperation; it leads to paranoia and bickering and stealing and thieving and bad manners.

Methedrine does lead to some spiritual insight, apparently, but it also leads to frayed, jittered, creepy insights—and bad universes and malnutrition and sleeplessness and testiness, irritability. It's a drag to live with meth-heads...

Young kids seem to be hitting up on me thinking I've gone big dope fiend. I was talking with a couple of other elders of the white brotherhood and we thought we should make some kind of public statement that young kids should not get hung up on junk and methedrine because they're a drag...

(I asked Allen about his use of the tape recorder, which was given him by Bob Dylan and which he carries about wherever he goes.)

I've been writing poetry on the freeway. I've also been singing a lot, mantra singing, and teaching people to sing and spreading it. I'd like to get some of the mantras on juke boxes so I've been trying to make tapes to turn on a professional group or maybe to build up with a double track to put on juke boxes... Primarily I got it for singing but I've been running around making poem fragments, just like I would normally do with a notebook. But you can see what you've done with a notebook, so there's feedback.

MUSIC AND THE HEART

We went to India to get information on music and the heart. The conclusion that I finally came to was that for me what was important were my feelings rather than my consciousness—I don't know how to make that distinction—that sheer pinball machine consciousness. The simultaneous perception of drugs didn't feel good compared to the feeling of tenderness I felt normally and which emanated from the holy men I talked to in India as well as from many people in the states like William Carlos Williams (who had the same eyes as many of the holy men, the same general thing in his eyes).

I don't know whether that comes to any conclusion but my own feeling is finally for feeling, which is an old Indian thing, *bahkti*. *Bahkti* yoga, devotional yoga, faith yoga.

What they say is that we are in the midst of the *kaliyoga* (?) or the age of destruction, the age of *kali*, in which we are so sunk in materiality and confusion that knowledge yoga, which would be the drugs or philosophy also, as well as breath yoga and all other forms of yoga, are hopeless to get us out of the mire, and so the only recourse in this age of ultimate destruction is delight—sheer delight and joy and devotion. (Editorial note: It is difficult to make this transcription sound accurate, even with care for the words—because Allen, at this point particularly but throughout the conversation, was laughing or smiling as if at the words themselves and their inadequacy to carry the thought.)...“Adoration” is the word. So you choose whatever image inspires you to adore and you go ahead and adore. And it is that way that you get an expanded consciousness, when you give your devotion completely. So it begins with a root in the body where the heart lies.

(I asked at this point whether his concern for the printed word showed something else, and what I meant by this was a concern for society and not just the individual, which was a duality we returned to again and again in the course of the conversation.)

Yes, but lately I've been singing more, paying more attention to singing in public than to writing. But poetry is one of the means of *bahkti*, one of the means of devotion. All of the arts—music and poetry and painting—are one of the primary instruments for *bahkti* practices. I can't say *Bahkti* yoga for I don't practice formal yoga. *Bahkti* is recommended by everyone around in India nowadays. Big secret of India. Secret of the Orient...

LSD IN INDIA & TIBET

We went around and talked to holy men about different problems. I asked one where I could find a guru (teacher) and he said “your own heart is your guru,” which relieved me of the necessity of finding an external guru. Another man said that poetry is *sadhana* (?) or yoga or holy discipline or just a discipline. I was thinking at the time if I should abandon everything and sit and do breathing exercises or something. I asked him if poetry doesn't have to stop when you reach the void or when you reach god or when you reach *shinyatta*. (Editorial note: the spelling here, as elsewhere, is probably atrocious because Allen did not always stop to spell an Indian word; but at this point he did clarify that “*shinyatta*” meant “empty mind.”) He said yoga has to stop, too, so either way...

We were traveling for a while with Gary Snyder (a West Coast poet) the first couple of months we were in India. We went to see the Dalai Lama and talked mostly about meditation problems (and) a little bit about LSD too. He was curious about it There is some LSD (in Tibet) now. There seem to have been a whole group of American bearded and British bearded fellows and unbearded girls who've been living in and out of the Tibetan scene teaching English to young Tibetan incarnate lamas and learning Tibetan practices from them. In the last five years there has been a great cross-cultural exchange so all of these Tibetans are learning the hippest Western styles...I don't know about the higher officials but a lot of younger monks know about LSD now...

It's not a big drug scene but marijuana is legal and universal and liquor is banned. That is, liquor is forbidden both by the Koran for the Muslims and not acceptable for the Hindus, whereas *ganja* or Indian hemp is sold in government tax shops, is quite legal and is part of the normal day-to-day scene of the average Indian family.

POT IN INDIA

As I described, it's part of the Shiva ritual to smoke *ganja* at the burning grounds. And on Shiva's birthday all the respectable families of India, whether they're Shivite or not, are expected to drink *bhang* (?), which is *ganja* mixed with milk and almond paste. The respectable grandmothers all prepare it for their families and everyone takes it as a sacrament to Shiva, who is the god of asceticism, yogi practices, and a god of marijuana. That is one of its formal ritual properties...

So that anyone who is a worshipper of Shiva, the god of creation and destruction (as in a sense I am) and wishes to practice Shivite rituals I imagine has a constitutional right in America to smoke marijuana, just as the Indians

with their church here have a constitutional right to peyote. On Shiva's birthday you've got to take marijuana, it's obligatory—it's part of the ritual.

There hasn't been sufficient information to do it but given that information and an intelligent attorney and sufficient money to import witnesses as to the actual traditional practice you could make an iron-clad case which would stand up constitutionally.

You just need a little money. You could probably break all the marijuana laws for about sixty thousand dollars...

It would involve not only a legal attack but a campaign of dissemination of information and enough money to hire a small staff of scholars to investigate the narcotics department for possible malpractice and misuse of authority... There was a report in the *New York Times* about two years ago of the President's Judicial Advisory Committee, which was a subcommittee of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, doing a report on narcotics which was signed by a number of judges, which concluded that the narcotics department had been acting illegally since 1926 or 1927 in criminalizing junk addicts, since the Lindner decision which said that any doctor was legally empowered to treat an addict and give him maintenance doses. This Dr. Lindner had been challenged by the narcotics department...

This committee under Kennedy criticized the Treasury Department for extending its administrative power. You see, they were never empowered by law to prevent doctors from treating addicts or to recommend that doctors not treat addicts. And doctors, according to the Hippocratic Oath, should have been treating addicts all along. And general thinking is now that the junk problem should be returned to the legal profession.

As for pot, I don't think that there has ever been any large scale sociological-chronological study of the propaganda activities of the narcotics department. That's what is crucial because the question is who paid for all of the lobbying and public information that marijuana's supposedly dangerous—paid for that which is such a big lie. What was the structure through which all that information was disseminated to the public?...

It all comes back to Anslinger and the building up of his Treasury Department bureaucracy. What's necessary ultimately is a Congressional investigation of the whole scandal, because that is what it boils down to being. Or just a private group, like the Fund for the Republic or the Rand Corporation, doing a really historical study, finding out if any of the liquor companies are involved or were involved in public propaganda at the time of the marijuana tax act.

It would take a little money to do that and expose everybody, print it up in books and pamphlets, and circulate them around to doctors and the mass media, to all the Senators and Representatives. I've just finished a long essay on the subject which I'm having published in a new book by David Solomon called "Marijuana Papers" which will contain excerpts from the *La Guardia Report*, the *British East Indian Hemp Report*, and the report of our own Surgeon-General in Panama. (The book will be published later this year by the Bobbs-Merrill Company)

...How much of the juvenile delinquency and robbery and problematic crimes in New York that are clogging all the courts and making everything such a mess might be traceable to narcotics crimes which could all be eliminated by simply changing the treatment of narcotics! If you sent all the junkies to doctors the black market would disappear. If you legalize marijuana there will be no use for a narcotics department. There will be no more crime because none of the junkies will be robbing to get money to score because junk is cheap when legal. That would mean that a whole section of government would have to be dismantled and the courts would be reduced back to their normal volume. The whole thing is operating under Parkinson's Law (that paper work begets more paper work, and bureaucracy begets more bureaucracy).

In other words, the narcotics departments of all the cities and state and federal government are fighting tooth and nail now to maintain their existence. Actually one has to think of them, too. How can their problem be solved?—because they're hooked to the drugs, their whole existence depends on drugs. If the drug problem didn't exist, if the whole problem were solved, they would be left jobless. Someone's got to figure out a way of planning vocational training for them, or something.

There's no reason why they should feel threatened, you see. The problem is possibly that they've been feeling threatened that they will lose their jobs if there is no more drug problem. The problem is to solve their vocational problem just as it is to solve the junkies' vocational-problem. Then everybody will see it, the whole thing was a great mirror image where the junkies and cops were both hooked on each other. Which is what I've been saying all along,

really. Everybody thought of it as a fancy metaphor but it's literally true. Selling is more of a habit than using, and prosecuting is as much of a habit.

A cop in New York City has to make 85 drug arrests a year or something like that to stay in the Narcotics Squad. So somebody has to do a complete sociological study of the narcotics on the police side. All the way from the inception and the whole Treasury Department. And to prevent it from repeating with LSD because it is starting all over again with that.

As far as I understand what is happening is that the Pure Food and Drug Administration is introducing some new regulations about LSD in February (and will, therefore, build up an entirely new and unnecessary bureaucracy that will duplicate in size that of the Narcotics Department of the Treasury). That means they've got a monopoly on it, and they won't license anyone to use it because they will claim that they don't have anybody to supervise you. I have heard that since they do not have the staff now they were already taking advice as to who to license from the Army Chemical Warfare Branch. Which means that now LSD and all the hallucinogens are being monopolized by exactly the people who should not have that responsibility—the Army, the people who are least psychologically qualified.

I guess it is a big military secret that the Pentagon already has a monopoly on consciousness expansion. This fact should be published immediately. I heard from a Los Angeles pharmaceutical man that the Army has already been around to him, asking him if he could not alter the molecules in LSD to make it a bum kick so they could use it for warfare. In other words, not only are they going to control the beneficent effects—they want to spray it on the Vietnamese and terrify them, bring about total anxiety where they would go amuck in the streets and kill people! ...Or they could spray it on Berkeley students...

That is something that someone should publish, that the Army now has a monopoly on LSD. It is a shocking scandal...I mean it's the same mess as with the atom bomb, they didn't have to drop it but they went ahead and dropped it...The wrong people had the monopoly on the decisions...

ON BEING A FOREIGNER

...The only advantage of being a foreigner in another country is that you don't have to get involved in their politics. You can pursue your sex-life or your dope-life or your religious life without being involved in the society at all. Every country I have ever been in has its problems. If you are a citizen and at all involved with the country and the social life and the police-state-life and the political life, you are going to encounter the same problem, maybe worse, because you won't have enough to eat to begin with.

As an American in a foreign country it might be easier but if you're living with the people, if you penetrate the depths and make friends, if you make friends among the same range of people from cops to gangsters to movie stars to long-haired beautiful boys with green pants, you run into the same equivalent. You should go abroad for an education, not to escape from the pressure here.

We almost got locked up and expelled (from) India. The Communists felt we were spies and the right wing felt we were Communist spies and tourist visas had to be renewed and they wouldn't renew them. They wanted to know why we wanted to stay in India so long. They couldn't figure out why anyone would want to stay in India...

I went to Cuba this January as a correspondent for *Evergreen Review*, but I had to threaten the State Department with an injunction before they would validate my visa for the trip...I had a good time...

I had a good month there before I got kicked out...It's less of a police state than ever before...They are persecuting fairies and anarchists...They are having the same problems as any other ideologist country...

The situation as I see it is as in all countries of the world. There is a left wing and a right wing. The left wing in Cuba are the revisionists, the good guys that fuck with their eyes open and listen to the Beatles or Bob Dylan or read Dostoevsky or Genet or Sartre and have a wide-ranging intellectual, humanist, democratic life and they're interested in local customs and the African worship rituals which are preserved in Cuba.

And on the other side there are the ideological sectarian dogmatists who have a tendency to fall into the bureaucratic or police posts, the loudmouths who don't have a mature temperament, who use force and who want to force

everybody to follow their version of what the revolution is. So whoever controls the word “revolution” and how you interpret the word “revolution” controls who is anti-revolutionary and who is not anti-revolutionary.

So the more force and anxiety the United States puts on Cuba, the more the dogmatists have the power in their hands; the more the United States relaxes the more power shifts to the democratic revisionist type of Marxist who would make a nice, pleasant socialism. The more relaxed the United States, the more the relaxed people there have a chance to get into power. So if our policy in general was to bring about a non-police state situation down there, we should send them the Byrds and the Beatles. Whereas if our policy is to precipitate a crisis (and we are doing just that), we push the hard-line spy system paranoid Marxists into power.

The hard line people there are mirror-images of the hard line people here in the Pentagon. That is, they all have these rigid ideological positions here and there. They all have this very strong ego hangup and identify the system that they're working through with their own existence, and they're willing to die for it or kill other people for it...

HELLS' ANGELS

...During the Vietnam Day demonstrations in Berkeley, Gary (Snyder) and I got up and sang mantras from the sound truck both to calm the demonstrators and to calm the police and the Hells Angels. I think the introduction of mantra chanting on demonstration lines would resolve most of the problems of ideology and social relations that are set up. It produces a deep impressive sound from the belly which affects other people nearby, observers and cops. It makes them realize that there is nothing to be afraid of, that nobody's going to hit them, that there isn't going to be any violence. It also gives the demonstrators a vehicle for expression, a way of channeling the expression away from a manifestation of hostility to a manifestation of their lone important presence, that their self is singing from the center of the body rather than screaming from the top of their heads...

It makes them realize that they all exist as a hope, as one body, as the policeman exists as one body, as the Pentagon exists as a body which must not be destroyed,...Otherwise you are forcing all those rats into a corner where they have to fight back. Unless you can create some space where everybody can coexist, you're going to have a war...It's not a question of pacifism; it's a question of control of one's own hostility—which is what yoga is good for, what singing is good for, that patience necessary to realize that hostility is just a passing whim and a manifestation of energy which could find a more solid home than the whims of screaming and hatred and counterattack...

I realize that you have to have more than one system of functioning. I would call my theory of politics not humanism but space-age, post-LSD indifference. Benevolent; indifferent neutrality... it's a direct realization that if someone is screaming at you, you realize that you are not nuts, he is. So what do you do with that? You deal with him like a nut. Now how do you deal with a nut? How do you deal with somebody who is unbalanced? You don't push them forward to make them more unbalanced, you try to balance them up if you can. Naturally there are some people that are so unbalanced that there is nothing you can do with them, you have to restrain them or something. But when you restrain someone you don't have to conk them on the head...

WAY OUT

In conclusion, the only way out of the conflicts and hostilities is OUT of conflict and OUT of hostility...I would join more protest marches although I think we should stop calling them PROTEST marches and call them manifestations of something specific, instead of protesting against something. Like on the Vietnam Days in Berkeley. We were sort of in the middle between the Vietnam Day Committee and the Hells' Angels, who attacked the VDC. So me and Peter and Neil Cassidy and Ken Kesey and some of Ken Kesey's merry pranksters went on the Wednesday before the march to the house of the president of the Hells' Angels.

We all turned on to LSD together and I sang Buddhist mantras and we explained what the confusion was and talked to them. And they didn't come out to attack the next march, whereas the VDC had been calling them fascists and that they were in alliance with the Oakland power structure and with the police, and that we would have to

beat up the Hells' Angels with a violence battalion. In fact the VDC forgot about the Vietnam war in their thinking about the Hells' Angels.

It turned out that the Hells' Angels thought this was a police state, that it would be a worse police state if the communists won. They were really afraid of being wiped out in a police state. They had a sincere reason; they felt that the VDC was a Communist plot.

Nobody had ever explained that most of the people that marched with the VDC were not Marxists or Communists—we were just long-haired kids who read *On The Road* or listened to Dylan or smoked pot—or admired people, who had once tried to intercede with them didn't have the sense to actually find out what was bothering them. The problem was, rather than reflecting the hostility and getting mad at the Hells' Angels, that they should have found out what was motivating them and neutralize them by explaining what the actual situation was. Dig?

So they finally became clued in to what the scene was. They were disoriented, literally. The birchites had got at them. There was a group in Berkeley called "Citizens Aroused" which was putting stuff in their ears. It was a question of not reacting blindly. Everyone was reacting like a bull to a red flag; the VDC was reacting to a red flag and charging and missing the bull or the bullfighter, or whoever you're supposed to be missing. The Hells' Angels had a problem, which they were manifesting publicly, and if the VDC wanted to solve their own problem of social cooperation they had to solve the problem of the Hells' Angels...Really, the VDC problem was to present a solution to the Vietnam war, but they really weren't doing that. They are beginning to do so now, Robert Scheer and the others, step by step solutions...

But they'll have to. The old radical thinking was dominating the head of the VDC groups, the organizers, but the majority of people that came out on the march were all these young hip cats. The leadership will have to—as it says in all these Marxian things—the leadership will just have to go back to the grass roots to learn what the populace actually feels and is actually motivated by instead of assuming that they know. Anyway, that leadership will drop dead or change, because the younger people will produce their own. Anyway, I don't think that anything is going to happen through direct political action of this nature. What will happen is just a slow change of consciousness throughout the country as the younger kids grow older and move in their own circles. There will be a cellular change in the country rather than a head change...

Related

Other FE articles by Allen Ginsberg

fifth Estate

Allen Ginsberg
Art Kunkin
Allen Ginsberg on Everything
1966

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/5-march-6-20-1966/allen-ginsberg-on-everything>
Fifth Estate #5, March 6-20, 1966

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)