UNIVERSITATEA “OVIDIUS” DIN CONSTANȚA

ŞCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE ŞTIINŢE UMANISTE

DOMENIUL DE DOCTORAT: FILOLOGIE

PhD. THESIS

SUMMARY

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CONSTANŢA

2021

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CORPORATE CULTURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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CONSTANȚA

2021

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Key Words: Corporate culture, long 1950s, power elite, military-industrial complex, beat generation

SUMMARY

At the time on which this dissertation focuses, the post-World War Two age in American culture, on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, as part of the ideological confrontation between the free world and the totalitarian world, the word "culture" was meant to be apolitical. One of the books on which what follows depends is Giles Scott-Smith's *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-War American Hegemony*. Scott-Smith's volume, while focusing on what will be called here "the long 1950s," dispels the myth of a disinterested form of artistic and intellectual pursuit. Culture has always been political, even if its promoters were sometimes unaware of it, such as the elite intellectuals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, as it will be shown in Chapter 1.

Consequently, the literary-into-cultural-studies perspective of this doctoral dissertation considers a comprehensive, anthropological definition of culture as a way of life supported by the accompanying institutions, culture being more specifically defined as "that entire range of institutions, artifacts and practices that make up our symbolic universe," according to Jeff Browitt and Andrew Milner (Browitt and Milner 2002: 5).

Among those institutions, political and ideological institutions will be very important in this dissertation's examination of a series of artistic texts, such as novels, poems, plays within the institutional frameworks of the early Cold War age, dominated by key actors defined by such phrases as "the power elite" and "the military-industrial complex." Such institutions had promoted what will be called in this dissertation "corporate culture." The use of this phrase to refer to significant developments in postwar American culture is inspired by such volumes as Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America* and Herbert I. Schiller's *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*. This prevailing corporate culture, as it will be stated, is not defined only as the culture of specific corporations, but as the overall consequence of economic and political factors. These factors promote a specific kind of culture in the general context of the Cold War, particularly during what Keith-Booker will call "the longer 1950s."

The dissertation examines the complicated relationship between "corporate culture," on the one hand, and vast American audiences, both mainstream, satisfied, ordinary citizens and various minorities of discontented citizens, on the other hand. The emphasis will be put on the

actors adopting the extreme positions: *corporate culture* and the *power elite* on the one hand, the *discontents* of various sorts on the other hand. The mechanisms involved in the interaction between dominant corporate culture and vaster, more compliant audiences, as well as the minorities of discontents, the opposition or the acceptance of the culture industries, largely used in the promotion of the prevailing ideology, all these relations and interactions have an important part to play.

This text undertakes to see the contribution and the echoes in American society of a number of public figures, including cultural figures, mainly literary authors, sociologists, philosophers, and their impact. This is done within the framework of an increasingly dynamic cultural conversation in which what is here called corporate culture imposed by the power elites comes under siege. The prevailing corporate culture is initially challenged by a few individuals from the field of arts and letters and also by a number of sociologists and philosophers.

As expected in such an enterprise, the main coordinates of the American corporate culture under study here are provided by the rhetoric of the Cold War, in which America is facing the other superpower beyond the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union. In this particular context, the special roles, sometimes contradictory, both supporting and counteracting acts of resistance to authority, assumed by such respectable institutions as the CIA and the FBI, will be noted in the comprehensive context of the time, with the KGB outside the general picture of this dissertation.

As previously mentioned, the approaches are interdisciplinary, starting from a literary-into-cultural-studies perspective. They combine the close critical readings of artistic works and the resources offered by cultural studies, new historicism, sociology and philosophy as they deal with culture in its broad definition which includes ideology and politics as prevailing in both the arts and ordinary life. As a main distinction between the critical theory/ cultural studies approaches and the sociological perspective, the former are deliberately involved and highly militant, while the latter attempts to express a detached, scientific attitude.

In this interdisciplinary realm, to follow Michel Foucault's general view on power, this is not a clearly unilateral, straightforward relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. In keeping with Foucault, power flows in all directions, through arteries and veins and smaller capillaries. The power of the elites and of the attending military-industrial complex will engage in complex networks of flows of influence in which critical, non-conformist responses, initially

timid because of the early contexts of the Cold War, will grow in intensity and relevance. That is why the stories which will follow will not clearly distinguish between good and evil. What will be worth examining are the specific configurations, links and relationships in which the power elite, the prevailing institutions, will contribute, alongside the responses of the discontents, to the shaping of a dynamic American culture on the threshold of the more "revolutionary" mid-1960s.

The voices, texts, institutions and key actors of the age comprise a heterogeneous mix, focusing on such "discontented" literary figures as Beat authors Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, Ken Kesey, a transitional figure between the Beats and the counterculturals of the 1960s, Joseph Heller and his satire of the military-industrial complex and of the power elite, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee with their artistic critique of the corruption of the American Dream. Among the minority discontents of "the long 1950s," central are such theorists and texts as sociologist C. Wright Mills with his seminal works *The Power Elite* and *The Sociological Imagination*, sociologist William H. Whyte and his *The Organization Man*, philosopher Herbert Marcuse and his *One-Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilization.*

The first two chapters deal with the relevant contexts in which the artistic voices examined in the other five sections are to be examined. **The first chapter** clarifies what its title claims: the geopolitical coordinates in which the US had turned into a superpower and into the model to be followed by the Western world, in competition with the other superpower of the time, Soviet Russia. Geopolitically, it was the time when America was turning a new leaf. Realism in geopolitics involves looking after one's own interests and being aware that war is an important option against any dangerous rival. Idealism involves values and their promotion in a country's foreign policy. Remarkably, "corporate America" combined realism and idealism in a very effective way. It confronted its adversary in the arms race of the Cold War, while being generous with allies and former enemies alike, the Marshall Plan being a good illustration of that. Thus, in the European imaginary, America became associated with Hollywood and Santa Claus, while the adversary was mainly perceived as Stalin & Co. and the Evil Empire. On the cultural ideological front, one of the major political weapons was the "apolitical" culture promoted by such organizations as The Congress for Cultural Freedom. The overall architecture of the prevailing Corporate Culture was significantly supported by such slogans as Daniel Bell's "end of ideology," to be compared with Keith Booker's "post-utopian imagination" that was supposed to follow this end of ideology. The main pillars of conformism and consensus, which

suited both the state and the corporate culture of the power elites, were substantially supported by America's ability to implement the domestic policy of the welfare state for the vast majority of U.S. citizens and the politics of the warfare state on the geopolitical stage. One of the best illustrations of combining consumer culture and geopolitical, ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union is briefly examined in 1.7, dealing with the famous "kitchen debate" held between Vice President Nixon and General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev at The American National Exhibition in Moscow in July 1959. The Russian had gained the first episode in the Space Race with their Sputnik. The Americans were temporarily counterattacking with a high tech American kitchen for the ordinary housewife before catching up with their most important rival.

Chapter 2 describes the figurative patterns of the sociological and philosophical imagination as shaped by such prominent thinkers of the post-war age as David Riesman, William H. Whyte, C. Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse.

David Riesman, in *The Lonely Crowd*, examines how the American character had changed from the inner-direction of the Puritan individuals toward the other-direction of conformist post-war American people. In that volume, David Riesman, in collaboration with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney offer a good description of an American affluent society, of a mass society at a time of uncertainty and change caused by massive suburbanization, consumerism, prosperity and their attending conformism.

William H. Whyte's book about the emergence of the "organization man" and C. Wright Mills's volume on the American power elite pave the ground toward the understanding of what President Dwight Eisenhower will call "the military industrial complex." Used in Eisenhower's farewell speech, the phrase ironically became part of the vocabulary of the discontents of the 1960s. *The Organization Man* focuses on middle-level corporation employees and their ordinary workplaces within the organization. *The Organization Man* was instrumental in defining mid-20th century American corporate culture, providing useful views on what would be defined in the subsequent decades organizational culture. C. Wright Mills, for his part, in his *The Power Elite,* provides a comprehensive account of the evolution of what he calls the power elite from the American Revolution to the 1950s, describing its three main branches - political, military, corporate – while also referring to the subordinate, "mass society." The book preceded Eisenhower's famous phrase "the military-industrial complex," while faithfully describing the interlocking interests of top politicians, big business tycoons and the so-called "top brass."

The last section of the chapter deals with two books by Herbert Marcuse that provide the finishing touches of the so-called sociological and philosophical imagination of the age of consent, but also of the emergence of a critical attitude to consumerist, materialist America. Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* will examine the conjunction between the Welfare State and the Warfare State, offering the author's view on Corporate America. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, together with Mills's *The Power Elite* and Whyte's *The Organization Man,* describes the effects of corporate America in the conformist 1950s. Written mostly in the 1950s, although first published as late as 1964, the volume is very much about the spirit of the conformist age that preceded the more tumultuous countercultural years. In the late 1960s the book would be read by people who probably wanted to detach themselves from the previous generation of their mass culture parents. They would be the new discontents of the 1960s and 1970. Marcuse's *Eros and Civilizatio*n*: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, draws attention to the necessity of expressing discontent in the concrete circumstances of a society of both affluence and increased control and repression. It advocates a society which is not based on civilization as repression in the way the founder of psychoanalysis had described. Marcuse's title obviously evokes Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. The book will, a little later, turn into a sort of manifesto of the discontented baby boomers of the 1960s.

Chapter 3 examines two emblematic figures of the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, and their artistic resistance to what is called here corporate culture. The chapter sees them both as a group linking the bohemian geographic extremities of America, going from Greenwich Village in New York City to the City Lights bookstore and its neighborhood in San Francisco. As individuals, these two prominent Beats have a complex, love-hate relationship with America, from which they often want to break free, in which they "howl," which they cannot help celebrating from time to time. Ginsberg and Kerouac try to break free from established literary traditions, although acknowledging the influence of some of its prominent figures. But, first and foremost, they would rebel against the colossal figure of what Ginsberg thought was an American god, a colossal figure that he calls Moloch in his best-known poem, *Howl.* His Moloch will be seen in this dissertation as Ginsberg's artistic representation of Corporate America. Corporate America is thus represented as a cruel god demanding the

sacrifice of innocent children. The innocent children sacrificed to Moloch in *Howl* are Allen Ginsberg's nonconformist friends, the Beats, in his opinion these people being the best minds of his generation. *Howl* can be seen in relation to "the best minds" of the Beat Generation, but also as part of a response to the materialism of post-war America and to the emergence of the strong corporate culture that appeared to control, through various means, what people thought, said, and desired. The Beats' rebellion, including Ginsberg's artistic performance, should be seen in the much vaster framework in which some of the previously mentioned thinkers – sociologists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, such as C. Wright-Mills, Herbert Marcuse, David Riesman, William H. Whyte, had described American society and its accompanying culture.

Ginsberg, like Kerouac, is putting his "queer shoulder" to America's wheel, long before "marginality" was to be transfigured into "diversity." The thesis aims at providing a balanced perspective on such rebel figures as Ginsberg. In the subchapter 'From images of discontent to images celebrating consumerism: "A Supermarket in California,"' the poet appears to move from the harsh condemnation of capitalist America in Howl to more celebratory tones in his Witmanesque delight in the reality sandwiches of a Californian supermarket, a symbol of diversity, affluence, consumerism. Ginsberg seems to be willing to strike up a conversation with Walt Whitman during his wandering on Californian streets and through what one might call their temples of consumerism, the new supermarkets. The poem is seen as apparently contradicting the general perception of the Beats as rebels against the consumerism and materialism of mainstream corporate culture. He appears to hunger for the common material items on display in a supermarket, he is interested in the people here, obviously imitating Whitman in his famous poems. He also imitates Whitman's enumerations, the stylistic feature that he uses in his poem. "A Supermarket…" quite surprisingly for its author as Beat, but quite understandably for him as an admirer of Walt Whitman, is as crowded with images as *Howl*, although of a completely different kind. It is, Moloch as material culture that swallows its victims is no longer a sinister figure, but a seducer that uses the attractions of material abundance and diversity.

Kerouac is one of the figures that his friend Ginsberg associates with the discontented rebels of the Beat generation, the best minds that the poet laments over in his *Howl*. Apart from the specific discontents that Ginsberg evokes in his *Howl*, both Ginsberg and Kerouac managed to appeal to a large number of young people, for whom his writing came to acquire cult status. Central to what one may call the Beat canon is, in addition to Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's

novel *On the Road*. The volume is examined as both period piece and as a relevant document to the uncertain position of the discontented rebels of the 1950s, both "beaten" and "enlightened." Jack Kerouac tried hard to achieve authenticity and spontaneity by resorting to jazz-style improvisations, especially of the kind called bebop. Under this kind of music's influence, he called his style "spontaneous prose." It is obvious that this artistic statement is part of Ginsberg's nonconformist position. Unlike the employees of Corporate America, who work hard and under the strict guidance of their chief executives, Ginsberg sees his work as spontaneous and authentic.

Although the novel was based on a series of fast-paced, drug-induced, writing sessions, there is evidence that they were far from spontaneous, based on carefully preserved previous notes that were to be polished later. The claim that the novel was created in an almost non-stop session extending over a little more than one month, written on one single, very long sheet of paper on Ginsberg's typewriter created the impression of romantic inspiration and spontaneity. The artist has a revelation, and under divine inspiration he expresses the initial vision authentically, without painful work on the words, like any ordinary craftsman.

In the novel, Sal (actually, Kerouac) travels across America, but he will also spend some time in Mexico, whose culture fascinates him. Sal's travels across America, echoing the author's own adventures on the new American highways of the 1950s, represent, to a large extent, the quest for the main myths associated with the land of the free and of the brave and adventurous pioneers, the land of unlimited opportunity. The West lures the protagonist, and then there will come some lucid realization, which makes Sal change direction, but the quest continues, a combination of hope, dream and disappointment. The dream is there all right, but its materialization is illusory, very much like the hoped-for revelations that Oedipa Maas has in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49.*

Kerouac will be one of the enthusiastic members of the audience who, in San Francisco in 1955, will take part in the famous reading at the Six Gallery, where Ginsberg first performs his poem *Howl.* *On the Road* and *Howl* may be seen as main forms of artistic resistance to the respectability of the Establishment and its corporate culture, while at the same time showing a certain enthusiasm toward the new opportunities that American affluence were making available to everyone, rebellious figures or mainstream one-dimensional people as well.

It can be said that Kerouac's complex or ambivalent attitude in *On the Road* resembles that of Ginsberg in his "A Supermarket in California," combining the persona of the nonconformist rebel with the celebration of material life. However, its overall significance can be found in its relation to larger American narratives. Kerouac's *On the Road* appears to be a quick rally all across the United States in quest of the foundational values linked to American identity, the freedom that its vast spaces inspires, as well as the prosperity that the American Dream discreetly implies or loudly claims.

Like the previous chapter, **Chapter 4** brings together two authors, this time two playwrights, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee. The plays which are examined shed light on the iconoclastic, nonconformist ethos of the 1950s associated with the discontents resisting corporate culture and what it does to postwar America. American theater, like other forms of artistic expression within the cultural context of the post-war age, displayed a contradictory configuration of both consent and dissent, with the former outweighing the latter, for obvious reasons, which are to be defined. However, despite strong pressures to conform, in order to be accepted on the important US theatrical stages, the discontent was also clearly represented at the time, with such dramatists as Arthur Miller and Edward Albee as major figures.

Ranked with Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams as one of the three classic pillars of 20th century American theater, Arthur Miller can also be seen in connection with the post-war age of anxiety and discontent, in such company as Edward Albee the dramatist, but also Allen Ginsberg and the other rebels of the conformist 1950s and early 1960s. The connection with the discontents of the age is clearly marked through such plays as *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, the latter a veiled allusion to the McCarthy anti-Communist witch hunt of the 1950s. *The Crucible*, as well as *Death of a Salesman*, is particularly relevant to the time of discontent of the post-war age, at least to those minorities of artists and sociologists and philosophers examined in this dissertation.

Arthur Miller' *Death of a Salesman* invites its audience to see it as a tragedy of the common post-war man for whom the American Dream failed to come true. Like many 20th century dramatists looking back in time to more heroic stages, Miller will try to deal with tragedy and its ironies in both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*. If Willy Loman is a low man, he ironically appears to aspire to a tragic condition, the tragedy of the common man.

Death of a Salesman can also be seen as opening new perspectives for American theater, bringing together in its dramatic formula comedy, poetry, tragedy, to which a strong dose of realism and elements of expressionism were added. From the beginning, Miller, in his advocacy of the tragedy and the common man theatrical formula, was willing to bring forth his equally critical, equally progressive views on American politics and American theater alike. He was thus joining the limited number of "discontented" sociologists, philosophers, poets and novelists, some of whom are examined in this dissertation.

Miller's *The Crucible* engages in a critical dialog with McCarthy's anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s, linking the present to the Salem witch trials of 1692. Miller's *The Crucible* links these two critical moments in American history. The object which gives its name to the play, the crucible, has an obvious symbolic meaning. This is a vessel which is usually employed to purify metals. Figuratively, the crucible also refers to a time of serious challenges, in which various elements engage in a sort of chemical reaction and something new emerges.

Both the anti-Communist crusade led by Senator McCarthy in the early 1950s and the Salem witch trials of 1692 involved not a desire to root out evil, but to instigate the most deplorable acts of intolerance, thus leading to mass hysteria. Salem, Massachusetts in the late 17th century was not a good illustration of what one might expect in the New World, the land of the free. In the conformist 1950s, at the time of the Cold War, when the ideological, propaganda mentality divided the world between America the good and Stalin's Russia the evil, the narrative of American Exceptionalism saw the country in favorable colors only, and its heroic past was also seen that way. The Puritans had been devout, hardworking people, working together for the common good. This is what Miller, among other discontents, will try to see in more nuanced colors, thus referring to the ambiguity of evil both in the past and in the present.

The second part of the chapter undertakes to interpret Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* not only in the framework of the Theater of the Absurd, as initially seen by some critics, including Martin Esslin, but as a short theatrical piece in which realism and symbolism anchor it firmly in a land that has lost the American dream, at least for such characters as Jerry (an alter ego of Edward Albee himself?). The few similarities between this play and the Theater of the Absurd are there all right, if one compares *The Zoo Story* with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for example. Both Albee's and Beckett's plays feature a central pair of opposite characters - Peter and Jerry, Vladimir and Estragon, respectively – although the interaction of the former is more realistic

than that of the latter. Both pairs appear to be "caged" by circumstances together, having to share a limited theatrical space with a minimum of details. Elements of existentialism seem to be relevant to both plays. These have to do with solitude and alienation, with the meaning of existence or with the lack of it., with the other as an obstacle to achieving authenticity. The impression of the confinement of a cage in which two desperate animals are trying to contest each other's place and space may justify the title of Albee's play, *The Zoo Story*. However, if both couples appear to be doomed to find no revelation while they may be looking for an illusory Godot, in Albee's play Jerry will try an extreme gesture to provide the apparent absurdity with some symbolic meaning.

It is worth remembering that when Edward Albee came of age, he finally broke with his rich adoptive family, choosing to live the life of an independent transient or drifter in the Greenwich Village which had also been the "bohemian alma mater" of such Beat figures as Allen Ginsberg, and Jerry is obviously one of those best minds of the Beat poet's generation.

Each of the next three chapters (**5 – 7**) will focus on one novelist and on the texts that have come to define them. There are ways in which they can be grouped together, and ways in which they are very different. That was the reason why they were finally discussed in separate chapters. These texts all show as their protagonists rebellious, nonconformist individuals who try to resist what Ginsberg saw as a capitalist Moloch, what one of the characters, Chief Bromden, in Kesey's best-known novel saw as "the Combine," what Oedipa Maas has to make of the overwhelming proportions of a tycoon's business empire, apparently encompassing and engulfing everything.

Kesey, in **Chapter 5,** can be seen as the link between the discontents of the 1950s, especially the Beats, and those of the countercultural generation of the late 1960s, coming up with memorable expressions of authority vs rebellion. If Ginsberg had imagined the control exerted by the power elites by means of his horrible, demonic Moloch figure in *Howl*, Ken Kesey would come up with his own "Combine," ruling not only over the "cuckoo's nest" of the weaker, more vulnerable members of the larger community, but also over the world outside it. The "Combine" and the "cuckoo's nest" can be seen as metaphors in the large ideological and social picture sketched in this dissertation. In it, authority and non-conformism will add drama to the so-called decade of consensus of the 1950s, and Kesey writes his novel in the 1950s, in order to have it published for another generation in the 1960s.

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published about the same time as Heller's *Catch-22* and it acquired cult fiction status with the same baby boomer generation of the 1960s. The author himself, Ken Kesey is seen as a mediator between the rebels of the 1950s and the counterculturals of the 1960s, not only through the messages of his best-known book, but also through his actual eccentric involvement in psychedelic culture. In the company of his friends, the Merry Pranksters, the Grateful Dead, on board his painted bus *Further*, Kesey traveled all over America from one "acid test" to the next. The author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest'*s experience as well as his personal inclinations prepared him to play his role of the "psychic outlaw" figure and to serve as the "bridge" between the earlier Beat Generation and the counterculture movement of the 1960s, for which he turned into a cult character and a guru, rivaling Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, and Timothy Leary.

Heller's *Catch-22*, in **Chapter 6**, is to be seen as a cultural manifesto written in the 1950s but gaining its appeal in the following decade, when the book addressed the countercultural generation. The phrase giving its name to the novel has entered contemporary English. It denotes the kind of absurd, contradictory situations proliferating throughout the text. The novel will be seen, despite its settings and characters, as less of a war novel or anti-war novel and more as a complex structure in which "the military industrial complex" invoked in the theoretical framework of this dissertation finds its most memorable absurd expression. Milo Minderbinder, a humble mess officer in Yossarian's squadron, becomes a very influential business figure, getting both American generals and business partners from the opposing camp of Nazi Germany to make profitable deals with him and with the company that he has set up, in which everyone has a share. In the imagined "military-industrial complex" of the book, quite satirically, Milo Minderbinder is the most outstanding representative of the power elite.

Thomas Pynchon's early fiction, with *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* as centers of interest, in the final section, **Chapter 7**, is usually seen in the context of poststructuralism, postmodernism emerging after the theater and literature of the absurd. The last chapter of this dissertation, placed in the more comprehensive context of the 1950s and 1960s, contrasts the "structuralism" of the certainties of the prevailing culture of consent of the age with the uncertainties associated with the lack of a sense of self that an "absurdist Luddite" such as young Pynchon himself associates with an entropic vision of the world and of its history. The paranoid condition, usually linked to the postmodern condition, and the proliferation of conspiracy

theories in times of anxiety and doubt make Pynchon's fiction relevant not only to some prevailing states of mind at the time the texts were written, but also in the equally uncertain time when this dissertation was completed.

The overall impression that a complex, interdisciplinary approach to the long 1950s enabled, was that corporate, capitalist America had ways of assimilating even nonconformist authors gradually, thus including them in a complicated, sometimes contradictory general narrative. This complex narrative prides itself on the dissent that it accepts as part of the democratic power games. Even such rebels as Allen Ginsberg eventually become institutionalized as part of freedom-loving America, thus legitimizing … Corporate America.

This doctoral dissertation claims that the roots of dissent sown by the discontents of "the long 1950s" will lead to a more comprehensive set of progressive movements in the next decade and a half, including the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement, which had been gradually gaining strength, the countercultural movement, the Women's movements, a number of movements stressing the importance of groups until recently considered marginal. These two will be included in the American narrative, and what is going on today is a powerful expression of the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s. What the relationship between this new progressive paradigm and the avatars of Corporate America today amounts to, requires some very serious research that those who choose to concentrate on significant contemporary issues are naturally tempted to explore. The research and the text that led to this doctoral dissertation is only confined to the period leading up to, and not including, what may be called the "post-late 1960s age."

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