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by

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**Counterculture Country: Nation-
Building at 1960s Rock Music
Festivals**

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Rock Music Festivals**

by

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Report

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**Counterculture
Country: Nation-
Building at 1960s
Rock Music Festivals**

by

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Rock music festivals of the late 1960s were the sites of regular and violent contestation between promoters who organized them and the countercultural festival goers who attended. Throughout the final years of the 1960s, many countercultural youth began envisioning the rock music festival as the most practical space for realizing a revolutionary social order. Overwhelming local police and rural communities, these festival spaces were comprised of hundreds of thousands of countercultural youth who gathered and openly embodied countercultural values in plain sight and in solidarity. When promoters recognized the profitability of organizing rock music festivals, they began charging admission and excluding those who could not, or would not, pay admission. This tension between promoters and countercultural youth violently erupted at rock music festivals throughout the era.

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“The spectre that walked through this artificial rural ghetto was one of everybody's vision of a future experience that had not yet taken shape and form except in our innermost consciousness: the Revolution!”¹

-Miller Francis Jr., reflecting on The Woodstock Music and Arts Festival in *The Great Speckled Bird*

As the sun rose over Max Yasgur's dairy farm early Monday morning, the hundreds of thousands of bleary-eyed and battered countercultural youth who had stuck out the torrential rain, mud, bad LSD and numerous food and medical supply shortages limped home in high spirits. They had witnessed an extraordinary moment—half a million countercultural youth gathered on a 600-acre farm, for four straight days, free of charge.

Woodstock had calcified a budding movement within the counterculture to designate the rock music festival as *the* space for the counterculture to manifest a “freak nation,” a countercultural prototype of an alternative social and communal order composed of hundreds of thousands of LSD-dropping, dope-smoking, free-loving, long-haired youth.² Rock music festivals congregated crowds that overwhelmed local police and rural communities, which allowed for individuals to experiment with psychedelic drugs, nudity, and indiscriminate sex within a sympathetic and hostility-free setting (made up of hundreds of thousands of others who were granted the same permissiveness.) Amidst the enormous gathering in Bethel, this invigorated quest to construct a massive and permanent countercultural community was aptly inaugurated: Woodstock Nation.³

Prior to Woodstock, music festivals of the late 1960s had been sites of regular and violent contestations between “hip” entrepreneurs and promoters who organized and financed rock music festivals and those countercultural festival-goers who attended them.⁴ As attendance at rock

music festivals ballooned from 1967 onward, many in the counterculture soon realized the potential of rock music festivals for envisioning and manifesting a revolutionary, countercultural social order. Within these settings, the congregated countercultural youth could manifest, in freak solidarity, the spirit and ideology many had preached in disparate neighborhoods and communities across the country for nearly a decade.⁵ Expression of these ideologies within their home communities were more likely than not to be met with anger and hostility from both police and non-freak residents; however, at rock music festivals, these expressions were widely exhibited and *encouraged*. The rock music festival was the ideal countercultural space for radical self-expression, tolerance and experimentation - principles of the counterculture - in their many forms, if only for a weekend at a time. A living, breathing alternative to the culturally conservative communities where many in the counterculture resided, the rock music festival simulated an ephemeral countercultural city. Several reporters in the underground press compared festival grounds to the biblical Garden of Eden.⁶

As rock music festivals became attractive sites for massive countercultural gatherings in the summer of 1967, promoters quickly realized the potential profit in organizing them. Rock promoters, record executives and, in the case of Woodstock, a trust-fund Ivy-League graduate seeking investment opportunities, founded limited liability companies (LLCs) and other ventures to raise capital, organize festivals, and handsomely profit. The main form of return on investment was through the sale of day and weekend passes to the festival. However, by charging admission and erecting fencing around these spaces to ensure that non-ticket holders were excluded (thus ensuring their profit), promoters had, in the language of the counterculture, fenced off Eden. As festivals transitioned from non-profit to for-profit enterprises, fencing and security expanded, which starkly delimited who could access the holy festival grounds.

Techniques for resisting barrier fencing began with simply climbing over them; this expanded into cutting chain links and padlocks, and, eventually, wholesale destruction. As the rock music festival phenomenon swelled after 1967, these attacks became increasingly violent and contentious, culminating in the complete destruction of barrier fencing at Woodstock. The festival's legendary status is due in large part to not only the enormity of countercultural youth who made the pilgrimage, but also, to the complete and total destruction of barrier fences, which granted entrance to several hundred thousand youth who would have been excluded otherwise.⁷

Although a few large-scale rock festivals materialized in the mid 1970s, their prime resonance and (counter) cultural significance was squarely between 1967 and 1970. Prior to 1967, most music festivals consisted of the peaceful gathering of a few thousand jazz and folk fans at genre festivals and the congregation of countercultural youth in places like Golden Gate Park; after 1970, due to numerous factors, including tighter regulations and permitting requirements implemented by state legislatures, rock music festivals sputtered, occurring irregularly as single day extravaganzas.⁸ As the likelihood of widespread cultural transformation diminished as the end of the decade neared, rhetoric within the counterculture became increasingly distraught and forlorn at possibilities for positive change within their home communities. The rock music festival became one of the few remaining safe spaces (and by far the largest) where countercultural youth could gather peacefully and embody their lifestyle-as-revolution ethos in solidarity. Festivals provided hope to an increasingly cynical counterculture that a more inclusive, tolerant, egalitarian and spiritual society could still be salvaged.

Providing a far more telling story of what the rock music festival meant to the countercultural youth who attended them, this account de-centers the famous promoters, musicians and record executives responsible for much of the organization. Instead, it spotlights why the rank-and-

file counterculture bestowed these spaces with nearly divine and revolutionary potential, how they resisted the commercialization of these spaces, why they legitimized these forms of resistance, and finally, how the counterculture coped with the decline of rock music festivals in the early 1970s.

Like the counterculture itself, those youth who participated in countercultural nation building at large-scale rock music festivals were overwhelmingly white.⁹ Reared in postwar abundance, countercultural youth were often those young, white men and women with enough economic security and privilege to reject both. Experimentation with alternative lifestyles and self-imposed poverty was often at odds with the goals of many communities of color.¹⁰ There were certainly black and Latino youth who rejected their parent's values, corporate employment, and rigid sexual mores; however, many were simultaneously involved in a fierce national battle for basic political, economic and civil rights, which took precedence over attending rock music festivals on rural farms and raceways.

Nation-building efforts more broadly, however, were not monopolized by the counterculture. The rise of the rock music festival as a space for manifesting a countercultural nation coincided (and was most likely influenced by) nation-building efforts by the American Indian and Chicano movements as well as black power struggles. Nation-building within the American Indian Movement and United Indians of all Tribes largely focused on cultural revitalization efforts, affirmation of American (and Canadian) Indian identity, and reclamation of Indian land. The Chicano movement shared AIM's goals as well, while certain factions also sought the liberation and return of territory ceded to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Currents within black power movements also emphasized cultural revitalization and the reallocation

of land for a racially homogenous nation, but also pushed for both greater political power in existing American institutions.

While countercultural nation building did involve advocacy for a permanent settlement and sought political power in existing institutions (at least temporarily), the youth who overwhelmingly comprised the counterculture were white, and, rather than rediscovering an oppressed ethnic identity, rejected their past in favor of a more enlightened future.¹¹ The rock festival-as-countercultural-nation, which encouraged myriad forms of expression, inclusivity and free love was largely an imagined nation that manifested much of the racial segregation as the country they were attempting to transcend.

Countercultural Spaces

The creation of countercultural spaces, or “counterinstitutions,” had emerged prior to the phenomenon of massive gatherings at rock music festivals. At The University of Texas at Austin, “Gentle Thursday,” which began in 1966, encouraged students to “do exactly what they want...bring your dog to campus or a baby or a whole bunch of red balloons.”¹² Gentle Thursday expanded to campuses throughout the Southwest, providing a relatively safe forum and venue for the counterculture to gather within hostile conservative climates. Gentle Thursdays were an attempt to “offer a vision of a better, more fulfilling way of life.”¹³ At many universities where fraternities and football reigned supreme, safe spaces for freaks, hippies, and the counterculture to gather became essential for finding solidarity amidst an unfriendly climate.

The underground press itself served a similar function, both as a home for countercultural and New Leftist reporters, writers and journalists, but also as a medium for expressing and transmitting information pertinent to, and through the lens of, the counterculture. This included reports on police harassment, national and local politics, safe drug use, and rock festival dates. The

Liberation News Service coordinated these disparate underground presses, sharing information and press releases from one countercultural stronghold to another, while simultaneously granting rural readers and sympathetic college students a sense of solidarity with the greater counterculture. Although this network helped form a shared, national countercultural ethos for disparate counterculture strongholds spread throughout the country, the counterculture-at-large remained physically isolated.

Gentle Thursdays and gatherings at Peace Park in Berkeley and at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco were relatively small in scale and attracted mostly the countercultural youth from the surrounding area. However, beginning in the summer of 1967, rock music festivals materialized as the optimal space for countercultural gathering. For several days at a time, in a space free of police and judgmental glares, the counterculture could gather peacefully and embody countercultural values (and, at least for the moment, free of charge.)

The Fantasy Fair and Magic Mountain Music Festival is the earliest and most recognizable rock music festival of the era. The festival was held in Marin County, just north of San Francisco, at the cost of \$2.00, all of which was designated as charitable contributions to the Hunter's Point Child Care Center. *The Barb*, the local San Francisco underground paper, wrote glowingly about the cause and money raised (between twelve and sixteen thousand dollars), summing up the weekend, "That's a benefit."¹⁴ Those interviewed, both the countercultural community in San Francisco who crossed the Golden Gate Bridge to attend, as well the artists who performed, shared nothing but positive memories of the event. Although this festival is the most recognizable precursor to the rock music festivals that proceeded it, Monterey Pop, which was held just a week later, greatly overshadowed the rock music festival inception and is thus often considered the first rock music festival of the era.¹⁵

If compared to the grounds of festivals in 1969 - - a massive sea of youth, scattered and makeshift tents, sleeping bags strewn throughout, motorcycles ridden through the crowds -Monterey Pop resembled an evening at the Metropolitan Opera. The fifty thousand attendees who paid the \$6.50 for a ticket (which was tax exempt and again allocated as a charitable contribution to a local non-profit) sat placidly on folding chairs organized into neat rows. They sat patiently and quietly during sets and clapped enthusiastically at the end of each performance. Yet even in this more relatively constrained environment, the hallmarks of the counterculture were present - alternative fashion, open marijuana smoking, long hair on men, and performances by the Mamas & Papas, Jefferson Airplane, The Who and Jimi Hendrix. In this era of massive rock music festivals, Monterey Pop was one of the smallest gatherings and resembled more of the genre festivals that preceded it rather than the rock music festivals that followed. However, the gathering of tens of thousands of countercultural youth in a tolerant and safe space began the germination of the rock music festival as a revolutionary social space. Monterey Pop was a transition space, reaffirming the importance of safe and tolerant countercultural spaces while clearly demonstrating the superiority of the rock music festival as this ideal space.

1968 was a relatively slow year for rock music festivals.¹⁶ The Newport Pop Festival in Costa Mesa, California, at the Orange County Fair Grounds, was the only major summer music festival that year. Although there were no widespread attacks on fencing at Newport, the lack of facilities and the \$5.50 admission fee (marked for-profit) sparked an angry denunciation in Los Angeles's rag, *The LA Free Press*.¹⁷ Reporter John Carpenter lambasted the promoters: "...all responsible for producing it [the festival] should be run out of town on a rail...All the outdoor festivals should be free."¹⁸ Elliot Mintz, who contributed to the *Free Press*, questioned how the rock music festival and its promoters could overcome their many faults in Costa Mesa. He hoped

that promoters would begin choosing rural spaces that were more fitting to the large crowds of countercultural youth who, he was certain, would become increasingly involved in rock music festivals. He argued that there must be “nothing which separates ‘us’ from ‘them’....Hopefully, next year’s festival will furnish us with the trip as well as the vision.”¹⁹ Regardless of whether many countercultural youth read this article, Mintz’s vision of the future for rock music festivals, especially his opposition to anything that ‘separates’, was eerily accurate.

The amplification of hostilities directed toward promoters moved beyond angry rhetoric within the underground press by the following summer. The two major music festivals to kick off the summer of 1969 - The Denver Pop Festival and Newport ’69 - were sites of intense physical violence including clashes with police and security guards as well as widespread attacks on fencing and barriers.²⁰

At Newport ’69, signs of trouble began early. Frustrated youth who either refused on principle or were financially unable to purchase a ticket began hurling bottles at the motorcycle gang and local police who maintained the barrier. As police responded to the provocation and attempted to clear the area, several officers removed their clubs and began indiscriminately beating the countercultural youth outside, which resulted in hundreds of injuries to both the youth and police, as well as thousands of dollars in property damage.

The coverage in the underground press was scathing. A reporter for *The LA Free Press*, one of the longest running and most influential of the underground rags, blasted Robinson for the weekend. The onslaught began with the headline: “Devonshire Downer: It wasn’t Newport, Pop, or even a festival.”²¹ Robinson’s profiteering approach, especially the “outrageous admission price - which alienated thousands,”²² was blamed for the violence and bad vibes. The reporter wrote: “The Devonshire shuck wasn’t a festival either. Festivals are supposed to be occasions for

joy, celebrations and the observance of religious rites. The only religion here, however, was that of MONEYTHEISM.”²³ A week later, *The LA Free Press* published a letter to the editor that proclaimed a similar disgust: “When are we going to realize that the people who promote these concerts are doing it for one reason only - to fill their pockets... We [must] refuse to let anyone bully us into paying that kind of money for anything.”²⁴

The Denver Pop Festival, held just a week later, witnessed similar clashes. For two nights in a row, the fences outside Mile High Stadium were attacked, scaled, and cut open, while police responded with tear gas, riot gear and beatings. Amidst the plumes of tear gas, a gust of wind changed direction, which blew the substance into the stadium, panicking those inside. The mayor eventually pled with Denver Pop’s promoters to open the gates to avoid further damage and arrests, which they eventually did.

These battles - and combative counterculture editorials directed at promoters - continued throughout the summer. An editorial written by *The Bird*’s Miller Francis Jr. addressed the ticketing at the upcoming Atlanta Pop Festival, to be held over the Fourth of July weekend. He wrote, “What cannot be doubted any longer is that the power of a free and freeing music... demands a free people in a free setting.”²⁵ A few weeks later, *The Bird* published another editorial, this time asserting, “the movement is made by and sung by people who oppose exploitation... The movement is not represented in any way by rich investors getting richer by the profits of rock festivals - even if the investors do look hip and talk hip and know hip people.”²⁶ Not only did investors look hip and talk hip, by the summer of 1969, they had successfully infused much of the countercultural rhetoric into the promotional materials for rock music festivals.

The Woodstock program included this revolutionary proclamation:

...we have realized that the revolution is more than digging rock or turning on. The revolution is about coming together in a struggle for change. It is about the destruction of a system based on bosses and competition and the building of a new community based on people and cooperation.²⁷

Revolutionary appeals by “hip” capitalists imitated revolutionary aspirations of the counterculture. This was likely shrewd marketing as well as an attempt to dampen the harsh anti-capitalist discourse that was becoming more vitriolic as the year progressed. By the time the editorial in *The Bird* was published, the confrontations outside musical festivals between countercultural youth and security guards, police and biker gangs had significantly intensified. The disgust at rock promoters’ attempts to profit off rock festivals had reached a fever pitch²⁸.

Woodstock: The Breakthrough

The story of Woodstock is well trodden. Two young “square” entrepreneurs, teamed up with two “hip” ones, acquired a large dairy farm in Bethel, New York for a weekend in mid-August 1969 to throw the biggest, baddest, and most iconic rock festival in music history. As much as fractal tapestries and the peace sign, Woodstock has become a major signifier of the 1960s counterculture, a symbolic source of authenticity for films, television and literature alike. Its presence pervades nearly every account of the decade, and thus a day-to-day account of the event is unnecessary here. The focus of this section then is to reveal new insights into the significance of Woodstock. Most importantly, the pervasiveness and intensity of optimism within the underground press immediately following Woodstock demonstrated a fierce devotion and almost militaristic dedication to ensuring the future and long-term success of the rock music festival as a potentially permanent space for the founding of a countercultural nation.

The fences come down

Woodstock Ventures, formed by Artie Kornfield and Michael Lang - the two “hip” entrepreneurs”, as well as John Roberts and Joel Rosenman - the two “squares” seeking investment opportunities, were well aware of the flare-ups that had become increasingly common at music festivals that summer. Conducting an interview with the underground press, Woodstock Ventures Inc. declared their intent on “curtail[ing] incidents between kids and police.”²⁹ The promoter’s decision to dress-down the off-duty police officers acting as security guards in colored t-shirts instead of police uniforms was likely a direct result of this consideration.³⁰ When Michael Lang was interviewed for the Woodstock documentary, he willfully revealed the cost of production at several million dollars, yet he deflected and obscured his answer when asked about the potential profit. His obfuscation to the filmmaker’s questioning reveals a discomfort, and quite likely, a realization that disclosing the enormous potential profits would be bad for countercultural business.

Woodstock Ventures Inc. pursued a similar admissions model to other festivals that summer. Day passes were sold for \$7 per day, or \$18 for the weekend. Fencing was erected around the 600-acre dairy farm to ensure ticket sales were respected. However, before music had even begun, attendance had already far outnumbered even Lang’s expectations, culminating in nearly half a million people either at the site or, having deserted their vehicles altogether in the massive traffic jam, trekking down the highway. The fencing was torn down almost immediately, and festival goers began pouring over and trampling on the dislodged chain-link barrier. Security was quickly overwhelmed and ceased any attempt to quell the crowds pouring over the flattened barriers. Woodstock’s promoters abandoned ticket sales and opened the festival free of charge, which was less an act of altruism than a realization that, with most of the fencing destroyed and

an unending mass of countercultural youth marching onto Bethel, any attempt to funnel a crowd that large through ticket checks was futile (and likely to be met with violent resistance.)

The complete and total destruction of fencing and the promoter's swift capitulation marked a significant turning point in the battle over festival grounds. For the first two and half years of rock music festivals, promoters had successfully evaded the vitriolic language directed toward them by the underground presses and violently struck down fence jumpers. Promoters and hired security had successfully held the line, maintained the barriers and excluded those without passes. However, by late 1969, many in the counterculture (which now included many of the former New Left and Yippies in its ranks) had recognized the precariousness of their revolutionary lifestyles amidst an escalating conservative backlash. Safe and tolerant spaces for congregation were becoming increasingly rare and police hostilities more pronounced. The rock music festival was, by mid-August 1969, one of only a few spaces for countercultural youth to gather peacefully. At the same time, a dense network of interconnected underground presses had vividly articulated these national developments - the rise of conservatism, widespread police harassment and festival contestations - with a countercultural spin to them, to millions of countercultural youth spread throughout the country. The attacks on fencing at Denver were reported in Austin, Texas by *The Rag*, while *The Great Speckled Bird* bemoaned the clashes at Newport '69 in Atlanta. This instantaneous reporting primed countercultural youth all over the country, a large number of who had traveled across the nation to Bethel, New York.

As countercultural reporters returned to their home presses after Woodstock, coverage emanating from underground papers was nearly universal.³¹ Writers for *The Great Speckled Bird* voyaged up the coast from Atlanta to check out the hype.

As they entered Bethel and drove past the hordes of youth, a reporter observed,

With all these people, in cars and on foot, an immediate recognition of common goal and experience was set during those first few miles; the air was filled with enthusiasm and also some sort of apprehension. A strange kind of suspense was there, as if a door had been opened and none of us knew what lay behind it.³²

Relayed through the *Berkeley Tribe*, Stephen Ponek of local radio station KSAN reported his initial perceptions,” There was an incredible spirit among the people. It was like we were the only people left; there had been a major disaster and we were starting all over again.”³³ The *Ann Arbor Argus* began referring to themselves as “A Product of Woodstock Nation.”³⁴

Abbie Hoffman, who would become famous within Woodstock folklore for supposedly blackmailing the promoters for \$10,000 in exchange for a promise not to taint the water supply with LSD, as well as for being struck by Pete Townshend on stage, coined the term “Woodstock Nation” in his talk-rock album of the same name that following fall. The text, which is a meandering account of the 1960s counterculture, traces the eclectic ideology that the counterculture had articulated for nearly a decade. These revolutionary principles had been ingested through the writings of Ginsberg and the Beats, scribed in underground newspapers, embodied through Gentle Thursdays and human be-ins and realized at Monterey, Denver, Newport and Atlanta. Woodstock, to many in the counterculture who wrote about it in the afterglow, was the apex of these ideals. It was the biggest, realest, most *tangible* victory yet, a space large enough to nurture as many of the nation’s countercultural community who could traverse the congested roads. Most importantly, the festival was free and open to all. After Woodstock, fixing society-at-large was no longer an essential marker of victory--their own countercultural nation, manifested at periodic rock music festivals, would suffice.³⁵

The Arduous Task of Nation Building

Basking in the afterglow of Woodstock and antsy about rumors of a free rock festival to be headlined by The Rolling Stones in San Francisco that December, the underground press drastically amplified its revolutionary rhetoric surrounding the rock music festival. In an issue released in late September 1969, *The Bird* proclaimed: “The pop festival season itself did more to destroy the capitalist machine which sought to exploit the youth ‘market’ than any organized opposition could have done... Woodstock proved that there are no fences high enough to separate the affluent from those unable or unwilling to produce dollars and cents.”³⁶ Although the wholesale destruction of fencing by a massive force of countercultural youth eliminated admission barriers at Woodstock, the battle between promoters’ attempts to turn a profit and the counterculture resistance to them was not over.

A late August issue of the *NOLA Express*, the underground paper published in New Orleans, featured a graphic of wire cutters snipping a fence above the words “WIRE CUTTING SALE” in off-set lettering (resembling letters that had been cut.) This encouragement of fence destruction was featured in the issue published a few days before the New Orleans Pop Festival on Labor Day Weekend 1969, only a week after Woodstock fences had been destroyed. The corresponding article - a brief summarization of capitalist profiteering by “hip” entrepreneurs - attempted to forcefully resolve the conflict between enterprising capitalists and the counterculture by proclaiming: “If money gets in the way, we’ll tear it up. If fences get in the way, we’ll tear them down.”³⁷ Below the quoted text was a brief tutorial written by Zero Buck in which he detailed the many ways a fence can be torn down, scaled, or cut open.³⁸ A local hardware store ran an ad embedded in the lower right hand corner of the page, which offered wire cutters on sale.

The promise of a revolutionary countercultural space, free of admission, seemed increasingly likely and worth fighting for.

In October, several prominent figures within the counterculture and festival scene, including Ken Kesey and Woodstock promoter Michael Lang, gathered in New Mexico for a so-called “Symposium.” Robert Santelli, author of *Aquarius Rising: The Rock Festival Years*, claims that, with the explosive popularity of summer music festivals, and fresh off Woodstock, those gathered sought an answer to the burning question within the counterculture: “What Comes After Woodstock?” Santelli writes, “The group was unanimous in its feeling that the rock festival was a potent force in the continuation of the counterculture and should be used to further advocate alternative life-styles, aside from presenting the newest sounds in rock music.”³⁹ These gathered individuals, as well as hundreds of thousands of countercultural youth spread throughout the country, were eager to bring the Nation back together once again.

Altamont & Institutionalization

The Rolling Stones had been touring throughout the fall of 1969. Beset by criticisms that their hefty ticket prices excluded many of their fans, but perhaps also by the growing anti-commercialism tied to rock music and festivals where it was performed, the British rock group agreed to perform at a free festival at Golden Gate Park in early December. The event was eventually moved twice, finally finding a home at the Altamont Speedway, nearly an hour east of San Francisco, partially because of its ability to fit several hundred thousand festival-goers on its grounds. The show was scheduled for Saturday, December 6, 1969. By Friday afternoon, December 5th, tens of thousands had already arrived.⁴⁰

Famously depicted in the documentary *Gimme Shelter*, the Altamont Free Festival was a series of missteps, misunderstandings and flagrant incompetency by The Rolling Stones manager

Sam Cutler, the owner of Altamont, local police, the Hells Angels and the festival goers themselves. Altamont is the most widely covered festival of the period with the exception of Woodstock; however, as Woodstock became legendary as a spectacle of peaceful assembly, Altamont is equally notorious for its violence. A brief survey of the titles dedicated to the subject reveal what most historians and writers retrieved from that December weekend: *Altamont: The Rolling Stones, the Hells Angels, and the Inside Story of Rock's Darkest Day*; *Let it Bleed: The Rolling Stones, Altamont, and the End of the Sixties*; and *Altamont: Death of Innocence in the Woodstock Nation*. These titles, though sensational, are misleading. Although the event was a complete failure by any metric, the proclamations that it was the end of '60s idealism or the death of innocence for Woodstock Nation is inaccurate and hyperbolic. Whether it was disregard for the seriousness of the countercultural mission to realize Woodstock Nation, or the sensationalism of a motorcycle gang killing a countercultural kid ripped on methamphetamine, Altamont has been consistently mischaracterized as the catastrophic obliteration of the rock music festival format and the end of countercultural idealism.⁴¹

Most writers for the underground press, however, chalked up Altamont as an unfortunate and poorly executed music festival that was a blip in an otherwise positive and growing movement. A writer for the *Rag* wrote, "Anyway, it was just something to get 300,000 people together - free....There will be more. And more and more.....Someday the celebration grounds will become the living grounds, the homeland of a new people."⁴² Optimism about the successful realization of Woodstock Nation - the grounds of musical festivals as the birthplace of a new countercultural nation - remained strong after Altamont.

A full page spread in *The Great Speckled Bird* reflected that Woodstock and Altamont "relate to each other like Yin and Yang, the bright and dark sides of the same coin...much of

value can be learned from the experience of Altamont.”⁴³ A reporter from *The Tribe* argued, “The job of cleaning up Altamont, or America, is still up for grabs. America wallows in the hope that someone, somewhere, can set it straight.”⁴⁴

Many underground rags recognized the weekend as a disaster and there were numerous, legitimate arguments in favor of this interpretation. But amidst the recounting of violence, there was a persistent hopeful theme, a belief that the movement would recover and continue with strength.

In fact, throughout the first few months of 1970, the underground press began publishing editorials that outlined *more* elaborate visions of Woodstock Nation. Some of these argued for the creation of a space akin to a permanent festival, while others sought to expand beyond the music festival into something resembling an actual administrative state.

An article by Steve Haines in *The Rag*, published two days after Altamont, imagined a reoccurring series of music festivals held on land that the counterculture would collectively purchase. By owning the land, they could throw music festivals free of charge, absent of profiteers and police. This space would be called “Earth People’s Park” and the music festival would be the means by which the counterculture would gather and began the arduous process of nation building.

Haines proclaimed:

Once we have the first festival, we would continue - say at the rate of one a month...They would be the classrooms and laboratories for discovering and learning all of the new skills necessary to build a new nation...We could use this first festival as a platform to declare the existence of our new nation.⁴⁵

The writer continued, arguing that Earth People’s Park would not be “to drop out but to come together, to join together-in the spirit of People’s Park-in the spirit of Woodstock - to build a new

nation.”⁴⁶ Other approaches were preoccupied with administrative matters and issues that would inevitably arise within the new nation. A “Dear Abbie” letter from a *NOLA Express* publication in mid-January 1970 contains serious musings about symbols and the administration of Woodstock Nation: What colors should the flag be? How do we administer currency, issue passports, and collect taxes? Garner recognition from other countries such as Cuba, China, North Vietnam, and apply to the United Nations?

Abbie Hoffman penned an open letter to Attorney General John Mitchell with a list of demands, the second of which called for the elimination of police “occupation” of countercultural friendly cities such as Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Haight Ashbury and the Boston Common, among numerous others. To support this claim, Hoffman argued that Bethel had already been freed, and would serve as the capitol of Woodstock Nation.

These writings illuminate a growing current and realization within the counterculture that the political, economic, and social life within their communities was increasingly unlikely to change fundamentally. Police hostilities towards countercultural youth, including stricter drug enforcement (John Sinclair had just been sentenced to 10 years for possession of two joints) offered little hope for the countercultural mission to succeed nationally (or even sustain itself locally). Mayor Allen of Atlanta openly boasted “We arrest them [countercultural youth] by the hundreds for the slightest infraction of the law. The police surveillance out there is two or three times what it is in the balance of the city.” Back-to-the-land movements, including a proliferation of rural communes, offered a potential opportunity for building Woodstock Nation away from this police oppression and surveillance out in the sticks. However, rural communes never grew to a fraction of the size of the crowds that turned out to Atlanta Pop, Newport ’69, Woodstock or Altamont.

A countercultural investment in rock music festivals as a space for manifesting the countercultural nation survived past Altamont; however a successful reunion of Woodstock Nation would only convene once more. This festival, which has largely been overshadowed by Woodstock and Altamont, was nonetheless the closest realization of Woodstock Nation after Bethel. The Second Atlanta Pop Festival, held on the Fourth of July weekend in 1970, would prove to be the last of these massive gatherings, the final reunion of Woodstock Nation and the last battleground of the counterculture and “hip” entrepreneurs on the grounds of rock music festivals.

The Last Gasp

On the morning of July 2nd, 1970, the population of Byron, located ninety-three miles southeast of Atlanta, was just slightly over thirteen hundred residents. The home of Middle Georgia Raceway and an annual NASCAR race throughout the 1960s, Byron was an otherwise sparsely populated, quiet Georgia town shaded by groves of pecan trees. However, less than twenty-four hours later, Byron would temporarily balloon to one of the largest cities in Georgia as its population exploded, growing by more than two hundred thousand people over the course of the holiday weekend (according to the most conservative estimates - some gauge the growth as high as six hundred thousand). Unbeknownst to many of Byron’s residents that July morning, hundreds of thousands of hippies, freaks and the countercultural citizens of Woodstock Nation were caravaning from across the country, barreling down the I-75 interstate to converge on the small town for three days of counter-cultural nation building. Woodstock Nation would meet again.

Although Byron’s residents may not have been prepared for the onslaught, the local underground newspaper certainly was. In an editorial from June 8th, less than a month before the 2nd Atlanta Pop Festival, *The Great Speckled Bird* ended their promotion for the festival with, “See you there, Woodstock Nation!”⁴⁷ *Bird* also released a “how-to-guide” for Byron, including

information for navigating the camping area and the OD tents (they're staffed by freaks!) In the spirit of Woodstock Nation and following a long line of attacking "hip" entrepreneurs, the underground paper found space to chastise event promoters for charging admission: "somebody evidently didn't learn the lesson of Woodstock that all stages are free."⁴⁸

Construction on the festival began nearly a month in advance. Wet Willie, a southern rock band out of Mobile, Alabama played for the crew, mostly out of Memphis, as they erected an eight-foot fence around the perimeter of the grounds and assembled the main stage. A free stage was constructed in the camping grounds nearby to showcase local artists and provide entertainment for those without tickets, which unsurprisingly aroused skepticism within the underground press. *The Bird* proclaimed, with a dash of prophecy thrown in at the end:

The idea behind the Free Stage is a bad one based on the good intentions of the festival promoters. They want to distinguish between those who come with tickets and those who can't pay... What we think will happen eventually is that THE PEOPLE will let the promoters know what they think of this class system and will take matters into their own hands.⁴⁹

The PEOPLE certainly did. 2nd Atlanta Pop, like Denver, Newport and Woodstock, was originally a ticketed affair - \$14 for a three-day pass. However, Woodstock Nation had learned a valuable lesson over the years and the throng of people at the gates chanting "Free!" was much larger than the promoters had expected, which ultimately ended any hopes of getting a tight control on those with tickets and those without. The gates were thrown open, and the festival became free to anyone able to traverse the congested roads south of Atlanta.

Overall, the atmosphere of Woodstock and 2nd Atlanta Pop were remarkably similar: long lines of cars bogged down local roadways, nudity was pervasive, drug use rampant (vendors openly sold STP, LSD, Mescaline and other drugs), and OD tents staffed by the counterculture themselves. Similar musical acts graced both festivals, though local fare provided a distinct

Georgian flavor to the mix, such as the Allman Brothers, whose countercultural currency would skyrocket after 2nd Atlanta. Jimi Hendrix's midnight performance of the Star-Spangled Banner under a night sky full of 4th of July fireworks (an act he performed at Woodstock as well) became one of the more memorable performances of the weekend.

Instead of torrential rain (though there was some of that), blistering heat blessed the festival with uniquely oppressive conditions, which, like Woodstock's rain, infuses nearly every written account of the weekend. At one point, a fire truck drove onto the grounds, opened its hoses and provided temporary relief from the scorching Georgia sun. A lake nearby served as a watering hole for cooling off and salt tablets were widely distributed to replenish the sweaty crowd. Cooley and his partners, though naive toward the resistance to admission fees, were otherwise much better prepared to deal with summer conditions than his counterparts at Woodstock the year before.

The concentration of festivalgoers was also similar. Although attendance figures are difficult to pinpoint once ticket sales and enforcement were abandoned, the 2nd Atlanta Pop Festival most likely had slightly fewer attendees. However, the space at Middle Georgia Raceway was almost a fifth the size as the Woodstock dairy farm, which caused much closer proximity between members of the Woodstock Nation.

The local reaction was relatively neutral. Local police maintained a loose quarantine of the area, hesitant to enforce Georgia's laws for petty misdemeanors in fear of provoking a widespread riot. A few Byron residents and others (who were referred to as "rednecks" by the festivalgoers) stopped to witness the nude bathers in the local lake, which beyond further exacerbating the traffic jam along the highway, didn't seem to bother the skinny-dippers.

Governor Maddox was less pleased. When news of the festival arrived in Atlanta, which relayed reports about the expression of countercultural values in plain sight of Byron's upstanding citizens, notably the skinny-dipping and flagrant marijuana smoking, he was outraged. A local paper quoted Maddox, "You would expect something like this going on in the jungle but not in civilized America."⁵⁰ His distaste for the behavior of the festival's attendees would fuel his attempts to stop another gathering of this sort in the future.

The festival ended early Monday morning on July 6th. With the exception of some bunk STP and a few bad trips, heat exhaustion and dehydration, the festival was largely a success. A woman from Washington State named Margarita reflected on her experience:

The energy was fantastic, folks were bathing in the creek, drugs were flowing and faces were smiling...everyone was sharing their goods and there was so much loving energy and togetherness everywhere. The music was great, but secondary to the energy amongst the people.⁵¹

For many attendees who had missed Woodstock and earlier festivals, this was their first experience with a large countercultural gathering and their stories reflect an extremely positive experience. For others, it was an ongoing movement, one of many gatherings in which Woodstock Nation had taken form.

In the first edition of *The Great Speckled Bird* released after Byron, the leading story on the festival was titled "What Beast Is This." The opening paragraph is worth quoting at length:

Let us celebrate the triumph of Byron. WE DID A THING! To understand its nature and its impact, we must see the Atlanta Pop Festival *not* as a 'music extravaganza', nor simply as an occasion to all the dope we wanted in total freedom, a chance to get naked, but - and this is absolutely basic - as a people's assembly in, of, and for Woodstock Nation, population in the millions, of whom several hundred thousand were gathered at Byron, Georgia.⁵²

The editorial, written by Greg (his surname is omitted) is an orgasmic rendering of the weekend, part journalistic reporting, part political manifesto, and part diary. His rhetoric reaffirms the commitment to Woodstock Nation, a sign of Byron's success.

He wrote:

And more than by mere numbers of people...we are measured by our *consciousness*, by our commitment, by our dedication to the establishment of new life in the rotten gut of Babylon/monster/ Amerika. It is in that way, with that understanding, that it makes sense to speak of Byron as a triumph.⁵³

The last paragraph of the editorial reflects persistent hope and commitment to the creation of Woodstock Nation after 2nd Atlanta Pop.

Greg was optimistic:

At our exit, I held my hat out the window, waving to a carload of freaks movin [sic] on up the road. Sad that for us the festival had ended; but joyous in the bonds that link my family with literally hundreds of thousands of other families from coast to coast—we sleep "free" in Vermont, California, Oregon, Georgia, every state in the Union, under the freak [sic] flag of Woodstock Nation.⁵⁴

Woodstock Nation had successfully pulled off a sequel. After Altamont and a relatively slow year for music festivals, especially after the cancellation of the Wild West Festival, 2nd Atlanta Pop Festival was a shot in the arm for those in Woodstock Nation who dreamed that a massive countercultural gathering would happen again. For many, however, 2nd Atlanta Pop was more than just Woodstock Two. For Greg, and many other freaks, hippies, countercultural youth who just plainly didn't fit in growing up in the Deep South, the act of expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo was much riskier. Far away from progressive strongholds such as Ann Arbor, Madison, and Berkley, the counterculture in the Deep South was far outnumbered by those who

felt less sympathetic to the ideals of Woodstock Nation.⁵⁵ This gathering was a significant moment of solidarity between the nation's counterculture, especially for those in less hospitable areas of the country. It was also the first rock music festival of the South to witness full scale and successful resistance to exclusionary fencing, forcefully reiterating the countercultural principle of Woodstock Nation that rock music festivals were a space of inclusion and revolutionary nation-building, free of charge.

Conclusion: Beyond Atlanta

Near the end of *Woodstock Nation*, Hoffman reflected on the struggles ahead:

The hope is that PIG NATION cannot endorse what happened up in WOOD STOCK NATION...That it will continue thinking it was a festival in the making and not the building of a Nation. Can Amerika absorb smoke-ins, fuck-ins, liberated zones, what have you, inside its borders?? I don't think soooo. That's an opinion and not a prediction. No politician can support what went on there, no WOODSTOCK NATION delegate could possibly win a seat in the mother-country Senate or even House for that matter.⁵⁶

Hoffman's prediction, much to his dismay, was spot on. America couldn't (or at least wouldn't) absorb the building of an alternative nation within its border, especially one consisting of hippies, freaks and the counterculture. Representative of a political and cultural backlash swelling throughout the nation, there was never a Third Atlanta Pop Festival (or a second Altamont, or 2nd Denver Pop). Georgia Governor Lester Maddox, furious at the boldness at which the counterculture ingested drugs and practiced nudity, ensured legislative action prevented their return. The Georgia State Legislature passed a series of ordinances that made it prohibitively expensive to host another festival. Promoters were required to post a million-dollar bond (which most could not afford), were subject to a five-dollar fee for every attendant beyond the estimated account (which was often several hundred thousand more than the estimate), granted the health department veto power over permitting if facilities did not meet satisfactory standards, and perhaps

most gravely, granted the governor authority to implement martial law in the case of lawlessness. Other states that had hosted major rock music festivals instituted similar restrictions.

Not only did a Third Atlanta Pop Festival never happen, but rock festivals in general began a slow and steady decline. By the end of the decade, few festivals remained. In 1979, on the ten-year anniversary of Woodstock, promoters from the original festival began scouring land in upstate New York for a location suitable to hold a reunion of the most famous rock festival in history. They could not find a landowner to lease their property.

The album of live recordings from 2nd Atlanta Pop prophesied this end as well: “As far as can be seen, the Age of the Rock Festival is dead. State governmental restrictions, local ordinances and a general sense of apathy have led to its demise.”⁵⁷ *The Great Speckled Bird* ran a serialized novel, which was modeled after a real account of an attempt to organize a rock festival in 1974. The title of the proposed festival was, “The Last Rock Festival.” Santinelli, whose book was published in 1980, had a similar prognosis. He writes, “Let’s face it, rock festivals perished along with other by-products of the sixties in the maturing process of the Woodstock generation. The festival idea is permanently tucked away somewhere in a rock ‘n’ roll graveyard.”⁵⁸ Along with local ordinances and state regulation, the baby boomer generation - who made up the core of the counterculture - moved on. The rise of disco and club culture, with a corresponding proliferation and popularization of speed and cocaine - drugs that fostered less of a cosmic connectedness and ego loss and more of an individualized, ego boosting effect- may also be partly responsible.

Sociologist Anthony D. Smith argues that a gauge of nationalist strength involves accounting for, “intensity, duration, extent, force, and clarity.” How did counterculture nation

building fare in this respect? In terms of intensity, force, and clarity, the counterculture articulated a passionate and lucid vision for a revolutionary social order (inaugurated under the common banner of Woodstock Nation after August 1969) built upon countercultural values. The extent of this countercultural nationalism was impressive. The countercultural nation, lacking geographical permanence or claims to large swaths of land, manifested itself at rock music festivals with citizenship in the hundreds of thousands (with arguably several million nationwide.)

Duration, however, is where the strength of countercultural nationalism failed. The proliferation and demise of the rock music festival as the ideal space to realize countercultural nationalism was swift. In the years after Byron, most of the counterculture either assimilated into the mainstream, moved onto rural communes, joined co-ops, or found other means to integrate their countercultural identity within “straight” political, social and economic life.

Whether the counterculture could institutionalize the rock music festival as a permanent space for the realization of a countercultural nation is highly suspect. The musical acts who played these shows demanded enormous fees, and there is no indication that many (or frankly, any) were willing to play for free, especially those acts who drew such enormous crowds. The rock music festival may have simply been the best compromise for countercultural goals - a less drastic and impermanent retreat from urban living that did not involve the commitment of moving to a rural commune, yet offered a temporary space for sustaining the countercultural vision of a more progressive and tolerant future.

As aforementioned, by the summer of 1969, it was becoming increasingly difficult to charge admission to rock music festivals. Without the proceeds from *Woodstock* the documentary, the promoters of that event would have lost millions. Alex Cooley never recouped the millions of dollars he had invested in 2nd Atlanta. This hesitation by promoters was exacerbated by

state legislatures, governors and local authorities who burdened promoters with an array of regulations, all of which made profiting from festivals even more precarious. Although rock music festivals brought together countercultural youth in quantities that rival the largest gatherings in American history, regulations and the successful resistance to barrier fencing and admission fees discouraged promoters from investing in them.

However, by the mid 1990s through the 2000s, the massive music festival had re-emerged. Entertainment companies and promoters no longer doubted the profitability of organizing festivals; they had discovered a formula to turn these gatherings into enormously profitable ventures.

Notes

¹ Miller Francis Jr, "Woodstock." *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA), Sept. 1, 1969.

² In the final years of the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between Yippies, politicians, the New Left, and the counterculture. Abbie Hoffman, the most famous of the Yippies, moved fluidly within and throughout these circles and a large faction of the New Left had broken ranks due to their insistence on embracing revolutionary lifestyles as a political act. Thus, a revolutionary social order was revolutionary in the sense that hundreds of thousands of individuals, who had crafted and formed their individual lives as revolutionary, were gathered in solidarity. Paul Rossinow, who penned an essay in *Imagine Nation*, writes, "In the late 1960s, New Left radicals chose to pursue their own countercultural activities as a means of attracting and maintaining members and as a way of fomenting social change in America. We can think of these activities as constituting a second counterculture, separate from the one built by the hippies, or we may view them as forming the left wing of a larger white youth counterculture." (100) This separation of the counterculture into two phases, the one that was strictly *apolitical* in contrast to the highly politicized New Left, to the second phase, that consisted of a merging of political-hippies (Yippies) and the New Left adopting countercultural values, notably experimentation with psychedelic drugs and an embrace of a countercultural "the personal is political." This second phase is the counterculture to which I refer.

³ Two other major forms of gathering - rural communes and protest marches - were sites of countercultural togetherness, yet neither matched the size, scale, and scope of the rock music festival. In contrast to a more permanent retreat in the form of rural communes - which were popping up throughout the countryside as a viable long-term alternative to urban living but which never concentrated more than a few hundred countercultural youth at a time - rock music festivals brought together countercultural crowds, albeit temporarily, that rivaled some of the largest cities in the country (Woodstock's attendance was nearly identical to Atlanta's population in 1970.)

Protest marches were the only other gathering of comparable size that included a significant countercultural presence. On the one hand, festivals were generally a three or four-day experience, involving camping, art vending and numerous other forms of socialization beyond the musical performances. They also included widespread expressions of countercultural values such as the ingestion of psychedelics, nudity and sexual experimentation with strangers. Protest marches, on the other hand, were not self-contained temporary communities, and thus were both much more susceptible to violence. Marching in cities was also not conducive to countercultural expressions, many of which were illegal and carried strict fines or prison sentences. Because of this confluence of factors, festival spaces resonated visions of a revolutionary new social order absent from protests - which were largely demonstrations and expressions of opposition. Also, protests were more heterogeneous - African-American civil rights protesters and former veterans against the war, for example - many of which didn't necessarily share the lifestyle choices of the counterculture.

⁴ As noted above, the counterculture is notoriously difficult to define. One of the best articulations I have found is by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle in their chapter "Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s" included in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*. They defined the counterculture as an "inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, "lifestyles," ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negations and affirmations. These roles were played by people who defined themselves first by what they were not, and then, only after having cleared that essential ground of identity, began to conceive anew what they were. What they were was what they might become - more a process than a product, and thus more a direction or a motion than a movement." (10)

⁵ When I use the term "freak", I mean it with endearment. Many in the counterculture, both within the underground press, in the documentaries of music festivals at the time, and elsewhere use the term self-referentially, proud of the label as a moniker for living their values.

⁶ Obviously not everyone who attended rock music festivals self-identified as countercultural. There were many who came to see a lineup of musical artists. However, the countercultural presence at these festivals was enormous, and thus their overwhelming presence within these spaces was what bestowed rock music festivals with this revolutionary vision. This massive convergence of countercultural youth within a safe and tolerant space that was largely free of police or authoritative harassment endowed the rock music festival with a nearly divine stature, occasionally bestowing festival grounds with the moniker "the garden." Referencing a biblical time of peacefulness and inclusivity, free of hierarchy, exploitation, and war, the rock music festival became a sort of "countercultural eden." A reporter for the Ann Arbor Argus referred to the festivalgoers at Woodstock as "Israelites."

⁷These conflicts were articulated most visibly within the pages of the nation's underground press, which emerged mostly on college campuses with at least a modicum of countercultural presence in the mid to late 1960s. Although they varied slightly by locale - either leaning more towards SDS and New Left politics or toward counterculture life-style content - the major underground presses of the time blended both politics and (counter) culture. As the decade progressed and clashes at rock music festivals became more violent, the underground press published more columns and editorials attacking promoters and profiteers, while simultaneously extolling the revolutionary potential of the rock music festival.

⁸ There are other factors potentially responsible. These include a rise in club culture, a further splintering of leftist youth, the popularity of certain drugs, etc.

⁹ By nation-building, I refer to both a physical, bordered, geographical space that delineates one grouping of people from another and a "nation" in terms of a bounded citizenship based upon shared political goals, values, language, etc. What differentiated countercultural nation-building from other movements at the time is the lack of racial homogeneity as a core guiding principle. Although this countercultural nation was overwhelmingly white, there was never a racial requirement (at least not one that was articulated within the underground press (or any other publication I have read).

¹⁰ Historians Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle argue, "The hippies' adoption of virtual poverty... was often regarded as cruel mockery by the black, Hispanic, and immigrant residents... who dreamed of attaining entry into the very material world the hippie children had casually - and provisionally - repudiated."

¹¹ Many did, however, romanticize a vague, aggregate image of Native Americans. These included a supposed more intimate connection to nature and the American landscape. See *Hippies, Indians and the Fight For Red Power*. Several other possibilities potentially illuminate why these sites remained so racially homogenous. First, the systematic segregation instituted by federal housing policies and suburban homeowner's associations ensured that the majority of black Americans resided within inner cities and depended on public transportation for mobility. Access to many of these festival spaces, such as Woodstock, Altamont, and 2nd Atlanta - all held in rural areas - were likely unreachable by many black youth who otherwise would have attended. Secondly, musical acts that performed at the majority of these festivals were overwhelmingly white. Also, as the decade progressed, many political white radicals - members of the New Left, SDS, and the Yippies - increasingly joined ranks with the counterculture, refocusing their political energies toward inward revolution.

¹² Doug Rosinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 262.

¹³ Ibid 263

¹⁴ *The Barb*.

¹⁵ A fiftieth anniversary of the Monterey Pop is planned for this summer, 2017.

¹⁶ Perhaps the looming presidential election between Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, the burgeoning antiwar demonstrations, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy as well as the clashes in Chicago may have exhausted, or rather, refocused, the energies of the counterculture that year; regardless, 1968 was the trough of the rock music festival wave that would crest the following year. It also possible that these upheavals are partially responsible for the massive growth and attendance at rock music festivals in 1969.

¹⁷ After criticizing the lack of shade and overall poor conditions that had required a ticket to experience, reporter John Carpenter wrote, "These pop exploiters have shown us the light of their true love. It's green, it burns, and it crawls on its belly like a reptile." An anonymous police officer friendly to the counterculture wrote to Carpenter that the scene at Newport was "No doubt... just another case of greedy, thoughtless men using the names of talented groups to take advantage of the youth."

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Elliot Mintz, "Pop Goes the Newport Scene," Los Angeles Free Press (Los Angeles, CA), Aug. 9, 1968. p.17

²⁰ Both of these festivals were promoted and organized as for-profit ventures as the cascade of rock music festivals continued, and for the most part, were successful at selling tickets and limiting admission to those who had purchased them beforehand. Yet, the increasingly fierce condemnations directed towards profiteering within the underground press inspired thousands of countercultural youth to assault, climb over and tear down fencing, fight with police and refuse to pay admission at both of these festivals. The outcome of these skirmishes was somewhat of a compromise - paid admission maintained for most, free entrance allotted to few. Newport '69 and Denver Pop starkly revealed the growing momentum and potency of this anti-commercialism.

²¹ Paul Cabbell and Jerry Applebaum, "Devonshire Downer, It wasn't Newport, Pop, or even a festival," *The Los*

Angeles Free Press (Los Angeles, CA), Jun. 7, 1969.

²² Ibid 14

²³ Ibid 14

²⁴ Susan Bowers, "Cash for Gash." *The Los Angeles Free Press* (Los Angeles, CA), Jul. 4, 1969.

²⁵ Miller Francis Jr., "Atlanta International Pop Festival," *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA) Jun. 30, 1969.

p.10

²⁶ Mark Kramer "Woodstock - - 3 days of peace??" *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA), Jul. 28, 1969 p.17

²⁷ Paul Williams, quoting I Ching, Woodstock Pop Festival Program. *Great Speckled Bird*, September 1, 1969

²⁸ Not all rock promoters were greedy capitalists with cold, calculated aspirations for ripping off the counterculture for personal gain. Perhaps one of the most complex relationships is between Michael Lang and Artie Kornfield one on hand, and the two straight entrepreneurs on the other. Near the end of the Woodstock documentary, Lang and Kornfield are interviewed during the festival about the loss of revenue. These two promoters, who were not the primary financial benefactors of the weekend, glowed with inspiration at the turn out and good vibes and seemed to care very little about the financial hit.

²⁹ Kramer, 7.

³⁰ Who were eventually replaced by a hodgepodge of laborers once the officers were warned by their home departments not to participate as private security.

³¹ However, while the underground press rendered these scenes bathed in revolutionary rhetoric, local government and the mainstream press offered a vastly different account. The governor, Nelson Rockefeller, nearly declared the site a disaster area, and coverage in the *New York Times* was dismissive at best. The *Times* published an editorial entitled "Nightmare in the Catskills" and issued a follow-up article, which declared, "By adult standards, the occasion was clearly a disaster." However, the underground press, written by the counterculture itself, considered the unorganized and haphazard gathering not in terms of disaster and destruction, but as the manifestation of their revolutionary vision - a community of cooperation, tolerance, and inclusivity. Hundreds of thousands of youth who had rejected "straight" careers and materialistic fulfillments, strict sexual mores, and drug prohibition had converged in their greatest number and free of charge.

³² Miller Francis Jr., "Woodstock," Sept. 1, 1969 p.12

³³ Nixon, "Woodstock: The Wild East," *Berkeley Tribe* (Berkeley, CA), Aug. 22-28, 1969 p.5

³⁴ *Ann Arbor Argus*

³⁵ *The Great Speckled Bird* defined the countercultural-nation for its readers this way: "If the idea of us as a "nation" seems, at first, far- fetched, it's because nations are traditionally defined in terms of contiguous territory with continuous borders. Ours is not-yet. We hold title to no territory, we *control* no geographic space in Amerika; we live and evolve in significant but very small and widely scattered aggregations of spaces-10th Street Atlanta, Lower East Side, Bay Area, the Commons in Boston. And we are more than this, we have residents of *consciousness* who can be found in every city, town, hamlet, and countryside from coast to coast. *The Rag* concurred: "For the first time in our history there were enough of us in one place to get a feeling of just how big we are and how beautiful we can be...A community - several communities - were born, if only for three days, and the people got it together...Woodstock was right. It was the people coming together in a festival to celebrate our lifestyle."

³⁶ Miller Francis Jr., "Our Park," *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA) Sept. 22, 1969. p. 13

³⁷ Marvin Garson, "Sell Soul Cell Sole." *NOLA EXPRESS* (New Orleans, LA), Aug. 29, 1969, p.3

³⁸ These tactics included searching for weak spots in the barb wire, a recommendation to cut in the dark to avoid detection, and to hide the openings so that others may access it as well.

³⁹ Robert Sanintelli, *Aquarius Rising: The Rock Festival Years* (New York: Delacorte Press 1980), p. 151

⁴⁰ Many of those involved, including the Stone's lawyer who was responsible for coordinating between the owner of Altamont and the rock band, were shocked by the enormity of festival-goers converging onto Altamont. Upon the lawyer's astonishment that tens of thousands had already arrived from as far as New York, an associate chimed in: "You have no idea what goes on here, it's an amazing phenomenon," and, revealing his ignorance at the seriousness of the movement by quoting similar rhetoric from an article in the *New York Times*, claimed, "it's like the lemmings of the sea."

⁴¹ Hunter was one of the few black festival-goers who attended Altamont, and his stabbing by the all-white Angels begs the question over whether this murder was racially motivated. Hunter did draw a pistol on the Angels, who were already beating the crowd more and more violently with each clash.

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- ⁴² the preacher boy - - & the virgin mary, "Million Dollar Bash," *The Rag*, Dec. 15, 1969, p. 15
- ⁴³ "quotations from Altamont." *Great Speckled Bird*. January 19, 1970, p.12.
- ⁴⁴ George Paul Csicsery, "STONES CONCERT ENDS IT: AMERICA NOW UP FOR GRABS," *Berkeley Tribe* (Berkeley, CA), Dec. 12-19, 1969, p.5
- ⁴⁵ Haines p.13
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 13
- ⁴⁷ Charlie Cushing, "Pop," *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA) Jun. 8, 1970. p.7
- ⁴⁸ That someone was Alex Cooley. Although he and his partners who organized and promoted the 2nd Atlanta Pop Festival were well aware of the founding tenets of Woodstock Nation, they severely underestimated its anti-capitalist ethos. Undersigned by Cooley himself, the program for 2nd Atlanta Pop included several pages of graphics and short phrases, proclaiming the countercultural virtues of rock festivals. These phrases included, "Festival can be beautiful... sharing-communicating-feeling. It is what we *are*." On a separate page, twenty short sayings were embedded within a drawing of the Sun, under the title, "A music festival." Designed to read each group of words with the preface "A music festival", the phrases proclaim a cosmic, utopian togetherness. Some of the more notable examples include: A music festival is "spontaneous joy shared together", "is as serious as the universe and the life it sustains", "identifies with the infinite", "is an earthly garden of life nourished by sound and light", "is a format for consciousness we all must soon share", "is a changing prototype of an alternative to the self destructive quality of materialistic culture" and perhaps most hopeful, "is a first step in a universal action out in the open bringing us back to mother earth, our roots, our bodies, the flowers, the sun, fun, food and all that we are." While several of these proclamations are absurdly vague and clearly written by someone outside the counterculture (Cooley) attempting to market to it, Cooley did recognize, as did Lang and his partners of Woodstock Ventures, the palatability of music festivals as ground zero for the "prototype" of an "alternative" countercultural nation. He just didn't realize the Nation would be so unwilling to pay for it.
- ⁴⁹ "Pop Festival," *The Great Speckled Bird*, (Atlanta, GA) Jul. 6, 1970.
- ⁵⁰ "Pop Festival 'Turns on' 200,000."
- ⁵¹ Margarita, *Messy Optics*
- ⁵² Greg, "What Beast is This," *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA) Jul. 13, 1970.
- ⁵³ *Ibid* 2
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid* 3
- ⁵⁵ A young freak from Macon, Georgia (twenty miles from Byron) wrote a letter to the editor of *The Great Speckled Bird* during the Woodstock honeymoon period. He wrote, "Dear Bird, Since we read your paper and notice there is nothing said about Macon we thought we would write you a letter and tell you what kind of shit is going on here. Five of us were walking down the main drag the other night calmly minding our own business. Soon, a car full of rednecks began harassing us, obviously in disagreement with our looks and dress. The car stopped, they got out, and one of the gang began making a pass at one of the girls in our group. One of us told him to leave her alone and then had the shit beat out of him by the redneck while the other rednecks threatened our group. Passers-by and John Doe citizens stood around and watched. The whole incident took place about two blocks from City Hall. If ever any of you beautiful people are in Macon, stay off the streets at night because the rednecks are out to get us." (p.4)
- ⁵⁶ Abbie Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) p.97
- ⁵⁷ Santinelli 260
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid* 260

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