MAILER'S HIPSTER MEETS THOMPSON'S BIKERS: WHITE NEGROES ON WHEELS

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IN 1957, NORMAN MAILER PUBLISHED AN ESSAY in *Dissent* called "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" in which he addressed the existential crisis Americans experienced in the wake of the two great horrors of the twentieth century: the mass exterminations of concentration camps and the use of atomic weapons. In the aftermath of such senseless and horrific violence, he announced that

> It is on this bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist—the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as *l'univers concentrationnaire*, or with a slow death by conformity . . . the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society . . . to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. . . . (277)

Mailer biographer J. Michael Lennon recalls that "The White Negro" became the "intellectual manifesto" of the Beat Generation, as Kerouac's *On the Road* represented the mythical roadmap and Ginsberg's *Howl* the poetic testament (239).[1] The hipster, as John Leland shows, is an archetypal character who appears in many guises—the outcast, the rebel, the trickster—personified by figures such as Walt Whitman, Bob Dylan, and Kurt Cobain. Critics have

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argued that Mailer's hipster is a myth, a fiction, a proletarian, a fallen Adam, and a romanticized version of himself, all plausible interpretations.[2] Mailer's hipster was a projection of his existential worldview, an abstraction based on his own experiences of jazz clubs, parties, and underground characters in the post-war world; yet, his "white Negro" bore similarities to his 19th and 20th century Hip predecessors who rejected America's Protestant work ethic, domesticity, and sexual repression. As one of the most widely read essays on college campuses and in intellectual circles in the 1950s–1960s, "The White Negro" shocked many in the Cold War generation into an awareness of what it meant to be Hip.

Kerouac, an original hipster, romanticized the lives of African-Americans, or at least the way he imagined those lives, engaging with their down and outness, their alienation, and their style. In *On the Road*, published the same year as Mailer's essay, Kerouac recalls walking through the streets of Denver and naively "wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had to offer was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night" (179). In his reverie, Kerouac imagines a Romantic ideal of African-Americans as noble primitives. According to Gary T. Marx in "The White Negro and the Negro White," members of the Beat Generation liked "super-sexed, narcotics-using, primitive, easy-going, spontaneous, irresponsible, violent Negroes"; therefore, "Their conception of what it means to be a Negro probably differs greatly from the experience of most back people" (175). Yet, as Mailer's worldview was darker and less romanticized than Kerouac's, he displayed a keener awareness of racial oppression and the means by which black people struggled to survive:

> Knowing in the cells of his experience that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions permitted) . . . kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, he lived in the enormous present . . . and in his music he gave voice to the quality and character of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream, and despair of his orgasm. (279)

Mailer thus concluded that "it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin of totalitarianism [in the form of slavery and institutionalized racism] and democracy for two centuries"

(278). Mailer argued metaphorically that "The Hipster had absorbed the existential synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro" (279). He had gleaned in that post-war era that race is not only biologically determined but socially constructed, anticipating the formulation of racial formation theory.[3] Although Mailer did construct African-Americans in some ways as the Other, in his essay he was breaking down the binaries, self and Other, white and black.[4]

Mailer's conception of the hipster was informed by his reading of psychoanalyst Robert Lindner's book *Rebel Without a Cause—The Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath*,[5] a case study of one of his psychopathic patients. Lindner diagnosed the psychopath as

> a rebel without a cause, an agitator without a slogan, a revolutionary without a program . . . his rebelliousness is aimed to achieve goals satisfactory to himself alone; he is incapable of exertions for the sake of others. All his efforts, hidden under no matter what disguise, represent investments designed to satisfy his immediate wishes and desires. . . . The psychopath, like the child, cannot delay the pleasures of gratification, and the trait is one of his underlying, universal characteristics. He cannot wait upon erotic gratification which convention demands should be preceded by the chase before the kill: he must rape. He cannot wait upon the development of prestige in society: his egoistic ambitions lead him to leap into headlines by daring performances. Like a red thread the predominance of this mechanism for immediate satisfaction runs through the history of every psychopath. It explains not only his behavior but also the violent nature of his acts. (2)

Roughly a decade after the publication of "The White Negro," Hunter S. Thompson published *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* in which he cited a truncated version of the same Lindner quote, and as applied to the Angels it bears repeating:

> The psychopath, like the child, cannot delay the pleasures of gratification, and the trait is one of his underlying, universal characteristics. He cannot wait upon erotic gratification which

> convention demands should be preceded by the chase before the kill: he must rape. He cannot wait upon the development of prestige in society: his egoistic ambitions lead him to leap into headlines by daring performances. Like a red thread the predominance of this mechanism for immediate satisfaction runs through the history of every psychopath. It explains not only his behavior but also the violent nature of his acts. (2)

The fact that both Thompson and Mailer cited the same passage connects Mailer's essay to Thompson's reporting on the motorcycle gang. Mailer's "White Negroes" and Kerouac's Beats anticipated some of the countercultural figures of the 1960s such as hippies, Black Power radicals, and outlaw motorcycle clubs like the Angels. Mailer wrote that to get hip required one "to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on the unchartered journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self" (277), an ethos consistent with figures as diverse as the Beats and the Angels. Mailer's hipsters had morphed into Thompson's bikers: they had become white Negroes on wheels.

As Leland noted, the hipster tends to be a male figure who forms male-bonding relationships, a feature of the Beat Generation's core figures, Kerouac, Cassady, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and others. The Angels were an exclusively white male club for whom bonding and bad behavior on bikes were *de rigueur*. Mailer acknowledges that there are female hipsters, but his hipster is a projection of his own notions of masculinity, and with some exceptions his white Negro was a solitary figure, an underground man to whom the idea of belonging to something—a group, a party, a religion—was Square. So, the hipster opted out, believing that

> One is Hip or one is Square (the alternative which each new generation coming into American life is beginning to feel), one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed. (278)

Lexicographer Clarence Major locates the origins of the words "hip" and the related but anachronistic "hep" to the West African Zolof words "hepi" ["to

see"] and "hipi" ["to open one's eyes"] (214). The hipster, then, is by definition someone with a heightened awareness and a powerfully felt sense of authentic values, even if some of those values are considered anti-social. The Angels' values included racism, violence, and misogyny, but nobody ever accused them of being Squares. As ugly and as objectionable as they were to many, they were hip to a life lived freely and defiantly, relishing the threat they posed to notions of common decency.

The Angels were an exclusively white club, of course, most of whom, at the time Thompson rode and partied with them, would probably have rejected the label "white Negro." However, Thompson editor Douglas Brinkley notes that "After reading 'The White Negro,' Thompson developed a theory that all working-class people were 'niggers'" (471). In a letter to high school friend Paul Semonin, Thompson wrote, "I wonder if you're really as hip as you think you are, or just deluded. In other words, are you just another of those nigger-loving liberals or have you found that secret bridge that Mailer keeps looking for?" (491–92). Thompson's use of the n-word in that passage sounds archly satirical. In his correspondence as well as in his journalism, Thompson frequently engaged in satire, adopting the voice of a racist redneck who would use the n-word unapologetically, as he does in the letter to Semonin. As reflected in *Hell's Angels*, Thompson's attitude toward race was more ambivalent. At times, he places the n-word in quotation marks to distance his own attitudes from those of the Angels; at others, he drops the quotation marks, raising a question about his objectivity, the degree to which he aligned his own value system with that of the Angels. Halfway through his narrative, Thompson said that "I was so firmly identified with the Angels I saw no point in trying to edge back to neutrality" (143). As his immersion in the biker culture deepened, he confessed that "[b]y the middle of summer [1965] I had become so involved in the outlaw scene that I was no longer sure whether I was doing research on the Hell's Angels or being slowly absorbed by them" (46). Thompson's idea that working-class people were "niggers" was likely informed by Mailer's essay on the hipster. He had read Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself*, including his preface to the republication of "White Negro," in which Mailer recalled an editorial on race he had sent to journalist Lyle Stuart on a bet (which Mailer won) that no newspaper would publish it. In that piece he postulated that white male Southerners so feared racial equality because "the Negro," who already possessed superior sexual prowess (a prevalent racist myth), would in time

achieve intellectual equality as well, tipping the scale from equality to superiority (332–333).

Mailer never uses the n-word in his essay, but by presuming to write genuinely about the experiences of African-Americans, he reveals the degree to which he stereotyped African-Americans. The major shortcoming of both Mailer's essay and of Thompson's book is the extent to which they reflected the unconscious racial biases of their era. Mailer was a white middle-class liberal who knew and socialized with African-Americans, but he was justifiably criticized by his friend James Baldwin for his relative ignorance of the experiences of real black people.[6] Indeed, Mailer refers to only one unnamed and (according to Mailer) illiterate black person in the entire essay. What Gary T. Marx says here about the Beats could apply to Mailer:

> In observing how readily beats identify with Negroes, use their jargon, assume that they understand what it means to be a black man in America, they think that they can even speak for them, and that they are accepted by them (all the while ignoring or being unaware of the hatred many Negroes have for whites at some level of consciousness) we may note the phenomena of misplaced intimacy and identification. (175)

Marx could be speaking for many white liberals then and now who consider themselves enlightened on the subject of race, yet Mailer's hipster was a paradox, a black and white metaphorical figure with a keen awareness of what it meant to be down and out and hip.

Thompson, a son of the South, once contemplated a piece similar to Mailer's on race relations in which he would explore the "untenable position of the white liberal if Negro militants continued to gain power in the movement" (*Fear and Loathing Letters* 458). Throughout *Hell's Angels* his perspective is alternately engaged and detached, but despite his association with the Angels, he remained on the periphery of the scene, never becoming a formal member. Thompson critic William McKeen claims that Thompson used *Advertisements* as the "blueprint" for his own anthology *The Great Shark Hunt* (263). Thompson occasionally corresponded with Mailer, and Brinkley notes that he "*respected Mailer immensely but it didn't keep him from needling the established author from time to time*" (255). Thompson disparaged Mailer because he felt that the older, more accomplished novelist had

lost his edge after his early success with *The Naked and the Dead*. Having sent Mailer a copy of Henry Miller's *The World of Sex*, which apparently was never returned, Thompson wrote to him suggesting that because Mailer owed him one, he was calling in a favor. Under severe deadline pressure to complete his book on the Angels, he asked whether Mailer would send him any thoughts or writing he already had on the subject. "Needless to say," he wrote "I would use your stuff however you wanted it used. . . . My own idea would be to come on with something like: 'Norman Mailer, a would-be Hell's Angel for many years, put it all in a plastic bag, to wit . . . etc.'" (547). Mailer did not respond, but Brinkley reveals that Mailer had sent Thompson a friendly letter telling him that he liked his pieces in *The Nation* (566), including his original article on the Angels, the publication of which led Random House to offer him a book contract.[7] Another writer to whom Thompson reached out was Nelson Algren, whose novel *Walk on the Wild Side* he wanted to quote in his history of the Angels as heirs to the rootless, Depression-era whites who fled the Dust Bowl on a pilgrimage to California. Algren's anti-hero Dove Linkhorn escaped to the sweet sinfulness of New Orleans, but "Ten years later he would have gone to Los Angeles" (53), possibly to join a motorcycle gang. Algren, a literary hipster like Mailer, declined to allow Thompson to use his work (Thompson, *Fear and Loathing Letters* 558–559).

Thompson's appropriation of the Lindner quotation points to another concern he shared with Mailer, the threat of rising authoritarianism. As early as *The Naked and the Dead*, one of Mailer's central concerns was a disturbing drift toward totalitarianism in the U.S. Lindner was an existential, humanistic psychologist in the tradition of Erich Fromm and Rollo May, and in works like *Must You Conform?* and *Prescription for Rebellion* he diagnosed the psychic damage inflicted on Americans by pressures to adjust to social norms and to obey authority. What Mailer admired about Lindner's work was his assertion that the urge to rebel was a human instinct. In an obituary for his friend reprinted in *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer wrote that "Man is a rebel. He is committed by his biology *not* to conform, and herein lies the paramount reason for the awful tension he experiences today in relation to society" (305). Leland shows how Hip, in all its historical manifestations, from the Transcendentalists through the Beat Generation and beyond, is always an instrument of progress because the hipster represents an *avant-garde*. To Mailer, atomic bombs and concentration camps represented only

the most obvious threats to mankind; more insidious was the "slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled" (277) which Mailer's hipster resisted through jazz, marijuana, and orgasm. Both Lindner and Mailer knew Freud's theories of repression and sublimation, yet Lennon writes that both men "chafed under the yoke of repression, renunciation, and compromise that [Freud] believed made civilization possible" (165). Mailer's reading of Wilhelm Reich convinced him that repressed libido resulted in illness, both psychological and physical, including cancer. Worse, as Lennon asserts, "the hipster stood opposed to the repression of sexual urges that are noble and natural, a suppression that seemed likely to lead, under the threat of nuclear warfare, to a new epoch of Faustian regimes that would wield technology to eliminate opponents" (219). Just as in Orwell's dystopian allegory, *1984*, repression forced individuals to sublimate their libidos into service to totalitarian regimes.

Another way the hipster, the Beat, and the Angel refused to suffer the "slow death by conformity" was by living on the margins of society like Neal Cassady, bouncing from coast to coast behind the wheel, or by going underground like Burroughs as a junkie and petty criminal. As an epigraph to "The White Negro," Mailer cited a quote from journalist Caroline Bird who painted a truthful, yet condescending, portrait of the hipster as "a jazz musician . . . a petty criminal . . . a hobo . . . a carnival roustabout or free-lance moving man in Greenwich village" (276). All of those avatars of Hip fit into Mailer's conception, and like those hipsters, the Angels lived on the edge of the capitalist economy, working assembly lines, construction sites, and auto body shops, jobs which provided temporary, unskilled labor, paid cash, required little allegiance to employers, and allowed them to quit periodically to take off on runs with their fellow Angels. Despite ways in which he bonded with the Angels, Thompson was clear-eyed and direct that the Angels were doomed to become economically obsolete in a society which increasingly required high-skilled and college-educated labor.

The hipster and the Angel share a psychopathology, in Mailer's terms, to "encourage the psychopath" in themselves (277), refusing to repress and sublimate their sexual and violent impulses. From the perspective of contemporary psychology, what Mailer and Lindner meant by "psychopath" is problematic. Psychoanalysts have largely abandoned the terms sociopathic and psychopathic in favor of more specific diagnoses like narcissistic and histrionic. Based on Lindner's profile, a psychopath seeks immediate grati-

fication of his impulses and displays anti-social, even violent, behavior, symptoms which then and now could be attributed to millions of Americans.[8] I stipulate that Mailer used the term "psychopath" to mean a spectrum of anti-social personalities or traits, from the hipster, living a furtive, subterranean existence, to the Angel, loudly and proudly proclaiming his rebellion. Yet Mailer's hipster is a "philosophical psychopath" because he "possesses the narcissistic detachment of the philosopher," a self-conscious perspective "alien to the unceasing drive of the psychopath" (280). The philosophical psychopath feels his desires and impulses more intensely than most people, and he chooses to act on them rather than to confess them to a psychiatrist, thus subjecting himself to what Mailer calls a "psychic blood-letting" (283), running the risk of becoming a well-adjusted zombie, "less bad, less good, less bright, less willful, less destructive, less creative" (283).

Mailer's hipster differs from Kerouac's and Ginsberg's Beat prototypes in his embrace of violence as a means to summon the courage to achieve existential transcendence in the form of the "violence as catharsis which prepares growth" (290). In the essay's most controversial passage, Mailer claims that

> The psychopath murders—if he has the courage—out of the necessity to purge his violence, for if he cannot empty his hatred then he cannot love, his being is frozen with implacable self-hatred for his cowardice. (It can of course be suggested that it takes little courage for two strong eighteen-year old hoodlums, let us say, to beat in the brains of a candy-store keeper, and indeed the act—even by the logic of the psychopath—is not likely to prove very therapeutic for the victim is not an immediate equal. Still, courage of a sort is necessary, for one murders not only a weak fifty-year old man but an institution as well, one violates private property, one enters into a new relation with the police and introduces a dangerous element into one's life. The hoodlum is therefore daring the unknown, and so no matter how brutal the act, it is not altogether cowardly.) (284)

Mailer faced critical backlash for his hypothesis that two hoodlums would be existentially justified in killing the candy-store owner.[9] He viewed the act symbolically, as a challenge to conventional morality, authority, and private

property. Maggie McKinley argues that while Mailer "clearly believes in the power of violence . . . his writings (both fictional and nonfictional) also suggest that he sees the damage that might be wielded by violence, especially when that violence is used by governments as a mechanism of totalitarian control" (69). As Mailer frequently argued in his early work, and explicitly in "The White Negro," the violent acts of the individual are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the state. Nevertheless, McKinley illustrates how violence as a means of achieving transcendence and liberation is always doomed to failure. In 1965, with the publication of his novel *An American Dream*, Mailer drew the ire of Second Generation feminists for his depiction of rape, and in her ground-breaking work of Feminist criticism, *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet attacked Mailer and other male writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller for their alleged misogyny, but "The White Negro" has largely escaped such criticism.

The Hell's Angels were a notoriously libidinous and riotous gang who indulged their appetites for sex and violence. Their behavior and attitudes were openly misogynistic, expressed a misogynistic attitude toward women, and one of the prominent themes in Thompson's book is rape, including gang rape. In *Advertisements* Thompson would have read some columns Mailer had written for *The Village Voice* (which he co-founded), one of which was called "The Hip and the Square". Mailer wrote that

> To a Square, a rapist is a rapist. Punish the rapist, imprison him, be horrified by him and/or disinterested in him, and that is the end of the matter. But the hipster knows that the act of rape is part of life too, and that even in the most brutal and unforgiveable rape, there is artistry or the lack of it, real desire or cold compulsion, and so no two rapists nor no two rapes are ever the same. (314)

Mailer's morally ambivalent stance on rape might well have influenced Thompson's view of the Angels' misogyny. He tends to characterize the Angels' women as "half-bright souls turned mean and nervous from too much bitter wisdom in too few years" and some as "aging whores" (9). In his research on the "infamous Monterey rape" (13), the incident which Thompson claims first introduced the motorcycle club to the American public, he exposes the fact that some of the media accounts of the Angel's violent sexual

behavior were sensationalized due to "a curious rape mania that rides on the shoulder of American journalism like some jeering, masturbating raven" (13). Yet, in *Gonzo Republic*, William Stephenson argues that "Thompson understood that the sexism of the bikers mimicked the power imbalances of wider society. He writes of how the Angels divide their girlfriends into old ladies and mamas, with the former belonging to one Angel exclusively, and the latter being sexually available to the whole chapter. . . . Thompson likens these women, especially mamas, to other groups of people who are exploited and remain voiceless" (115). Thompson did not want to become too closely associated with the Angels' predilection for violent outbursts and orgies, but Stephenson adds that "rather than expressing hatred for woman, Thompson's writing suggests another form of sexism, in that it often virtually ignores them or uses them as incidental bystanders to male-dominated scenes" (117). While Mailer's hipster rationalizes his sexual violence as an attempt to purge repressed libido, essential for him to grow, the Angels, based on Thompson's account, lack any such rationale for their violent behavior toward women.

Dubious as it may seem to call any Angel a "philosophical psychopath," Thompson showed that they were capable of seeing themselves self-reflectively, keenly aware of their sensationalistic representation in the media. They were self-mythologizing, the subjects of ballads, and for a while they were in vogue with the radical Berkeley intelligentsia, "treated as symbolic heroes by people with whom they had almost nothing in common," and yet, the Angels, many of whom were veterans who reflexively supported the war in Vietnam, "could never get the hang of the role they were supposed to play" (227). Stephenson observes that "if the Angels or their educated admirers thought a bunch of down-at-heel bikers were truly free, Thompson knew they were being naïve. A look at the Angels' crude political thinking was enough to show this. Rather than having a coherent ideology, the Angels wallowed in the same reactionary stew as the John Birch Society and other fringe groups" (66). Mailer suggested that hipsters had the potential to form an "elite of storm troopers" prepared to follow a "magnetic leader" (290), and the Angels seemed to fit that description. Thompson highlighted the Angels' authoritarian mindset, and their right-wing tendencies are the strongest factor mitigating their hipness. Even though their sense of inclusivity and exclusivity paralleled Mailer's Hip-Square dichotomy, the Angels were paradoxically conformists and nonconformists, forming a cohesive so-

cial group with initiation rituals, behavioral and dress codes, and a hierarchical structure maintained by then president Ralph "Sonny" Barger. The Angels clashed with anti-war protestors in Berkeley and bonded with Oakland police—both paramilitary, authoritarian organizations—based on their mutual antagonism to the area's African-American population.

Mailer channeled Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* when he argued that throughout history "sublimation was possible [and] sublimation depends on a reasonable tempo of history" (282), but in the modern era, "the collective life of a generation has moved too quickly . . . the nervous system is stressed beyond . . . such compromises as sublimation" (282–83). He posited that in this "crisis of accelerated historical tempo and deteriorated values . . . neurosis tends to be replaced by psychopathy" (283), and hipsters are "trying to create a new nervous system for themselves" (282). Mailer here revealed his obsession with the related ideas of energy, movement, and existential growth; for the hipster, "Movement is always to be preferred to inaction. In motion a man has a chance . . . and when the crisis comes, whether of love or violence, he can make a little better nervous system, make it a little more possible to go again, next time to go faster. . . ." (286). Movement was what the Angels were all about, and the central motif of Thompson's book is the motorcycle, specifically a Harley-Davidson, signifying an Angel's insider status. In the mid-1960s, as Thompson observes, the motorcycle became an "instrument of anarchy, a tool of defiance" (88).[10] Loud, obnoxious, and transgressive, motorcycles represented freedom in fast motion and a restlessness born of the post-war era. When Thompson traced the origins of the Angels, he could just as well have been talking about Mailer's hipster:

> The whole thing was born . . . in the late 40s when most GIs wanted to get back to an orderly pattern. . . . But not everybody felt that way . . . there were thousands of veterans in 1945 who flatly rejected the idea of going back to their prewar pattern. They didn't want order, but privacy—and time to figure things out. It was a nervous downhill feeling, a mean kind of *Angst* that always comes out of wars . . . a compressed sense of time on the outer limits of fatalism. They wanted more action, and one of the ways to look for it was on a big motorcycle. (58)

Thompson's reference to a "compressed sense of time" reflects Mailer's sense of the accelerated pace of history and of the hipster's and the Angel's need for speed, kicks, ecstasy.

Thompson's hipness was informed by his life's journey but also by his reading of Mailer's essay, and in some ways, Thompson was himself a "white Negro." A southern white boy from Louisville with a history of juvenile delinquency and anti-social behavior, Thompson did a brief stint in jail for petty theft, after which he was given a choice between more jail time or military service. Choosing the latter, he served a brief tour in the Air Force where he got his journalistic training as a sports writer for the base newspaper. Some years later, as a roaming free-lance reporter, he found himself in California, and that's where he met the Hell's Angels. For Mailer's hipster, life is a zero sum game in which there is only so much of the "sweet" to go around, a capitalist, free market idea according to which the pleasures of sex and adventure are a limited commodity up for grabs to the individual with the will and courage to seize them (285). Like Mailer himself and his hipster figure, Thompson seemed determined to seek the sweet and to test himself in order to grow. Like the white Negro, and like the Angels, Thompson indulged his legendary appetite for alcohol and drugs, and he sought out intense experiences like riding and partying with this gang of outlaws, placing himself into weird, even dangerous situations, culminating in his being badly beaten by a group of Angels, an encounter which ended his relationship to the gang. Mailer said the hipster is one who has chosen "to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger" (277). At the end of *Hell's Angels,* Thompson describes riding his motorcycle out on Highway One, late at night and dangerously fast, experiencing a state of awareness he calls "The Edge" (271):

> There is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over. The others—the living—are those who pushed their control as far as they felt they could handle it. . . . But the edge is still Out there. Or maybe it's In. The association of motorcycles with LSD is no accident of publicity. They are both a means to an end, to the place of definitions. (271)

Thompson seems to have followed Mailer's admonition, the hipster's code: "one must grow, or else pay more for remaining the same" (286).

NOTES

1. Glenday notes that Kerouac and Ginsberg "reacted negatively to Mailer's more abrasive and confrontational adaptation of Beat philosophy," considering Mailer's essay "a fundamental distortion of what for them had been its essence" (21); yet, Ginsberg considered Mailer a "philosophical ally" (22). Michael K. Glenday, *Norman Mailer*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1995.
2. Laura Adams, *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1976; Andrew M. Gordon, *An American Dreamer: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Fiction of Norman Mailer.* Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1980; Stanley T. Gutman, *Mankind in Barbary: The Individual and Society in the Novels of Norman Mailer.* Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1975; Jean Malaquais,"Reflections on Hip." *Advertisements for Myself.* NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959, pp. 359–362; Jean Radford, *Norman Mailer: A Critical Study.* NY: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1975; Robert Solotaroff, *Down Mailer's Way.* Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1974; Joe Wenke, *Mailer's America.* Stamford, CT. Trans Uber LLC, 2013.
3. Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States,* 3rd ed. NY: Routledge, 2015.
4. The O.E.D. cites the title of Mailer's essay as the first time "white" appears in print as an adjective modifying "Negro".
5. Except for the title, Lindner's book bears no relationship to the 1955 film directed by Nicholas Ray.
6. James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." *Esquire* 55, no. 5 (May, 1961) 102–6.
7. Hunter S. Thompson, "The Motorcycle Gangs: Loser and Outsiders," *The Nation*, May 17, 1965.
8. In "The White Negro," Mailer suggested that "there are ten million Americans who are more or less psychopathic," but the number is purely speculative (280).
9. Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians." *Partisan Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, Spring 1958, pp. 305+.
10. Thompson cited the 1947 Hollister riot in which a motorcycle gang terrorized a small California town, an incident that became the basis for *The Wild One* (1953), one of a series of biker films throughout the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and beyond, a list including the iconic *Easy Rider* (1969).

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