Student Biographies and Abstracts

Panel: Make Love or Make War?: America and the World in the 1960s and ‘70s

Hannah Smith

Title: “The Making of a Long Strange Trip: LSD and The Grateful Dead”
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Hannah Smith is in her third year at IPFW, majoring in Secondary Education with a concentration in historical perspectives, political science, and sociology. She appreciates all historical subjects, but is particularly enthusiastic about the Cold War era. After she graduates next spring, she plans to attend graduate school to obtain her master’s degree in History.

Abstract

When many think of American culture in the 1960s, visions of hippies, rock n’ roll, Woodstock, and drugs perhaps come to mind. These are all aspects of the counterculture that flourished during the decade. This paper explores the significance of the correlation between drugs and music for the counterculture in the 1960s, particularly examining the newest recreational drug at the time, LSD (also known as acid), and what would soon be one of the most popular rock n’ roll bands in American history, The Grateful Dead. For three decades — the 1960s to the 1980s — LSD influenced The Grateful Dead’s music, aesthetic, and fan base. In the 1960s, The Dead discovered their acid rock sound and jam band quality at Ken Kesey’s Acid Test Parties. In the 1970s, acid fueled the psychedelic artwork that appeared on their albums and in the lyrics in some of their most popular songs. The 1980s saw the creation of a Deadhead community as well as a firm connection between the band and its fans due to LSD and the surrounding drug culture. Interviews, memoirs, song lyrics, and documentaries from the time show that LSD impacted The Grateful Dead’s unique sound, loyal fan base, and psychedelic aesthetic, culminating in the creation of a legacy for the band that lasted for decades to come.

Bibliographical Note

The sources presented in this paper include both primary and secondary sources. The latter include books and articles relating to The Grateful Dead, LSD, or both. Why The Grateful Dead Matters by Michael Benson and Perspectives on The Grateful Dead edited by Robert G. Weiner are two books containing various view points on The Grateful Dead. “What LSD Actually Does to the Brain” by Zoe Cormier provides scientific evidence of the effects of acid on the chemistry of the human brain. Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond written by Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain and Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Owsley Stanley III are two novels about LSD’s pertinence to the 1960s and The Grateful Dead. Primary sources
used include interviews, books, song lyrics, and a documentary. Among said interviews are three with Jerry Garcia himself, two with artists for the Grateful Dead, one with a Grateful Dead lyricist, one with a veteran Deadhead, and one with Jerry Garcia’s ex-wife. Books include Growing Up Dead: The Hallucinated Confessions of a Teenage Deadhead written by Peter Conners and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test by Tom Wolfe. The paper also includes song lyrics by and a documentary about Bob Weir. All the sources help to identify LSD as one factor that contributed to the legacy of The Grateful Dead.