

Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Movement

“The only thing that can save
the world is the reclaiming of
awareness of the world.
That’s what poetry does.”

—Allen Ginsberg

Essential Questions

- What events led to the emphasis on conformity in the late 1940s and 1950s?
- What were the specific features of American society that the Beat Movement protested against?
- What is the function of art in an era of conformity?
- Is censorship of art ever justified?

The 1950s: The Age of Conformity



Conformity made people feel safe in the Cold War era,
when nuclear war seemed not only possible but imminent



Emphasis on:

- Family togetherness
- New consumer products



The Beat Movement

Movement of poets and writers:

- Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti

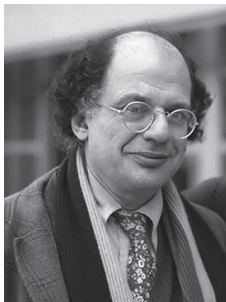


Poets Peter Orlovsky and Allen Ginsberg



William S. Burroughs

Allen Ginsberg



- Influenced by the poets Walt Whitman, William Blake, and William Carlos Williams.
- Experimented with form
- Addressed topics not usually found in American Poetry including drug use and his own homosexuality

Ginsberg gained national fame with his poem “Howl”

“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed
by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at
dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient
heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the
machinery of night”

Poetry in Trial

- 1956—Lawrence Ferlinghetti published “Howl”
- 1957—Ferlinghetti prosecuted for publishing an “obscene” book
- Judge Clayton Horn ruled the book was not obscene because it had “redeeming social value.”



Lawrence Ferlinghetti

“Would there be any
freedom of press or
speech if one must reduce
his vocabulary to vapid
innocuous euphemisms?”

—Judge Horton

Later Years

- 1979—Inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters
- 1984—Won the National Book Award for poetry for *Fall of America*
- 1993—French government awarded him the *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of Arts and Letters)
- 1997—Died in New York City

