swinging down the street and says he's real bent and he's down and he has a twisted face, he works, he wallies, he bops, he bangs, this man who was sent, stoned and stabbed is now down, bent and stretched-out—he is home at last, his music is here to stay, his history has washed over us, his imperialistic kingdoms are coming.

ABOUT THE BEAT GENERATION
1957

The Beat Generation, that was a vision that we had, John Clellon Holmes and I, and Allen Ginsberg in an even wilder way, in the late Forties, of a generation of crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America, serious, curious, bumming and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way—a vision gleaned from the way we had heard the word “beat” spoken on streetcorners on Times Square and in the Village, in other cities in the downtown city night of postwar America—beat, meaning down and out but full of intense conviction—we’d even heard old 1910 Daddy Hipsters of the streets speak the word that way, with a melancholy sneer—it never meant juvenile delinquents, it meant characters of a special spirituality who didn’t gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization—the subterraneans heroes who’d finally turned from the “freedom” machine of the West and were taking drugs, digging bop, having flashes of insight, experiencing the “derangement of the senses,” talking strange, being poor and glad, prophesying a new style for American culture, a new style (we thought) completely free from European influences (unlike the Lost Generation), a new incantation—The same thing was almost going on in the postwar France of Satre and Genet and what’s more we knew about it—but as to the actual existence of a Beat Generation, chances are it was really just an idea in our minds—we’d stay up 24 hours drinking cup after cup of black coffee, playing record after record of Wardell Gray, Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, Willie Jackson, Lennie Tristano and all the rest, talking madly about that holy new feeling out there in
On Bop and the Beat Generation

the streets—We'd write stories about some strange beatific Negro hepcat saint with goatee hitchhiking across Iowa with taped up horn bringing the secret message of blowing to other coasts, other cities, like a veritable Walter the Penniless leading an invisible First Crusade—we had our mystic heroes and wrote, nay sung novels about them, erected long poems celebrating the new “angels” of the American underground—in actuality there was only a handful of real hip swinging cats and what there was vanished mightily swiftly during the Korean War when (and after) a sinister new kind of efficiency appeared in America, maybe it was the result of the universalization of television and nothing else (the Polite Total Police Control of Dragnet’s “peace” officers) but the beat characters after 1950 vanished into jails and madhouses, or were shamed into silent conformity, the generation itself was shortlived and small in number.

But there'd be no sense in writing this article if it weren't equally true that by some miracle of metamorphosis, suddenly, the Korean postwar youth emerged cool and beat, had picked up the gestures and the style, soon it was everywhere, the new look, the “twisted” slouchy look, finally it began to appear even in movies (James Dean) and on television, bop arrangements that were once the secret ecstasy of beat contemplatives began to appear in every pit in every square orchestral book (cf. the works of Neil Hefti and not meaning Basie's book), the bop visions became common property of the commercial popular cultural world, the use of expressions like “crazy,” “hungup,” “hassle,” “make it,” “like” ("like make it over sometime, like"), "go," became familiar and common usage, the ingestion of drugs became official (tranquilizers and the rest), and even the clothes style of the beat hipsters carried over to the new Rock'n'Roll youth via Montgomery Clift (leather jacket), Marlon Brando (T-shirt), and Elvis Presley (long sideburns), and the Beat Generation, though dead, was suddenly resurrected and justified.

It really happened, and the sad thing is, that while I am asked to explain the Beat Generation, there is no actual original Beat Generation left.

Yet today from Montreal to Mexico City, from London to Casablanca kids in blue jeans are now playing Rock'n'Roll records on jukeboxes.

As to an analysis of what it means . . . who knows? Even in this late stage of civilization when money is the only thing that really matters, to everybody, I think perhaps it is the Second Religiousness that Oswald Spengler prophesied for the West (in America the final home of Faust), because there are elements of hidden religious significance in the way, for instance, that a guy like Stan Getz, the highest jazz genius of his “beat” generation, was put in jail for trying to hold up a drug store, suddenly had visions of God and repented (something gracefully Villonesque in that story)—Or take the case of the posthumous canonization of James Dean by millions of kids—Strange talk we'd heard among the early hipsters, of “the end of the world” at the “second coming,” of “stoned-out visions” and even visitations, all believing, all inspired and fervent and free of Bourgeois-Bohemian Materialism, such as P.L.'s being knocked off his chair by the Angel and his vision of the books of the Fathers of the Church and of Christ crashing through Time, G.C.'s visions of the devil and celestial Heralds, A.G.'s visions in Harlem and elsewhere of the tearful Divine Love, W.S.B.'s reception of the word that he is the One Prophet, G.S.'s Buddhist visions of the vow of salvation, peo'll visions of all the myths being true, P.W.'s visions of malific flashes and forms and the roof flying off the house, J.K.'s numerous visions of Heaven, the “Golden Eternity,” bright light in the night woods, H.H.'s geekish visions of Armageddon (experienced in Sing Sing), N.C.'s visions of reincarnation under God's will [ . . . ] A.L.'s vision of everything as mysterious electricity, and one unnamed Times Square kid's vision of the Second Coming being televised (all taking place, a definite fact, in the midst of everyday contemporary life in the minds of typical members of my generation whom I know), reappearances of the early Gothic Springtime feeling of Western mankind before it went on its “Civilization” Rationale and developed relativity, jets and superbombs and supercolossal bureaucratic totalitarian benevolent Big Brother structures—so, as Spengler says, when comes the sunset of our culture (due now, according to his morphological graphs) and the dust of civilized striving settles, lo, the clear late-day glow reveals the original

1. Philip Lamantia.
2. Gregory Corso.
3. Allen Ginsberg.
5. Gary Snyder.
8. Herbert Huncke.
10. Alene L., the African-American woman with whom Kerouac had an affair in New York City in 1953; she is called “Mardou” in The Subterraneans.
concerns again, reveals a beatic indifference to things that are Caesar's, for instance, a tiredness of that, and a yearning for, a regret for, the transcendent value, or "God," again, "Heaven," the spiritual regret for Endless Love which our theory of electromagnetic gravitation, our conquest of space will prove, and instead of only techniques of efficiency, all will be left, as with a population that has gone through a violent earthquake, will be the Last Things . . . again (for the fact that everybody dies makes the world kind).

We all know about the Religious Revival, Billy Graham and all, under which the Beat Generation, even the existentialists with all their intellectual overlays and pretenses of indifference, represent an even deeper religiousness, the desire to be gone, out of this world (which is not our kingdom), "high," ecstatic, saved, as if the visions of the clostral saints of Chartres and Clairvaux were back with us again bursting like weeds through the sidewalks of stiffened Civilization wearying through its late motions.

Or maybe the Beat Generation, which is the offspring of the Lost Generation, is just another step towards that last, pale generation which will not know the answers either.

In any case, indications are that its effect has taken root in American culture.

Maybe.

Or, what difference does it make?

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LAMB, NO LION
1958

The Beat Generation is no hoodlumism. As the man who suddenly thought of that word "beat" to describe our generation, I would like to have my little say about it before everyone else in the writing field begins to call it "roughneck," "violent," "heedless," "rootless." How can people be rootless? Heedless of what? Wants? Roughneck because you don't come on elegant?

Beat doesn't mean tired, or bushed, so much as it means beato, the Italian for beatific: to be in a state of beatitude, like St. Francis, trying to love all life, trying to be utterly sincere with everyone, practicing endurance, kindness, cultivating joy of heart. How can this be done in our mad modern world of multiplicities and millions? By practicing a little solitude, going off by yourself once in a while to store up that most precious of golds: the vibrations of sincerity.

Being bugged is not being beat. You may be withdrawn, but you don't have to be mean about it. Beatness is not a form of tired old criticism. It is a form of spontaneous affirmation. What kinda culture you gonna have with everybody's gray faces saying "I don't think that's quite correct"?

Let's start at the beginning. After publishing my book about the beat generation I was asked to explain beatness on TV, on radio, by people everywhere. They were all under the impression that being beat was just a lot of frantic nowhere hysteria. What are you searching for? They asked me. I answered that I was waiting for God to show his face. (Later I got a letter from a 16-year-old girl saying that was exactly what she'd been waiting for too.) They asked: How could this have anything to do with mad hepcats? I answered that even mad happy hepcats with all their kicks and chicks and hep talk were creatures of God laid out here in this infinite universe without knowing what for. And besides I have never heard more talk about God, the Last Things, the soul, the where-we-going than among the kids of my generation: and not the intellectual kids alone, all of them. In the faces of my questioners was the hopeless question: But Why? Billy Graham has a half million spiritual babies. This generation has many more "beat kiddies," and the relationship is close.

The Lost Generation of the 20s believed in nothing so they went their rather cynical way putting everything down. That generation forms the corpus of our authority today, and is looking with disfavor upon us, under beeting brows, at us who want to swing—in life, in art, in everything, in the confession of everything to everyone. The Lost Generation put it down; the Beat Generation is picking it all up again. The Beat Generation believes that there will be some justification for all the horror of life. The first of the Four Noble Truths is: All Life Is Suffering. Yet I hear them talk about how it's worth it, if you only believed, if you let that holy flow gush endlessly out of that secret source of living bliss.

"Man, I dig everything!" So many cats said that to me on the sidewalks of the 1940s when beatness rose like an ethereal flower out of the squalor and madness of the times. "But why?" I'd say, "You haven't
got a cent, no place to sleep.” Answer: “Man, you gotta stay high, that’s all.” Then I’d see these same characters next day all bushed and beat brooding on a bench in the park, refusing to talk to anybody, storing up for more belief.

And there they all were, at night, the bop musicians were on the stand blowing, the beat was great, you’d see hundreds of heads nodding in the smoky dimness, nodding to the music, “Yes, yes, yes” is what their nodding heads said, so musingly, so prettily, so mystically. Musicians waiting for their turn to take a solo also listened nodding, Yes. I saw a whole generation nodding yes. (I also saw the junkies nod No over their bed-edges.)

I don’t think the Beat Generation is going to be a moronic band of dope addicts and hoodlums. My favorite beat buddies were all kind, good kids, eager, sincere (“Now lend me five minutes of your time and listen to every word I’m going to say!”) . . . such tender concern! Such a pathetic human hope that all will be communicated and received, and all made well by this mysterious union of minds. The dope thing will die out. That was a fad, like bathtub gin. In the Beat Generation instead of an old Lost Generation champagne bottle intertwined in one silk stocking, you found an old benny tube in the closet, or an ancient roach in a dresser, all covered with dust. The dope thing was confined to a handful of medical metabolica junkies before it was given such publicity by the authorities. Then it got out of hand.

As to sex, why not? One woman interviewer asked me if I thought sexual passion was messy, I said “No, it’s the gateway to paradise.”

Only bitter people put down life. The Beat Generation is going to be a sweetie (as the great Pinky Lee would say, Lee who loves children, and all generations are children).

I only hope there won’t be a war to hurt all these beautiful people, and I don’t think there will be. There appears to be a Beat Generation all over the world, even behind the Iron Curtain. I think Russia wants a share of what America has—food and clothing and pleasantness for most everyone.

I prophesy that the Beat Generation which is supposed to be nutty nihilism in the guise of new hipness, is going to be the most sensitive generation in the history of America and therefore it can’t help but do good. Whatever wrong comes will come out of evil interference. If there is any quality that I have noticed more strongly than anything else in this generation, it is the spirit of non-interference with the lives of others. I had a dream that I didn’t want the lion to eat the lamb and the lion came up and lapped my face like a big puppy dog and then I picked up the lamb and it kissed me. This is the dream of the Beat Generation.

BEATIFIC:
THE ORIGINS OF
THE BEAT GENERATION
1959

This article necessarily’ll have to be about myself. I’m going all out. That nutty picture of me on the cover of On the Road results from the fact that I had just gotten down from a high mountain where I’d been for two months completely alone and usually I was in the habit of combing my hair of course because you have to get rides on the highway and all that and you usually want girls to look at you as though you were a man and not a wild beast but my poet friend Gregory Corso opened his shirt and took out a silver crucifix that was hanging from a chain and said “Wear this and wear it outside your shirt and don’t comb your hair!” so I spent several days around San Francisco going around with him and others like that, to parties, arties, parts, jam sessions, bars, poetry readings, churches, walking talking poetry in the streets, walking talking God in the streets (and at one point a strange gang of hoodlums got mad and said “What right does he got to wear that?” and my own gang of musicians and poets told them to cool it) and finally on the third day Mademoiselle magazine wanted to take pictures of us all so I posed just like that, wild hair, crucifix, and all, with Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg and Phil Whalen, and the only publication which later did not erase the crucifix from my breast (from that plaid sleeveless cotton shirt-front) was The New York Times, therefore The New York Times is as beat as I am, and I’m glad I’ve got a friend. I mean it sincerely, God bless The New York Times for not eraseing the crucifix from my picture as though it was something distasteful. As a matter of fact, who’s really beat around here, I mean if you wanta talk of Beat as “beat down” the people who erased the crucifix are really the “beat down” ones and not The New York Times, myself, and Gregory Corso.
the poet. I am not ashamed to wear the crucifix of my Lord. It is because I am Beat, that is, I believe in beatitude and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to it. I am sure no priest would've condemned me for wearing the crucifix outside my shirt everywhere and no matter where I went, even to have my picture taken by Mademoiselle. So you people don’t believe in God. So you’re all big smart know-it-all Marxists and Freemasons, hey? Why don’t you come back in a million years and tell me all about it, angels?

Recently Ben Hecht said to me on TV “Why are you afraid to speak out your mind, what’s wrong with this country, what is everybody afraid of?” Was he talking to me? And all he wanted me to do was speak out my mind against people, he sneeringly brought up Dulles, Eisenhower, the Pope, all kinds of people like that habitually he would sneer at with Drew Pearson, against the world he wanted, this is his idea of freedom, he calls it freedom. Who knows, my God, but that the universe is not one vast sea of compassion actually, the veritable holy honey, beneath all this show of personality and cruelty. In fact who knows but that it isn’t the solitude of the oneness of the essence of everything, the solitude of the actual oneness of the unbornness of the unborn essence of everything, na ye the true pure foreverhood, that big blank potential that can ray forth anything it wants from its pure store, that blazing bliss, Mattivajarakaruna the Transcendental Diamond Compassion! No, I want to speak for things, for the crucifix I speak out, for the Star of Israel I speak out, for the divinest man who ever lived who was a German (Bach) I speak out, for sweet Mohammed I speak out, for Buddha I speak out, for Lao-tse and Chuang-tse I speak out, for D.T. Suzuki I speak out... why should I attack what I love out of life. This is Beat. Live your lives out! Naw, love your lives out. When they come and stone you at least you won’t have a glass house, just your glassy flesh.

That wild eager picture of me on the cover of On the Road where I look so Beat goes back much further than 1948 when John Clellon Holmes (author of Go and The Horn) and I were sitting around trying to think up the meaning of the Lost Generation and the subsequent Existentialism and I said “You know, this is really a beat generation” and he leapt up and said “That’s it, that’s right!” It goes back to the 1880s when my grandfather Jean-Baptiste Kerouac used to go out on the porch in big thunderstorms and swing his kerosene lamp at the lightning and yell “Go ahead, go, if you’re more powerful than I am strike me and put the light out!” while the mother and the children cowered in the kitchen. And the light never went out. Maybe since I’m supposed to be the spokesman of the Beat Generation (I am the originator of the term, and around it the term and the generation have taken shape) it should be pointed out that all this “Beat” guts therefore goes back to my ancestors who were Bretons who were the most independent group of nobles in all old Europe and kept fighting Latin France to the last wall (although a big blond bosun on a merchant ship snorted when I told him my ancestors were Bretons in Cornwall, Brittany, “Why, we Wikings used to swoop down and steal your nets!”) Breton, Wiking, Irishman, Indian, madboy, it doesn’t make any difference, there is no doubt about the Beat Generation, at least the core of it, being a swinging group of new American men intent on joy... Irresponsibility? Who wouldn’t help a dying man on an empty road? No and the Beat Generation goes back to the wild parties my father used to have at home in the 1920s and 1930s in New England that were so fantastically loud nobody could sleep for blocks around and when the cops came they always had a drink. It goes back to the wild and raving childhood of playing the Shadow under windswept trees of New England’s gleeful autumn, and the howl of the Moon Man on the sandbank until we caught him in a tree (he was an “older” guy of 15), the maniacal laugh of certain neighborhood madboys, the furious humor of whole gangs playing basketball till long after dark in the park, it goes back to those crazy days before World War II when teenagers drank beer on Friday nights at Lake ballrooms and worked off their hangovers playing baseball on Saturday afternoon followed by a dive in the brook—and our fathers wore straw hats like W.C. Fields. It goes back to the completely senseless babble of the Three Stooges, the ravings of the Marx Brothers (the tenderness of Angel Harpo at harp, too).

It goes back to the inky ditties of old cartoons (Krazy Kat with the irrational brick)—to Laurel and Hardy in the Foreign Legion—to Count Dracula and his smile to Count Dracula shivering and hissing back before the Cross—to the Golem horrifying the persecutors of the Ghetto—to the quiet sage in a movie about India, unconcerned about the plot—to the giggling old Tao Chinaman trotting down the sidewalk of old Clark Gable Shanghai—to the holy old Arab warning the hot-bloods that Ramadan is near. To the Werewolf of London a distinguished doctor in his velour smoking jacket smoking his pipe over a lamplit tome on botany and suddenly hairs grown on his hands, his cat hisses, and he slips out into the night with a cape and a slanty cap like the caps of people in broadlines—to Lamont Cranston so cool and sure
suddenly becoming the frantic Shadow going mwee hee hee ha ha in the alleys of New York imagination. To Popeye the sailor and the Sea Hag and the meaty gunwales of boats, to Cap'n Easy and Wash Tubbs screaming with ecstasy over canned peaches on a cannibal isle, to Wimpy looking X-eyed for a juicy hamburger such as they make no more. To Jiggs ducking before a household of furniture flying through the air, to Jiggs and the boys at the bar and the corned beef and cabbage of old woodfence noons—to King Kong his eyes looking into the hotel window with tender huge love for Fay Wray—nay, to Bruce Cabot in mate's cap leaning over the rail of a fogbound ship saying "Come aboard." It goes back to when grapefruits were thrown at crooners and harvestworkers at bar-rails slapped burlesque queens on the rump. To when fathers took their sons to the Twi League game. To the days of Babe Callahan on the waterfront, Dick Barthaolmes camping under a London streetlamp. To dear old Basil Rathbone looking for the Hound of the Baskervilles (a dog big as the Grey Wolf who will destroy Odin)—to dear old bleary Doctor Watson with a brandy in his hand. To Joan Crawford her raw shanks in the fog, in striped blouse smoking a cigarette at sticky lips in the door of the waterfront dive. To train whirls of steam engines out above the moony pines. To Maw and Paw in the Model A clanking on to get a job in California selling used cars making a whole lotta money. To the glee of America, the honesty of America, the honesty of oldtime grafters in straw hats as well as the honesty of oldtime waiters in line at the Brooklyn Bridge in Winterset, the funny spitelessness of old bigfisted America like Big Boy Williams saying "Hoo? Hee? Huh?" in a movie about Mack Trucks and sliding-door lunchcarts. To Clark Gable, his certain smile, his confident leer. Like my grandfather this America was invested with wild selfbelieving individuality and this had begun to disappear around the end of World War II with so many great guys dead (I can think of half a dozen from my own boyhood groups) when suddenly it began to emerge again, the hipsters began to appear gliding around saying "Crazy, man."

When I first saw the hipsters creeping around Times Square in 1944 I didn't like them either. One of them, Huncke of Chicago, came up to me and said "Man, I'm beat." I knew right away what he meant somehow. At that time I still didn't like hop which was then being introduced by Bird Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and Bags Jackson (on vibes), the last of the great swing musicians was Don Byas who went to Spain right after, but then I began... but earlier I'd dug all my jazz in the old Minton Playhouse (Lester Young, Ben Webster, Joey Guy, Charlie Christian, others) and when I first heard Bird and Diz in the Three Deuces I knew they were serious musicians playing a goofy new sound and didn't care what I thought, or what my friend Seymour thought. In fact I was leaning against the bar with a beer when Dizzy came over for a glass of water from the bartender, put himself right against me and reached both arms around both sides of my head to get the glass and danced away, as though knowing I'd be singing about him someday, or that one of his arrangements would be named after me someday by some goofy circumstance. Charlie Parker was spoken of in Harlem as the greatest new musician since Chu Berry and Louis Armstrong.

Anyway, the hipsters, whose music was hop, they looked like criminals but they kept talking about the same things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, nightlong confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by War, stirrings, rumblings of a new soul (that same old human soul). And so Huncke appeared to us and said "I'm beat" with radiant light shining out of his despairing eyes... a word perhaps brought from some midwest carnival or junk cafeteria. It was a new language, actually spade (Negro) jargon but you soon learned it, like "hung-up" couldn't be a more economical term to mean so many things. Some of these hipsters were raving mad and talked continually. It was jazzy. Symphony Sid's all-night modern jazz and hop show was always on. By 1948 it began to take shape. That was wild vibrating year when a group of us would walk down the street and yell hello and even stop and talk to anybody that gave us a friendly look. The hipsters had eyes. That was the year I saw Montgomery Clift, unshaven, wearing a sloppy jacket, slouching down Madison Avenue with a companion. It was the year I saw Charley Bird Parker strolling down Eighth Avenue in a black turtleneck sweater with Babs Gonzales and a beautiful girl.

By 1948 the hipsters, or beaters, were divided into cool and hot. Much of the misunderstanding about hipsters and the Beat Generation in general today derives from the fact that there are two distinct styles of hipsterism: the cool today is your bearded laconic sage, or schlurm, before a hardly touched beer in a beatnik dive, whose speech is low and unfriendly, whose girls say nothing and wear black: the "hot" today is the crazy talkative shining eyed (often innocent and openhearted) nut who runs from bar to bar, pad to pad looking for everybody, shouting, restless, lushy, trying to "make it" with the subterranean beatniks who ignore him. Most Beat Generation artists belong to the hot school, naturally since that hard gemlike flame needs a little heat. In many cases
the mixture is 50-50. It was a hot hipster like myself who finally cooled it in Buddhist meditation, though when I go in a jazz joint I still feel like yelling “Blow baby blow!” to the musicians though nowadays I’d get 86d for this. In 1948 the “hot hipsters” were racing around in cars like in On the Road looking for wild bawling jazz like Willis Jackson or Lucky Thompson (early) or Chubby Jackson’s big band while the “cool hipsters” cooled it in dead silence before formal and excellent musical groups like Lennie Tristano or Miles Davis. It’s still just about the same, except that it has begun to grow into a national generation and the name “Beat” has stuck (though all hipsters hate the word).

The word “beat” originally meant poor, down and out, deadbeat, on the bum, sad, sleeping in subways. Now that the word is belonging officially it is being made to stretch to include people who do not sleep in subways but have a certain new gesture, or attitude, which I can only describe as a new more. “Beat Generation” has simply become the slogan or label for a revolution in manners in America. Marlon Brando was not really first to portray it on the screen. Dane Clark with his pinched Dostoevskyan face and Brooklyn accent, and of course Garfield, were first. The private eyes were Beat, if you will recall. Bogart. Lorre was Beat. In M, Peter Lorre started a whole revival, I mean the slouchy street walk.

I wrote On the Road in three weeks in the beautiful month of April 1951 while living in the Chelsea district of lower West Side Manhattan, on a 100-foot roll and put the Beat Generation in words in there, saying at the point where I am taking part in a wild kind of collegiate party with a bunch of kids in an abandoned miner’s shack “These kids are great but where are Dean Moriarty and Carlo Marx? Oh well I guess they wouldn’t belong in this gang, they’re too dark, too strange, too subterranean and I am slowly beginning to join a new kind of beat generation.” The manuscript of Road was turned down on the grounds that it would displease the sales manager of my publisher at that time, though the editor, a very intelligent man, said “Jack this is just like Dostoevsky, but what can I do at this time?” It was too early. So for the next six years I was a bum, a brakeman, a seaman, a panhandler, a pseudo-Indian in Mexico, anything and everything, and went on writing because my hero was Goethe and I believed in art and hoped some day to write the third part of Faust, which I have done in Doctor Sax. Then in 1952 an article was published in The New York Times Sunday magazine saying, the headline, “This is a Beat Generation”’’ (in quotes like that) and in the article it said that I had come up with the term first

“when the face was harder to recognize,” the face of the generation. After that there was some talk of the Beat Generation but in 1955 I published an excerpt from Road (melding it with parts of Visions of Neal) under the pseudonym “Jean-Louis,” it was entitled Jazz of the Beat Generation and was copyrighted as being an excerpt from a novel-in-progress entitled Beat Generation (which I later changed to On the Road at the insistence of my new editor) and so then the term moved a little faster. The term and the cats. Everywhere began to appear strange hepcats and even college kids went around hip and cool and using the terms I’d heard on Times Square in the early Forties, it was growing somehow. But when the publishers finally took a dare and published On the Road in 1957 it burst open, it mushroomed, everybody began yelling about a Beat Generation. I was being interviewed everywhere I went for “what I meant” by such a thing. People began to call themselves beatniks, beats, jazzniks, bopniks, bugniks and finally I was called the “avatar” of all this.

Yet it was as a Catholic, it was not at the insistence of any of these “niks” and certainly not with their approval either, that I went one afternoon to the church of my childhood (one of them), Ste. Jeanne d’Arc in Lowell, Mass., and suddenly with tears in my eyes and had a vision of what I must have really meant with “Beat!” anyhow when I heard the holy silence in the church (I was the only one in there, it was five p.m., dogs were barking outside, children yelling, the fall leaves, the candles were flickering alone just for me), the vision of the word Beat as being to mean beatific . . . . There’s the priest preaching on Sunday morning, all of a sudden through a side door of the church comes a group of Beat Generation characters in stripped raincoats like the I.R.A. coming in silently to “dig” the religion . . . . I knew it then.

But this was 1954, so then what horror I felt in 1957 and later 1958 naturally to suddenly see “Beat” being taken up by everybody, press and TV and Hollywood borscht circuit to include the “juvenile delinquency” shot and the horrors of a mad teeming billyclub New York and L.A. and they began to call that Beat, that beatific . . . . bunch of fools marching against the San Francisco Giants protesting baseball, as if (now) in my name and I, my childhood ambition to be a big league baseball star hitter like Ted Williams so that when Bobby Thomson hit that homerun in 1951 I trembled with joy and couldn’t get over it for days and wrote poems about how it is possible for the human spirit to win after all! Or, when a murder, a routine murder took place in North Beach, they labeled it a Beat Generation slaying although in my child-
After Me, the Deluge

1969

What am I thinking about? I'm trying to figure out where I am between the established politicians and the radicals, between cops and hoods, tax collectors and vandals.

I'm not a Tax Free, not a Hippie-Yippie— I must be a Bippie-in-the-Middle.

No, I'd better go around and tell everybody, or let others convince me, that I'm the great white father and intellectual forebear who spawned a deluge of alienated radicals, war protestors, dropouts, hippies and even "beats," and thereby I can make some money, maybe and a "new Now-image" for myself (and God forbid I dare call myself the intellectual forebear of modern spontaneous prose), but I've got to figure out first how I could possibly spawn Jerry Rubin, Mitchell Goodman, Abbie Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg and other warm human beings from the ghettos who say they suffered no less than the Puerto Ricans in their barrios and the blacks in their Big and Little Harlems, and all because I wrote a matter-of-fact account of a true adventure on the road (hardly an agitational propaganda account) featuring an ex-cowhand and an ex-footballer driving across the continent north, northwest, midwest and southland looking for lost fathers, odd jobs, good times, and girls and winding up on the railroad. Yup, I'd better convince myself that these thinkers were not on an entirely different road.

But now, where will I turn? Oh, I know, I'll go to the "top echelons" of American Society, all sleeked up, and try to forget the ships'