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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Riot Nights on Sunset Strip

Mike Davis

From shortly before the Watts rebellion in August 1965 until late October 1966, I was the Los Angeles regional organizer for Students for a Democratic Society [SDS]. My assignments from the national office in Chicago were to build a core of draft resistance in the city (I had burnt my own draft card the previous March and was waiting to see whether or not I would be prosecuted) and to assist two eloquent and charismatic local SDSers — Margaret Thorpe at University of Southern California and Patty Lee Parmalee at University of California Irvine — in raising hell on local campuses. The most hell was generated by a group of wonderful 16- and 17-year-old SDS kids from Palisades High School. Hanging out with them, we soon became participants in some of the events described below (although with a crew-cut and a phobia about recreational drugs, I was hardly a representative 'teeny-bopper'). I left L.A. in 1967 to briefly work for SDS in Texas, returning to Southern California late in the year to begin real life as an apprentice butcher in San Diego and later as a truck driver in East L.A. I missed the 1967 riots on the Strip, but was on the scene for the culminating protest in 1968. So what follows is an alloy of research and memory. It is also the first, small installment in a projected history of L.A.'s countercultures and protestors, tentatively titled *Setting the Night on Fire*.

A MOMENT IN ROCK-AND-ROLL DREAMTIME: Saturday night on Sunset Strip in early December 1967. Along that famed twelve blocks of unincorporated Los Angeles County between Hollywood and Beverly Hills, the neon firmament blazes new names like the Byrds, the Doors, Sonny and Cher, the Mamas and the Papas, and Buffalo Springfield. But the real spectacle is out on the street: 2,000 demonstrators peacefully snaking their way west along Sunset into the county Strip then circling back to their starting point at Pandora's Box Coffeehouse (8180 Sunset) just inside the Los Angeles city limits. On one side of the boundary are several hundred

Mike Davis, "Riot Nights on Sunset Strip," *Labour/Le Travail*, 59 (Spring 2007), 199-213.

riot-helmeted sheriff's deputies; on the other side, an equal number of Los Angeles police, fidgeting nervously with their nightsticks as if they were confronting angry strikers or an unruly mob instead of friendly 15-year-olds with long hair and acne.

"*There's somethin' happening here*"

The demonstrators — relentlessly caricatured as 'Striplings', 'teeny boppers', and even 'hoodlums' by hostile cops and their allies in the daily press — are a cross-section of white teenage Southern California. Movie brats from the gilded hills above the Strip mingle with autoworkers' daughters from Van Nuys and truck drivers' sons from Pomona. There are some college students and a few uncomfortable crew-cut servicemen, but most are high-school age, 15 to 18, and, thus, technically liable to arrest after 10 p.m. when dual county and city juvenile curfews take effect. Kids carry hand-lettered signs that read "Stop Blue Fascism!," "Abolish the Curfew," and "Free the Strip."

The demonstration has been called (but scarcely organized) by RAMCON (the Right of Assembly and Movement Committee), headquartered in the Fifth Estate Coffeehouse (8226 Sunset). The coffee house's manager, Al Mitchell, acts as the adult spokesman for the high-school students and teenage runaways who cluster around the Fifth Estate and Pandora's Box, a block away. This is the fifth in a series of weekend demonstrations — perhaps more accurately 'happenings' — that have protested a year-long campaign by sheriffs and police to clear the Strip of 'loitering' teenagers. In response to complaints from local restaurateurs and landowners, the cops trawl nightly after the early curfew, searching for under-18s. They target primarily the longhaired kids in beads, granny glasses, and tie-dyed shirts.

It has become the custom to humiliate curfew-violaters with insults and obscene jokes, pull their long hair, brace them against squad cars, and even choke them with billy clubs, before hauling them down to the West Hollywood Sheriffs or Hollywood Police stations where they will be held until their angry parents pick them up. This evening (10 December), however, has so far passed off peacefully, with more smiles exchanged than insults or blows. The high point was the appearance of Sonny and Cher, dressed like high-fashion Inuit in huge fleece parkas, waving support to adoring kids. (Later, after photographs have appeared on front pages across the world, the city of Monterey Park will ban Sonny and Cher from their Rose Parade float for this gesture of solidarity with "rioting teenyboppers.")[1]

By midnight the demonstration has returned to Pandora's and a happy Al Mitchell has officially declared the protest over. As the crowd begins to disperse, LAPD officers enter Pandora's to check IDs. Eason Monroe, head of the Southern California chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], complains that the police are acting illegally: Pandora's doesn't serve alcohol and the curfew ordinance exempts teenagers inside licensed businesses. The response of the cops is to

[1]*Los Angeles Times* [*LAT*], 10 and 11 December 1966.

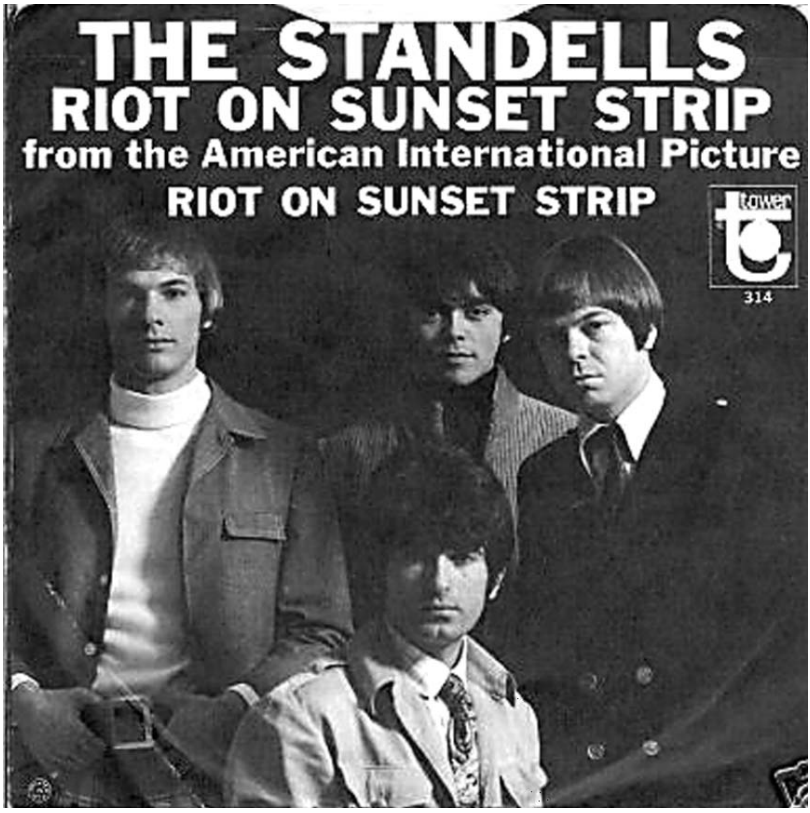
handcuff and arrest Monroe. When Michael Vossi, a PR agent for the Beach Boys, who is acting as a legal observer from an entertainment industry support group, speaks up in Monroe's defense, he is pummelled by another officer. The few hundred remaining demonstrators outside Pandora's shout at the police to leave their adult supporters alone. Riot-equipped police reinforcements converge from all sides.

Paul Jay Robbins, another adult supporter from CAFF (Community Action for Facts and Freedom Committee) whose members are a veritable Who's Who of the liberal pop culture scene, will a few days later in the *Los Angeles Free Press* (lovingly known as the *Freep* to its devotees) describe the unprovoked fury of the LAPD's attack on panic-stricken and fleeing protestors. After Robbins himself is hit by a police baton, he watches in horror as police flail away at a helpless teenager.

> I saw a kid holding a sign in both hands jerk forward as though struck from behind. He fell into the path of the officers and four or five of them immediately began bludgeoning him with clubs held in one hand. I stood transfixed watching him as the officers continued beating him while he attempted to alternately protect himself and crawl forward. Finally he slumped against a wall as the officer continued to beat him. Before I was spun around and set reeling forward again, I saw him picked up, belly-down, by the officers and carried away. Later legal representatives of CAFF measured a trail of blood 75 yards long leading from this spot to the point where he was placed in a car. Where is he now?[2]

The night's peaceful demonstration had been wantonly turned into another of those police 'massacres' for which Los Angeles is becoming justly notorious. The two daily newspapers — the Chandler-owned *Los Angeles Times* and the Hearst-owned *Herald-Examiner* — as usual characterize the unwarranted police aggression as a teenybopper-inspired 'riot'. Al Mitchell and the other adult supporters, meanwhile, are so appalled by the LAPD violence that they call off next weekend's planned demonstration out of fear that the police may yet kill or seriously injure one of the kids.[3] After two months of political debate, litigation, and frustrating negotiations, the protests will resume massively in February 1967 and continue episodically through the autumn of 1968. Thousands of kids will be arrested for curfew violations and American International Pictures will immortalize the 'riots' in a camp film with a famous soundtrack.[4]

[2]Los Angeles *Free Press* [*LAFP*], 16 December 1966.
[3]See *LAT* and Los Angeles *Herald Examiner* [*HE*], 11 and 12 December 1966.
[4]"Riot on Sunset Strip" (1967), directed by Arthur Dreifuss, starring Aldo Ray as a tough cop and Mimsy Farmer as his unruly Sunset Strip teenage daughter, American International Pictures, 87 min.



"*Battle lines being drawn*"

This legendary Battle of the Strip, 1966-1968, was only the most celebrated episode in the struggle of teenagers of all colours during the 1960s and 1970s to create their own realm of freedom and carnivalesque sociality within the Southern California night. There were other memorable contestations with business and police over Griffith Park 'love-ins', beach parties, interracial concerts, counter-cultural neighbourhoods (like Venice Beach), 'head' shopping districts (like L.A.'s Haight-Ashbury on Fairfax), cruising strips (Whittier, Hollywood, and Van Nuys boulevards), street-racing locales, and the myriad local hangouts where kids quietly or brazenly defied parents, police, and curfews.[5]

[5]See "As Bad as the H-Bomb," in Mike Davis, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York 2002), 207-225.

Of course such battles were not a new story (Los Angeles had passed its first juvenile curfew in the 1880s), nor unique to Southern California. But postwar California motorized youth rebellion. A culture of cars, high-speed freeways, centrifugal sprawl, and featureless suburbs generated a vast ennui amongst bored but mobile teenagers. Any hint of excitement on a weekend evening might draw kids from anywhere in the hundred-odd-mile radius of local AM radio. Thus when one rock station incautiously advertised a party at Malibu Beach in 1961, nearly 20,000 teenagers showed up and then rioted when sheriffs ordered them to leave. Nor is it surprising that once the Strip 'riots' were celebrated in song (by Stephen Stills in 1966), as well as in *Time* and *Life*, that the 8000 and 9000 blocks of Sunset Boulevard would become an even more powerful magnet to alienated kids from the valleys and flatlands. Indeed, decades later, to claim that you had been busted on the Strip in '66 or '67 was the Southern California equivalent of boasting that you had been at Woodstock, at the Creation.

But why the Strip? The parents of many Southern California teenagers in 1966 had their own lustrous memories of a night — returning from a Pacific War in 1943 or after college graduation in 1951 — when they had dined, danced, and rubbed shoulders with celebrity in one of the famed Sunset Boulevard nightclubs, such as Ciro's, Mocambo, or the Trocadero. The Strip, one of those strange 'county holes' in the Los Angeles urban fabric, was for a generation the major centre of movie colony nightlife, and thus the epicentre of tabloid scandal and romance. It was also a city-state run by famed gamblers and their gangster allies in league with a corrupt Sheriff's Department. During its most glamorous years, from 1939 to 1954, the Strip's informal mayor was the indestructible Mickey Cohen, prince of gamblers and king of survivors. Operating from a haberdashery on the 8800 block of Sunset, Cohen defied all odds by emerging unscathed from an incredible series of Mob ambushes and bombings that took the lives of half a dozen of his bodyguards.

By the late 1950s, however, Cohen was cooling his heels in the pen and the Strip was in steep decline. Las Vegas, thanks to Bugsy Siegel, had usurped the lucrative symbiosis of movie stars and mobsters that the Strip had pioneered, and hijacked its star chefs and famous entertainers. Yet precisely as urban decay was taking a huge bite out of its golden mile, the popular television show *77 Sunset Strip* was generating a new mythology. Ed 'Cookie' Byrnes — the program's Elvis-like co-star who played a parking-lot jockey who was also a part-time sleuth — briefly became the biggest youth celebrity in the country. The Strip was portrayed as a dazzling nocturnal crossroads for a handsome Corvette-and-surfboard set.

In fact, the Strip, like the larger (west and east) Hollywood community, was in transition between its golden age and two competing strategies for reusing vacant nightclub and entertainment space. The 'Times Square' option was to reopen clubs with topless or, later, nude dancers. The Bodyshop was the exemplar of successful neo-burlesque. The other option was to cater to juvenile audiences with rock music. Music producers and PR people, especially, liked the idea of a geographically cen-

tralized youth club scene to talent-scout new bands and develop those already under contract. The success of *77 Sunset Strip*, moreover, established a national cachet and name recognition for groups weaned on the Strip. In 1965 the County reluctantly acceded to club-owners' and record companies' pleas and created a tiered licensing system that allowed 18-to-21-year-olds inside clubs where alcohol was served, while creating special liquor-less music venues for younger 15-to-18-year-olds. The youth club scene promptly exploded.

For older teenagers and young adults the premier clubs were the Whiskey, Gazzarri's, and the Galaxy. The newly baptized teenyboppers favoured It's Boss (formerly the renowned Ciros), The Trip (formerly Crescendo), and Sea Witch, as well as cheap, atmospheric coffee houses like Pandora's (owned by former tennis star Bill Tilden) and the Fifth Estate (bankrolled by teen magazine mogul Robert Peterson). As the clubs inexorably hiked their cover charges, younger and poorer kids preferred simply to be part of the colourful street scene, wandering in groups down Sunset or hovering near club entrances for a glimpse of Jim Morrison or Neil Young. As the nightly teen crowds grew larger, however, the Strip's upscale restaurant owners and their wealthy adult clientele began to protest about the lack of parking and the increasing sidewalk congestion. Beverly Hills matrons and Century City lawyers recoiled from contact with the beatified throngs.

"Moreover, at this point," wrote Edgar Friedenberg and Anthony Bernhard in a later account of the riots, "the good behavior of the 'teeny boppers' had become a problem." Because the kids were generally "not hostile, aggressive nor disorderly," there was no obvious pretext for driving them off the Strip. Eventually, the Sunset Strip Chamber of Commerce and the Sunset Plaza Association, representing landlords and restaurant owners, cajoled the Sheriff's Department to stringently enforce a youth curfew. During the 1940s, when teenage 'B-girls' were a national scandal, both the city and county had adopted parallel curfew regulations that forbade anyone under 18 from loitering in public after 10 p.m. "Loitering," Friedenberg and Bernhard noted, "is defined as 'to idle, to lag, to stand idly by or to walk, drive, or ride about aimlessly and without purpose' — a definition that may well make the entire solar system illegal."[6]

"*Young people speaking their minds*"

During the summer of 1966, the sheriffs on the Strip, soon joined by the LAPD in the adjacent Hollywood and Fairfax districts, escalated their pressure on the under-18s. Curfew arrests soared into the thousands, with 300 hauled away from the sidewalks outside Canter's Restaurant on Fairfax on a single July evening. "It was just like shooting ducks in a duck pond," boasted one deputy. When the city's largest newspaper needed a dramatic image for a story about the teenage hordes, the deputies

[6]Edgar Friedenberg and Anthony Bernhard, "The Sunset Strip," *The New York Review of Books*, 9 March 1967, 8.

obligingly arrested ten kids and stood them handcuffed in a line "for the direct accommodation of the *Los Angeles Times*."[7] "Throughout the spring and summer," reported Renata Adler in a later *New Yorker* article, "licenses permitting minors to be served anything at all were revoked at one place after another: several of these places reluctantly went adult and topless — a change that seemed to cause the authorities no distress." Indeed, it was widely rumoured that the kids were being cleared off the Strip to make way for the return of Mob-connected sex entertainment and "for more serious, less conspicuous forms of vice than lingering after curfew."[8]

Shortly after Halloween, a couple of angry teenagers decided it was time to organize a formal protest against the arbitrary arrests and police abuse of kids on the Strip. They printed a flyer — "Protest Police Mistreatment of Youth on Sunset Blvd. — No More Shackling of 14 and 15 year olds" — calling for a demonstration on Saturday night, 12 November. It was at this point that Al Mitchell, the leftist ex-merchant sailor and filmmaker who managed the Fifth Estate for Robert Peterson, became their informal sponsor. Cans were soon being circulated around the coffee house to raise money for additional leaflets. Rock stations began to luridly warn that a 'major riot' was brewing, and cautioned kids away from the Strip on the 12th. This was irresistible publicity for a demonstration whose urgency was underlined by the arrest of 80 kids for curfew violations on Friday night.

The next evening, according to the *Freep*, by 9 p.m. more than 3,000 teenagers, flanked by adult curiosity-seekers and hostile servicemen, gathered in front of Pandora's. Aside from a handful of placards hastily painted at the Fifth Estate a few hours before the demonstration, there was no apparent organization or leadership whatever. In the spirit of the times, the protest had been conceived as a spontaneous "happening" and the overwhelming majority of the crowd complied with its peaceful purpose. At one point the police called a fire company to the scene, and some of the kids nervously asked the firefighters whether they were going to hose them. A bemused fire captain replied: "Have a good time and let me go home." The engine left.

The overflow of protestors onto Sunset and Crescent Heights boulevards created a traffic jam; several bus drivers angrily honked and screamed at the kids. In response, demonstrators climbed up and danced on the roofs of the buses. One youth scrawled "Free the 15 Year Olds!" on a windshield; another broke a window with a fire extinguisher. On the fringe of the crowd there was a brief scuffle between longhaired protestors and some young sailors and Marines. Shortly after 10 p.m., a hundred cops roughly used their nightsticks to clear the sidewalks. Police with drawn revolvers chased kids into Pandora's. Panicky protestors who tried to retreat

[7]*LAFP*, 28 October 1966.
[8]Renata Adler, "Fly Trans-Love Airways," *The New Yorker*, 25 February 1967.

westward down Sunset collided with a wall of riot-ready sheriffs, and about 50 were arrested.[9]

The LAPD declared a 'tactical alert' the next evening, closing Sunset from Fairfax to Crescent Heights. State Highway Patrol officers and private Pinkerton guards reinforced the sheriffs' side of the line. Thanks to wildly escalating rumours in the station houses, the atmosphere was irrationally tense, and the *Freep* reported that "many of the officers seemed to be in a state of panic." While Al Mitchell shot footage for his documentary *Blue Fascism*, 300 or so protestors jeered "Gestapo, Gestapo!" at the police line and then dispersed after they were declared an "unlawful assembly." They vowed to return the following weekend.[10]

On Monday morning, it was the turn of the Establishment to riot. Although a handful of protestors had been involved in the bus incident (total estimated damage: $158), the *Herald-Examiner*'s headline screamed: "Long Hair Nightmare: Juvenile Violence on Sunset Strip." A *Times* editorial likewise warned of "Anarchy on Sunset Strip," and blamed the teenagers and their "senseless, destructive riot" for a "sorry ending for the boulevard that was once Hollywood's most dazzling area." The *Times* also gave much space to the melodramatic claims of Captain Charlie Crumly, commander of the LAPD's Hollywood Division, that "left wing groups and outside agitators" had organized the protest. Crumly also asserted that "there are over a thousand hoodlums living like bums in Hollywood, advocating such things as free love, legalized marijuana and abortion."[11]

Los Angeles suddenly seemed like an embattled patriarchy. Hollywood councilman Paul Lamport demanded a full-scale investigation into Crumly's charges of a subversive plot, while his county counterpart, Supervisor Ernest Debs, ranted that "whatever it takes is going to be done. We're going to be tough. We're not going to surrender that area or any area to beatniks or wild-eyed kids." The Sunset Plaza Association, representing Strip restaurant owners, called for a city crackdown on such "kid hangouts" as Pandora's and the Fifth Estate that offered sanctuary to protesting teenagers across the county/city border.[12]

Only the *Freep* challenged the daily press's characterization of the previous weekend's police disturbance as a 'teenybopper riot'. "To the editorial writers of the *Times*, sitting in their bald majesty on First Street, entirely isolated from the events, unable to properly evaluate or analyze them, it is only possible to say: 'You are stupid old men who make reckless and irresponsible statements that can only make a bad situation worse'." According to the *Freep*, the kids were actually caught in the middle of an economic conflict between the Sunset Strip Chamber of Commerce with its ties to the adult-entertainment industry, on one hand, and the Sunset Strip Association, representing the youth venues, on the other. "The police, in ef-

[9] *LAFP*, 18 November 1966.
[10] *LAT*, 13 and 15 November 1966.
[11] *LAT* and *HE*, 15 November 1966.
[12] *LAT*, 15 November 1966.

fect, have been cooperating with one very wealthy group of property owners on the Strip against a less powerful group of businessmen."[13]

The lopsidedness of the battle was further demonstrated when the Los Angeles City Council unanimously acceded to the Sunset Plaza Association's request and voted to use eminent domain to demolish Pandora's Box. At the same time, Sheriff Peter Pitchess and Supervisor Debs lobbied the County Public Welfare Commission to prevent the renewal of the permits allowing Strip clubs to admit under-21s. When the Commission baulked, the supervisors themselves rescinded the offending ordinance and effectively banned teenagers from the clubs.[14] Suddenly, Los Angeles' celebrated rock renaissance itself was under threat, and this quickly galvanized the younger generation of music producers and agents into unexpected solidarity with the next wave of protests on the Strip.

"*There's a man with a gun over there*"

Although the second weekend of protests (18-20 November 1966) again pitted thousands of flower children against huge phalanxes of police and sheriffs, the still leaderless protestors broadcast enough seductive warmth, as well as carnival-like mirth, to take the grim edge off the evening. As they marched down the Strip, they handed out flowers and blew bubbles and kisses. The cops seemed disarmed by the happy mood, although at 10 p.m. a sheriffs' sound truck began warning under-18s to clear the street or be arrested. Hundreds of kids resolutely faced off a cordon of deputies, police, and Navy Shore Patrol around the Crescent Heights and Sunset triangle. Although several score of curfew violaters were ultimately arrested, there were no baton charges, and the crowd, still in surprisingly good humour, dispersed by 2 a.m. There were widespread rumours, however, that the business interests were upset with the evening's outcome, and that the sheriffs were under pressure to use more aggressive tactics the next weekend.

To forestall the expected violence against their fans, a group of concerned celebrities and music-industry executives went into a huddle the following Friday. The meeting was called by Jim Dickson, the manager of the Byrds, who took fulltime leave to organize the awkwardly titled CAFF. Its initial membership included Dickson's partner Ed Ticker, the ubiquitous Al Mitchell, Whiskey's co-owner Elmer Valentine, Sonny and Cher manager Brian Stone, television star Bob Denver of *Gilligan's Island* fame, millionaire sportsman and Woolworth heir Lance Reventlow (a member of the Sheriffs' Aero Squadron), and Beach Boy Enterprises' Michael Vossi and David Anderle. The meagre political clout of the club owners was now dramatically augmented by support from the top bands and music-industry leaders. CAFF decided to mobilize its members and friends to attend the next evening's demonstration as legal observers in yellow armbands. A group of

[13] *LAFP*, 18 November 1966.
[14] *LAT*, 17 November 1966; *LAFP*, 25 November 1966.

sympathetic Hollywood ministers and the local chapter of the ACLU also promised to turn out to support the right of peaceful protest.[15]

In the event, amok sheriffs' deputies gave CAFF and some 30 clergy a shocking exhibition of the abuse that the kids had been complaining about all year. "People were viciously clubbed and beaten," wrote the *Freep*'s Brian Carr. "There was no plan or purpose evident in the beatings or the subsequent arrests. It seemed the handiest people, with no regard given to age, sex or social position were clubbed, punched and/or arrested."[16] The immensely popular Bob Denver, a one-time mailman and former teacher before roles as Maynard G. Krebs on *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-1963) and Gilligan (1964-1967) launched his stardom, was left almost speechless by the scene. "Unbelievable ... just unbelievable," Denver mumbled as deputies spat on a woman in his group, then charged down the street to baton some harmless teens. Peter Fonda, who was filming outside the Fifth Estate with actor Brandon de Wilde, was arrested with 27 others, mainly adults, as they watched the LAPD's emulation of the sheriffs. "Man, the kids have had it," Fonda later told reporters.[17]

Meanwhile inside the lobby of the West Hollywood Sheriffs station, Brian Stone — who was already a legend for creating Sonny and Cher as well as Buffalo Springfield — was arrested for refusing to produce identification upon demand. His business partner, Charlie Green, was in turn busted for protesting Stone's arrest. Before the night was over, the sheriffs and LAPD together had made enemies of one of the most powerful, if unconventional, industries in Los Angeles. As the Mamas and the Papas later explained to reporters, even millionaire rock stars could no longer "drive down the street with any feeling of safety from harassment."[18]

The even more promiscuous police violence at the 10 December protest (described at the beginning of this essay) solidified CAFF's apprehension that 'blue fascism' posed a direct threat to Los Angeles' billion-dollar rock culture. As the city council and board of supervisors forged ahead with their plans to bulldoze Pandora's and gut the Strip club scene, CAFF joined with the club owners and the ACLU in an ultimately successful legal defense of the status quo ante. If the *Los Angeles Times* red-baited the longhaired protestors as dupes of the "the leftwing W.E.B. DuBois Clubs," AM stations fought back with a dramatic recording of a defiant teenager saying "it's our constitutional guarantee to walk unmolested on Sunset Strip" as he was being bundled into a sheriff's car.[19] And within a few weeks, tens of millions of teenagers across the world were listening to the haunting words — "Stop, children, what's that sound?" — of Stephen Stills's Strip battle anthem, "For What It's Worth."

[15] *LAFP*, 2 December 1966.
[16] *LAFP*, 2 December 1966.
[17] *LAT*, 28 November and 4 December 1966.
[18] *LAT*, 28 November; *LAFP*, 2 December 1966.
[19] *LAT*, 27 November 1966.

Al Mitchell and CAFF, supported by the *Freep*, suspended demonstrations over the Christmas holiday while they held 'peace talks' with country officials. Verbal progress on that end, however, was undercut by what was widely seen as an escalation of police pressure on youth and adult counter-cultures throughout the Los Angeles area. In mid-December, for example, Pasadena Police raided the popular Catacombs art gallery and arrested 100 young people on a variety of drug charges, many of them utterly bogus. Then, on New Year's Eve, the LAPD vice-squad rampaged through the gay bars in the Silverlake district, roughing up and arresting scores of patrons.[20]

The LAPD also increased its illegal harassment of the *Freep*'s salesforce. Despite a city ordinance authorizing their right to sell papers from the curb to passing cars, *Freep* vendors were systematically ticketed and frequently arrested, especially on the Strip and in front of Pandora's. Since local television and the two dailies had blacked out images of police brutality, the *Freep*, together with a few rock stations and the local Pacifica franchise (KPFK-FM), were truly the alternative media. Persecution, moreover, only made the *Freep* vendors into heroes and boosted the paid circulation of the paper above 65,000.[21]

"*I think it's time ...* "

The 'phony war' on the Strip lasted until the end of February when Al Mitchell announced that "we must go on to the streets again police and sheriff's deputies have again and again violated the terms of a 'truce' RAMCOM and other concerned groups negotiated on 16 December with the Los Angeles Crime and Delinquency Commission." Indeed, Captain Victor Resau of the West Hollywood Sheriffs humiliated the Commission when he publically renounced the truce or any other constraint on the vigorous enforcement of the curfew law. The County's earlier attempt to outlaw teenagers from rock clubs by ordinance had been ruled unconstitutional, so sheriffs and police were once more under terrific pressure from property-owners to use brute force to drive the kids off the Strip. Mitchell was particularly outraged at repeated raids on the Fifth Estate and other alcohol-free coffee houses. Some 80,000 leaflets calling for a demonstration on Saturday night, 11 February 1967, saturated the clubs and made their way clandestinely through every high school in the county.

For the first time there was strategic planning to broaden the base of the protests to incorporate the grievances of gays and people of colour. As the *Freep* noted, "one of the most interesting and pace-setting reactions to the call to demonstrate came early this week from homosexual organizations who are currently up in arms about New Years Eve's police raids on a number of Silver Lake area gay bars." Two

[20] *LAFP*, 17 February 1967.
[21] For a history of LAPD harassment of the alternative press, see *Los Angeles Underground* [*LAU*], July-August 1967.

leading gay groups, PRIDE and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, endorsed the 11 February demonstration and added plans for their own simultaneous march along Sunset in Silver Lake. Mitchell's loosely knit RAMCOM group also plotted actions in Watts, East L.A., and Pacoima in the hope that angry Black and Chicano youth would be drawn to participate. The self-concept of the Strip movement was shifting from an amorphous 'happening' to an all-embracing coalition of outcast and police-persecuted street cultures.[22]

A crude attempt was made to frame the movement's principal adult leader. Ten days before the scheduled demonstrations, Mitchell — a veteran of harassment for such offenses as allowing singing in the Fifth Estate and obscene anti-police graffiti in its lavatories — was arrested (but not booked) on suspicion of 150 counts of statutory rape. The fortyish leftist, whom the *Times* had caricatured as the "muezzin of the teenboppers," was now unmasked as a sinister sex criminal preying on his teenager followers — or so it was claimed on radio and television news. In fact, Mitchell's 17-year-old accuser quickly confessed that her allegations were lies told in anger after she had been thrown out of the Fifth Estate for drug use. The *Freep* pondered why Mitchell had been so brazenly arrested and demonized in the media before the LAPD had even checked out the teenager's preposterous story.[23]

In any event, the hubbub around Mitchell did not deter more than 3,000 teenagers, along with unprecedented numbers of college students and adults, from once again assembling in front of Pandora's on Saturday night. For the first time, there was an organized rally — with speeches by Mitchell, civil liberties lawyer Marvin Chan, and ACLU counsel Phil Croner — as well as an ingenious tactical plan. Every hour new contingents of protestors were sent west on the county Strip where sheriffs deputies, impassive for the most part, allowed them to march without harassment. The demonstrators, carrying signs that read "Stop Beating the Flower Children" and "Stop Blue Fascism," were both exuberant and disciplined: vivid refutation of the hoary myth of "wild-eyed, drug crazed rioters."[24]

Meanwhile 500 protestors in front of the Black Cat Bar at the corner of Sunset and Hyperion were urged by speakers to make "a unified community stand in Silver Lake against brutality." In L.A. history, this was the less dramatic counterpart to the Village's Stonewall Riot, the birthdate of an activist gay rights movement. Unfortunately the other protest venues were unhistoric flops. Only a desultory crowd turned out in Venice, where most residents had preferred to join the main action on the Strip, and in Pacoima a small group of hapless RAMCOM kids with good intentions but poor communication skills were set upon and beaten by local gang members. The *Freep* could find no evidence of any protests in either Watts or East L.A.[25]

[22]*LAFP*, 17 February 1967; and *LAT*, 1 April 1967.
[23]*LAFP*, 10 February 1966.
[24]*LAFP*, 17 February 1967.
[25]*LAFP*, 17 February 1967.

This did not mean, however, that the Strip protests had no impact upon the ghettoes and barrios. Black and Chicano flower children were beginning to integrate the Strip in small numbers, despite frequent racist treatment from club bouncers and, of course, cops; and some Black leaders, both moderate and radical, were rallying to the idea, pushed by Al Mitchell and New Left groups, that there really was new ground for a broad, anti-police-abuse coaliton. In March, after another large protest on the Strip, Georgia legislator and civil rights hero Julian Bond spoke to admiring youth at the Fifth Estate while cops loomed threateningly on the periphery in riot gear.[26] From February onwards, moreover, every protest on the Strip self-consciously identified itself with the victims of far more deadly police brutality in Southcentral L.A. Radical groups, especially SDS and the International Socialists, began to play more prominent roles in the protests and actively recruited high-school-age memberships.

But many Angelenos had no inkling that mass protests, larger than ever, were continuing on the Strip. In April, the latest addition to the local alternative media, *Los Angeles Underground*, bannered the huge headline: "STRIP WAR: News Blackout Conceals Struggle, Police Sabotage Truce Agreement." The paper excoriated the *Herald-Examiner*, but even more the *Times*, for their refusal to print a word about the huge but now disciplined demonstrations on the Strip.[27] The *Times*, however, did continue its vilification of youth culture ('teenyboppers' had now metamorphosed into 'hippies') with constant stories and editorials of the ilk, "Hippies Blamed for Decline of the Sunset Strip." Furthermore, the *Times* warned, the bell-bottomed hordes were now poised to 'invade' and presumably destroy Hollywood as well. Much attention was given to a speech that a local real-estate appraiser, Robert Steel, had made in May 1967, charging that longhaired teens had done more damage than the Watts rioters two years earlier. Steel claimed that the under-18 youth had reduced property values along the Strip by 30 per cent and scared away potential major investors, including a large savings-and-loan company.[28]

The *Times*, at least, was accurate in pointing out a new hotspot in Hollywood where property owners were squaring off against new youth venues, especially Hullabaloo, a vast rock emporium that sometimes staged a dozen popular bands in all-night marathons. On 28 July 1967, the LAPD, using elaborate decoys and commando tactics, had swept down upon the ticket lines at Hullabaloo and arrested 200 fans for curfew violations, although their IDs were only checked at the station. As usual the incident went unreported in the *Times*, but it sent shock waves through the

[26] *LAT*, 1 April 1967.
[27] *LAU*, July-August 1967; see also *LAFP*, 17 February 1967, for complaints about press blackout.
[28] *LAT*, 1 and 8 September 1968. See also "Hippies Hurt More than Riots in Los Angeles," *American City*, July 1968, 47.

music world and revived CAFF-type interest in defending the industry's local fandom.

Nineteen sixty-eight was year three of the struggle and the Strip War threatened to become as protracted as the Civil War, with the baby sisters and brothers of the original protestors now on the front line. No one could much recall what a 'beatnik' was, but hippie-phobia was reaching a crescendo, with the *Times*, as usual, providing a rich diet of innuendo and stereotyping.[29] Yet the immense engines of the culture industry were slowly turning the great ship of mainstream taste around. Straight young adults, from secretaries to longshoremen, were quietly letting their hair grow and putting on bell bottoms. The young sailors and Marines who a few years before had waylaid unwary teenyboppers in the Strip's back alleys were now happily trading drugs with their hippie connections. Storeowners and restaurateurs who once had apoplexy at the sight of a madras-clothed teenybopper now couldn't distinguish them from the palm trees.

As the mainstream went counter-cultural, much of the counter culture, including its music, moved, however temporarily, to the political left. The LAPD and the sheriffs had to shift deployments to deal with the new specters of the Black Panther Party in Southcentral and high-school unrest on the Eastside. Curfew enforcement on the Strip became a less urgent law-enforcement priority. Although police harassment would continue for another decade or more, the Strip war came to a climax on 28 September 1968, the day after Huey Newton had been sentenced to prison.

The protest this time was organized by the new Peace and Freedom Party which gave equal billing to three demands: "Free the Strip. End Police Brutality. Free Huey Newton." Although the *Times* — what else could one expect? — gave the protest only a few sentences, claiming that there were about 600 participants, I can testify that the number was at least four times larger.[30] It was, in fact, one of the most memorable demonstrations of a lifetime, as the same kids, so frequently scorned and physically abused by the deputies, now boldly shoved "Fuck the Sheriffs" and "No More Murder of Black People" placards in their faces.

For the first time the shoe was on the other foot. The West Hollywood Sheriffs station was surrounded by protestors, besieged by 'revolutionary hippies' no less. In a tense, hour-long confrontation, the kids showed superb courage and good humour. In the end, everyone simply walked off, back into the rock-and-roll night, while some of the girls threw kisses to the thoroughly vexed and defeated sheriffs.

[29]See, for example, the *LAT* editorial "Hippies on the Glamor Belt," 9 September 1968.
[30]*LAT*, 29 September 1968.

APPENDIX

Buffalo Springfield
For What It's Worth
Stephen Stills, 1966

There's something happening here
What it is ain't exactly clear
There's a man with a gun over there
Telling me I got to beware

I think it's time we stop, children, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down

There's battle lines being drawn
Nobody's right if everybody's wrong
Young people speaking their minds
Getting so much resistance from behind

I think it's time we stop, hey, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down

What a field-day for the heat
A thousand people in the street
Singing songs and carrying signs
Mostly say, hooray for our side

It's time we stop, hey, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down

Paranoia strikes deep
Into your life it will creep
It starts when you're always afraid
You step out of line, the man come and take you away

We better stop, hey, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down
Stop, hey, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down
Stop, now, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down
Stop, children, what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down