

WHAT MADE THE 1960s THE SIXTIES FOR ME

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The 1960s was many things. I have looked through some of the dozens and dozens of books explaining it and understand why they wrote what they did, but don't recognize my experience in them. Perhaps it is because I was raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a kind of weak sister back then to more aggressive (and progressive) cities like Berkeley and Cambridge. That is no longer true. Today Ann Arbor is state of the art. My experience of the Sixties was very much colored by my life in Ann Arbor. I can only tell it like I saw and remember it.

The books say the Sixties was about the radical politics, anti-war movement, sexual revolution, women's liberation, rock music, the almost-socialism, and so on. And many say that the cause of the 1960s can be laid directly on then button-down life of the 1950s. The Sixties is said to be a reaction to that decade. I can see all these different views and they make some sense. For me it was simply the drugs that caused the Sixties to be what they were.

And by drugs I don't mean to say that I was a druggie or that all drugs were responsible. To my mind it was only the psychedelic drugs that mattered. They were responsible for what made the Sixties memorable to me. Obviously this statement requires some explanation.

I am not going to comment on any of the above movements and causes just now, except the one about the 1950s. That decade was indeed bland, too much about surface, and overly conservative. Beehive hairstyles, crew cuts, Pat Boone, non-fluid dancing, and so on were something my generation sought to get away from. I only wish I had recognized European cinema and Fellini films as just as retarded back then in the opposite direction, but I didn't.

I worshipped the Beats in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but I was well behind the curve on that one. My time Beat surfing left me high and dry, right back where I started. It went nowhere, but it did leave me with something of a liberal education.

I have examined carefully what I did from 1960 until the Sixties actually started for me in 1964. Rebellious against the 1950s? Sure, but I was 20 years old! What twenty-year old does not carve out a little distance from the previous generation? OK, maybe a lot of distance and considerable time too, but that alone still does not explain the Sixties to me. If the Sixties had a wider gap between it and the 1950s than other generations, what caused that gap? The revulsion at my parent's life style and the 1950s by themselves did not cause that gap.

Which leaves me with drugs and in particular one drug: LSD. Drugs like speed, pot, opium, and so on were mostly entertainment in my opinion. I was not really better or worse off for them. But the psychedelics are another matter, LSD especially.

The Sixties began for me from the moment I took LSD in the bathroom of a small coffee shop in Berkeley California on May 6th, 1964 at 10:30 PM. And I caution you please to be very careful in how you understand this. It is not really about the drugs alone. Drugs were all around and not all that interesting to me at that. And it was not simply the conscious-altering quality of drugs. Marijuana altered my consciousness too, but not in any lasting way.

However LSD altered my consciousness in a lasting way and that altered-consciousness

created just enough of a gap in my mind that I got a real glimpse of myself in various dualisms. LSD let me catch myself in a few of the miss-takes in my life, for example that there was a 'me' and then an outside world separate from me that I fought against or lived in. LSD allowed me to clearly see that my own biases and thoughts colored and shaped not only how I saw the outside world but actually the outside world itself. I saw what I believed. Bias kills truth. Now this was a revelation for me. LSD enabled a gap to open that has never closed, but remains a doorway into the mind itself. This was for me the defining parameter of the 1960s – an introduction to the mind and a way of understanding the "self".

In the last analysis the Sixties was for me about seeing into the mind. I changed my mind during that time (or watched my mind change) and the mind's openings (at least for me) led to the decade known as the Sixties. I realize it is not romantic to link the Sixties to drugs, even the exotic LSD. Anti-war, feminism, anti-establishment, and so on sound like a better cause or reason. It just was not the case in my experience. These various movements were results but not the cause or root as I know it.

As mentioned earlier, when LSD appeared in my life I was happily being a 23-year old body trying to discover myself, find what I wanted to do as a career, and meet the woman of my life. I was quite happy to have some respite and distance from society as my parents lived it. None of these factors could add up to the Sixties as I eventually lived it.

The wild card is missing, that bit of breakthrough or genius that made the difference between an average generational gap and a gap large enough to embrace the changes that actually took place. It may be embarrassing to find that my bit of genius came with the help of drugs rather than from between my own two ears, but the truth is that it did come from drugs. Would I prefer that my insights came directly from the "Spirit" and not from a drug? Sure, but I say to myself: "Get over it! It is all god or spirit anyway!" And here is the subtle part.

I really can separate the baby from the bathwater here, the drugs from the insights of the psychedelics. The drugs may be regrettable, but the insights gained through them were and still are profound. Today there are other ways to get the same insights, like the Asian forms of mind training and meditation, but they take a very long time and lots of work. LSD did the job in hours, but it took a very long time and lots of work to stabilize those insights, if they could be stabilized. It's pay me now or pay me later; either way takes a lot of work. The LSD and other psychedelic drugs happen to be the way it went down for me. Meditation and mind training were not readily available back then, and are just starting to really come into the picture now, here in the 21st Century.

If my mind had not been opened by LSD, I would never have seen what I saw. I have no reason to believe that short of that kind of sudden cram course in the mind and how it actually works I would have come upon those kinds of insights normally. The course of my life changed then and forever. IMO the insights from psychedelics opened my mind and allowed me to discover and appreciate all of the other important themes born in the Sixties, themes like home birth, home schooling of our kids, psychedelic music (obviously), the place of women in the world, food, health, and a spiritual life.

And I will make a prediction:

Just as a college diploma or degree is the coin of the realm today, it will be replaced in importance tomorrow by somehow measuring the degree of realization an individual has attained through mind training of one form or another. The kind and degree of mental clarity and

realization will be how we know one another. Just my two cents.

Photo by me of some Holiday flowers my daughter May gave us.

