Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HUNTER S. THOMPSON

Hunter S. Thompson was born the first of three sons to Virginia Ray Davison, a local Louisville librarian, and Jack Robert Thompson, an insurance adjustor. Thompson lived a comfortable middle-class life with his family until his father died of a rare neuromuscular disease when Thompson was just 14. Thompson went on to high school in Louisville, but after he was charged as an accessory to robbery in 1955 and sentenced to sixty days in the local jail, he was not allowed to take his final exams and didn't graduate. That same year, Thompson joined the United States Air Force, and in 1956 he applied to aviation school. His application was ultimately rejected, and Thompson was later stationed in Florida, where he took night classes at Florida State University and wrote for the school newspaper. He received an early honorable discharge from the Air Force in 1957 due to his unruly behavior and inability to follow directions. Thompson briefly lived in New York City and audited courses at Colombia, but by 1960 he was living in Puerto Rico writing for a sports magazine. In 1961, he moved back to the States and lived in Big Sur, California, where his first feature article was published in *Rouge* magazine. Around this time, Thompson began writing novels, including *The Rum Diary* about his time in Puerto Rico, but he failed to publish at that time. In 1963, Thompson married Sandra Dawn Conklin, who gave birth to their son, Juan, in 1964. By 1965, Thompson and his family were living in San Francisco, California, where he was active in the American countercultural movement. He took an assignment to write a story about the Hell's Angels motorcycle club, and spent an entire year riding and living with them. Thompson's research of the club gained much attention and he was offered several book deals. Unfortunately, Thompson's presumed financial success angered the Angels, who demanded half his profits and savagely beat him. During the late sixties, Thompson moved to Colorado, where he ran, unsuccessfully, for Sheriff of Pitkin County in 1970. During his political run, Thompson created gonzo journalism, a form of new journalism that rejects objectivity and instead relies on a first-person account to report any given event. In 1972, Thompson published *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* to split reviews; however, the book gained popularity with the public throughout the 1970s and has since become an iconic piece of American literature. Thompson spent most of the '70s working as a journalist, but he frequently drank and missed deadlines. By 1980, he began to slow down and isolate himself, but he continued to write for *Rolling Stone* magazine. For most of the 1990s, he worked on a single novel that was never published, and in 2000, he began writing a weekly column for *ESPN*. Thompson married Anita Bejmuk in 2003, and in 2005, he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head while at home in Woody Creek, Colorado.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is based on a 1971 trip to Vegas that Thompson took with attorney and Chicano activist, Oscar Zeta Acosta. Thompson was writing a story for *Rolling Stone* magazine about the death of Mexican-American journalist, Ruben Salazar, and as a prominent member of the Mexican-American community, Acosta was Thompson's primary source. Racial tensions had been rising in Los Angeles during the time, and Thompson and Acosta decided to travel to Vegas to escape the hostile environment. Salazar, a writer for the Los Angeles *Times*, was a principle voice in the Mexican-American community and a civil rights activist who was vocal about the disproportionate number of Mexican-American soldiers who were sent to Vietnam and subsequently killed. In August of 1970, Salazar was covering the National March of the Chicano Moratorium, a Mexican-American anti-war group that protested the Vietnam War, when he was killed after being struck in the head by a tear-gas bomb fired by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hunter S. Thompson famously referred to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a failed piece of gonzo journalism. Gonzo is Thompson's personal creation based in part on the style of New journalism, a form of expository writing pioneered by Tom Wolfe during the 1960s and '70s. Wolfe rejected traditional objective journalism and instead favored literary techniques and a subjective perspective. Wolfe's 1965 book of essays, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, began as an article on custom car culture for *Esquire* magazine and was compiled almost completely from Wolfe's personal notes and letters. This same subjective perspective is seen in Thompson's own writing, as well as a sharp critique of American culture and 1960s counterculture. American counterculture began when the beatnik subculture of the 1950s gave way to the hippie culture of the 1960s, and Jack Kerouac's 1957 publication of *On the Road*, an account of Kerouac's own travels across the United States, is generally considered to be the defining literary work of the American counterculture. Thompson identifies American writers Ken Kesey and Allen Ginsberg as prominent figureheads of the counterculture and even finds them partially at fault for the movement's failure. Kesey's own novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which examines the treatment of patients in an Oregon psychiatric hospital, is in keeping with

Thompson's anti-establishment views and the importance of equal and universal civil rights. This anti-establishment viewpoint is also seen in Ginsberg's 1973 publication of *The Fall of America: Poems of These States: 1965-1971*, an openly political collection of poems in which Ginsberg condemns the Vietnam War and speaks frankly about his sexuality, during a time when homosexuality was considered a crime in most of the United States.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*
- **When Written:** 1971
- **Where Written:** Woody Creek, Colorado
- **When Published:** 1971
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary/Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Gonzo journalism
- **Setting:** Las Vegas, Nevada
- **Climax:** When Duke and Dr. Gonzo go to the Old Psychiatrist's Club looking for the American Dream and find it burned to the ground.
- **Antagonist:** The establishment of American government and mainstream society
- **Point of View:** First-person narrative

EXTRA CREDIT

Famous Relatives. Thompson was named after a distant relative on his mother's side, Nigel John Hunter. Hunter was a prominent Scottish surgeon who pioneered human artificial insemination and prescribed to Lord Byron, a famous British poet born with a club foot, the first orthopedic shoe that enabled him to finally walk.

Hemingway Robbery. Thompson visited the home of American writer Ernest Hemingway in 1964, a few years after Hemingway's suicide, where he stole a pair of elkhorns that were hanging over the front door. Thompson kept the antlers as a souvenir for the rest of his life, but his wife, Anita, finally returned them to Hemingway's family in 2015, nearly ten years after Thompson's own suicide.

PLOT SUMMARY

After journalist Raoul Duke is hired by *Sports Illustrated* to cover the Mint 400, "the richest off-the-road race for motorcycles and dune-buggies in the history of organized sport," he gathers his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, a huge Chevy convertible called **the Great Red Shark**, and a massive **bag of drugs**, and heads out to Las Vegas. Duke and Gonzo plan to "*relax*, as it were, in the womb of the desert sun," and search for the American Dream along the way. Duke and Gonzo begin to sample their stash of drugs, including "two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, [and] laughers," long before they arrive in Vegas, and by the time they reach Barstow, California, they are already hallucinating. They arrive at their hotel in the grips of a full-blown acid trip, where Duke is barely able to check in amidst the reptilian people and blood-soaked carpet. Once Duke's hallucinations calm, Gonzo and Duke head to the Mint Gun Club, the site of the Mint 400, to do some early research and look around.

The Gun Club has not cancelled target practice on account of the race and countless shots ring out as the racers gather to register. The race doesn't begin until the morning but plenty of spectators are already milling about the grounds. Duke approaches the registration table and is met by a humorless man with a gun. Duke looks around and realizes that several spectators are carrying guns, and he begins to grow nervous. "We're the only people here without guns," Duke says to Gonzo as they make a hasty retreat. They spend the night out in the casinos and return to the club early the next morning. After Duke and Gonzo kill time in the bar, the racers begin to take off; however, after two hundred bikes race into the desert, visibility quickly becomes poor. Duke takes a press vehicle around the track and sees very little, except for a large group of menacing nationalists with a machine-gun, so he decides to return to the bar and "drink heavily."

Duke and Gonzo decide to go the Desert Inn to see the Debbie Reynolds/Harry James show but are quickly kicked out because of their rowdy behavior. They take some mescaline and inhale some ether, and then head to Circus-Circus. When they get to the casino, it's a complete zoo. Trapeze acts fly high above their heads and the gaming floor is littered with colorful attractions as well. The casino's bar is on a spinning carousel, and Duke and Gonzo go around and around as they sip their beers. The lights and constant movement begin to get to Gonzo, and he starts to feel "the Fear," the dreaded state of a trip gone bad. "Nonsense," says Duke. He believes they have found "the main nerve" of the American Dream, and he isn't ready to give up.

That night, Duke finds Gonzo soaking in the bathtub and listening to Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" after having eaten an entire sheet of blotter acid. Gonzo is clearly on the edge of a raging acid trip, and he wants Duke to throw the radio into the tub at the height of the song so he can get "*Higher!*" Duke finally manages to talk some sense into Gonzo, and Gonzo soon slips into a drug-induced "catatonic despair." Duke's own relationship with psychedelic drugs began back in the 1960s in San Francisco, "a very special time and place to be part of." During the late '60s, an entire generation of young

people "came to a head in a long fine flash," and while it might not have meant anything, for a while there was a "sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil." Duke remembers the "wave" of the '60s counterculture fondly, but inevitably "the wave finally broke and rolled back."

The next day, Duke and Gonzo are reminded of the massive room service bill they have accumulated. They have no way to pay it, and Gonzo quickly flies back to Los Angeles leaving Duke with the bill. Duke decides it is best to flee and "slip the noose," so he hops in the Great Red Shark and heads back to L.A. Duke makes it to a desert town named Baker when he grows paranoid and begins to break down. He has been taking plenty of drugs even in Gonzo's absence, and it is beginning to look like he will never make it home. He calls Gonzo, who tells him to go back to Vegas—Duke has been given an assignment to cover the National Conference of District Attorneys' seminar on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and there is a room reserved for him at the Flamingo and a **white Cadillac** at the airport. Gonzo is on his way back as well, so Duke decides to head back to Vegas. "Register at the Flamingo and have the White Caddy sent over at once. Do it right," Duke thinks, "remember Horatio Alger."

By the time Duke gets to the Flamingo after picking up the Caddy, he finds Gonzo already checked in with Lucy, a strange girl of "indeterminate age." Lucy is a runaway from Montana, and Gonzo has foolishly given her acid on the plane. Duke convinces Gonzo to send Lucy to a different hotel, and then they return to their dwindling bag of drugs. Gonzo has brought a bottle of adrenochrome from L.A., and Duke spends the rest of the night in drugged stupor. The next day, Duke and Gonzo attend the District Attorneys' drug conference, where they end up in a room with 1,500 law enforcement officials. The "drug experts" are painfully ill-informed about drug use and users, and they falsely criminalize "the Drug Culture" as crazed sex maniacs. Duke and Gonzo have a "headful of mescaline," but it makes little difference. These "poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni," Duke says right before they abruptly walk out.

Duke and Gonzo spend the rest of the day in a haze of drugs and end up in a diner in North Vegas. There, Duke and Gonzo tell the cook, Lou, about their plan to find the American Dream. "Is that the old Psychiatrist's Club?" Lou asks, referring to a Vegas disco. The club, according to Lou, is violent and full of drugs, and currently closed for remodeling. Later, Duke and Gonzo go to the club to find it has burned to the ground. The next morning, Gonzo flies back to L.A. and Duke is left with another ridiculous hotel bill. The white Caddy is trashed, and Duke is nearly out of money. Duke will slip this bill as well, but first he returns to Circus-Circus where he meets his friend, Bruce. Sitting at the revolving bar, Duke explains to Bruce that he has found the American Dream at Circus-Circus. As a child, the casino owner had always wanted to join the circus. "Now the bastard has his *own* circus, and a license to steal, too," Bruce says. "It is pure Horatio Alger," Duke says and then leaves Vegas feeling "totally confident."

CHARACTERS

Raoul Duke – The protagonist and narrator of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and author Hunter S. Thompson's alter ego. Duke is a journalist, and when he is assigned a story in Las Vegas, he figures it is the perfect time to find the American Dream. He loads up his rented car, **the Great Red Shark**, with a massive **bag of "extremely dangerous drugs,"** grabs his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, and heads to the desert. Duke takes an insane number of drugs and frequently hallucinates, but in his clearer moments he reminisces fondly about the 1960s in San Francisco. He laments and openly criticizes the countercultural movement's inability to bring "Peace and Understanding" to American society and examines where they went wrong. He loves Bob Dylan and loathes law enforcement, and he finds "twisted humor" in covering the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs while "in the grip of a potentially fatal drug episode." Duke's desire to take drugs and resist the establishment is "not to prove any final, sociological point," nor is it "a conscious mockery," but is "mainly a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty." Raoul Duke *is* the counterculture, and he is determined to carry out their agenda despite the movement's failure. Duke, and Thompson by extension, adamantly objects to the violence and inequality of the American government and mainstream society. Despite this objection, however, he frequently thinks and hallucinates violence, and he easily accepts and tolerates the violent actions of Dr. Gonzo. Duke even suggests pimping out Lucy for money, but never follows through with it. While Duke may never physically act in a violent way, he sure seems to condone violence, and in this way, Thompson suggests that violence is common in average American citizens. Duke also represents Thompson's discontent with the state of journalism in America. As a journalist, Duke is "dangerously disorganized" and completely unprofessional, and he is just one of many. Duke claims that "journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits." Through Raoul Duke, Thompson implies that journalist can do much better, and he argues the need to reinvent the field of journalism for the future.

Dr. Gonzo – Raoul Duke's attorney and travel companion on his trip to Las Vegas in search of the American Dream. Gonzo insists on going with Duke to Vegas in case he needs legal advice, but he fails to be useful in any legal sense. Gonzo spends most of the book taking acid and throwing up. He trashes their hotel rooms, runs up the room service bill, and leaves Duke to deal with the consequences alone. Of course, Duke runs out on the bill too, but he must run without his attorney. Gonzo is

selfish and indulgent, and he underscores the capitalist excess and greed implied in Duke's understanding of the American Dream. Duke introduces Gonzo as person of color, claiming, "I think he's probably Samoan. But it doesn't matter does it?" To Duke, it doesn't matter if Gonzo is Samoan or Mexican, because the point is that he isn't white. Duke believes that Gonzo doesn't readily appreciate the importance of the American Dream because he has "no faith in the essential decency of the white man's culture," which implies that the American Dream is reserved for white Americans only. Gonzo's character highlights the inherent racism of the American Dream, which Thompson argues should be made more equal and inclusive. Like Duke, Dr. Gonzo's contempt for law enforcement and love for illegal drugs makes him an obvious symbol of the 1960s countercultural movement, but he also represents the violence of mainstream American society. Before Duke and Gonzo even arrive in Las Vegas, Gonzo points a .357 Magnum at Duke simply because he sarcastically refers to Gonzo as a "narcotics agent." He violently threatens innocent salespeople and Midwestern tourists for no reason at all, and in his most despicable moment, he gives Lucy, a girl of "indeterminate age," acid and presumably rapes her. Gonzo's violence is excessive and unapologetic, and it mirrors the violence that is unfolding in the world around him. Thompson ultimately argues that the violence of the Vietnam War and the 1960s has spread to average Americans, and the character of Dr. Gonzo is an example of this violence.

The Hitchhiker – Duke and Gonzo pick up the hitchhiker just outside of Barstow on their way to Las Vegas, and Duke describes him as a "poor Oakie kid" who has never been in a convertible before. Thompson includes an illustration of the hitchhiker in which he appears as a balding hippie, but Duke's reference to him as an "Oakie" suggests that he isn't from California. While the hitchhiker may want to appear as a member of the counterculture, he is easily shaken by Duke and Gonzo's drug use and references to violence, and he jumps out the back of the moving convertible the first chance he gets. Duke again encounters the hitchhiker near a desert town named Baker after a run-in with the California Highway Patrol. Drunk and tripping on acid, Duke is struck with crippling paranoia at the sight of the hitchhiker and immediately runs back to Vegas—in the opposite direction of the hitchhiker. Duke and Gonzo represent 1960s American counterculture, a movement that was centered largely on the West Coast. The hitchhiker, on the other hand, represents middle America, a place and people Duke and Gonzo feel completely at odds with.

Savage Lucy – A "*religious* freak" from Montana and "artist" who only paints portraits of Barbara Streisand. Lucy is a runaway of "indeterminate age," and Gonzo meets her on an airplane and gives her acid. Gonzo takes Lucy to the hotel room he shares with Duke in Las Vegas and presumably rapes her. She is described as a girl full of violence and hate with "the face and form of a Pit Bull," and Duke worries she may attack, or worse—get them arrested for kidnap and sodomy. Duke and Gonzo concoct an outrageous story and ditch Lucy at the Americana Hotel, and she is never heard from again. The character of Lucy underscores sexism and violence against women in American society. Gonzo takes advantage of Lucy, uses and assaults her, and then discards her. While her violence and hatred toward Duke and Gonzo is certainly understood if not justified, she is yet another reflection of the widespread violence in American society.

Alice – A maid from linen services at the Flamingo Hotel. Gonzo is caught off guard when Alice enters their hotel room to clean, and he violently attacks and chokes her. To silence Alice after the attack, Duke and Gonzo convince her that they are the police and then recruit her as a criminal informant. Alice is another example of sexism and violence against women in American society.

Lacerda – A photographer for *Sports Illustrated* and Duke's contact at the Mint 400. Unlike Duke, Lacerda is actually interested in reporting the story, and he heads off to take pictures while Duke goes back to the bar. Lacerda is the only member of the press who behaves in a professional way, which implies that professionalism in journalism is exceedingly rare.

Lionel Olay – Duke's rich friend from Big Sur who won big at a casino in Reno three weekends in a row. On the fourth weekend, Lionel was invited back to the casino by the General Manager—all expenses paid—but by the end of the weekend, Lionel was $30,000 down. Lionel was forced to sell his business and was savagely beaten by "the world's heaviest collection agency," but still couldn't cover his debt. "Gambling," Duke says, "is a very heavy business—and Las Vegas makes Reno seem like your friendly neighborhood grocery store." As Duke considers a casino in Vegas an example of the American Dream, Thompson implies that the American Dream is likewise rigged and largely unobtainable.

Dr. E. R. Bloomquist – A keynote speaker at the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs and "a well known authority on the abuse of dangerous drugs." Despite his credentials, however, Dr. Bloomquist's lecture is full of "dangerous gibberish," and he portrays drug users as violent, sex-crazed maniacs. He is out of touch with the actual "Drug Culture" of 1971 and is focused mainly on psychedelics, while the nation's drug users have largely moved on to much harsher drugs like heroin. Dr. E. R. Bloomquist represents the ignorance of the American establishment regarding drug use and users, and the tendency of that establishment to unfairly criminalize "the Drug Culture."

The Georgia Cop – Duke and Gonzo meet the police officer from Georgia outside the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and he is the epitome of the clueless law enforcement official in attendance

at the conference. Duke claims that the officers at the conference don't "know mescaline from macaroni," and the Georgia cop is no better. Duke and Gonzo tell him that "junkies" are taking over California, and to curb crime and drugs, they have started decapitating them. The Georgia cop immediately believes their far-fetched story and is completely onboard with killing innocent "junkies." The character of the Georgia cop underscores how easily drug users are unfairly criminalized by law enforcement in American society.

The Waitress – A waitress at North Star Coffee Lounge in North Vegas, a "ghetto" on the outskirts of Las Vegas for those who "fucked up once too often on the Strip." The waitress looks like a "burned-out caricature of Jane Russell," but she appears to have complete control of the diner. Gonzo propositions the waitress with a napkin that reads, "Back Door Beauty?" and then terrorizes her by waving around a knife and cutting the cord on the telephone. The waitress represents the marginalized lower class, but her character also underscores sexism and violence against women in American society as well.

Lou – The cook at a North Vegas diner. Duke and Gonzo ask Lou where they can find the American Dream, and while he suspects they have been sent on "a goose chase," he suggests they check at the Old Psychiatrist's Club, a violent Vegas discotheque full of "pushers" and "peddlers." Lou warns Duke and Gonzo that the disco is "completely remodeling," but when Duke and Gonzo arrive at the club, they find that it had burned to the ground three years before.

Bruce Innes – Duke's friend from Circus-Circus. Bruce comes in at the very end of the book, and as Duke is an unreliable narrator, he never does reveal where he met Bruce or how. Duke goes to Circus-Circus to see a man about an ape, and there he tells Bruce that Circus-Circus is "the main nerve" of the American Dream.

The Reporter – A journalist from *Life* magazine who is also covering the Mint 400 in Las Vegas. Duke meets the *Life* reporter at the bar of the Mint Hotel, where the man is a drunken mess. He falls to his knees after "losing his grip on the bar," but he continues to talk about the importance of reporting the event with "definite authority." Duke is horrified by the reporter's unprofessional behavior. "We are, after all, the absolute cream of the national sporting press," Duke says. The drunk reporter portrays journalists as a despicable bunch, a profession that Duke later claims is "a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits."

TERMS

Adrenochrome – Adrenochrome is a chemical compound created by the oxidation of adrenaline, a hormone secreted by human adrenal glands. **Dr. Gonzo** brings a bottle of adrenochrome to Vegas, a drug that **Duke** claims "makes pure mescaline seem like ginger beer." Duke takes a tiny drop of the drug and can't walk or speak for hours. While adrenochrome is a fictional drug in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the compound does actually exist, although it does not have any psychedelic properties. Thompson's reference to adrenochrome is implicitly violent—the drug must be harvested from a living adrenal gland, which implies someone must be murdered simply so someone else can get high. This implication of violence aligns with Thompson's overall argument relating to violence in American society.

Amyls – Amyl nitrate is a common pharmaceutical drug and vasodilator, which is usually used to lower blood pressure. In the Drug Culture, Amyls are also known as "poppers," and when snorted they produce an immediate, euphoric high. **Duke** and **Gonzo** abuse amyls throughout most of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, especially when they begin to hallucinate and panic.

Blotter Acid/LSD – Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), otherwise known as blotter acid, or simply acid, is a psychedelic drug. LSD causes intense hallucinations and a rapid heartrate, and it produces effects that can last up to twelve hours. Use of acid was central to the American counterculture movement in the 1960s, and **Duke** and **Gonzo** consistently take the drug throughout their Vegas trip.

Cocaine – Cocaine is a strong stimulant drug. **Duke** and **Gonzo**'s massive bag of drugs holds a salt shaker half full of cocaine, but Gonzo spills it when he tries to snort it while driving down the highway.

Ether – A volatile chemical liquid that has historically been used as an anesthetic and industrial solvent. **Duke** and **Gonzo** frequently inhale ether, which Duke identifies as the most dangerous substance in their big bag of drugs. "There is nothing in the world more helpless and irresponsible and depraved than a man in the depths of an ether binge," Duke claims.

Grass/Marijuana – A psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis plant. Marijuana is by far the least dangerous drug that **Duke** and **Gonzo** partake in, but it is still heavily criminalized by law enforcement and the American government. A large billboard in Vegas warns that use of marijuana is punishable by twenty years in prison, while sale of marijuana can lead to life in prison.

Hash – Also a psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis plant, only hash, or hashish, is made from the resin of cannabis and is generally considered to be stronger and more concentrated than regular marijuana. **Duke** smokes hash before moving on to LSD during the 1960s.

Heroin/Smack – An opioid drug known for its euphoric effects. Heroin, or smack, is usually injected into a vein, has an immediate onset, and is incredibly addictive. **Duke** and **Gonzo** don't use heroin in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but Duke closely examines the shifting national trend from psychedelic drugs like LSD and mescaline, to heavy, more dangerous drugs

like heroin. Duke claims that the Drug Culture is moving toward drugs like heroin, which he calls "downers," to cope with the corruption and violence of American society and Nixon's notoriously crooked presidency. "It is worth noting, historically," Duke says, "that downers came in with Nixon."

Mescaline – A naturally occurring alkaloid derived from the peyote cactus. Mescaline has hallucinatory effects similar to LSD, and **Duke** and **Gonzo** take a lot of this drug during the course of Thompson's book. The drug can also be harvested from a cactus known as the Peruvian torch, and Duke vaguely claims that he nearly missed his plane once in Peru, a likely reference to his mescaline use.

Opium – An addictive drug derived from opium poppy plants, also used as a pharmaceutical pain killer. **Duke** and **Gonzo** take opium to Las Vegas in their bag of drugs.

Seconal – A barbiturate drug typically used as a sleeping aid. Seconal was widely abused during the 1970s and is one of the "downers" Duke associates with the worsening drug crisis in America.

Singapore Grey – A specific type of opium that **Duke** and **Gonzo** have in their bag of drugs.

Speed – Speed, or amphetamine, is a central nervous system stimulant typically used to treat certain conditions like narcolepsy and attention deficit disorder. It is highly addictive and produces an immediate burst of energy and euphoria. **Duke** claims that speed was popular in the 1960s but is "going out of style" in the '70s.

Thorazine – Thorazine is an antipsychotic medication used to treat schizophrenia. After **Gonzo** eats an entire sheet of blotter acid, **Duke** tells him that he will be sorry if they don't have any Thorazine in their bag of drugs. Duke's reference to Thorazine implies that Gonzo is about to go completely insane from the acid, thus requiring antipsychotic medication.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

AMERICAN CULTURE AND COUNTERCULTURE

At its core, Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is an examination of the fall of American counterculture. During the 1960s, young people began to reject the conservative views of their parents and took to the streets in a collective rebellion to protest society's greatest ills—specifically the mounting violence and corruption of the Vietnam War and the racial, social, and gender inequality of American society. By 1970, it became clear that the anti-establishment movement had failed to produce a better America. The war in Vietnam raged on violently and American society was still in the grips of widespread racism and sexism. The counterculture sought freedom, equality, and peace but didn't get it, and Thompson laments this failure. Thompson's narrator and protagonist, Raoul Duke, personifies the American countercultural movement, which places him in a unique position to critique it. Through Duke, Thompson exposes the hypocrisy of the countercultural movement and argues that it while it was inherently naive, it ultimately failed because the movement was also violent and intolerant, the very things it was fighting against.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is rife with references to the 1960s and counterculture, which in turn reflects Thompson's own devotion to the anti-establishment movement. Thompson dedicates his book "to Bob Dylan, for *Mister Tambourine Man*." Dylan came to fame during the early 1960s with songs that addressed many of the social and political concerns of the counterculture, and he quickly became known as the voice of a generation. Thompson's dedication underscores his appreciation for both Dylan and the movement. While in Las Vegas, Duke returns to the hotel room he is sharing with his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, to find him listening to Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow* and blaring "White Rabbit" at a deafening volume. Released in 1967, "White Rabbit" is widely considered to be the anthem of the countercultural movement, and Dr. Gonzo's embrace of this song mirrors his enthusiasm for counterculture.

Duke frequently looks back on the '60s and reminisces fondly. "San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of," he recalls. Duke references the movement's social power and desire for change, claiming that "every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash." He speaks of the 1960s in idyllic terms, which makes his participation and support of counterculture clear, but his actions speak louder than his words. Duke's prolific drug use and open contempt for law enforcement proves that he hasn't left the '60s behind. Thompson's book takes place in 1971, but Duke is still deeply entrenched in the countercultural lifestyle, which highlights both Duke and Thompson's resistance to the traditional establishment of American society.

Despite his dedication to counterculture, however, Duke is openly critical of the movement's naivety, which he blames in part for its failure. Duke repeatedly mentions Tim Leary, an American psychologist who openly advocated for the use of psychedelic drugs in the '60s. Leary argued that use of LSD and other psychedelics would lead to "consciousness expansion," and ultimately increase "Peace and Understanding." Duke claims that Leary's theory has a "fatal flaw"—Leary did not

account for "the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait." In other words, as members of the counterculture expanded their minds with drug use, they quickly learned that peace and understanding don't really exist in American society. Duke openly admits to the movement's failure. "No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them," Duke says. "All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit." Duke believes they deserved to fail, even—instead of actively working toward fixing society's problems, the counterculture got high and hoped that society would fix itself.

According to Duke, the counterculture not only failed but created an additional problem in its wake—"a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some *force*—is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel." The counterculture falsely assumed that there was basic good in the world and that good will out. Obviously, this was not the case, and Duke likens this naivety to "a blind faith in some higher or 'wiser authority.'" In short, the counterculture was in search of a basic good that simply wasn't there in the first place.

In addition to this gullibility, Duke claims that the countercultural movement's failure was cemented by violence and intolerance, which mirrored the violence and intolerance of broader American society. Duke claims that the Hell's Angels, an American motorcycle club and organized crime syndicate who were critical players in counterculture, "blew it in 1965" when they violently attacked the SDS, or Students for a Democratic Society, a national activist organization that objected to the Vietnam War. The Angels' attack on the anti-war march was a "historic schism" in the rising momentum of the countercultural movement, causing division within the movement itself. Duke argues that the SDS and Hell's Angels were unable to "reconcile the interests of the lower/working class biker/dropout types and the upper/middle, Berkeley/student activists."

In the end, the opposing social classes of the countercultural movement were intolerant of one another and unable to unite in the face of their differences—a particularly troublesome message from a movement that sought to unite an entire country. The violence between the Hell's Angels and the SDS exploded in 1969 at a musical festival at Altamont Speedway in Northern California. The concert was riddled with fist-fights and disagreements, including the stabbing death of one concertgoer. Duke refers to the concert as an "orgy of violence," and claims it "*dramatized* the problem" of counterculture. The "reality," according to Duke, is that the movement was "terminal" and doomed to fail, but this doesn't mean that Duke, or Thompson for that matter, has thrown in the towel and abandoned it. The alternative—to succumb to and accept the injustices of mainstream American society and culture—is unimaginable, and as such, both Duke and Thompson continue the movement despite its obvious futility.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas focuses on Raoul Duke, a California journalist, and his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, as they travel from Los Angeles, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada, in a drug-fueled search for the American Dream. Duke's understanding of the American Dream assumes that *anyone*, with a little luck and "true grit," can succeed and prosper in America, and when he is assigned a story in Las Vegas, he figures it is the perfect opportunity to put "the American Dream in action." During their time in Vegas, Duke and his attorney "burn the locals, abuse the tourists, [and] terrify the help," and the elusive American Dream threatens to evade them, not to mention those they abuse along the way. Duke ultimately concludes that the American Dream is dead at worst, and at best, exists only in a Vegas casino. Duke's outrageous and at times ridiculous experiences in pursuit of the American Dream imply that traditional notions of this popular ideal are antiquated and, for many, limited and even unobtainable, and it is through these experiences that Thompson argues the need for a new understanding of the American Dream.

Duke makes repeated references to Horatio Alger, an American writer from the 1800s whose rags-to-riches stories are often cited as examples of the American Dream, and these references reflect Duke's own understanding of the concept. Duke suggests that the American Dream is inherently capitalist, and when he finds out his magazine is sending him to Vegas he responds excitedly, "Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas." Even though Duke modifies the American Dream a bit—that is, he adds drugs—the premise is still the same: hard work plus luck equals success in America. After Duke and Dr. Gonzo run up a massive hotel bill they can't pay, Dr. Gonzo runs back to L.A. and Duke fears his search is dead in the water. "How would Horatio Alger handle this situation?" Duke wonders. He answers with "panic," and runs off, abandoning the bill but not the American Dream. As Duke runs from his debt, he decides to hide in plain sight. He goes to a different hotel and switches cars to be less conspicuous. "Register at the Flamingo and have **the White Caddy** sent over at once. Do it right; remember Horatio Alger." Even when the chips are down, Duke doesn't abandon his search. Though his words certainly contain a level of irony, on some level he believes, just as Alger did, that success in America comes to those who work for it.

Duke's understanding of the American Dream, however, isn't really available to just anyone, and Thompson extends this understanding to American society at large. When Dr. Gonzo initially criticizes Duke's plan to find the American Dream, Duke replies, "You Samoans are all the same. You have no faith in the

essential decency of the white man's culture." Because Dr. Gonzo isn't white, according to Duke, he has less appreciation for the American Dream. On their way to Vegas, Duke and Dr. Gonzo pick up a hitchhiker, and Duke tries to explain to him the reason for their trip. "My attorney understands this concept," Duke claims, "despite his racial handicap." Duke implies that Dr. Gonzo understands the American Dream despite his identity as a non-white American, which Duke believes makes one unable to appreciate the finer nuances of the American Dream. Duke's automatic exclusion of non-white Americans from the American Dream parallels the belief that traditional notions of the American Dream are inherently racist and meant for white Americans only. Thompson points out this grim reality and implies that the American Dream should be more inclusive and equal.

Duke's editor later finds a recording of an interview of sorts between Duke and the staff of a North Vegas diner, the "rationale" for which "appears to be based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney—that the American Dream" is somewhere in Las Vegas. When Duke and Dr. Gonzo ask where they can find the American Dream, the diner's cook, Lou, assumes they are referring to the "Old Psychiatrist's Club," a discotheque in Vegas. "Or," questions Lou, "did somebody just send you on a goose chase?" Lou's reference to the American Dream as "a goose chase" implies that Duke and Dr. Gonzo are looking for something that doesn't exist and therefore can't be found. According to Lou, the "Old Psychiatrist's Club" is a hangout for "a bunch of pushers, peddlers, upper and downers," and is full of "twenty-four-hour-a-day violence." Lou's description harkens to the failed counterculture and the attempts of a generation to find the American Dream in a country and society they were fundamentally at odds with. Lou says the disco is "completely remodeling," which suggests a need to reinvent the American Dream to better accommodate this new and different generation. When Duke and Gonzo finally find the disco, however, it is a "huge slab of cracked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds," and the locals claim the club "burned down about three years ago." In this way, Thompson implies that the American Dream is dead and had gone out with the counterculture, who took with them the belief that America can do better.

Ultimately, Duke only finds an example of the American Dream at Circus-Circus, a loud and crowded casino in Vegas. The owner had dreamed as a child of running away with the circus, and "now the bastard has his own circus, and a license to steal, too." This realization underscores the harsh truths of the American Dream—the odds are always in favor of the house and only certain already-privileged Americans are taken seriously as players at the table. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is Thompson's attempt to redefine the American Dream, which he implies by extension is in need of "complete remodeling" as well.

DRUGS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

Nearly every page of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* mentions illegal drug use in some way, and when narrator and California journalist Raoul Duke is tasked with covering a local sporting event in Las Vegas, he takes with him his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, and a huge **bag of drugs**, including "two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, [and] laughers." While in Vegas, Duke is further tasked, ironically, with covering the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, where he finds countless Midwestern police lamenting "the Drug Culture" and falsely criminalizing drug users as violent, sex-crazed maniacs. Duke doesn't see "the Drug Culture" as a problem to be fixed per se; rather, he maintains that drug use is a natural response to American society and culture. Through Duke's drug-induced escapades, Thompson implies that Duke's altered reality, no matter how awful, is preferable to the real-world experience of mainstream American society in the 1970s.

Despite Duke's massive stockpile of drugs, Thompson does not offer a wholesale endorsement of drug use. Instead, he implies that drugs are hazardous and often unsafe. As Duke packs his car for Las Vegas after spending nearly his entire salary advance on acid and ether, he claims that they are "extremely dangerous drugs." Duke makes plain from the beginning that his drug use is ill-conceived; however, Duke maintains that the only drug that really worries him is ether. "There is nothing in the world more helpless and irresponsible and depraved than a man in the depths of an ether binge," Duke says. Obviously, Duke knows that using drugs, and abusing ether specifically, is a bad idea; he simply does it anyway. In turn, his drug use only leads to the need for more drugs—"not all at once, but steadily, just enough to maintain focus." Thompson recognizes that drugs are indeed a slippery slope. As Duke and Dr. Gonzo hallucinate their way through Las Vegas, they decide that LSD is too much for the bustling and colorful city. "No. this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs," Duke says. "Reality itself is too twisted." Their drug-induced delusions are heightened against the chaotic backdrop of Las Vegas, and while Duke and Gonzo are fully aware of this, they continue to eat acid by the sheet-full. Of course, Duke and Dr. Gonzo's acid trips only worsen and even seem likely to kill them.

Duke argues that his foolish use of drugs is prompted by American society and culture, and that drugs offer him a means of coping. To Duke, and by extension the rest of American drug users, drugs temper the sting of reality. At the beginning of Thompson's book, Duke explains "the socio-psychic factor," or the idea that "every now and then when your life gets complicated and the weasels start closing in, the only real cure is to load up on heinous chemicals and then drive like a bastard

from Hollywood to Las Vegas. To *relax*, as it were, in the womb of the desert sun." The complications and "weasels" that Duke mentions are references to American society, and drugs offer him a temporary escape from his painful reality.

Duke examines the national shift in American drug use from psychedelics in the 1960s to much harsher drugs in the 1970s, claiming that "the big market, these days, is in Downers. [...] What sells today is whatever Fucks You Up—whatever short-circuits your brain and grounds it out for the longest possible time." Duke asserts that this shift is not unexpected or random but is linked to the country's political climate. "'Consciousness Expansion' went out with LBJ...and it is worth noting, historically," says Duke, "that downers came in with Nixon." The election of a violent and corrupt president has led to America's worsening drug epidemic, and Duke openly draws attention to this. According to Duke, "the Drug Culture" has "turned, with a vengeance, to skin-popping and even mainlining...and for every ex-speed freak who drifted, for relief, into smack, there are 200 kids who go straight to the needle off Seconal. They never even bother to *try* speed." Thompson does not ignore or deny the mounting drug crisis in America, but in this vein, the crisis is less a self-indulgent habit and more a necessary evil to cope with the terrible state of American society.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas takes place during "this foul year of Our Lord, 1971," which Duke describes as the "doomstruck era of Nixon." Despite running for president on a platform of peace and change, Nixon has dragged the nation further into the violence of the Vietnam War, and things on the home front are not much better. The American counterculture and the civil rights movement combined were not enough to combat racism and sexism in American society, and because of these grim realities, Duke argues, America is "wired into a *survival* trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties. Uppers are going out of style." In the end, Thompson acknowledges the seriousness of the drug problem in American society and posits that the violent and corrupt American government, along with the widespread injustices of traditional American culture, are largely to blame. Instead of fixing "the Drug Culture" directly, Thompson implies that once American society and politics are fixed, drug use will cease to be such a detrimental problem. Of course, it seems unlikely that America will ever be completely fixed in the way Duke imagines, and as such, Thompson suggests that "the Drug Culture" is here to stay.

NEWS AND JOURNALISM

Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a piece of "Gonzo journalism"—a form of "New journalism" invented by Thompson himself that rejects the objectivity of traditional journalism and instead relies on an individual, first-person account of any given event. Whereas traditional journalism seeks to disclose objective and absolute truth, Gonzo journalism assumes that absolute truth does not exist, which results in a strange blend of fact and fiction that reveals personal truth through a writer's own experiences and emotions. In addition to its classification as journalism, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is full of references to newspapers and televised newscasts, and each bit of news reflects America's torn and troubled society. News and journalism in Thompson's book only serve to bolster and reinforce the violence and intolerance in American society, and it is in this way that Thompson argues that journalism has failed. His response is to reimagine journalism for a new and changing generation, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* represents an effort to do just that.

Thompson's narrator, Raoul Duke, is a proud journalist, a profession Duke believes deserves respect. Whenever anyone speaks to Duke in a way he perceives as disrespectful, he invariably responds by mentioning his profession in some way. "You're talking to a doctor of journalism!" Duke once yells at his attorney, Dr. Gonzo. Duke demands respect simply because he is a journalist, and he frequently uses his profession to get himself out of trouble. When Duke is approached by two dune-buggies full of angry American nationalists packing a machine-gun at the Mint 400, a dirt-bike race he is covering for *Sports Illustrated*, Duke introduces himself as "the sporting press. We're friendlies—hired geeks." Once the patriots realize Duke is a journalist with a popular sports magazine, they move on to harass the next person. Furthermore, when Duke tries to come up with a plausible reason for having an illegal .357 Magnum, he concocts a story in which a crazed madman had run up on him with a knife and gun, but after Duke told him he was a journalist, "his whole attitude changed." The once-angry and homicidal man threw away his knife and gave Duke his gun. "Right," says Duke, "he just shoved it into my hands, butt-first, and then he ran off into the darkness." Obviously, Duke's story is sarcastic, but his point is that journalists are important members of society and should be respected. Duke repeatedly refers to his "obligation" as a "professional journalist" to "*cover the story*, for good or ill." He vows to "never lose sight of the primary responsibility," which is to deliver the news to the masses. On the surface, Duke appears to be wholly dedicated to his chosen profession, and society seems to generally agree that journalism is a valued and trusted line of work.

However, Duke and the other journalists in Thompson's book don't behave in respectful ways and are hardly deserving of the respect they demand, which underscores Thompson's disillusionment with traditional journalism. Before the start of the Mint 400, Duke goes to the hotel bar where he meets a reporter from *Life* magazine, who happens to be a drunken mess. The drunk reporter is "losing his grip on the bar, sinking slowly to his knees, but still speaking with definite authority." Duke finds the display difficult to watch and turns away. "It is too horrible," Duke says. "We are, after all, the absolute cream of the national sporting press," although the *Life* man's behavior

obviously does not reflect this. Duke himself is constantly drunk and high on drugs, is "dangerously disorganized," and repeatedly misses deadlines. He often doesn't know what story he is supposed to cover, and by the end of the Mint 400, he can't even remember who won the race. Duke loses sight of his "primary responsibility" and nervously looks for a copy of the *L.A. Times* to catch up on the story. "Get the details. Cover myself," Duke says. "Even on the Run, in the grip of a serious Fear…" Thompson's portrayal of journalists in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* does not place journalism in a flattering light. The drunken behavior of Duke and other reporters suggests that journalists are an irresponsible and despicable bunch, and their poor reporting is clearly reflected in the stories that cover newspapers and fill national television broadcasts.

Throughout his trip to Las Vegas, Duke is constantly looking for newspapers and broadcasts "for news of the outside world," and each time he does, he is confronted with the violence and corruption of the Vietnam War, images of America's deteriorating "Drug Culture," and the criminalization of the 1960s counterculture. After reading a particularly disturbing story about the mass murder of an entire U.S. Naval fleet at the hands of China's "Heroin Police," Duke finally declares that "journalism is not a profession or trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector." With Duke's scathing and vivid critique of American journalism, Thompson seems to suggest that actual journalists have a lot of work to do, and Thompson's own career as a journalist lends weight to this opinion. While Thompson does not come out and directly declare Gonzo journalism the solution to traditional journalism's overall failure, he does imply that it couldn't be much worse.

VIOLENCE

Violence is everywhere in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. As Duke and Dr. Gonzo travel to Las Vegas in a drug-fueled search for the American Dream, they both engage in violent behavior and see violence reflected in the world around them. Television and newspapers are filled with the violence of the Vietnam War, and the people on the streets of Vegas and Hollywood are no different. Duke and Dr. Gonzo intimidate an innocent hitchhiker with the mere implication of violence, and Dr. Gonzo threatens tourists from Oklahoma simply because they look boring, like "they'd just beaten Caesar's Palace for about $33 at the blackjack tables, and now they were headed for the Circus-Circus to whoop it up. . . ." Violence in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is often unnecessary, excessive, and "savage," and it is impossible to ignore. Thompson depicts a brutal American society in which violence is tolerated and even encouraged, and by proxy he implies that actual society is just as violent—a precedent, he argues, that is ultimately set by the American government itself.

Each of the central characters in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* displays a baseline level of violence that is almost always a disproportionate response to some perceived threat or circumstance. After Duke and Dr. Gonzo pick up the hitchhiker on their way to Vegas, Duke begins to worry that the hitchhiker knows they are completely high on drugs. "If so—well, we'll just have to cut his head off and bury him somewhere," Duke says. "Because it goes without saying that we can't cut him loose. He'll report us at once to some kind of outback nazi law enforcement agency, and they'll run us down like dogs." Duke isn't actually sure if he has said this aloud, but Thompson's point is clear; Duke's first impulse is needless violence, and he would rather murder the innocent hitchhiker than risk a run-in with the law. Dr. Gonzo is likewise violent, and his most brutally violent moment comes when he is caught off-guard by Alice, a hotel maid, while hungover and throwing up into a closet. When Alice enters the room to clean, Dr. Gonzo body slams the woman and chokes her as she begs for her life. "She was holding that mop like an axe-handle," Gonzo later tells Duke. "So I came out of the closet in a kind of running crouch, still vomiting, and hit her right at the knees…it was pure instinct; I thought she was ready to kill me." Gonzo knows his reaction to the maid was ridiculous, but he is so inherently violent that his "instinct" upon seeing an unexpected middle-aged woman is to strike and strangle her.

Thompson twice mentions Lieutenant Calley, an American soldier who was charged with the murder of 109 Vietnamese civilians during the Vietnam War. Calley allegedly opened fire on a small village in Vietnam, and several solders under his command followed suit. Thompson's references to Calley highlight the violence present in society during the 1970s. After Calley's court martial, President Nixon ordered his release from prison and a federal judge ultimately dismissed his conviction. The American public agreed overwhelmingly that while Calley certainly killed innocent people, he was simply following orders, and they too excused this dark stain on American history. By drawing so much attention to the true case of Lieutenant Calley, Thompson clearly wants readers to ruminate on the implications of this violent event. As Duke and Dr. Gonzo drive to Las Vegas, Duke hears "The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Calley" on the radio, a *Billboard* Hot 100 hit and the heroic depiction of Calley's crime in Vietnam. "Great God!" Duke yells as the song begins to play. "What is this terrible music?" Duke's outburst underscores Calley's violent crime, as well as the fact that America has glorified this violence in song. Duke later invents a story in which he is stuck in the desert and a strange man approaches him with a menacing knife. Duke fears the man will kill him, but he only wants to "carve a big X in [Duke's] forehead, in memory of Lieutenant Calley." Duke's bizarre story makes little sense, but the strange man's purpose is unmistakable—he wants to honor Calley, and that honor takes a form that has almost biblical connotations and is reminiscent of the cross marked on a worshiper's forehead

during the Christian celebration of Lent.

Thompson juxtaposes the tragedy of Calley's alleged violence against the criminal conviction of Muhammed Ali, who Duke notes has recently "been sentenced to five years in prison for *refusing* to kill" people in Vietnam. Ali, a prominent boxer in America during the 1960s and '70s, was an adamant objector to the Vietnam War, and he famously refused to travel across the world in order to kill people he had never met. The comparison of Calley to Ali implies that the American government and greater society condone and even reward violence—after all, Calley has a song dedicated to him—while attempts for peace are met with scorn and punishment. In this vein, Thompson suggests that violence is a given in American society, and each of his characters embodies this notion.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GREAT RED SHARK

The Great Red Shark is the huge Chevy convertible Duke and Gonzo rent for their trip to Vegas, and it symbolizes America and the American Dream in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The car is a classic American automobile and an icon of American culture. Duke's understanding of the American Dream is inherently capitalist and involves hard work, both of which are represented in the Chevy. The automotive industry is a large part of America's capitalist society, and the Chevy, when compared to the luxury of **the Cadillac** Duke and Gonzo later drive, is built for muscle and work.

This deeply American car makes Duke and Gonzo appear more American just by sitting in it, which is sure to help them find the American Dream, they believe. Duke tries to explain as much to the hitchhiker. "That's why we rented this car," Duke says. "It is the only way to do it. Can you grasp that?" Duke and Gonzo drive the car around the Las Vegas Strip for about forty-eight hours, abusing it and running it up curbs and sidewalks, and after Gonzo deserts Duke in the wake of their massive hotel bill, Duke jumps in the Shark and races back towards L.A. Duke is ultimately forced to abandon the car (it is way too conspicuous and he *is* a felon) but for the time that he drives it, the Chevy easily takes the abuse Duke hands it. The Great Red Shark thus also represents the resilience and hard work associated with achieving the American Dream, though this too paints a depressing picture considering the car's fate.

THE WHITE WHALE

The White Whale is the fancy Cadillac Duke and Gonzo rent after they abandon **the Great Red Shark**, and while it symbolizes the American Dream as well, it also represents wealth and luxury, and therefore status. The White Whale is a beautiful car; everything is automatic, and the dashboard is full of "esoteric lights and dials" that Duke doesn't understand. Duke doesn't have to understand, however, because it is clear to him that the Cadillac is "a superior automobile." Duke is given undue respect and special treatment because he is driving such a nice car, and he even gets into the Flamingo Hotel with only a canceled credit card because the White Whale is sitting at the curb. Duke is a drunken, drug-addled mess with ripped clothes and a two-day beard, but the Cadillac makes him appear rich and powerful, and he is treated as such.

The White Whale underscores America's classist society. Duke is respected only because he is presumed to be wealthy, which obviously isn't the case, but this respect comes at the expense of others. Duke is given a room at the Flamingo, but the man in front of him is turned away—even though he has already paid for his room. Duke's special treatment emphasizes how the lower class is marginalized in society by the rich and powerful, making the American Dream even more difficult to obtain. Of course, Duke drag also races the Cadillac, dangerously overinflates the tires, and even "drives it into Lake Mead on a water test," and by the time he leaves it in the parking lot at the airport, it is trashed just like the Chevy. The Whale's convertible top is stuck half down and the engine is making awful sounds. "Every circuit in the car is totally fucked," Duke says. Like the American Dream the car symbolizes, the White Whale is dead.

THE BAG OF DRUGS

Duke and Gonzo secure a large bag of "very dangerous drugs" before heading off to Las Vegas. This stash symbolizes 1960s American counterculture, as well as Duke and Gonzo's own resistance to mainstream American society and government. Drugs, especially psychedelic drugs, were central to the countercultural movement, and while Duke is openly critical of the movement and its failure to produce a better America, he is still very much committed to its anti-establishment agenda. Each time Duke and Gonzo dip into their (mostly) illegal stash of drugs and "run amok" in Vegas, they are effectively resisting the establishment and society they are so deeply at odds with. As the bag of drugs begins to dwindle near the end of the book, Duke heads to the drug store to replenish the stash. Despite the failure of the counterculture and the decline in popularity of psychedelic drugs, Duke's dedication remains as "a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty."

The bag of drugs is also another form of the capitalist excess

and greed implied in the American Dream, and it includes, among other things, "two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, [and] laughers." The overindulgence of the drug bag is mirrored in the Las Vegas backdrop, and it parallels broader American society as well. Through the bag of drugs, Thompson implies that Americans are needlessly and selfishly drawn to excess, no matter the cost. "Once you get locked into a serious drug collection," Dukes explains, "the tendency is to push it as far as you can."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* published in 1998.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

The sporting editors had also given me $300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab. We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers . . . and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), Dr. Gonzo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the beginning of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as Duke is packing the Chevy for Vegas, and it is significant because it illustrates the laundry list of drugs Duke and Gonzo are taking with them on their trip. As personifications of the 1960s counterculture gone sour, Duke and Gonzo are strong supporters of "the Drug Culture," and their trip to Vegas is the perfect opportunity to take drugs, cut loose, and resist the establishment.

Duke and Gonzo's huge stash of drugs also underscores the greediness implied in the American Dream and American society. Duke and Gonzo don't need such a big supply of drugs, but they want it and it's available, so they indulge. They load their smorgasbord of drugs into their expensive car—a symbol of the American Dream—and set out to find success. Of course, they fail miserably, but Duke and Gonzo continue to indulge along the way. This extensive list of drugs foreshadows what is to come in the book, and like the extravagant Las Vegas backdrop, Thompson's stand-in for American society, the drugs represent excess and greed in the capitalist nation.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

"You Samoans are all the same," I told him. "You have no faith in the essential decency of the white man's culture. Jesus, just one hour ago we were sitting over there in that stinking baiginio, stone broke and paralyzed for the weekend, when a call comes through from some total stranger in New York, telling me to go to Las Vegas and expenses be damned—and then he sends me over to some office in Beverly Hills where another total stranger gives me $300 raw cash for no reason at all . . . I tell you, my man, this is the American Dream in action! We'd be fools not to ride this strange torpedo all the way out to the end."

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), Dr. Gonzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Gonzo has just expressed doubt in Duke's plan to find the American Dream in Las Vegas, and this quote represents Duke's response. This passage is significant because it directly establishes the American Dream as "the white man's culture." Duke's understanding of the American Dream assumes that America is full of possibility and opportunity for success, and with hard work and some luck, they too can make it big in America. This quote, however, suggests that the American Dream isn't available to Dr. Gonzo in the same way that it is available to Duke.

Duke implies that Gonzo doesn't appreciate the American Dream simply because he isn't white. Instead, the American Dream is yet another way for Duke to get ahead while Dr. Gonzo is left behind, further marginalizing him in society. What's worse, Duke isn't exactly working hard for the American Dream. The magazine assignment and trip to Vegas come out of the blue, and he is given "raw cash for no reason at all." Duke enjoys the privilege of the American Dream, which isn't afforded to Gonzo, a "Samoan," and it is in this way that Thompson argues the American Dream is inherently racist and in need of reimagining.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

The Circus-Circus is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war. This is the Sixth Reich. The ground floor is full of gambling tables, like all the other casinos . . . but the place is about four stories high, in the style of a circus tent, and all manner of strange County-Fair/Polish Carnival madness is going on up in this space.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Duke has just walked into Circus-Circus, a prominent and tacky casino on the Vegas Strip, for the very first time. This quote is significant because it underscores Duke's aversion to government and authority. Duke frequently references Nazis and fascist dictators, and he draws a parallel between American society and Hitler's authoritarian regime. In Duke's opinion, America is as oppressive as Nazi Germany, and casinos like Circus-Circus are just one way "undesirables" are sidelined in society. Duke later explains how casinos are crooked and favor the house, and the "strange County-Fair/Polish Carnival madness" is merely a distraction—smoke and mirrors meant to hide their corrupt intentions.

The fact that Duke later claims Circus-Circus is an example of the American Dream is particularly damning in this context. By proxy, Duke implies that American society is corrupt and oppressive as well, and his reference to Circus-Circus as "the Sixth Reich" illustrates just how awful it is. Hitler famously declared Nazi Germany the Third Reich—third in a line of great empires behind the Holy Roman Empire, or the First Reich, and the German Empire, or the Second Reich—and placing Circus-Circus all the way down the list at six leaves much to be desired. Duke does not hold American society in high regard, and his obsession with authoritarianism suggests that he fears for his personal freedoms and liberty at the hands of a corrupt government.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

Ignore that nightmare in the bathroom. Just another ugly refugee from the Love Generation, some doom-struck gimp who couldn't handle the pressure. My attorney has never been able to accept the notion—often espoused by reformed drug abusers and especially popular among those on probation—that you can get a lot higher without drugs than with them.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), Dr. Gonzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Gonzo has just experienced a bad acid trip and is relaxing in the bath, trying to recover. Gonzo is the embodiment of 1960s counterculture, and Duke's reference to him as an "ugly refugee from the Love Generation" reflects this. The term "refugee" implies that Gonzo is escaping war or persecution, and that he has no country to call his own. Duke calls Gonzo a "nightmare" and "ignores" him, just as the nation largely ignored the demands of the countercultural movement and resented the change they fought for. Of course, Duke is very open about the countercultural movement's failure, and this passage reflects this as well. Referring to Gonzo as a "doom-struck gimp who couldn't handle the pressure" implies that the movement was weak in the face of the establishment it sought to dismantle, and that it ultimately gave up.

Gonzo's refusal to give up drugs and join mainstream society despite the movement's failure underscores his commitment to the counterculture. Drugs and resistance are Gonzo's way of life, and he can't have one without the other. He is fully aware that the counterculture has failed, but he will never give up the fight, or the drugs—to do so would be to join the ranks of the establishment and accept the injustices of society, and Gonzo can't live with that.

Strange memories on this nervous night in Las Vegas. Five years later? Six? It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era—the kind of peak that never comes again. San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run . . . but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant. . .

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66-7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Duke is reflecting back on his time in California during the 1960s, and it underscores his own

appreciation for American counterculture. Duke's reference to the countercultural movement is unmistakable in this passage, and he speaks of it in a nostalgic and almost loving way. Duke desperately wants to believe that the movement's efforts to bring peace and equality to American society "meant something," but the continued war in Vietnam and persistent racism and sexism in American society suggests that the movement meant nothing, "in the long run."

The mere mention of the American 1960s conjures images of sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll; however, Duke maintains that these images don't do the actual movement any justice. The optimism and idealism that fueled the movement will likely never be seen again, and Duke is openly mournful of their failure to bring any lasting change to American society. The failure of the countercultural movement left an entire generation of people without hope or direction and forced them to live in a society that they were fundamentally at odds with.

❝ And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave. . .

So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Duke continues his explanation of the American counterculture as "a wave," and this quote underscores the movement's desire for social change. Duke's reference to "the forces of Old and Evil" that the movement sought to defeat refers to the antiquated and unequal ideals of the traditional American establishment, such as war and bigotry. The peace and unity of the countercultural movement was meant to mend these violent and corrupt aspects of American society, in effect producing a more just nation. Duke's claim that the movement's "victory" wouldn't be "in any mean or military sense" underscores the movement's peaceful message and their basic understanding that the good always prevails.

The image of the movement as a "high and beautiful wave" also implies its power to produce social change, but Thompson's use of an ellipsis suggests there is more to the story. In the end, the countercultural movement was unable to produce any lasting social change, and the power of the "wave finally broke and rolled back." Duke's mention of the "high-water mark," however, suggests that the movement wasn't quite as ineffectual and as Duke, and Thompson, maintain. The mark left on society by the 1960s remains visible, even all the way from Las Vegas, and this mark ensures the continuation of their fight.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Reading the front page made me feel a lot better. Against that heinous background, my crimes were pale and meaningless. I was a relatively respectable citizen—a multiple felon, perhaps, but certainly not dangerous. And when the Great Scorer came to write against my name, that would surely make a difference.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Duke and Gonzo run up a massive room service tab and then skip out on the bill. Duke feels guilty for running out on his debt, but the abject violence and corruption reflected in the newspaper makes him feel like less of a criminal. Thompson argues that violence and corruption has permeated all of society, a precedent set by the American government with the Vietnam War, and news and journalism are the primary means through which this violence is spread. When Duke reads about widespread drug overdoses and the murder of innocent civilians in Vietnam, this "heinous background" makes his crimes of fraud, larceny, and excessive drug use seem "pale and meaningless." The idea of Duke as a "relatively respectable citizen" is a a bit of a stretch, however. He spends most of the book being a public nuisance, and his driving alone on drugs is capable of killing someone, but he doesn't *intend* to hurt anyone, so he doesn't see himself as "dangerous."

Duke clearly feels guilty about his behavior and talks frequently about his "sins." Duke's mention of "the Great Scorer," or God, is another reference to his stained

conscience, although whether Duke is saved or not is open for debate. In addition to his obvious illegal behavior, Duke is openly racist and sexist, and he frequently treats others with disregard. As part of the countercultural movement, it is assumed that Duke supports peace and equality, but he condones violence and white male superiority in his personal life. While Duke may not be "dangerous" in the same way he perceives those in the newspaper to be, Thompson implies that Duke's actions are hazardous to society as well.

Part 1, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Yes, I would go back to Vegas. Slip the Kid and confound the CHP by moving East again, instead of West. This would be the shrewdest move of my life. Back to Vegas and sign up for the Drugs and Narcotics conference; me and a thousand pigs. Why not? Move confidently into their midst. Register at the Flamingo and have the White Caddy sent over at once. Do it right; remember Horatio Alger. . .

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), The Hitchhiker

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Duke decides to return to Las Vegas instead of heading back to Los Angeles. This quote is important because it underscores Duke's drug-addled paranoia and his resistance to mainstream society, but it also lends insight into his understanding of the American Dream. Duke has just been pulled over by the California Highway Patrol and ordered to get off the road, but his anti-establishment viewpoints mean he won't bow to the authority of the police. He has also encountered the strange hitchhiker again, and between the "Oakie kid" and the law, Duke is increasingly fearful that they are closing in on him.

Going back to Las Vegas means moving back in the direction of his crimes, which Duke sarcastically refers to as the "shrewdest move of [his] life." Duke knows traveling East isn't particularly wise, but the genius of his plan is in its foolishness. He will hide in plain sight, an obvious insult to the establishment, and sit through the conference on Drugs and Narcotics with "a thousand pigs" and a headful of drugs. Duke plans to resist and flout authority, and that can be more readily accomplished in Vegas. Plus, he believes he won't find the American Dream if he abandons his trip, and this is reflected in Duke's reference to Horatio Alger, the writer of many famous "rags-to-riches" stories.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ They called up the white Coupe de Ville at once. Everything was automatic. I could sit in the red-leather driver's seat and make every inch of the car jump, by touching the proper buttons. It was a wonderful machine: Ten grand worth of gimmicks and high-priced Special Effects. The rear windows leaped up with a touch, like frogs in a dynamite pond. The white canvas top ran up and down like a rollercoaster. The dashboard was full of esoteric lights & dials & meters that I would never understand—but there was no doubt in my mind that I was into a *superior machine*.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 104-5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Duke trades the Great Red Shark for the White Whale. It is significant because it introduces the expensive Cadillac, which symbolizes wealth, luxury, and status, both in Thompson's book and in broader American society. The automatic controls that "make every inch of the car jump" mean that Duke never has to lift a finger, and the "red-leather" interior is undeniably high-end. The "gimmicks and high-priced Special Effects"—meaning the extra bells and whistles that make the car so luxurious—alone are worth thousands of dollars, which suggests the final price tag is ridiculously expensive.

The dashboard and the "esoteric lights and dials" are much too complicated for Duke, but this hardly matters. Duke doesn't have to "understand" to know he is in a "*superior machine*," and it will be clear to others as well. Duke is given undue respect and special treatment because of the White Whale, and as long as he is driving it, he is viewed by others as wealthy and powerful, and therefore "*superior*," just like the car.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ We would be attending the conference under false pretenses and dealing, from the start, with a crowd that was convened for the stated purpose of putting people like us in jail. We were the Menace—not in disguise, but stone-obvious drug abusers, with a flagrantly cranked-up act that we intended to push all the way to the limit . . . not to prove any final, sociological point, and not even as a conscious mockery: It was mainly a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty. If the Pigs were gathering in Vegas for a top-level Drug Conference, we felt the drug culture should be represented.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), Dr. Gonzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109-10

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Duke readies himself for the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and it is important because it highlights Duke's resistance to the establishment and his complete disregard for authority. Duke and Gonzo don't plan on being on their best behavior for the conference, and as members of the counterculture practically dripping in booze and drugs, they will be easy to spot. As Duke says, they are "the Menace," and the trail of discarded felonies they have left in Las Vegas is proof of this. Duke's language and use of the words "stone-obvious" and "cranked-up" foreshadow his intended drug use, as he plans to push his own limits as well as the law's.

Duke's explanation of his drug use as "a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty" underscores his commitment to resistance and the countercultural movement, even as he recognizes its failure. He won't tone down his behavior and he won't apologize. Duke again refers to law enforcement as "Pigs," (with a capital P this time) which is another clear sign of his contempt for authority, but most importantly, Duke wants to give the conference a true-life example of the "junkie" they seek to demonize.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The first session—the opening remarks—lasted most of the afternoon. We sat patiently through the first two hours, although it was clear from the start that we weren't going to Learn anything and it was equally clear that we'd be crazy to try any Teaching. It was easy enough to sit there with a head full of mescaline and listen to hour after hour of irrelevant gibberish. . .. There was certainly no risk involved. These poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker), Dr. Gonzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

This passage also occurs while Duke and Gonzo are at the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and it emphasizes how dangerously out of touch law enforcement is with "the Drug Culture." Despite hours of talk, the "experts" aren't actually saying anything, at least not anything useful, and the conference is shaping up to be a complete waste of time full of "irrelevant gibberish." As veteran drug abusers, Duke and Gonzo are more informed than the esteemed speakers, but they can't exactly stand up and offer their expert opinions.

The fact that Duke and Gonzo are on a powerful psychotropic drug in the middle of a drug conference is obviously ironic, but it also underscores just how clueless the experts are. They have lectured for nearly two hours on the dangers of LSD but fail to notice when someone is under the influence of a similar substance. Just as Duke says, the experts don't "know mescaline from macaroni," which ultimately suggests they don't have any chance of coming to grips with "the Drug Culture" in 1971.

❝ "Hell, in Malibu alone, these goddamn Satan-worshippers kill six or eight people every day." He paused to sip his drink. "And all they want is the blood," he continued. "They'll take people right off the street if they have to." He nodded. "Hell, yes. Just the other day we had a case where they grabbed a girl right out of a McDonald's hamburger stand. She was a waitress. About sixteen years old . . . with a lot of people watching, too!" "What happened?" said our friend. "What did they do to her?" He seemed very agitated by what he was hearing. "Do?" said my attorney. "Jesus Christ man. They chopped her goddamn head off right there in the parking lot! Then they cut all kinds of holes in her and sucked out the blood."

Related Characters: Dr. Gonzo (speaker), The Georgia Cop, Raoul Duke

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Gonzo has met a police officer from Georgia outside the District Attorneys' Conference, and he tells the clueless cop that "junkies" have taken over California. This passage is obviously satirical, but it also highlights how drug users are easily criminalized in American society. Gonzo's far-fetched story takes place in Malibu, a famously up-scale town, but drugs have taken over there as well. The claim that "all they want is the blood" harkens to Duke and Gonzo's use of adrenochrome, a very powerful drug that is only found in the human spine. The murders Gonzo describes are exceedingly violent and visible, a clear sign that society is breaking down and becoming more dangerous—exactly the narrative that the cops are pushing as well.

Gonzo's claim that the "junkies" recently grabbed and murdered a young girl from a hamburger stand makes this crime appear even more tragic to the Georgia cop. The image of a tender and innocent life cut short by a depraved group of "Satan-worshipping" maniacs is particularly upsetting, and Gonzo's vivid description only intensifies these emotions. Even more upsetting are the gathering crowds that stand and watch, too terrified to intervene. Gonzo's story horrifies the Georgia cop and underscores just how powerful a tool fear can be in the false criminalization of "the Drug Culture."

Part 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ This is Nevada's answer to East St. Louis—a slum and a graveyard, last stop before permanent exile to Ely or Winnemucca. North Vegas is where you go if you're a hooker turning forty and the syndicate men on the Strip decide you're no longer much good for business out there with the high rollers . . . or if you're a pimp with bad credit at the Sands . . . or what they still call, in Vegas, "a hophead." This can mean almost anything from a mean drunk to a junkie, but in terms of commercial acceptability, it means you're finished in all the right places.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Duke and Gonzo venture to the outskirts of Las Vegas, and it underscores the marginalization of those deemed undesirable, both within the city of Las Vegas and within broader American society as well. Duke describes North Vegas as "a slum and a graveyard," which implies how hopeless and squalid this "exile" is. The "high rollers" from the Strip wouldn't be caught dead in North Vegas, and as such, the upper class remains safely segregated from the lower class.

Those who are found to be undesirable and shuffled to the "last stop" of North Vegas are in keeping with the widespread intolerances of mainstream American society. Prostitutes, especially old prostitutes, are particularly useless and threatening to the polished society of the Strip. Women are not depicted as terribly important in Thompson's book, and without the added perk of sex, they are immediately deemed worthless. Pimps, however, are ousted only if they are also financially broke, a point which echoes the sexism and classism of broader society. "Junkies" are of course banished to North Vegas as well, for what Duke explains as "permanent exile." The is no chance for a better life in North Vegas, and there is no chance for escape. Those exiled to North Vegas are stuck in an oppressive and vicious circle that serves to keep the lower-class poor and the "high rollers" rich.

❝ The "high side" of Vegas is probably the most closed society west of Sicily—and it makes no difference, in terms of the day to day life-style of the place, whether the Man at the Top is Lucky Luciano or Howard Hughes. In an economy where Tom Jones can make $75,000 a week for two shows a night at Caesar's, the palace guard is indispensable, and they don't care who signs their paychecks. A gold mine like Vegas breeds its own army, like any other gold mine. Hired muscle tends to accumulate in fast layers around money/power poles . . . and big money, in Vegas, is synonymous with the Power to protect it.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155-6

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Duke describes the relationship between money and power in Las Vegas, which parallels the relationship

between money and power in mainstream American society as well. Duke's reference to Vegas casinos as a "closed society" similar to "Sicily" makes them appear incredibly secretive and on par with the mob and organized crime, and he implies that security is the most important aspect of their "day to day life-style." Duke drops two famous names—Lucky Luciano, a notorious mobster and criminal generally regarded as the father of organized crime, and Howard Hughes, a business tycoon and film director, and one of the world's richest men—and he suggests that despite their perceived differences, they would both protect their money in the same ruthless ways.

Duke implies that the amount of money flowing through Las Vegas on any given day is beyond comprehension, evident by Tom Jones's staggering paycheck for minimal work. This amount of money naturally makes casinos a prime target for theft and extortion, which makes security "indispensable." The fact that these guards "don't care who signs their paychecks" suggests that they will go to any length to protect their "gold mines." Money breeds power in Vegas, just as it does in broader society, which further guarantees that the rich remain powerful, at the expense of the poor.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ But what is sane? Especially here in "our own country"—in this doomstruck era of Nixon. We are all wired into a *survival* trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties. Uppers are going out of style. This was the fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling "consciousness expansion" without ever giving a thought to the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 178

Explanation and Analysis

Duke has just decided to go back to Las Vegas, which even he admits is an insane choice considering the circumstances. Duke's decision prompts him to question his sanity, but he isn't sure what that even means at this point. This quote reveals Duke's contempt for President Nixon, but it also underscores the nation's worsening drug crisis and the country's shift from psychedelic drugs to much harsher drugs like heroin. Duke's use of quotations around "our own country" suggests that America doesn't really belong to the citizens after all, and that Nixon is sure to be the death of them. The country is "wired into a *survival* trip now" and is just trying to stay alive and cope. It is clear that the optimism and idealism of the 1960s have been replaced with something much darker, and the preferred drugs are changing as well.

Duke mentions Tim Leary, a psychologist who advocated for the use of psychedelic drugs to promote peace and greater understanding in the 1960s. Leary famously referred to use of these drugs as "consciousness expansion," but when the young people of the late 1960s expanded their minds with LSD, they were met with "the grim meat-hook realities" of a violent and corrupt government. The peace and understanding promised by Leary did not exist in American society, and this is the "fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip." Duke ultimately argues that the counterculture was naïve, which was to blame in part for their failure, and Leary's "consciousness expansion" is an example of this naivety.

❝ Not that they didn't deserve it: No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped to create . . . a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some *force*—is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 178-9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage represents Duke's explanation of the 1960s drug culture and also underscores the counterculture's naivety and subsequent downfall. Duke's description of the counterculture implies that they were passive spectators of their deteriorating society, and while they certainly objected to society's many ills, such as bigotry and violence, many members of the counterculture did very little to actually change it. Instead of working to make their society more just and inclusive, they took drugs and expected society to fix itself. In this way, Duke implies that the counterculture deserved to fail, and that looking for "Peace and Understanding" in "consciousness expansion" was

"pathetically eager."

Duke suggests that the current state of the counterculture in 1971 is useless and powerless to effect any real and lasting change in society. He refers to the "Light at the end of the tunnel," or the idea that good will always prevail, as the "old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture" and implies that this optimism is merely an illusion. The counterculture was in search of a basic good that Duke argues doesn't exist, much like "Peace and Understanding."

❝ Sonny Barger never quite got the hang of it, but he'll never know how close he was to a king-hell breakthrough. The Angels blew it in 1965, at the Oakland-Berkeley line, when they acted on Barger's hardhat, con-boss instincts and attacked the front ranks of an anti-war march. This proved to be an historic schism in the then Rising Tide of the Youth Movement of the Sixties. It was the first open break between the Greasers and the Longhairs, and the importance of that break can be read in the history of SDS, which eventually destroyed itself in the doomed effort to reconcile the interests of the lower/working class biker/dropout types and the upper/middle, Berkeley/student activists.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 179

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Duke continues his examination of the failure of the counterculture. This passage is significant because it explores the violence and intolerance that ultimately led to the movement's demise. Duke directly calls out Sonny Barger, a founding member of the Hell's Angels in Oakland, and claims that Barger "blew it in 1965" when the Angels violently assaulted a student-led protest of the Vietnam War. The student activists, known as the SDS, or Students for a Democratic Society, and the Hell's Angels were both prominent players within the countercultural movement, but they failed to find common ground and wasted valuable time and energy fighting with each other. Barger's attack lead to "an historic schism" within the counterculture that fractured the movement and stalled their progress.

In the end, the opposing social classes within the movement itself could not find "Peace and Understanding," which was a particularly troubling message for a movement that wanted to unite the entire nation. The counterculture expected from others what they couldn't deliver themselves, and because of this, both Duke and Thompson argue that their efforts were doomed from the beginning.

❝ Nobody involved in that scene, at the time, could possibly have foreseen the Implications of the Ginsberg/Kesey failure to persuade the Hell's Angels to join forces with the radical Left from Berkeley. The final split came at Altamont, four years later, but by that time it had long been clear to everybody except a handful of rock industry dopers and the national press. The orgy of violence at Altamont merely *dramatized* the problem. The realities were already fixed; the illness was understood to be terminal, and the energies of The Movement were long since aggressively dissipated by the rush to self-preservation.

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Book Page 179-80

Explanation and Analysis

Duke continues his examination of the fall of the 1960s counterculture, which further underscores the movement's inability to unite as one. Here, Duke specifically points to American writers Allen Ginsberg and Ken Kesey for failing to unite the cause, and he even goes so far as to capitalize the "I" in "Implications," drawing attention to the severity of the circumstances. Ginsberg and Kesey both came to fame with the beatnik writers of the 1950s and sought to join forces with the 1960s hippies through their notorious parities, famously referred to as "Acid Tests." Ginsberg and Kesey are generally considered to have been some of the most influential figures of the counterculture, but even with their considerable power, they couldn't bring the bikers and students together.

The free music festival at Altamont Speedway in California during the summer of 1969 was the "final split" between the student activists and the Hell's Angels. The bikers provided unofficial security for the festival, which ended in an "orgy of violence" when a concertgoer was fatally stabbed by one of the Angels. The violence that had been building for several years was finally played out at Altamont, and while the conflict wasn't unexpected, it was nonetheless shocking. After Altamont, the movement was finished—brought down by violence and intolerance, the very things it was fighting against.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

"You *found* the American Dream?" he said. "In *this* town?" I nodded. "We're sitting on the main nerve right now," I said. "You remember that story the manager told us about the owner of this place? How he always wanted to run away and join the circus when he was a kid?" Bruce ordered two more beers. He looked over the casino for a moment, then shrugged. "Yeah, I see what you mean," he said. "Now the bastard has his *own* circus, and a license to steal, too." He nodded. "You're right—he's the model." "Absolutely," I said. "It's pure Horatio Alger, all the way down to his attitude."

Related Characters: Raoul Duke, Bruce Innes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs near the end of the book, when Duke makes one last stop at Circus-Circus, and it is significant because it identifies Circus-Circus as an example of the American Dream. While this passage is obviously satirical, it also lends valuable insight into Duke's idea of the American Dream, and the overall state of American society. Bruce is clearly shocked to learn that Duke has found the American Dream in Las Vegas, but Duke has left prior clues to this. This is the second time he refers to Circus-Circus as the "main nerve" of the Dream, though he has also suggested that the American Dream is dead.

Circus-Circus and the rags-to-riches story of its owner appears to be the closest thing to the American Dream that Duke can find, yet he has already established that the casino is managed through corruption and unscrupulous business practices. When Duke identifies Circus-Circus as the American Dream, he implies that American society is similarly crooked and dishonest, and the American Dream is corrupt as well. He calls the criminal nature of the casino "pure Horatio Alger, all the way down to his attitude," which underscores the harsh reality that the American Dream is mostly about greed and exploitation, and isn't available to everyone after all. With this passage, Thompson again implies that the American Dream needs remodeling to better serve the new and changing generation.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Quotes

". . . Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? Agnew was right. The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoo-cage."

Related Characters: Raoul Duke (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the final pages of the book, after Duke attempts to read the morning newspaper and finds only violence and poor reporting. It is important because it highlights Duke's discontent with the state of journalism. Duke implies that newspapers are no good and even mentions Vice President Spiro Agnew, a famous opponent of the press. Duke is initially proud of his chosen profession and even demands respect simply because he is a journalist, yet he behaves in disrespectful ways. Duke constantly drinks and takes drugs, and he frequently misses deadlines. He *is* one of the "fuckoffs and misfits" he complains about in this quote.

Duke frequently looks for "news of the outside world" during his trip to Vegas, and each time he does, he is confronted by America's troubled society. Images of Vietnam, the criminalization of the counterculture, and the deteriorating drug crisis fill most newspapers, and Thompson implies that this coverage serves to bolster and reinforce the violence and intolerance plaguing American society. Duke's words are harsh and offensive, and as a journalist himself, they carry extra weight. Duke ultimately implies that journalism has failed and has become something deeply shameful and vulgar.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 1

Journalist Raoul Duke and his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, are near Barstow on their way to Las Vegas "when the drugs begin to take hold." Bats "swoop" and "screech" above Duke's head but Gonzo doesn't appear to notice. "It's your turn to drive," Duke says as he pulls **the Great Red Shark**, a large red Chevy convertible, to the side of the road. They are still over a hundred miles from Vegas, but they must get there by four o'clock for press registration to cover the "fabulous Mint 400." As a "professional journalist," Duke has an "obligation to *cover the story*, for good or ill."

Duke's hallucination of bats represents his first LSD-induced "trip," which starts the book on a wild, surreal note and foreshadows what is to come when they make it to Vegas. Their rented car, the Great Red Shark, is a symbol of the American Dream—as a classic American-made automobile, it is a cultural icon of America and firmly establishes both Duke and Gonzo as Americans. Duke's reference to himself as a "professional journalist" with an "obligation to cover the story" makes him appear professional by extension, although his drug use immediately upends this claim.

A "fashionable sporting magazine in New York" has already reserved Duke a hotel room in Vegas and rented him **the Great Red Shark**. They have also advanced him $300, most which he has spent on a **bag of "extremely dangerous drugs**," including "two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, [and] laughers." Duke and Gonzo also have beer and liquor, in addition to a "pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls."

Duke alludes to the fact that the "fashionable sporting magazine in New York" is Sports Illustrated, *which is another cultural icon of America. This reference further implies that Duke is a serious journalist, but his stockpile of drugs again suggest that he is not very dedicated to his profession, or, at least, that he cares very little about his job performance.*

"Not that we *needed* all that for the trip," Duke says, "but once you get locked into a serious **drug collection**, the tendency is to push it as far as you can." Duke is only "really worried" about the ether. "There is nothing in the world more helpless and irresponsible and depraved than a man in the depths of an ether binge," he claims. They have taken a little bit of all the drugs so far, except the ether, and now it is time to get into that too. The next one hundred miles will be "a horrible, slobbering sort of spastic stupor."

Duke is searching for the American Dream, which is inherently capitalist in nature, and his unnecessary stash of drugs underscores the greed and excess that fuels the Dream. Duke and Gonzo don't need such a large stash of drugs—they simply want it and so they have it. This excess and greed are likewise implied in the backdrop of Vegas—a city built on gambling huge amounts of money.

Dr. Gonzo notices a hitchhiker. "Let's give this boy a lift," he says as he pulls over. The hitchhiker, a "poor Okie kid," runs to **the Great Red Shark** smiling—he's never been in a convertible before. The kid jumps in and they take off down the road. "How long can we *maintain*?" Duke wonders in a panic. The hitchhiker is sure to realize that they are high on drugs. "This same lonely desert was the last known home of the Manson family," Duke thinks. "Will he make that grim connection when my attorney starts screaming about bats and huge manta rays coming down on the car?"

Duke's description of the hitchhiker as a "poor Okie kid" suggests that he is someone from the American Midwest, whom Duke and Gonzo consider to be square and boring. Duke's panic is a product of his drug-induced paranoia, and his reference to the Manson family is just the first of many. Charles Manson, a murderer and cult leader from the '60s, is just one example of the abject violence committed by members of the American countercultural movement.

"If so—well, we'll just have to cut [the hitchhiker's] head off and bury him somewhere," Duke says. "Jesus! Did I say that?" he wonders. "Or just think it? Was I talking? Did they hear me?" Duke quickly decides to "*explain* things" so the hitchhiker will "rest easy." Duke smiles at him. "There's one thing you should probably understand," Duke says. He tells the hitchhiker that they are on their way to Las Vegas to find the American Dream. "That's why we rented this car," Duke says of **the Great Red Shark**. "It is the only way to do it. Can you grasp that?"

Duke's brutal solution to the problem of the hitchhiker mirrors the violence of the 1960s and '70s, which Thompson argues has led to violence among average American society. Duke's mention of their car and the American Dream again implies the car's iconic status and its purpose as a symbol of the Dream, which is reflected in Duke's claims that a car like the Shark is "the only way to do it."

Duke explains to the hitchhiker that Dr. Gonzo is his attorney. "He's not just some dingbat I found on the Strip," Duke says, noting that Gonzo doesn't look anything like him. "That's because he's a foreigner," Duke confirms, describing Gonzo as Samoan. "In spite of his race, this man is extremely valuable to me," he claims. Just the day before, Duke and Gonzo were sitting in the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel when the magazine called and assigned Duke the story in Las Vegas. He was told to go to Vegas immediately and meet Lacerda, a Portuguese photographer, for the Mint 400, "the richest off-the-road race for motorcycles and dune-buggies in the history of organized sport." After the phone call, Gonzo informed Duke that he would be going with him. "You're going to need plenty of legal advice before this thing is over," he said.

Duke's reference to Gr. Gonzo as "a foreigner" reflects the deep-seated racism in American society. Duke suggests that because Gonzo is a person of color, he isn't inherently valuable to society—but he is to Duke because he is a lawyer, and Duke may need to get out of trouble. Of course, Gonzo isn't really interested in going to Vegas in case Duke needs legal representation; he is looking to have fun and do drugs. Duke's description of the Mint 400 as "the richest off-the-road race" again suggests that he is a serious journalist and only covers serious stories, which the race surely is.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 2: THE SEIZURE OF $300 FROM A PIG WOMAN IN BEVERLY HILLS

In preparation for the trip, Duke had called the magazine in New York and asked for a Vincent Black Shadow, a state-of-the-art dirt bike. They referred him to the office in Beverly Hills. When he got there, the "money-woman" would only give him $300. "I have no idea who you are," she said. Duke took the money and left.

Duke's desire to have a Vincent Black Shadow again represents the excess and greed of American capitalism. Duke doesn't want any old dirt bike—he wants the best *dirt bike that money can buy. The fact that the woman doesn't know who Duke is suggests that he isn't a well-known journalist after all, and his reference to her as a "Pig Woman" in the chapter title reflects the sexism present in American society, a particular concern of the counterculture.*

"This won't make the nut," Dr. Gonzo said in response to their meager funds. "You Samoans are all the same," Duke replied. "You have no faith in the essential decency of the white man's culture." After all, they were just sitting bored in a bar when the call to go to Vegas had come, and then a complete stranger had given them money for nothing. "I tell you, my man," Duke said, "this is the American Dream in action! We'd be fools not to ride this strange torpedo all the way out to the end."

Duke's reference to the American Dream as "the white man's culture" suggests that it is accessible to white Americans only, and since Gonzo is Samoan, it is unavailable to him. Duke's comment that "you Samoans are all the same" also reflects racism in American society, as Duke paints an entire group of people with one broad stroke.

Duke and Gonzo agreed and decided that they needed a car and cocaine, a tape recorder, and a few "Acapulco shirts." Then, they would head to Vegas and "*cover the story*. Never lose sight of the primary responsibility," Duke said. Only he had no idea what the story was. No one at the magazine had actually told him. Duke wasn't worried—he would "drum it up on [his] own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it *now*: pure Gonzo journalism," Duke said. Plus, there is the "socio-psychic factor," he explained. "Every now and the then when your life gets complicated and the weasels start closing in, the only real cure is to load up on heinous chemicals and then drive like a bastard from Hollywood to Las Vegas."

Duke and Gonzo's desire to obtain extra drugs and clothing again underscores the excess and greed implied within the American Dream. Horatio Alger, an American novelist from the 1800s whose stories are often used as examples of the American Dream, represents Duke's own understanding of the Dream—that hard work and a little luck equals success in America. Furthermore, Duke's explanation of the "socio-psychic factor" implies that his drug use offers him a means to escape or cope with the unfairness of society. This is also Duke's first mention of Gonzo journalism, Thompson's own creation that rejects the objectivity of traditional journalism.

It had been easy getting the **bag of drugs**, but the car and the tape recorder were another story. It was late and most electronics stores were closed, but one did offer to stay open if Duke and Gonzo hurried. They were waylaid after a Stingray "killed a pedestrian on Sunset Boulevard," and by the time they got to the store, it was locked.

The ease with which Duke and Gonzo can secure their drugs underscores how commonplace drugs are in mainstream society, and their indifferent response to the dead pedestrian implies that horrific sights of death and carnage are likewise common, most frequently in news coverage and reporting, and easily ignored.

They could see people inside the store, so they banged on the windows until a salesman finally agreed to sell them the recorder through a small crack in the door. "Now take that stuff and get the hell away from here," he said. "We'll be back," yelled Dr. Gonzo. "One of these days I'll toss a fucking bomb into this place! I have your name on this sales slip! I'll find out where you live and burn your house down!"

Duke and Gonzo's behavior again reflects America's capitalist society (they want something and will go to great lengths to get it, at the expense of other people), but it is also evidence of their violence. Gonzo's threats are horrific and exceedingly personal, in another example of over-the-top brutality.

The man at the car rental agency was equally suspicious. Duke had backed **the Great Red Shark** over a two-foot concrete abutment going forty-five in reverse and nearly hit a gas pump. "Say there…uh…you fellas are going be *careful* with this car, aren't you?" the agency man asked. Duke explained he was merely testing the transmission as Gonzo mixed drinks in the backseat. "Are you fellas *drinking*?" the man questioned in disbelief. "Not me," Duke said as he drove away. "We're responsible people."

This passage is obviously ironic. Of course, Duke and Gonzo aren't going to be careful—they are going to take drugs, drink beer, and wreck the car. It is clear the rental agency suspects this as well, but the man lets them go in the interest of business and making more money.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 3: STRANGE MEDICINE ON THE DESERT…A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

Duke is "vaguely haunted" by the fact that the hitchhiker has never been in a convertible before and considers giving **the Great Red Shark** to him, but he has "*plans* for this car." He wants to "flash around Las Vegas in the bugger" and do some drag-racing on the Strip. He wants to take on the locals and "challenge the bastards on their own turf." After all, a chance like this doesn't come around often. "Old elephants limp off to the hills to die," Duke says, "old Americans go out to the highway and drive themselves to death with huge cars."

Obviously, the hitchhiker has never been in a convertible because he can't afford one, which underscores the uneven distribution of wealth within America. Las Vegas is a small-scale representation of American society within Fear and Loathing, *and Duke's desire to take on the locals underscores his identity as part of the counterculture and his resistance to the traditional establishment.*

The trip to Vegas is "a classic affirmation of everything right and true and decent in the national character." It is a "salute to the fantastic *possibilities* of life" in America, but only for those with "true grit," and "we are chock full of that," claims Duke. Dr. Gonzo understands this, Duke says, "despite his racial handicap," but it is much harder to explain to the hitchhiker. Duke and Gonzo begin to snort amyls from **the bag of drugs** as the hitchhiker looks on in horror. Gonzo yells loudly and swears, turning the music up loudly. "Pay no attention to this swine," Duke says to the hitchhiker. "He can't handle his medicine." Duke begins to tell the hitchhiker about the Mint 400.

This again harkens to the American Dream and the "fantastic possibility" that anyone can get rich in America with hard work, or "true grit." However, Duke's reference to Gonzo's "racial handicap"—that he's not white—implies that this "fantastic possibility" isn't available to people like Gonzo. This opinion underscores the blatant racism present in American society—wholesale opportunities are reserved for white Americans.

Gonzo interrupts. "The truth is," he says, "we're going to Vegas to croak a scag baron named Savage Henry." Gonzo and Duke begin to laugh hysterically. They tell the hitchhiker that Savage Henry has "ripped them off," and now they are going to "rip his lungs out." As Gonzo snorts another amyl, the hitchhiker "scrambles" out the back of the convertible and takes off running down the street. "Good riddance," Gonzo yells after him.

Gonzo's story is another reflection of violence. Presumably, Savage Henry doesn't exist—Gonzo simply makes him up—but he does so with the intention of intimidating and scaring the hitchhiker with the implication of violence. Gonzo's decision to invoke violence is sudden and feels natural to him.

Duke and Gonzo decide it is time to eat some blotter acid, and then Gonzo takes out the salt shaker of cocaine, spilling most of it. "You're a fucking narcotics agent!" Duke yells at him. "I was on your stinking act from the start, you pig!" Gonzo pulls out a .357 magnum. "You better be careful," he says as he points the gun at Duke. "Plenty of vultures out here." They burst out laughing as they blaze down the highway. "You're full of acid, you fool," Duke says, noting they have about thirty minutes before they completely lose their minds. "Are you ready for this?" Duke asks. "Checking into a Vegas hotel under a phony name with intent to commit capital fraud and a head full of acid?" If they don't make it, the Nevada Sate prison is just upstate in Carson City.

This interaction further establishes both Duke and Gonzo as members of the counterculture. In addition to their prolific drug use, Duke's contempt for law enforcement is clear as well. As an anti-establishment movement, members of the counterculture were openly critical of law enforcement, and Duke frequently refers to the police as "pigs" or "Nazis." The way in which Duke quickly brushes off having a gun pointed at him suggests that he encounters violence like this frequently.

Duke and Gonzo finally get to the hotel, but Gonzo is "unable to cope artfully with the registration procedure." There is a long line, and they are forced to stand and wait. Duke begins to feel "terror" as he approaches the desk. The desk clerk tells Duke that their room isn't ready yet, and then she hands him an envelope and tells him someone is looking for him. "No!" shouts Duke. "Why? We haven't *done* anything yet!" The clerk shrugs and walks away.

The drugs are clearly getting to Duke, and he is increasingly paranoid by the time he arrives in Vegas. Even though Duke is obviously acting strange, the clerk responds with indifference and doesn't even appear to notice, which is a testament to the drug-addled guests she probably sees daily at her job—or the fact that as long as they have money, she doesn't care how people act.

Duke and Gonzo go to the hotel bar to wait. "Who's Lacerda?" Gonzo asks after opening the envelope. The name sounds familiar, Duke says, but he can't remember. All around him the carpet is a "blood-soaked sponge" and huge reptiles sit around drinking. "Order some golf shoes," Duke yells. "We're right in the middle of a fucking reptile zoo!" Duke looks across the bar to a table of lizards staring at him. "That's the press table," Gonzo says. "You handle that, and I'll get the room."

Duke's LSD is taking over, and he is clearly out of his mind. He tells Gonzo to order "golf shoes" so he can wear them to walk across the blood-soaked carpet that he is hallucinating. This is obviously a disturbing hallucination, and also implies the fundamental violence of Duke's world. Duke doesn't hallucinate pleasant images, and he maintains that most of society is violent and awful. This opinion is also clear in his hallucinations of people as "reptiles."

PART ONE, CHAPTER 4: HIDEOUS MUSIC AND THE SOUND OF MANY SHOTGUNS...RUDE VIBES ON A SATURDAY EVENING IN VEGAS

Duke and Gonzo finally get to their room, and Gonzo calls room service and orders some sandwiches, rum, and nine fresh grapefruit. "Vitamin C," he says. "We'll need all we can get." Duke's acid trip is beginning to wear off, and by the time room service arrives the waiter looks only "vaguely reptilian." They decide to take some mescaline and watch the TV news, which is coverage of the Laos Invasion. They watch as a "series of horrifying disasters" unfold, including explosions and generals "babbling insane lies" from the Pentagon. "Tun that shit off!" Gonzo yells. "Let's get *out* of here!"

A popular myth within the Drug Culture is that vitamin C will stop a bad acid trip. Gonzo orders so many grapefruit because he is expecting a series of bad trips on several kinds of drugs—but he wants to do them anyway. The news coverage is more evidence of the violence present in society, and it also implies government corruption, a point of concern for the counterculture.

Back in **the Great Red Shark**, Gonzo passes out behind the wheel and runs a red light on Main Street, but Duke takes over driving and manages to get things under control. Behind the wheel, Duke turns the radio up and relaxes in the cool breeze. "Great God! What is this terrible music?" Duke yells as "The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Calley" begins to play on the radio. Duke looks to Gonzo, but he is sitting in a daze and doesn't seem to notice. "Thank Christ," Duke thinks. This song "would drive him into a racist frenzy."

"The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Calley" is a heroic description of Calley's actions in Vietnam, where he fought on behalf the United States Army and was responsible for the shooting deaths of over one hundred innocent civilians. The song about Calley glorifies and celebrates this violence. Duke worries that the song will send Gonzo into a "racist frenzy" because, to many, Calley's actions were considered genocidal, and since Gonzo is a person of color, Duke expects him to be empathetic and therefore angry.

As Duke drives towards the Mint Gun Club, he begins to hear bike engines and the sound of gunfire. "Of course," Duke thinks. "The Mint *Gun Club*!" He can see lines of people shooting targets not far from the registration tables for the race. Countless dirt bikes pass back and forth, including Husqvarnas, Yamahas, Kawasakis, and Triumphs.

The Mint Gun Club represents the American establishment, and it is described as violent and even militant in nature. There are several brands of dirt bikes represented, as Thompson again shows how American culture is defined by capitalist enterprise.

Duke parks and heads to the registration table. "What's the entry fee?" he asks. "Two fifty," says the man at the table. "What if I told you I had a Vincent Black Shadow?" Duke says. The man stares at him, and Duke notices he has a .38 revolver stuffed in his pants. "Forget it," Duke says and walks away. "We're the only people here without guns," Duke says to Dr. Gonzo. Gonzo stops and looks around, listening to the distant popping of gunfire. "You cocksuckers!" Gonzo screams, running back toward the car. "We'll be back!"

Obviously, Gonzo wants to go back to the hotel and get his .357 Magnum. Duke tells the registration clerk that he has a very expensive bike because he is hoping that this will get him some respect and perhaps a discount. Of course, Duke doesn't even have a bike, and the man figures this as well. Thompson's point, however, is that the wealthy are often given perks and advantages that others aren't.


PART ONE, CHAPTER 5: COVERING THE STORY…A GLIMPSE OF THE PRESS IN ACTION…UGLINESS & FAILURE

The Mint 400 is scheduled to start at nine in the morning, and Duke and Gonzo spend all night out in the casinos. By seven, the bar at the Mint Gun Club opens to accommodate the large crowd that has begun to gather, and they all file in and begin drinking. The crowd is rowdy and excited. "In some circles," Duke notes, "the 'Mint 400' is a far, far better thing than the Super Bowl, the Kentucky Derby and the Lower Oakland Roller Derby all rolled into one."

Duke's explanation of the Mint 400 as a big deal again implies that he is a serious journalist, and the Mint is a serious event. Yet Duke is constantly drunk and high on drugs and doesn't take the event very seriously, which puts journalism in a very unflattering light. Thompson is openly critical of journalism, and this is a prime example.

A drunk reporter from *Life* yells loudly at the bartender for a drink. He sways back and forth, "losing his grip on the bar," and slowly falls to his knees. "This is a magic moment in sport!" he yells with "definite authority." A woman begins to "claw feverishly" at the *Life* man, but he pays little attention to her. Duke turns away, disgusted. "We are, after all, the absolute cream of the national sporting press," Duke says. The Mint 400 is a "very special assignment," and "when it comes to things like this, you don't fool around."

The correspondent from Life *is the only other journalist in the book beside Duke, and he doesn't put journalists in a flattering light either. Even Duke thinks his behavior is distasteful and bad for the profession, which is* really *saying something. Still, the* Life *man is so secure in his "authority" that he claims it even when he is behaving so badly.*

Just as the race is about to start, Duke realizes they are "dangerously disorganized." The first ten bikes line up at the starting point and rocket off into the dust, but there are nearly two hundred bikes in the race, and they each line up, ten at a time, every couple of minutes. Soon, there is little visibility and Duke realizes that "'covering this race' in any conventional press-sense is absurd." There is a "press Bronco" supplied by the Ford Motor Company to drive reporters around the track, but even that is little help.

When the journalists are "dangerously disorganized," Thompson implies that the press as a whole is likewise disorganized. Here, the press chases the race but can see nothing, which makes their reporting suspect. In this way, Thompson implies that objective truth isn't always clear or even useful.

Duke takes a ride in the "press Bronco" and doesn't see anyone, except for "two dune-buggies full of what looks like retired petty officers from San Diego." Their buggies are decorated with American flags and eagles, and one has a machine-gun mounted near the passenger side. "Where *is* the damn thing?" a man asks Duke. "Beats me," he answers. "We're just good patriotic Americans like yourselves." He explains to the men that he is with the sporting press. "We're friendlies—hired geeks." He tells the men that if they are looking to chase someone, the "skunk from CBS" who is "responsible for *The Selling of the Pentagon*" is just ahead in a black jeep. "Hot damn!" the men yell as they drive away.

The dune-buggies represent those in American society who are proud nationalists—they are also part of the establishment that Duke, and Thompson by extension, are resisting. The men appear militarized and unreasonable. The Selling of the Pentagon *was a 1971 documentary that uncovered Pro-Vietnam government propaganda that was particularly damning for the government, and as such, the men in the buggies want to hunt down the journalist responsible.*

Duke decides it is time "get grounded—to ponder this rotten assignment and figure out how to cope with it." Lacerda, who "insists on Total Coverage," gets back into the "press Bronco," but Duke goes back into the bar. He begins to "drink heavily, think heavily, and make many heavy notes…"

Lacerda is perhaps the only journalist who takes their job seriously. He acts as a foil to Duke, highlighting Duke's absolute disregard for professionalism. Duke, however, is still dedicated in his own "Gonzo" way, which is reflected in his "heavy" drinking and notetaking.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 6: A NIGHT ON THE TOWN…CONFRONTATION AT THE DESERT INN…DRUG FRENZY AT THE CIRCUS-CIRCUS

Many years ago, Duke lived in Big Sur near Lionel Olay, a rich friend who frequently gambled in Reno. One time, Lionel drove his Mercedes to Reno three weekends in a row and took a casino for $15,000. He skipped the fourth weekend, but by Monday morning, the General Manager of the casino called him and offered to fly him out the next weekend, all expenses paid. "The pit-men were bored" without him, the manager said.

Lionel Olay is another reflection of capitalism—he spends money needlessly on things like gambling, drives an expensive car, and clearly spends each weekend on a sort of mini-vacation. The General Manager is attempting to lure him back so they can (eventually) take his money, which Duke argues is a given.

Lionel took the offer and flew to Reno the following weekend. By Monday morning, he was $30,000 dollars in the hole and had to borrow a dime from the pilot to call for a ride home from the airport. His debt got him in trouble with "one of the world's heaviest collection agencies," and he was forced to sell his business. When even that failed to cover his debt, Lionel "got stomped" and was forced to take out a personal loan. "Gambling," Duke says, "is a very heavy business—and Las Vegas makes Reno seem like your friendly neighborhood grocery store."

As Las Vegas functions as a stand-in for American society, Thompson implies that society is just as violent and fueled by power and money. Lionel's own quest for the American Dream left him financially bankrupt (which Thompson implies is often the case) and then he is "stomped," or physically assaulted by those in power. Here, the American Dream is devised in such a way that it is difficult to obtain even for a rich, and presumably white, man.

Duke and Gonzo decide to go to the Desert Inn to see the Debbie Reynolds/Harry James show, and on the way, Duke notices a billboard that reads: "DON'T GAMBLE WITH MARIJUANA! / IN NEVADA: POSSESION—20 YEARS / SALE—LIFE!" Duke isn't paying attention as he drives, and he runs the car up several curbs along the Strip. Suddenly, two men are yelling at him. "What the hell are you doing?" one screams. "You can't park *here*!" Duke looks up and realizes they are in front of the Desert Inn. Gonzo gives the parking attendant five dollars to park the car and they go inside.

The billboard serves as a reminder to Duke, and the reader, that Duke and Gonzo are breaking multiple drug laws; however, not all the drugs they have are illegal, and the billboard draws attention to this as well. They certainly abuse ether, but it isn't illegal, and even LSD wasn't made illegal until 1968—yet marijuana is heavily criminalized. Thompson underscores the absurdity of these arbitrary designations.

Inside the Desert Inn, it isn't long before Duke and Gonzo "lose control" and are kicked out by security. Back on the Strip, they sniff some more ether and take some mescaline, and then decide to go to Circus-Circus. When they arrive, the ether is beginning to take hold, and it makes them "behave like the village drunkard in some early Irish novel." Duke bounces off the turnstiles at the entrance and can't seem to get his money out of his pockets. The ether has made his mind "unable to communicate with [his] spinal column." The security at the door pushes him inside anyway. "Ether is the perfect drug for Las Vegas," Duke says. "In this town they love a drunk."

Las Vegas "loves a drunk" because they figure alcoholics are easier to take advantage of and will lose more readily at gambling and spend more money everywhere else as well. As "drunks" only benefit those with power and money in Vegas, they are tolerated and indulged.

"Circus-Circus," according to Duke, "is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war." Trapeze artists fly around "half-naked" above the crowded gambling tables. The "action runs twenty-four hours a day" and "the circus never ends." There are attractions and "funhouse-type booths" everywhere, and for just ninety-nine cents, patrons can "stand in front of this fancy machine" that projects their picture, along with a voice message, two hundred feet tall on a screen high above the strip. Duke is used to seeing strange things, but the image of drunken gamblers in the sky over downtown Las Vegas is getting to him. "No," says Duke, "this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted."

Duke implies that the "funhouse-type" atmosphere of Circus-Circus is a distraction to hide the fact that the casino (and American society by extension) is taking advantage of the masses. Duke has already outlined how the cards are stacked in the favor of the house in his story about Lionel Olay, and the flying trapeze artists and other spectacles of the casino are meant to detract from this reality, which, Duke implies, is the kind of thing only a "Nazi" would do. The casino willing and purposefully oppresses people, a reality Duke views as "twisted."

Circus-Circus even has a bar on a Merry-Go-Round, and as Duke and Gonzo sit and have a drink, the mescaline begins to hit them. "I hate to say this," says Gonzo, "but this place is getting *to* me. I think I'm getting the Fear." Duke won't hear of it. "Nonsense," he says. They have come to find the American Dream, and it is not time to quit. "You must *realize*," Duke tells Gonzo, "that we've found the main nerve." Duke decides it is best to get Gonzo out of the casino, but Gonzo won't step off the platform and keeps going around in circles. "Carson City," Duke thinks. "Twenty years." Duke approaches Gonzo from behind and pushes him off the carousel. "You fell," says Duke. "Let's go."

When Gonzo claims to be "getting the Fear," he means that his mescaline trip is turning bad on him and he is growing increasingly paranoid and uncomfortable, but this capitalized concept also reflects the general sense of terror that Thompson seems to find at the heart of society. Duke's reference to Circus-Circus as "the main nerve" of the American Dream is again expressed at the end of the book when Duke confirms that owning the casino is indeed the American Dream—an extravagant lifestyle and "a license to steal."

PART ONE, CHAPTER 7: PARANOID TERROR...AND THE AWFUL SPECTER OF SODOMY...A

FLASHING OF KNIVES AND GREEN WATER

By the time Duke and Gonzo park **the Great Red Shark** in front of their hotel, they are both "hyper-tense." Duke decides the car will be safer in the parking garage, and he leaves Gonzo in the room alone and goes to tend to the car. He walks out through the gaming floor. It is now four thirty Sunday morning, but the casino is still crowded, full of people "humping the American Dream, that vision of the Big Winner somehow emerging from the last-minute pre-dawn chaos of a stale Vegas casino."

This passage again underscores the power of capitalist greed in society and the widespread desire to make it rich. Duke's reference to the people as "humping the American Dream" when they should be asleep implies that Americans are naturally drawn to the idea of wealth and excess in a way that is innate—like a physiological desire for sex.

After Duke parks the **car**, he returns to the room to find Gonzo soaking in the bathtub, the water a sickly green color from a bag of Japanese bath salts. Gonzo tells Duke to put the cassette tape he has just bought, Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*, into the tape player. "'White Rabbit,'" Gonzo orders. "I want *rising* sound." Duke notices that Gonzo has eaten an entire sheet of acid. "You evil son of a bitch," Duke says. "You better hope there's some Thorazine in that **bag**, because if there's not you're in bad trouble tomorrow."

Gonzo's radio, new cassette tape, and bath salts again recall consumerism and capitalism, but his love for Jefferson Airplane is a reflection of his identity as part of the American counterculture. "White Rabbit" an iconic song from the late '60s, is widely regarded as the anthem of the countercultural movement.


Gonzo wants Duke to play "White Rabbit" as loud as it will go and then throw the radio in the bathtub "when it comes to the fantastic note where the rabbit bites its own head off." Gonzo wants to get "*Higher!*" and he is convinced electrocution is the way to go. Duke tries to talk Gonzo out of it without much success, and begins to formulate a plan. As the song builds, Duke reaches for a ripe grapefruit near the tub, and then throws it "like a cannonball" into the water. Gonzo begins to thrash around violently and Duke grabs the radio and runs out of the bathroom.

Gonoz's prolific drug use also reflects his support of the counterculture. Psychedelic drugs were at the center of the movement, and Gonzo's desire to get "Higher!" suggests that he hasn't left his dedication to psychedelic drugs in the '60s. At the same time, his idea of "higher" at this point means a violent death, suggesting that the whole counterculture has devolved into a horrifying "bad trip."


Gonzo comes out of the bathroom waving a knife, and Duke quickly reaches for a can of mace. "You want *this*?" he asks, waving the can around. "You bastard!" Gonzo yells. Duke threatens to call the police and have Gonzo arrested. He doesn't have a choice, he tells Gonzo. "I wouldn't dare go to sleep with you wandering around in this condition—with a head full of acid and wanting to slice me up with that goddamn knife." Gonzo shrugs and lights a cigarette. "Try to get some rest," Gonzo says. "Don't let me keep you up." Duke agrees and closes his eyes. He knows "the acid has shifted gears on [Gonzo]." For the next four hours or so, Gonzo will be in the grips of "catatonic despair," and will not be physically dangerous.

Both Duke and Gonzo again have a baseline response of violence. While it could be easily argued that Duke only responds aggressively because Gonzo comes at him in a violent way, the fact that Duke even has a can of mace in the first place suggests that he expects violence and will need protection from it. Furthermore, both Duke and Gonzo quickly recover and seem to forget the incident easily enough, which again implies that they frequently encounter violence and are used to responding to it.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 8: "GENIUS 'ROUND THE WORLD STANDS HAND IN HAND, AND ONE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION RUNS THE WHOLE CIRCLE 'ROUND"—ART LINKLETTER

Duke once lived down the road from a doctor, a famous "acid guru," who had "made that long jump from chemical frenzy to preternatural consciousness." Duke approached the good doctor and asked what advice he had "for a neighbor with a healthy curiosity about LSD." Duke tried several times to "make himself clear," but the guru had no advice to give. Duke "stuck with hash and rum for another six months" until he was given a lump of sugar in San Francisco and "BOOM"—he began to regularly trip on acid.

Art Linkletter, who is mentioned in the chapter title, was a television and radio host. Interestingly, Duke's story suggests that he was cautious before initially taking LSD (it took him a full six months) which is at odds with the popular stereotype within the media of the counterculture as hopeless drug addicts.

"San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of," Duke says. "Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run," but for nearly five years "the energy of a whole generation came to a head in a long fine flash." There were drugs and "madness in any direction, at any hour," and Duke never had to look far for like-minded people. There was a "sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil," and the entire generation was "riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave." Now, only five years later, if one goes up high enough over Las Vegas and looks West, "with the right kind of eyes you can almost *see* the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back."

This passage has become famously known as Duke's (i.e. Thompson's) "wave speech," which highlights Duke's dedication to the countercultural movement. Duke's mention of "Old and Evil" references the antiquated and oppressive ideals the counterculture fought against, but the "wave speech" also expresses the counterculture's failure. Here, the wave crests, breaks, and dissipates, which is to say the movement has lost its social momentum and power to effect change in society.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 9: NO SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL...NEWSMEN TORTURED? ... FLIGHT INTO MADNESS

In the meantime, Duke and Gonzo have run up an insanely high room service bill. Over the course of the last forty-eight hours, they have been "running somewhere between $29 and $36 dollars per hour." Gonzo "senses trouble" and decides to flee. He calls down to room service and orders a "set of fine cowhide luggage" and borrows $25 from Duke for a plane ticket.

This speaks to Gonzo's ridiculous anti-establishment character. He is supposed to be Duke's lawyer, but he runs at the first sign of legal trouble. He then adds to the debt, and therefore the legal trouble, when he orders luggage before leaving. He even must borrow money from Duke to do it.

After Duke drives Gonzo to the airport, he is left alone, "completely twisted on drugs, no attorney, no cash, no story for the magazine—and on top of everything else [he] has a gigantic goddamn hotel bill to deal with." They had ordered everything under the sun, including "about six hundred bars of translucent Neutrogena soap."

This passage is also a nod to capitalistic excess. Duke has six hundred bars of soap for no reason other than that he can have six hundred bars of soap. He doesn't need the soap, but the soap does suggest that his behavior is dirty, or immoral, and therefore needs to be cleansed or purified.

"How would Horatio Alger handle this," Duke wonders and begins to "panic." He packs everything, including the soap, into **the Great Red Shark** and plans his escape. He notices Gonzo's .357 Magnum sitting on the front seat of the car. Great, Duke thinks. If he's caught with the gun, he is going to jail for sure. But he doesn't want to throw it away—a "good .357 is a hard thing to get, these days"—so he decides to keep it. "My risk—my gun," Duke reasons.

The image of all that soap loaded into the Great Red Shark, the symbol of capitalism and the American Dream, emphasizes the "dirtiness" of excess and greed. The fact that Duke keeps the gun again suggests that he expects trouble and violence, or even wants to be violent just for entertainment.

As Duke waits for the perfect time to "slip the noose," he tries to act casual and read the newspaper. The lead story is about the heroin overdose of a pretty young girl, and a few stories down is a similar story about the drug-related deaths of American soldiers. Inside the paper is another story about a recent congressional hearing in which the military was questioned for "routinely" killing Vietnamese prisoners. The Army defended their actions, claiming one murdered prisoner "was just a slope, anyway."

As a reflection of society, the news is equally violent and depressing. Duke later points out the national shift from psychedelic drugs to much harder drugs like heroin, and the news stories reflect this tragedy. Furthermore, the news bolsters and reinforces notions of white superiority—the white soldiers defend their brutal actions based on the race of their victims.

Reading the paper makes Duke "feel a lot better." By comparison, his "crimes are pale and meaningless." Duke claims that he is "a relatively respectable citizen—a multiple felon, perhaps, but certainly not dangerous," and that should count for something. But maybe not, he thinks. After all, Muhammad Ali has just "been sentenced to five years in prison for *refusing* to kill 'slopes,'" Duke says. "Five years."

Here, Duke argues that the corrupt nature of the government excuses and even encourages violence and crime. Ali is punished for a peaceful act while the government openly encourages the killing of the enemy, which in this case is perceived as the Vietnamese. Notably, Ali was a black man and the Vietnamese are not white either, which again underscores the racism in American society.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 10: WESTERN UNION INTERVENES: A WARNING FROM MR. HEEM...NEW ASSIGNMENT FROM THE SPORTS DESK AND A SAVAGE INVITATION FROM THE POLICE

Duke begins to "lose control" and walks out to the car to flee. "MISTER DUKE!" someone yells after him. "MISTER DUKE! Wait!" The hotel clerk is running after him. Duke is "dizzy" as the clerk hands him an envelope. "This telegram just came for you," he says, smiling. Duke rips it open; it is a message from Gonzo. The magazine wants him to cover the National Conference of District Attorneys' seminal on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. There is a room reserved for him at the Flamingo along with **a white Cadillac convertible**.

Obviously, Duke's assignment to cover the D.A.'s conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs is highly ironic. Thompson's book is first and foremost a satire, and Duke's identity as a member of the Drug Culture makes his presence at the conference absurd. Duke's new car, the Caddy convertible, again reflects capitalism and possibility in American society. It is luxurious and American through and through.

The hotel clerk is confused because the telegram came under the name Thompson but says "*care of* Raoul Duke," and it appears to have come from Gonzo, who they believe is still in the hotel. The clerk tells Duke that the manager of the hotel would like to meet Gonzo, as he does with all their "*large* accounts." Duke explains that the telegram is from Thompson to Duke. "Never try to understand a press message," he says. He then tells the clerk that Gonzo is still sleeping up in the room. He warns him to wait until after breakfast before bothering Gonzo. "He's a very crude man," Duke explains as he drives away.

This is Thompson's first hint that Raoul Duke is actually his alter-ego. As an example of Gonzo journalism, it is assumed that Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas *is Thompson's first-person account of the events covered in the book, and Duke represents Thompson's fictional version of himself. Even though Duke isn't a real person per se, his emotions and reactions are most certainly Thompson's.*

Duke considers his options as he drives. He knows he should just leave town, but there is a "stench of twisted humor that hovers around the idea of a gonzo journalist in the grip of a potentially terminal drug episode being invited to cover the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs." Duke is also attracted to the idea of giving the hotel the slip just to go across town to another casino. "It is dangerous lunacy," Duke thinks, "but is also the kind thing a real connoisseur of edge-work could make an argument for." Still, Duke worries, he is much too "conspicuous" to pull it off. Duke decides to find an "early morning beer and get [his] head together…to plot this unnatural retreat."

Duke's identity as part of the American counterculture implies that he relishes the opportunity to resist the establishment, and going to a drug conference high and fraudulently skipping out on a massive hotel bill are perfect opportunities to do just that. To Duke, it is the ultimate insult to embarrass the establishment in such a way, even if they aren't fully aware of it. The idea is to be as big a nuisance as possible to those in power, which Duke absolutely does.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 11: AAAWWW, MAMA, CAN THIS REALLY BE THE END?... DOWN AND OUT IN VEGAS, WITH AMPHETAMINE PSYCHOSIS AGAIN?

Duke sits alone in a bar on the outskirts of Vegas and thinks about his situation. The road between Vegas and L.A. is a straight shot, but there is no way to hide **the Great Red Shark**. He will be on the open road for nearly six hours with a car "so full of felonies that [Duke] is afraid to even look at it." Abandoning the car isn't an option. "Sweet Jesus, I am *tired!*" Duke cries. "I'm scared. I'm crazy. This culture has beaten me down. […] Jesus, bad waves of paranoia, madness, fear and loathing—" he says.

In this passage, it is unclear which "culture has beaten" Duke down. It seems that he is referring to the counterculture—he has spent two sleepless days resisting the establishment and he is exhausted—but it is mainstream American culture that has caused Duke to resist in the first place, so it is easily argued that this culture has "beat [him] down" as well.

"Jesus Creeping God!" Duke yells. "Is there a priest in this tavern? I want to confess! I'm a *fucking sinner!*" All morning long he has been trying to tell himself that he isn't really guilty. Skipping out on his hotel bill is "merely a necessary expedient, to avoid a nasty scene." He had made not "binding agreements; this was an *institutional debt*—nothing personal." Duke prays to God for five more hours of "high-speed" driving before he "brings the hammer down." This is all the magazine's fault, Duke thinks. "You'd better take care of me, Lord," he prays, "because if you don't you're going to have me *on your hands*."

This, again, is satire—of course Duke is guilty. He openly and purposefully broke multiple laws—laws that he doesn't agree with in the first place—but he is nonetheless guilty. To Duke, the hotel represents a corporation, not a sentient human being, so he figures that his crimes are less than those that directly target people. Still, Duke refuses to take responsibility for his actions, which Thompson suggests is also the case with the counterculture as a whole.

PART ONE, CHAPTER 12: HELLISH SPEED…GRAPPLING WITH THE CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY

PATROL...MANA A MANA ON HIGHWAY 81

Duke is driving through Baker on his way to L.A. when the California Highway Patrol pulls him over. The police officer gives Duke a written warning and orders him to a nearby rest area to take a nap. Duke gets back on the freeway heading towards Baker and passes the rest area. Suddenly, he notices the hitchhiker thumbing for a ride just up ahead. Their eyes lock and Duke begins to panic. He stops at a diner and immediately calls Gonzo.

The California Highway Patrol obviously represents authority, which Duke refuses to heed to. He has no intention of doing what the police officer says, so he drives right by the rest stop. Duke's panic and paranoia over the hitchhiker are more evidence of his drug-induced delusions.

"They've nailed me!" Duke screams in the phone to Gonzo. "I'm trapped in some stinking desert crossroads called Baker. I don't have much time. The fuckers are closing in." Both the Highway Patrol and the hitchhiker stand between Duke and L.A., and it appears as if he will never get there. "You're supposed to be in Vegas," Gonzo says. "We have a suite at the Flamingo. I was just about to leave for the airport." Gonzo reminds Duke about the telegram and it suddenly comes back to him. Yes, he will "slip the Kid and confound the CHP by moving East again, instead of West."

Again, Duke is exceedingly paranoid, a product of his excessive drug use. He thinks the CHP and the hitchhiker are out to get him specifically, and he is beginning to come unraveled. Ironically, Duke believes heading to Vegas is the safest course of action, which of course only makes his situation worse in the long run. Duke's paranoia and his dedication to the American Dream are the main sources of his trouble in Vegas.

Duke "relaxes" and hangs up the phone. Going back to Vegas is exactly what he will do. "Register at the Flamingo and have **the White Caddy** sent over at once. Do it right," Duke thinks, "remember Horatio Alger." The bartender approaches Duke and smiles. "Where ya headin', young man?" he asks. "Las Vegas," Duke answers immediately. "Great town, that Vegas," the bartender says. "You'll have good luck there; you're the type."

The "type" the bartender refers to is drunk and looking for trouble, which Duke definitely is. Duke again mentions the American Dream via a Horatio Alger reference, and the luxury of both the Flamingo hotel and the Cadillac again recall the capitalist exploitation implied within the American Dream itself.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 1

Duke pulls the **car** over twenty miles east of Baker. It is hot and he feels "like killing something. Anything. Even a big lizard." He pulls Gonzo's .357 Magnum out and squeezes off three rounds. The surprising recoil "knocks him off balance," and he throws the gun back into the car. He opens **the bag of drugs** holding his stash and finds it "a hopeless mess." It is dwindling fast, but with "careful rationing" it will probably get them through the Drug Conference.

Duke's sudden and needless desire to "kill something" again suggests that he is innately and naturally violent. He doesn't have a reason to behave so violently, he just does, which again implies that violence is a large part of the average American citizen.

Duke stops at a drug store and buys some tequila and Chivas, along with a pint of ether. On his way out, he steals a Review-Journal from the magazine rack. He randomly opens it and reads an article about a man in Baltimore who had gouged his own eyes out in a jail cell after a drug overdose. The police reported that the man was "in a deeply depressed state and so impervious to pain that he did not scream when he pulled out his eyes." Duke closes the magazine and immediately throws it away.

Again, Duke very easily obtains drugs. Here, it is as simple as walking into a drug store. The article about the awful drug overdose depicts drug users as a hopeless lot, so far-gone that they can inflict massive bodily pain without feeling anything. While Duke's drug use is certainly out of hand, he surely doesn't see himself gouging his eyes out, and he is bothered that he is represented in such a way.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 2: ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CONVERTIBLE...& ANOTHER HOTEL FULL OF COPS

Hours later, Duke arrives in Vegas and goes to the airport to get rid of **the Great Red Shark**. He must pick Gonzo up anyway, and he figures the rental lot at the airport is the last place anyone will look for the car. As Duke waits for Gonzo, he drinks Bloody Marys for two hours "for the V-8 nutritional content," then decides to go to the car rental counter to trade the Chevy for **the Cadillac**. "This goddamn Chevy has caused me a lot of trouble," Duke tells the car agency man. People have been looking down on him, Duke says, "especially in gas stations, when [he] has to get out and open the hood *manually*."

Duke's implication that people look down on him because he must "manually" open the hood of the car suggests that American society is classist and interested only in how much money someone has. The Cadillac cost more money than the Chevy and is the epitome of American luxury and wealth, and no one will look down on Duke while he's driving it. Also, Duke has replaced actual food with Bloody Marys, which speaks to the extent of his drug-fueled binge.

The **Cadillac** is completely automatic. Everything opens or goes up and down with just the touch of a button, and the dashboard is covered with "esoteric lights and dials" that Duke doesn't understand. "There is no doubt in [his] mind" that the Cadillac is "a superior automobile," so Duke pays with a canceled credit card and heads back to the Strip. There has been no sign of Gonzo, so he figures he will check into the Flamingo and wait.

This passage further depicts the Cadillac as the embodiment of luxury and wealth. The automatic features and dashboard displays ensure that the owner has to do less work. Duke doesn't know how to work the bells and whistles, but this doesn't matter—the Cadillac serves as a reflection of wealth, and functional use comes second.

When Duke arrives at the Flamingo, the place is crawling with cops. He gets in line at the front desk behind "a Police Chief from some small town in Michigan" and his "Agnew-style wife." The couple has arrived late, and even though they have already paid for their room, their reservation has been sent to another hotel across town. The Police Chief is livid, and he stands screaming at the desk attendant. Duke stands uncomfortably behind them for several minutes, and then decides to cut in line.

Duke's mention of the cop's "Agnew-style wife" is a reference to Spiro Agnew, vice president of the U.S. under Nixon. Agnew was forced to resign in disgrace due to suspicion of bribery and tax evasion, and with this reference, Duke implies that the Midwestern police officer is likewise corrupt, untrustworthy, and fueled by money and greed.

"Say," Duke says to the hotel desk clerk. "I hate to interrupt, but I have a reservation and I wonder if maybe I could just sort of slide through and get out of your way." Duke is a mess; his clothes are ripped, and he hasn't shaved in days, but the bellhop approaches and takes his bag. "The rest is out there in that white **Cadillac** convertible," Duke says, motioning to the car outside. "Don't worry about a thing, sir. Just enjoy your stay," the clerk says, handing him a key. The Michigan cop and his wife stand and watch as Duke heads to his room.

Duke looks like a homeless person, but the Cadillac outside suggests that he has money and influence, so the hotel staff immediately jump to serve him. The police officer has already paid for his room, but it's implied that he is probably only middle-class at best, and as such, Duke warrants more attention than he does. This exchange highlights the connection between money and power in American society.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 3: SAVAGE LUCY…'TEETH LIKE BASEBALLS, EYES LIKE JELLIED FIRE'

Duke is eager to get to his room. He wants to rest, smoke his "last big chunk of Singapore Grey," and watch Walter Cronkite. He needs to regroup before the Drug Conference, which will be nothing like covering the Mint 400. Duke and Gonzo will "be attending the conference under false pretenses and dealing, from the start, with a crowd that is convened for the stated purpose of putting people like [them] in jail." Still, Duke plans to take drugs and storm the conference—but "not to prove any final, sociological point, and not even as a conscious mockery." No, now it is "mainly a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty." If the cops are meeting for a "top-level Drug Conference," then Duke feels "the drug culture should be represented too."

Singapore Grey is a type of opium, which again highlights Duke's excessive drug use, but also reflects Duke's dedication to the counterculture. Taking drugs and resisting mainstream society has become a lifestyle for Duke, and he won't abandon it simply because the counterculture failed to effect any lasting change in American society. Duke's reference to Walter Cronkite, a famous network news anchor in the '70s, again harkens to journalism and its importance in mainstream culture.

As Duke opens the door to his room, he hits a human figure on the other side. It is a girl of "indeterminate age with the face and form of a Pit Bull." She stares at Duke with eyes full of anger. "You degenerate pig," Duke says to Gonzo, who is standing naked in the bathroom door. "It can't be helped," Gonzo says. "This is Lucy." The girl continues to stare at Duke with hate and violence in her eyes. "Lucy!" yells Gonzo. "Lucy! Be cool, goddamn it! Remember what happened at the airport…no more of that, OK?"

Lucy's "indeterminate age" suggests that she is very young and not yet eighteen, or a legal adult, and Gonzo's nakedness implies that he has behaved inappropriately with the girl—Duke later implies that Gonzo has raped her. Even if Gonzo's interaction with Lucy is consensual, she is still likely underage and on drugs, which makes this encounter statutory rape at the very least. This encounter reflects the sexism and violence against women typically seen in American society.

Gonzo explains to Lucy that Duke is his client and friend, and she starts to calm down. Duke looks around and sees several paintings cluttering the room. "Lucy paints portraits of Barbara Streisand," Gonzo says. "She's an artist up in Montana." Gonzo says that they plan to go to the American Hotel tonight to meet Barbara backstage. Obviously, Duke thinks, they have "a serious case on their hands." Duke turns to Gonzo and asks him to help unload the car. He agrees and turns to Lucy: "We'll be right back. Don't answer the phone if it rings."

While Lucy's violence certainly seems understandable and even warranted since she was presumably just raped, Duke also describes her as a violent person in general. Furthermore, her obsession with Barbara Streisand suggests that she isn't quite mentally sound, or at the very least is exceedingly young, which makes Gonzo's abuse of her even more horrifying.

"Well…" Duke says to Gonzo outside. "What are your plans?" Gonzo explains that he met Lucy on the plane. She had just run away from home for the fifth time in six months, and Gonzo didn't realize until after he had given her acid that she has never even had a drink. "Jesus," Gonzo says, "she's a *religious* freak." Gonzo stares at Duke. "Well," says Duke, "it'll probably work out. We can keep her loaded and peddle her ass at the drug convention."

When Duke mentions "peddling [Lucy's] ass" at the convention, he means to say that they should pimp her out for sex and make money off of her. This gross form of sexual exploitation again underscores sexism and violence against women in American society. Duke sees Lucy as simply another tool to make money with.

"Jesus Christ," yells Gonzo. "I knew you were sick, but I never expected to hear you actually *say* that kind of stuff." After they unload the car, they head back to the room to try to talk some sense into Lucy. She can't stay with them, Duke says. It is entirely possible that in a few hours she will "work herself into a towering Jesus-based rage at the hazy recollection of being picked up and seduced in the Los Angeles International Airport by some kind of cruel Samoan who fed her liquor and LSD, then dragged her to a Vegas hotel room and savagely penetrated every orifice in her body with his throbbing, uncircumcised member." This girl is a "walking bomb," says Duke, and the authorities might even call it kidnapping. "You're right," says Gonzo. "They'd probably burn me at the goddamn stake."

Of course, Gonzo deserves to be held accountable for what he has done to Lucy. Giving her drugs and using her for sex is a crime, but Gonzo gets away with it. Ironically, Gonzo is disturbed by Duke's suggestion that they pimp Lucy out for money, but he seems fine with using her for his own sexual pleasure for free. Either way, Lucy has been seriously exploited. In this vein, Thompson suggests that women are incredibly mistreated in American society, one of the main civil rights issues the counterculture tried, mostly unsuccessfully, to address.

Duke and Gonzo tell Lucy it is time to "go meet Barbara," and after packing up all her portraits, they head in the direction of the airport. They stop at a telephone where Gonzo makes Lucy a reservation at the Americana. He tells the desk clerk that he is the girl's uncle, and that she must be "treated very gently" because she "is an artist" and "a trifle high-strung." Then, Duke drives to the airport where Gonzo gets Lucy out of the car, telling her that they are trading the **Cadillac** for a Mercedes. Gonzo walks inside with Lucy but comes out alone and gets into the car. "Take off slowly," he tells Duke. "Don't attract any attention."

Gonzo's comment that they are going to trade in the Cadillac for a Mercedes again highlights the importance of capitalism and consumerism in American society—the two men keep seeking objects that represent ever more luxury and status. Even though Gonzo has treated Lucy so poorly, he still makes sure that she is treated well at the Americana, which suggests that he isn't quite as violent and horrible as he seems.

Gonzo tells Duke that he paid a cab driver to take Lucy over to the Americana and see that she checks in. He had told the cabbie that he would be there himself in an hour, and if Lucy isn't checked in by then, he's coming "back out here [to] rip his lungs out." Duke suggests taking it easy for the rest of the night, and Gonzo agrees. He wants to find a restaurant and get a fresh salmon dinner. "But first we should go back to the hotel and settle in," Duke says. "Maybe have a quick swim and some rum." They both agree and drive away.

Gonzo is immediately violent again and threatens to "rip out" the desk clerk's lungs if he doesn't do as he says. Other than the V-8 in Duke's Bloody Marys and the grapefruit used to combat bad LSD trips, this is the first time either Duke or Gonzo have mentioned food since coming to Vegas, which again speaks to the surreal extent of their drug and alcohol binge.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 4: NO REFUGE FOR DEGENERATES...REFLECTIONS ON A MURDEROUS JUNKIE

When Duke and Gonzo get back to their room, the light on the phone is blinking, and Duke calls the front desk to retrieve the message. "Ah yes," the clerk says. Duke does indeed have two messages; one from the National District Attorneys' Association welcoming him to Las Vegas, and one from Lucy, who wants Duke to call her at the Americana, room 1600. "Holy shit!" exclaims Duke and hangs up the phone.

The welcome message from the National District Attorneys' Association again underscores the ridiculousness of Duke and Gonzo's attendance of the conference. They have been doing drugs for two days straight and probably shouldn't be this close to so many police officers.

Gonzo is in the bathroom "doing the Big Spit, again," and Duke goes on the balcony for some fresh air. Gonzo appears, wiping vomit from his face. "This goddamn mescaline," he says. "Why the fuck can't they make it a little less pure?" Duke turns to him. "Lucy called," he says. "What?" Gonzo asks as the phone rings.

Gonzo spends most of the book "doing the Big Spit," which doesn't make drugs look like a particularly good time. Gonzo is constantly sick because the drugs are so strong—they aren't fun anymore, but Duke and Gonzo keep taking them anyway.

Duke answers the phone. "Hello, Mister Duke. I'm sorry we were cut off a moment ago…" says the clerk. "*What?*" yells Duke. "We're watching the goddamn news! What the fuck are you interrupting me for?" The clerk is silent. "What do you *want?*" Duke asks again. "There's a war on, man! People are being killed!" The clerk is confused. "Killed?" he asks. "In Vietnam!" Duke screams. "On the goddamn television!" The clerk suddenly understands. Yes, he says, the war is "terrible," but Lucy "sounded *very disturbed*" when she called. Duke is silent. "I thought you should know this," the clerk says.

This passage is also highly ironic. Duke implies that he is disturbed or bothered by the violence in Vietnam depicted on the evening news, yet he is perfectly comfortable with the violent acts he and Gonzo commit. In this way, the abject violence in Vietnam makes their own violence seem less by comparison, and thereby completely acceptable and commonplace within society.


"Look," Duke says, "you want to be gentle with that woman if she ever calls again." The clerk agrees. After all, he understands "the nature of [Duke's] work" and is "happy to cooperate with the police." Duke tells the clerk to send ice and hangs up the phone. He turns to Gonzo, who laughs. "[Lucy] is looking for *you*," Gonzo says. To get rid of her, Gonzo told her that he and Duke were headed out to the desert "for a showdown," and she should go to the Americana and wait to see which one of them returns. "I guess she figures you won," Gonzo says. "That phone message wasn't for *me*, was it?"

The desk clerk assumes that Duke and Gonzo are police officers because they are associated with the District Attorneys' conference. Ironically, the clerk suspects that something is wrong with Lucy and that perhaps she has been mistreated, but because he believes Duke and Gonzo to be cops, he is willing to look the other way. This implies that law enforcement, the authority-figure of the establishment, is violent and corrupt as well.


Duke immediately begins to put his shoes on and get his bags together. "Jesus, you're not *leaving*?" Gonzo asks. "You're goddamn right, I'm leaving," Duke answers. His mind suddenly flashes to an image of a courtroom where Lucy has just taken the stand. "Yessir," she says to the court, "those two men over there in the dock are the ones who gave me the LSD and took me to the hotel…" This can't happen, Duke thinks. "No jury would doubt her testimony, especially when it came stuttering out through a fog of tears and obscene acid flashbacks."

Obviously, Duke doesn't want to be held responsible for Gonzo's rape of Lucy. Duke's image of the courtroom reflects his unconscious guilt, which implies that Duke knows their treatment of Lucy is illegal and immoral. While Duke arguably feels badly, he still participates easily enough and is therefore complicit.


PART TWO, CHAPTER 5: A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE WITH EXTREMELY DANGEROUS DRUGS

"You can't leave me alone in this snake pit!" Gonzo cries. "This room is in my *name*." Duke continues to pack and Gonzo quickly agrees to call Lucy and sort everything out. "Hi Lucy," Gonzo says. "Yeah, it's me. I got your message…" He tells her that he "taught [Duke] a lesson he'll never forget" in the desert, but Duke had cashed a bad check at the hotel and used her as a reference. The police are looking for both of them, and it's not safe to call the hotel again. "O MY GOD!" Gonzo yells suddenly. "THEY"RE KICKING THE DOOR DOWN!" Gonzo throws the phone down and thrashes about, making excessive noise. "You'll never catch Lucy" he yells. "No! No! Don't put that thing on me!" Gonzo slams the phone down on the cradle, hanging up. "Well," he says. "That's that."

Gonzo's excuse to Lucy, of course, involves violence. Gonzo tells Lucy he "taught [Duke] a lesson he'll never forget," suggesting that he physically beat him so badly that Duke will always remember it. Lucy accepts this story easily enough, which again speaks to how commonplace violence is in the society of the book. This is the last time Duke and Gonzo hear from Lucy, which emphasizes the fact that Gonzo did in fact use her and then thoughtlessly discard her.

"Where's the opium?" Gonzo asks. Duke hands him **the drug bag**, which is nearly empty. "As your attorney," Gonzo says, "I advise you not to worry." He tells Duke to take "hit" from a small bottle in his shaving kit. "Adrenochrome," he says. "You won't need much." Duke has heard of this drug—it "makes pure mescaline seem like ginger beer." He dips the head of match into the bottle and licks it. "Where'd you get *this*?" Duke asks. Adrenochrome isn't the kind of thing you can just buy. It comes from "the adrenaline glands from a *living* human body." Gonzo tells him he got it as payment from a client, a "Satanism freak" that didn't have any cash.

The addition of adrenochrome means that Duke and Gonzo's drug binge is officially out of control. The fact that they have the drug implies that someone had to die for them to use it, which is in keeping with Thompson's overarching theme of violence as meaningless brutality and even entertainment. While Thompson is being satirical here, adrenochrome does exist, but it is not known to have any psychedelic properties.

The adrenochrome hits Duke almost immediately, and he can he can "feel [his] eyeballs swelling, about to pop out of the sockets." Gonzo begins to back away. "Goddamn it," he says. "You took too *much*." He assures Duke that the rush won't last long, and that he will have to "just ride the bastard out." Gonzo turns back to the television and continues watching the news. Images of "Nixon's face fill the screen," but Duke can't make out what he is saying. "Just stay relaxed," Gonzo says again. Duke looks back to the television where Nixon is repeating "sacrifice…sacrifice…sacrifice."

Duke has only taken the smallest drop of the drug, yet it is still too much—not even he can handle the pure essence of human emotion that adrenochrome supposedly contains. The news image of Nixon again calls attention to the violence and corruption of the Vietnam War. The image of Nixon repeating the word "sacrifice" reflects the violence of the government and their willingness to kill innocent people, which Duke is paradoxically calmed by—presumably because he is so used to it.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 6: GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS…OPENING DAY AT THE DRUG CONVENTION

The next day, Duke and Gonzo head off to the Dunes Hotel for the Drug Conference and find 1,500 officers of the law gathered in the main ballroom. There is a stage at one end of the room and at least a dozen speakers are scattered about. "This 1935 style of speaker placement" has something "ominous and authoritarian about it," and both Duke and Gonzo are immediately uncomfortable. On the stage is a "drug expert" named Dr. E. R. Bloomquist. He is talking about "the Drug Culture" and the danger of acid "flashbacks."

The "ominous and authoritarian" way in which the conference is presented makes it feel like the conference is taking place in the middle of Nazi Germany or some other similar society. Duke and Gonzo are immediately uncomfortable because such an authoritarian environment implies that law enforcement has absolute authority over their personal freedom.

Bloomquist is "a well known authority on the abuse of dangerous drugs," and he is going on and on about the "'four states of being' in the cannabis society: 'Cool, Groovy, Hip & Square.'" Duke has heard "dangerous gibberish" like this before. He remembers seeing bulletins in Police Department locker rooms that warned about the "DOPE FIEND." The bulletins cautioned officers to beware of Dope Fiends with "white [knuckles] from inner tension" and pants that are "crusted with semen from constantly jacking off when he can't find a rape victim." According to the bulletins, "the Dope Fiend fears nothing" and will shoot a cop with his own gun.

For being such a "well known authority" on drugs, Dr. Bloomquist is painfully ill-informed on their use, and Thompson implies that the American government and actual law enforcement agencies are likewise clueless. The conference falsely paints every *drug user as a violent criminal. The character of Gonzo seems to embody this, but Duke, while he certainly thinks violent thoughts, is generally harmless, albeit tolerant of violence in others.*

Gonzo becomes visibly uncomfortable and tense, and Duke "tries to console him." As Gonzo looks around the room at all the Midwestern cops, his anxiety continues to build. "I saw these bastards in *Easy Rider*, but I didn't believe they were real," Gonzo says. "Not like *this*. Not *hundreds* of them!" Gonzo begins to worry that the conference is infiltrated by a "dope-dealing bomb freak" who is sure to recognize him and "put the word out" that he is hanging around a bunch of cops. "This is a fucking *nightmare*!" Gonzo cries. Duke agrees and admits to feeling "a bit tense" because the check they had paid the registration fee with was "bad" and "absolutely worthless."

Gonzo's anxiety and reference to only seeing Midwestern cops in a magazine makes them seem like exotic animals in National Geographic. *Gonzo is the counterculture, which was focused on the West Coast, specifically in San Francisco, and this passage implies that he is inherently at odds with those from middle America, so much so that he calls it a "fucking* nightmare!*" Duke and Gonzo's attempt to pass a bad check again underscores their resistance to the establishment and mainstream society.*

PART TWO, CHAPTER 7: IF YOU DON'T KNOW, COME TO LEARN...IF YOU KNOW, COME TO TEACH

Duke and Gonzo sit quietly through the morning listening to the convention. Sitting there with a "headful of mescaline" is "easy enough" since these "poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni." As the speakers drone on, Gonzo gets up to leave. "I'll be down in the casino," he says. "I know a hell of a lot better ways to waste my time than listening to *this* bullshit." He crashes his way to the door, knocking over chairs and people on his way. "I have to get *out*!" he yells. "I don't *belong* here!"

Duke again describes law enforcement as completely clueless since they don't know mescaline, a powerful psychedelic drug, from "macaroni." Gonzo's reaction to his surroundings again reflects his commitment to counterculture and resistance—he doesn't feel that he belongs with the establishment and therefore must get out.

Duke follows Gonzo out, pretending that he is going to be sick. The crowd quickly parts to let him by, and he finds Gonzo at the bar talking to a cop from Georgia. "We don't have much of a problem with drugs down where I come from," the man says as Duke approaches. "You will," says Gonzo. "One of these nights you'll wake up and find a junkie tearing your bedroom apart." Junkies are everywhere, Gonzo says, and heading south. "Jesus God almighty," the Georgia cop says. "What the hell's *goin' on* in this country?"

The cop from Georgia is a satirical representation of what Thompson sees as clueless and out-of-touch law enforcement.. He has zero professional experience with drugs, yet he easily believes the nonsense that Gonzo tells him.

Gonzo tells the Georgia cop that junkies have taken over California, and that now they are into "witchcraft." He looks at the cop seriously and tells him about junkies "gone crazy for human sacrifice." The cop is shaken. "But we can't just lock ourselves in the house and be prisoners!" he says. Of course not, says Duke. That's why we "cut their goddamn heads off" in California. Gonzo confirms. "It's all on the Q.T.," he says, "but everybody who *matters* is with us all the way down the line." Duke explains they need to keep it "quiet," and the cop agrees. "We'd never hear the goddamn end of it," he says. Duke and Gonzo leave the man behind at the bar, shaking his head in disbelief.

Gonzo's ridiculous story underscores how easy it is to criminalize an entire population of drug users only out of fear. He makes the Georgia cop think that junkies are dangerous and headed his way. The cop is very accepting of the idea of killing junkies, which is of course needless violence, but it also reflects the contempt society at large has for drug users. Thompson again uses a hyperbolic situation to satirize what he sees as an essentially violent establishment—they really would *like to behead all junkies, he suggests, if they thought they could get away with it.*

PART TWO, CHAPTER 8: BACK DOOR BEAUTY...& FINALLY A BIT OF SERIOUS DRAG RACING ON THE STRIP

Gonzo has been throwing up for most of the night, and by midnight, he decides he wants coffee. Driving down the Strip, Duke pulls the **White Whale** up next to a Ford with Oklahoma plates. "Hey there!" Gonzo yells. "You folks want to buy some heroin?" The Midwestern tourists are shocked, and they attempt to ignore Gonzo as Duke drives alongside them. Suddenly, one of the men in the Ford loses control. "You dirty bastard!" the man screams. "Pull over and I'll kill you! God damn you! You bastards!" Duke spikes the brakes and shoots across three lanes of traffic. "Jesus Christ," Gonzo says. "Those Okies were getting excited."

Here, Gonzo again appears incompatible with people from the Midwest. He harasses the tourists only because he thinks that they must also be boring, and his harassment is incredibly violent as well. It's also notable that even these "boring" Midwestern tourists are so easily driven to threats of brutal violence in turn. The image of the Ford next to the White Whale, a car made by General Motors, harkens to the excess that saturates American society.

Duke and Gonzo head for a diner in "North Las Vegas," a "mean/scag ghetto" on the outskirts of town. North Vegas is for those who "fucked up once too often on the Strip" and have been exiled from town. It is a place for "hookers turning forty" and "pimps with bad credit at the Sands." Vegas casino owners pay a lot of money to make sure that "high rollers" don't have to deal with "undesirables," and security is "super tense and strict." Las Vegas is a "gold mine," and it "breeds its own army, like any other gold mine." Security "tends to accumulate in fast layers around money/power poles," Duke notes, and in Vegas, big money is "synonymous with the Power to protect it.

Duke's understanding of money and the power that protects it illustrates how capitalism marginalizes people who are considered to be of the lower class. Duke uses "undesirable" as another word for poor, suggesting that those who are considered washed up or broke are not welcome to mingle with the rich and fabulous within the city limits of Las Vegas.

Inside the North Star Coffee Lounge, Duke and Gonzo are the only customers, which is a good thing since they have just eaten some more mescaline. The waitress looks like a "burned-out caricature of Jane Russell," or like a "very old hooker who had finally found her place in life." She is "definitely *in charge*" behind the counter, and when she brings Duke his hamburger and coffee, Gonzo hands her a folded napkin with writing on it.

Duke's reference to Jane Russell, a famous movie star from the 1940s and '50s, suggests that the woman is attractive, albeit "burned-out," and she isn't prepared to take any nonsense from Duke and Gonzo.

The waitress turns her back and reads the napkin, which says: "Back Door Beauty?" She turns back to Gonzo, angrily. "You sonofabitch!" she yells. "I take a lot of shit in the place, but I sure as hell don't have to take it off a *spic pimp!*" She tells them to leave immediately and threatens to call the police. Gonzo stands up, holding a sharp knife, and walks to the pay phone. He slices the cord and brings the receiver back to his seat. Gonzo sets the severed receiver down on the counter and orders some lemon meringue pie. She brings the pie and the men stand to leave. Duke can see that Gonzo has "triggered bad memories" in the waitress. As they walk out, she is "in the grip of paralysis."

This entire exchange is completely offensive and abusive. The fact that Gonzo believes he has the right to proposition a random woman in the first place reflects the sexism present in society, but he then proceeds to implicitly threaten her with violence and further torture her by cutting off her life-line in the form of the telephone—her only connection to the outside world and help. Duke implies that she has probably been terribly abused in the past, which only makes the violence in society—and the men's callousness—even more apparent.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 9: BREAKDOWN ON PARADISE BLVD.

This chapter begins with a "Editor's Note" that is written entirely in italics. Around this time, Duke has "broken down completely," and after his original manuscript is destroyed, the editor at the magazine is forced to transcribe Duke's original tape recording "verbatim." The chapter is formatted much like a play and it entails a "transaction" between Duke, Gonzo, and the staff of a North Vegas diner. The "rationale" for the conversation is "based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney—that the American Dream" is somewhere in Las Vegas.

The use of italics makes the "Editor's Note" feel completely disconnected from the rest of the book, and the play-like structure makes the entire chapter stand out as well. The end of this chapter concludes with Duke's realization that the American Dream is dead, which is also the climax of the book.

After ordering his food, Gonzo asks the waitress if she knows where the American Dream is. She doesn't, and turns to ask the cook, Lou. Gonzo explains that they have been sent by a magazine to cover the American Dream, and Lou assumes he is talking about a specific place. "Is that the old Psychiatrist's Club?" Lou asks, referring to a discotheque on Paradise. "...or did somebody just send you on a goose chase?"

Lou's reference to the American Dream as a "goose chase" implies that Duke and Gonzo are looking for something that doesn't exist and thus can't be found. This suggests that the American Dream is simply an illusion that has no hope of making average people wealthy and successful, no matter how hard they work.

According to Lou, the old Psychiatrist's Club is a hangout for "a bunch of pushers, peddlers, uppers and downers," where the action "*never stops.*" It isn't a casino, he explains, but more like "a mental joint, where all the dopers hang out." There is "twenty-four-hour-a-day violence" there, but the owner is "completely remodeling." Duke and Gonzo finish their food and quietly leave.

The "pushers" and "peddlers" who hang out at the Psychiatrist's Club are a reference to the casualties of the American counterculture. As their movement failed to produce a better American society in which the marginalized can achieve success, the American Dream must be "completely remodeled."

The chapter ends with another "Editor's Note" that explains Duke and Gonzo's search for the Old Psychiatrist's Club. They find it—"a huge slab of cracked scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds." A local man tells them that the club had "burned down about three years ago."

This passage implies that the American Dream is dead. The members of the counterculture were, presumably, the only people who thought America could do better, and since they failed, the American Dream—for them, the marginalized—died as well.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 10: HEAVY DUTY AT THE AIRPORT...UGLY PERUVIAN FLASHBACK...'NO!

IT'S TOO LATE! DON'T TRY IT!'

By dawn, Duke drives Gonzo to the airport to catch a plane back to L.A., only Duke can't find the airport. When he finally does find it, it is on the other side of the freeway and there is no way to get over. Gonzo is worried that he will miss his flight. "Don't worry," says Duke. "I've never missed a plane yet. Except once in Peru." Suddenly, Duke cuts through the grassy median and drives directly across several lanes of traffic, coming out on the airport runway. He briefly drags a section of fencing and stops near the plane. Gonzo gets out and boards the plane with "no sign of a struggle."

This is one of several examples of Duke's reckless and dangerous driving, which in turn is a product of his excessive drug use. Duke's vague reference to nearly missing a plane in Peru leaves much to the imagination. If his exploits in Vegas are any indication of his usual lifestyle, one can only image what kind of drug-fueled trouble he got into in Peru.

Duke heads back to the hotel to "take stock." He drives near the campus of the University of Las Vegas where young students are rushing to class. Each of the students have "the hallmarks of a dangerously innocent culture." As Duke drives, he senses trouble. He has "pushed his luck a bit far" in Vegas and has "abused every rule Vegas lives by," including "burning the locals, abusing the tourists, [and] terrifying the help."

Thompson draws a parallel between the American counterculture and university students, both of whom Duke refers to as naive. Here, the students are portrayed as young and "dangerously innocent," one of the things Duke claims led to the downfall of the movement in the first place.

Duke remembers an old friend, a hippie and "out-front *drifter*" who wandered the country like "an early Bob Zimmerman trip." He decided to go to Vegas and was immediately arrested for vagrancy and thrown in jail. He didn't have the twenty-five dollars to pay for the fine, so he had to sit in jail for seven or eight days until his father wired him the money. He was in jail with some acid dealers who were arrested with $130,000 cash in their pockets. The drug dealers paid the guards to go hire them lawyers and they were out the same day. When Duke's friend was finally released, the police took an extra twenty-five dollars from the money his father had wired and told him "*never*" to come back to Vegas.

Bob Zimmerman is singer/songwriter Bob Dylan's real name, which is another reference to the American counterculture. Comparing the hippie drifter to Bob Dylan implies that he carried the same political views, which law enforcement in Vegas interpreted as a direct threat to their power. The fact that the drug dealers were so easily able to get out of jail while the drifter had to wait nearly a week again underscores the power of money in American society. Here, the drug dealers bought their freedom.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 11: FRAUD? LARCENY? RAPE?... A BRUTAL CONNECTION WITH THE ALICE FROM LINEN SERVICE

Duke is thinking about his drifter friend as he drives back to the hotel. The drifter's crime of vagrancy cost him fifty dollars and a week in jail, which makes Duke nervous. "Jesus," he says, "what kind of incredible penalties will they spew on *me*?" Duke is sure the law can't get him for rape, but fraud and larceny? That would be easy enough. He plans to tell the police that *Sports Illustrated* sent him to Vegas, which will hopefully tie *them* up in a "nightmare lawsuit" over the $44,066.12 bill Duke and Gonzo have run up in hotel bills and damage.

Duke is incredibly guilty compared to the innocent drifter, so Duke's punishment is sure to be severe, especially as he doesn't have any money to save him. Again, Duke refuses to take responsibility for his actions, and plans to dump it on his magazine, which he now directly identifies as Sports Illustrated. *The fact that Duke works for a major magazine again implies that he is a serious journalist, but of course his behavior tells a different story.*

It all seems so crazy, "but what is sane," Duke wonders, especially in this "doomstruck era of Nixon." People are "all wired into a *survival* trip now, and they no longer take "the speed that fueled the Sixties." Drugs like uppers "are going out of style," Duke says. This is the "fatal flaw in Leary's trip," he argues. He sold "consciousness expansion" without thinking about the "grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait." Leary "blew it badly for himself," and everyone one else he took "down with him."

Duke's reference to Nixon's presidency as a "doomstruck era" reflects his discontent and resistance to the establishment and formal government. Furthermore, Nixon's notorious corruption implies that the entire establishment is corrupt as well, which accounts for the "grim meat-hook realities lying in wait" for people passively trying to find "peace" by taking drugs.

"No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them," Duke says. Leary led "pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit." Leary's failure had created "a generation of permanent cripples" and "failed seekers," Duke argues, who don't understand "the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some *force*—is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel."

Here, Duke describes the counterculture as passive observers of their unjust society. They were certainly against the violence and corruption of their government, but they did little beyond voicing their discontent and seeking personal pleasure through drugs. In this way, Duke argues, their failure was deserved and even expected. He also expresses his fundamentally pessimistic and nihilistic worldview here—not only is society hopeless and corrupt, but there is no larger spiritual or moral force protecting anyone.

The "old-mystic fallacy" is the same "paradoxically benevolent bullshit" peddled by the Catholic Church, Duke says. This assumption and "blind faith" occurred during a "crucial moment" in the Sixties when "the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi," and it continued with the decade's multiple "gurus," which then morphed into cults and Charles Manson.

This "blind faith" assumes that there is basic good in the world, but Duke argues otherwise, and suggests that this "faith" also led to the counterculture's failure. Like with the American Dream, it is impossible to find good if it isn't there in the first place.

Sonny Barger "never quite got the hang of it," Duke says, and he "blew it in 1965" when the Angels "attacked the front ranks of an anti-war march." This was the "first open break between the Greasers and Longhairs," which ended with the destruction of the SDS and their inability to "reconcile the interests of the lower/working class biker/dropout types and upper/middle, Berkeley/student activists." At the time, no one "could possibly have foreseen the Implications of the Ginsberg/Kesey failure to persuade the Hell's Angels to join forces with the radical Left from Berkley."

Sonny Barger is one of the founding members of the Hell's Angels in Oakland, California, and Duke implies that it was Barger who ordered the Angels to attack the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), a group of student activists protesting the Vietnam War. The students and bikers were both members of the counterculture, and they were fighting amongst each other, all the while ignoring their true enemy—the American establishment. American beat novelists Allen Ginsberg and Ken Kesey were notable leaders of the countercultural movement, but they couldn't make peace within the movement itself.

The final break came at Altamont, Duke says, but that "orgy of violence" only "*dramatized* the problem." The "reality" is that "the Movement" was doomed to be "terminal," and "the energies of the Movement" were "aggressively dissipated by the rush to self-preservation."

The movement ultimately failed, Duke argues, because it was inherently violent, just as American society is. This violence culminated at a music festival at the Altamont Speedway in California, where a concert-goer was stabbed to death. Thompson further implies that society is greedy and self-centered, as Duke claims that the movement's failure led to a "rush to self-preservation."

Back in his room at the Flamingo, Duke feels "dangerously out of phase," like "something ugly is about to happen." He looks around the trashed hotel room at the obvious signs of violence and destruction. Gonzo's bed looks "like a burned-out rat's nest," and there are broken shards of glass and mirror everywhere. Thankfully, no maids have entered the room since the "awful confrontation on Tuesday" with Alice from linen service.

The state of Duke's hotel room reflects the violence that Thompson implies pervades all of society. Gonzo's bed, "a burned-out rat's nest," is the pinnacle of this display. The broken mirror is a particularly powerful image in which their violence has literally smashed the glass

On Tuesday, Duke and Gonzo had forgotten to hang the "Do Not Disturb" sign, and Alice had wandered in to clean. Gonzo, who was hungover and throwing up into a closet, was startled by her sudden appearance and quickly tackled her and began to choke her. "Please…please…I'm only the maid," she said with Gonzo's hands around her throat.

Gonzo's reaction is another example of violence and his target is again a woman. In this way, Thompson again implies that American society is both a sexist and violent place.

"You're under arrest!" Duke suddenly yelled. "No!" cried Alice. "I just wanted to clean up!" Duke asked Alice if she was part of "the dope ring" at the hotel and she began to cry. "I *know* you're cops," she said. "I don't know anything about *dope*!" Gonzo agreed to let her go if she would work for them, passing along information about illegal drug activity in the hotel. But, he warned, if she talks to anyone about it, she will "go straight to prison for the rest of [her] life." She agreed. "Whatever you say, gentlemen," she said as she backed out the door.

The fact that Alice actually believes Duke and Gonzo are cops is absurd and no doubt intended to be satirical, but Thompson's point is still clear: law enforcement, and by extension the American government, is violent and corrupt. Alice fully believes that the police would behave so brutally and then threaten her into becoming some kind of criminal informant.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 12: RETURN TO THE CIRCUS-CIRCUS…LOOKING FOR THE APE…TO HELL WITH THE AMERICAN DREAM

It has been seventy-two hours since the run-in with Alice, and no other maids have even tried to enter the room. Suddenly, the phone begins to ring. It is Bruce Innes, Duke's friend from Circus-Circus. He has just found the ape that Duke has been trying to buy. Last night, the man wanted $400, but now the price is $750. "What kind of greedhead are we dealing with?" Duke asks. Bruce claims the ape is housebroken, which drives up the price. "I'll be there in ten minutes," Duke says.

Duke's random desire for an ape again highlights Thompson's overarching theme of the excess and greed of capitalism. Duke has absolutely no need for an ape—in fact it is completely absurd—but he can own one for a sum of money. The bizarre request is also surely a result of Duke's intense drug use.

When Duke arrives at Circus-Circus, an old man is being loaded into an ambulance. He approaches Bruce at the bar. "Where is it?" Duke asks. "I'm ready to write a check." Bruce tells Duke that the ape has just attacked a man at the bar and has been taken by the police. "Goddamnit," says Duke. "What's the bail? I *want* that ape." Bruce tells Duke to "get a grip." He doesn't even need an ape, Bruce argues. Duke finally agrees and sits at the bar.

Duke ignores the sick or dying old man and focuses instead on his intense desire for something entirely unnecessary. Even the ape is brutally violent, but again Duke ignores this and seems to find it commonplace.

Bruce asks Duke when he is leaving town. "As soon as possible," Duke answers. "You *found* the American Dream?" Bruce asks. "In *this* town?" Duke confirms he has indeed. "We're sitting on the main nerve," he says. Duke explains that the owner of Circus-Circus always wanted to run away with the circus as a child and Bruce immediately understands. "Yeah, I see what you mean," he says. "Now the bastard has his *own* circus, and a license to steal, too." Duke nods. "It's pure Horatio Alger," he says.

For the second time, Duke refers to Circus-Circus as the "main nerve" of the American Dream. Las Vegas serves as a stand-in for American society, which Thompson sees as based on wealth, excess, and corruption. Duke has already implied that the casinos have an unfair advantage and lure people to financial loss, and the fact that Duke believes Circus-Circus to be the American Dream suggests that the Dream is likewise rigged and unfair.

Duke is eager to get out of Vegas. "A little bit of this town goes a very long way," he says. He claims that five days in Vegas can feel like five years. "Some people say they like it," Duke says, "but then some people like Nixon, too. He would make a perfect Mayor for this town; with John Mitchell as Sheriff and Agnew as Master of Sewers."

As Duke has already established Las Vegas as a corrupt and violent place, he implies that President Nixon, John Mitchel (his Attorney General), and Spiro Agnew (his Vice President) are corrupt and violent as well, which would make them natural choices to run the town.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 13: END OF THE ROAD...DEATH OF THE WHALE...SOAKING SWEATS IN THE AIRPORT

Duke tries to play baccarat at Circus-Circus, but the bouncers kick him out. "You don't belong here," they say. "Where's your friend?" Duke plays dumb. "The big spic," the bouncer clarifies. "Look," says Duke. "I'm a Doctor of Journalism. You'd never catch me hanging around this place with a goddamn spic." The bouncers produce a photograph of Duke and Gonzo in the casino. "That's not me," Duke says. He tells the bouncers that the man is a writer for *Rolling Stone* named Thompson, "a really vicious, crazy kind of person," and his companion is a "hit-man for the Mafia in Hollywood." Duke quickly flashes a PBA badge. "Act natural," he says quietly as he drives away.

Duke's reference to Gonzo as a "spic" again reflects the racism present in American society. This callous racial slur only serves to further marginalize Gonzo and other people of color. Duke again makes reference to Thompson himself, which further implies that Duke is Thompson's alter ego. Duke's PBA card, or the Police Benevolent Association, falsely identifies Duke as a cop, which he again uses as a ploy to get out of trouble and resist the mainstream American establishment.

Duke drives **the White Whale** back to the Flamingo to get his luggage, and then he heads to the airport. The convertible top on the car is stuck halfway up and there is "something wrong with the motor." All of the dashboard lights have been lit up since Duke drove it "into Lake Mead on a water test," and now it seems "that every circuit in the car is totally fucked." He decides to try driving it anyway; if it won't run, he'll just "abandon it and call a cab."

Duke treats the expensive Cadillac as completely disposable. This is Duke's first mention of the "water test" in Lake Mead (similar to Duke's story of the ape), which makes Duke appear as even more of an unreliable narrator.

Duke arrives at the airport VIP parking lot and turns **the White Whale** over to a shocked parking attendant. "Don't worry," Duke says. "I'm insured." He walks into the airport where he can hear the song "One Toke Over the Line" playing on a jukebox. The song begins to fry Duke's nerves. The only song Duke can possibly "relate to" at this point is "Mister Tambourine Man" or "Memphis Blues Again."

This is the second reference to "Mister Tambourine Man" in the book (the first is in Thompson's dedication). Duke's preference for the song further cements his dedication (however hopeless) to the countercultural movement, of which Dylan is an icon.

Duke checks all his bags except for his **bag of drugs** and the .357 Magnum. He looks around for metal detectors and doesn't see any, so he decides to risk flying with the gun. Duke suddenly realizes that the entire airport is crawling with "pigs." The police officers from the Drug Conference are heading back home to the Midwest. "Well, why not?" Duke says. "Every now and then you run up on one of those days" that are "a stone bummer from start to finish."

Duke's reference to the law enforcement officers as "pigs" again reflects his distaste for authority and the formal establishment of American society and its government. Here, the police cramp his style, or are "stone bummers," because he has a bagful of drugs and an illegal handgun.

Duke finds a morning newspaper and begins to read. He finds a story in which a Navy Captain had "fucked up very badly" and was "diced up like pineapple meat" along with five crewmen after a confrontation with the "Heroin Police" of Hong See. The Navy had no official comment pending the "top-level investigation" into the incident by "former New Orleans district attorney James Garrison."

James Garrison was a district attorney who formally investigated the assassination of JFK and ultimately implicated the government in his murder. In this way, Garrison is the ultimate figure of resistance in that he took on the establishment in the form of the American government.

Duke throws down the paper. He doesn't even want to read the news anymore if this is what it has to offer. "Agnew was right," Duke says. "Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector […]."

Here, Duke openly voices his disillusionment with the state of journalism. Vice President Spiro Agnew was also famously against journalism for different reasons, but here Duke implies that news and journalism serve to bolster and inform the injustices of society. In this way, journalism as a respectable field of work has failed.

PART TWO, CHAPTER 14: FAREWELL TO VEGAS…'GOD'S MERCY ON YOU SWINE!'

As Duke walks around the airport, he realizes that he is still wearing his police badge from the conference. He rips it off. The conference "had been a waste of time, a lame fuckaround" that was "a cheap excuse for a thousand cops to spend a few days in Vegas." The cops hadn't learned a thing about "the Drug Culture" in "this foul year of Our Lord, 1971." They are still talking about LSD, but the "popularity of psychedelics has fallen off so drastically" over the last couple of years."

When Duke rips off his conference badge, he is metaphorically rejecting the American establishment, which he considers a "lame fuckaround," much like the conference itself. The Drug Culture of the 1960s was fueled by LSD and other psychedelics, drugs that suited their optimistic agenda. With the fall of the '60s counterculture came the fall of optimism and LSD.

"The big market, these days," Duke says, "is in Downers." Today, what sells is "whatever Fucks You Up—whatever short circuits your brain and grounds it out for the longest possible time." Psychedelics "are no longer stylish," Duke clarifies. "'Consciousness Expansion' went out with LBJ…and it is worth noting, historically, that downers came in with Nixon."

"Consciousness Expansion" with psychedelic drugs in the 1960s was an effort to find peace and understanding in society, but Duke claims that this was never really possible, and became abundantly clear with the election of Nixon. Nixon's corrupt administration led to increased violence in the Vietnam War, which caused a national crisis with "Downers."

Duke boards his plane and enjoys a pleasant flight, but when he lands, he notices the Rocky Mountains out the window. "What the fuck am I doing *here*?" Duke asks. He decides to call Gonzo and figure it out, but first he goes to a drug store for some amyls. The woman at the counter refuses to sell them without a prescription. "But you see, I'm a *doctor*," Duke says. "I don't need a prescription." He produces his Ecclesiastical Discount Card that "identifies him as a Doctor of Divinity, a certified Minister of the Church of the New Truth. "I hope you'll forgive me, Doctor," the woman says. "We get some *real freaks* in this place."

Duke frequently claims to be a Doctor of Journalism and here he claims to be a Doctor of Divinity. He identifies Gonzo as a doctor (although he fails to mention in what), and even the expert at the drug conference, E. R. Bloomquist, is a doctor; however, Thompson doesn't depict these doctors in a flattering light. Duke and Gonzo are obviously violent and unreliable, and Bloomquist doesn't actually know anything about his specialty. In this way, Thompson again resists the American establishment and makes a mockery out of doctors, who fill a widely trusted and respected role in society.

Duke nods and walks away, snorting an amyl. He passes a couple of Marines near the bathroom. "God's mercy on you swine!" Duke yells at them as he walks by. He sniffs another amyl and walks toward a bar, feeling "like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger…a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident."

Duke again resists the establishment when he refers to members of the United States military as "swine." Duke's reference to Horatio Alger implies that he is still searching for the American Dream, or whatever it has or will become, and his continued drug use suggests that he will continue to resist the American establishment in any way he can.

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