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# On the Road Without a Map: The Women of the Beat Writers

*Jean Stefancic*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

During a tribute to Allen Ginsberg<sup>1</sup> at the Naropa Institute in Boulder in July 1994, a woman in the audience asked: “Why are . . . so few women on this panel? Why . . . so few women in this whole week’s program? Why . . . so few . . . among the Beat writers?” Corso, suddenly utterly serious, leaned forward and said:

There were women, they were there, I knew them, their families put them in institutions, they were given electric shock. In the ‘50s if you were male you could be a rebel, but if you were female, your families had you locked up. There were cases, I knew them, someday someone will write about them.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Research Professor of Law, Seattle University School of Law. M.A., University of San Francisco, 1989. Thanks to Richard Delgado for incisive comments, never-ending conversations, and high moments. Thanks also to David Skover and Ronald Collins for the invitation to write this paper for the symposium on their book *Mania: The Story of the Outraged & Outrageous Lives that Launched a Cultural Revolution* (Top Five Books, 2013). Thanks as well to research assistant Philip Chinn for a careful reading of the final draft.

1. Author of *HOWL and Other Poems* (1956), which provoked a famous obscenity trial in San Francisco. See RONALD K.L. COLLINS & DAVID M. SKOVER, *MANIA: THE STORY OF THE OUTRAGED & OUTRAGEOUS LIVES THAT LAUNCHED A CULTURAL REVOLUTION* 189–319 (Top Five Books, 2013).

2. BRENDA KNIGHT, *WOMEN OF THE BEAT GENERATION: THE WRITERS, ARTISTS AND MUSES AT THE HEART OF A REVOLUTION* 141 (1996) (quoting Stephen Scobie’s account of the Naropa Institute tribute to Allen Ginsberg, July 1994). Perhaps the poet Gregory Corso was thinking of his muse, Hope Savage, whose father committed her to a mental hospital for shock treatments to set her on a path to a more bourgeois life. See BILL MORGAN, *THE TYPEWRITER IS HOLY: THE COMPLETE, UNCENSORED HISTORY OF THE BEAT GENERATION* 90 (2010) (stating that Savage was “the love of his life”). Elise Cowan also comes to mind. Cowan, a brilliant, inward young poet with little confidence who recognized Allen Ginsberg as her “twin soul,” was twice sent to the psychiatric ward of Bellevue Hospital by her parents, and committed suicide in 1962. See KNIGHT, *supra*, at 141–65; see also JOYCE JOHNSON, *MINOR CHARACTERS* 51–58, 75–78, 91–92, 163–65, 255–59 (1983) [hereinafter JOHNSON, *MINOR*] (recounting the life of Cowan, her close friend).

Since that time, a small body of memoirs,<sup>3</sup> books,<sup>4</sup> movies,<sup>5</sup> scholarly papers,<sup>6</sup> and conferences<sup>7</sup> have helped bring to light the women of the Beat Generation—the precursors, the muses and partners, the writers, and artists. I limit this article to the women<sup>8</sup> who lived with or married three of the early major figures: Neal Cassady,<sup>9</sup> Jack Kerouac,<sup>10</sup> and William S. Burroughs.<sup>11</sup> The reader will notice that I have set the framework naming the men first. As it is usually constructed, the story of the Beats is primarily a story of men. One can discuss the men without the women but cannot write about the women without mentioning the men. The men's stories are about self-definition and developing one's talent and range of experience as a writer.<sup>12</sup> The women's stories are about relationships, primarily with the men.<sup>13</sup>

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3. On the unreliability of memoir see André Aciman, *How Memoirists Mold the Truth*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 7, 2013, at 8; see also *Epigraph (anonymous)* to JOAN HAVERTY KEROUAC, NOBODY'S WIFE: THE SMART ALECK AND THE KING OF THE BEATS xiii (1990) [hereinafter HAVERTY] ("Fact is the mother of memory; viewpoint its wayward father."). Nevertheless, the memoirs of women fellow travelers of the Beats provide additional perspectives not available until after the movement ended. See CAROLYN CASSADY, OFF THE ROAD: MY YEARS WITH CASSADY, KEROUAC, AND GINSBERG (1990); HAVERTY, *supra*; JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2; JOYCE JOHNSON, THE VOICE IS ALL: THE LONELY VICTORY OF JACK KEROUAC (2012) [hereinafter JOHNSON, VOICE]; EDIE KEROUAC-PARKER, YOU'LL BE OKAY: MY LIFE WITH JACK KEROUAC (2007).

4. COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3; MORGAN, *supra* note 2.

5. ON THE ROAD (2013), THE BEAT HOTEL (2012), NEAL CASSADY (2007), THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE (1997) and before 1996, HEART BEAT (1980). Echoing the lives of some of the early Beat women, Terrance Ratigan's play, *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), tells the story of an upper class British woman married to a judge, but seduced by a World War II Royal Air Force veteran. Her sexual excitement and attraction to danger drive her to abandon her staid, empty marriage. After a tempestuous, erotic affair, the veteran abandons her, after which she tries to commit suicide.

6. For papers published by the Beat Studies Association, see, for example, *About the B.S.A.*, BEAT STUD. ASS'N, <http://www.beatstudies.org/about.html> (last visited Aug. 18, 2013).

7. For Beat Panels at the Modern Language Association Panel, December 2009, see *Beat Panel at the Modern Language Association*, BEAT STUD. ASS'N, <http://www.beatstudies.org/archives/mla-2009.html> (last visited Aug. 18, 2013).

8. These women are: Carolyn Cassady (wife of Neal Cassady), Edie Kerouac-Parker (first wife of Jack Kerouac), Joan Haverty Kerouac (second wife of Jack Kerouac), Joan Adams Vollmer Burroughs (common law wife of William Burroughs), Joyce Johnson (romantic partner of Jack Kerouac).

9. Car thief, conman, sexual athlete, maniac driver, reader of Dostoyevsky, Proust, and Nietzsche, Neal Cassady became fictionalized as the main character, Dean Moriarty, in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*.

10. Often called the "King of the Beats," Jack Kerouac won national acclaim for his novel *On the Road* (1957).

11. Elite son of the Burroughs adding machine company family, William Burroughs's fame stems from his novel *Naked Lunch* (1959).

12. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 10, 16–17. See, e.g., Richard Delgado, *Two Narratives of Youth*, 37 SEATTLE U. L. REV. xxxiii, xxxv (2013).

13. Bill Morgan, *Preface to Edie Kerouac Parker*, KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 18–19 [hereinafter Morgan, *Preface*] ("[T]hey lived for their men and their lives revolved around the men's needs more than their own."); see also MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 155 ("[The male Beats] grew up in

Why should this be so? The notion of the social construction of identity, especially of women's identity, would not catch public attention in the United States until a few decades after the 1940s with the work of Catharine MacKinnon<sup>14</sup> and Carol Gilligan.<sup>15</sup> But the stories of Carolyn Robinson,<sup>16</sup> Edie Parker,<sup>17</sup> Joan Haverty,<sup>18</sup> and Joan Vollmer<sup>19</sup> contain many examples of pre-World War II concepts of what a woman is or should be—i.e., her construction back then. After briefly describing parts of their lives, I turn to some views on womanliness, marriage, children, and careers common at the time.

Not only were the early Beats male, they were white. Only a few black writers identified with them. Two of them, poets LeRoi Jones and Bob Kaufman, were fellow travelers for a time. Kerouac is said not to have known any black Americans well until he served in the merchant marine as a galley-scurion under the supervision of a team of black cooks, one of whom he came to admire.<sup>20</sup> Beat historian and archivist Bill Morgan posits that Allen Ginsberg, the glue that held the original group together from beginning to end, knew few black writers during the 1940s, but encouraged their writing and publishing after he himself had become famous.<sup>21</sup> And because Ginsberg associated with few women, it did not occur to him that they could be more than wives, mothers, or someone who would work and pay the rent.<sup>22</sup> Some of the women, who later published their own work, thought of themselves that way as well.<sup>23</sup>

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an era where men were called on to do important things and women were expected to support them in those endeavors.”).

14. Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory*, 7 SIGNS: J. WOMEN CULTURE & SOC'Y 515 (1982).

15. CAROLYN GILLIGAN, IN A DIFFERENT VOICE: PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT (1982).

16. Married to Neal Cassady from 1948 to 1963.

17. First wife of Jack Kerouac from 1944 to 1945.

18. Second wife of Jack Kerouac from 1950 to 1952.

19. Common law wife of William Burroughs from 1946 to 1951.

20. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 124–25.

21. Jones later distanced himself from the Beats, changed his name to Amiri Baraka, and became a key participant in the Black Power movement. Hettie Jones, his wife during 1961–1968, became famous in her own right in the late 1950s, publishing with him the newsletter *Yugen*, a “little magazine” devoted to Beat writing. Her book, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990), established her own credentials as a writer-poet. See MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 161. Bob Kaufman, an improvisational jazz-inflected poet, is credited with inventing the word “beatnik,” which Herb Caen, a San Francisco gadabout and reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, overheard him say in a North Beach bar. Caen used the term pejoratively in an April 1958 column. See *id.* at 145.

22. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 155.

23. See JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 212–13 (describing meeting Hettie Jones standing on a street corner in the snow, handing out leaflets announcing a poetry reading by her husband Leroi Jones, saying that she had never read any of her own poetry in public thinking it was not good enough. Johnson says that Hettie Jones later admitted “fiercely”: “Some of it was good enough.”); see also *id.* at 214–18 (recounting Hettie's life with LeRoi Jones). Eileen Kaufman, a budding jour-

The Western world plunged into war in 1939, with the United States entering in 1942, dividing the twentieth century into before and after.<sup>24</sup> Though the war was to transform life in the United States, the accounts of the Beats give little evidence that it was going on. Kerouac served in the merchant marine corps<sup>25</sup> and was later discharged from the Navy because of his unstable personality.<sup>26</sup> Edie Parker, Kerouac's first wife, describes how the presence of soldiers and sailors training for war changed the mood of New York City, infusing it with patriotic fervor and excitement.<sup>27</sup> But most of the Beats managed to stay home.<sup>28</sup> Some, probably aided by savvy friends, lawyers, and doctors, successfully dodged military service.<sup>29</sup>

Though many American women helped in the war effort either at home or in the armed services, others attended college or worked in low level clerical jobs. Near Columbia University, where Kerouac, Burroughs, and Ginsberg were students, women rented squalid apartments which became magnets for intellectual talk, experimental drugs, and unconventional sex. Many of the women, especially those who were con-

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nalist at the time she met Bob Kaufman, became his off-and-on wife and steadfast companion from 1958 to 1987, transcribing and preserving much of his oral, bardic poetry during their North Beach days in San Francisco. See KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 103–14. In her memoir, *Who Wouldn't Walk with Tigers?*, she describes how Kaufman changed her life: "When I met Bob Kaufman . . . my values changed overnight. I had been a greedy, mercenary career girl whose only object was to get it while you can . . . I knew at a glance and after one night that this man could create my life or destroy it . . . Suddenly wise, I did not fight [his] Dream." KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 114.

24. See Morgan, *Preface*, *supra* note 13, at 17 (describing the war as a "line drawn in the sand across the middle of the twentieth century. . . everything in America was utterly changed . . . [t]hose shifts led to the end of segregation, the sexual revolution and the liberation of women").

25. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 79; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 118–19 (asserting that Kerouac joined the merchant marine partly out of a desire to go to sea like Jack London rather than to go to war), 123–27 (describing his life aboard a merchant marine ship).

26. See KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 90, 106; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 128, 130 (noting that Kerouac signed up for Naval Air Force V-12 program which would keep him out of the draft), 134–38 (describing his maladjustment to life in the navy and subsequent discharge from the Bethesda Naval Hospital psychiatric ward).

27. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 76–77, 93–95 (describing her job as a longshoreman and the wartime activity of the ports).

28. Burroughs considered joining the merchant marine, but didn't. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 9. Lucien Carr also wanted to join so that he could get passage to Europe where he planned to jump ship with Kerouac and travel to Paris to wait out the war so that they could live a "bohemian life on the Left Bank." *Id.* at 11. Later Ginsberg, and then Burroughs, decided to enter the Maritime Service Training Station but the Allied defeat of Germany and then Japan ended the war before they could ship out. *Id.* at 18. Meanwhile thousands of minority enlistees—black Tuskegee airmen; Navaho code breakers; Mexican-American infantry units; a Japanese-American decorated unit—fought and died on the European and Pacific fronts.

29. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 118 (noting that Kerouac's boyhood friends had gone into the armed services); *Id.* at 193 (describing novelist Allen Temko's indignant reaction to "Morningside Heights Raskolnikovs . . . intellectuals who hadn't played any part in the war, sound[ing] off on its 'absurdity'").

sorts of the Beat writers, suffered penury, abortions, abandonment for long periods when the men were “on the road,” and, in some cases, physical and sexual abuse. Were they then mere passive facilitators and financial supporters of the mooching men—the kind of conformists that they and the Beat men detested?

As the reader will see, this interpretation would not do them justice. Once freed, years later, from the suffocating influence of the frenetic, immature but greatly talented men, some of these early fellow travelers emerged as major talents of their own. During the war years and later, the men broke free from social roles and gray-flannel suit lives, but only on the backs of the hard-working wives and girlfriends who steadied them and brought home the bacon. The men found and reveled in a ready-made social model—the rebel. Having no such model, the women’s road was much longer.<sup>30</sup> Consider now the lives of some of the women associated with them.

## II. FELLOW TRAVELERS

### A. Carolyn Robinson Cassady (1923–Present) “Standing by Her Man”

Carolyn Cassady was the long-time wife of Neal and a pivotal female character in the lives of Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg. Born to middle class parents, educators of English lineage, she graduated from Bennington, an elite, progressive women’s college in Vermont, then attended graduate school in theater arts, majoring in portrait painting and costume design, at the University of Denver.<sup>31</sup> While there she met and was swept off her feet by the charismatic, handsome, and uninhibited Neal Cassady in 1947.<sup>32</sup>

Neal, however, thought less highly of her. He confided in Allen Ginsberg that “[h]er lack of cynicism, artificial sophistication and sterility in her creative make-up will recommend her to you. She is just a bit too straight for my temperament; however, that is the challenge.”<sup>33</sup> Though they had been living together for a few months, he only initiated sex with Carolyn while Allen Ginsberg, who was visiting them, slept on the couch at the foot of their bed, leaving her shocked, confused, and pain-seared.<sup>34</sup> Though his second attempt also proved deeply disappoint-

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30. See *infra* note 127 and accompanying text.

31. KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 57–59.

32. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 1–7 (describing first meeting).

33. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 244 (positing that Carolyn’s “maternal straightness” may have given Neal, whose mother abandoned him at the age of four, the “sense of peace” he craved).

34. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 19–20.

ing to her, Carolyn agreed to marry Cassady even though he was still married to his child-bride, LuAnne Henderson.<sup>35</sup> She quickly backed off when she surprised him in their bed with his first wife and Allen Ginsberg.<sup>36</sup> Though he subsequently broke promises, lied, and stood her up on various occasions,<sup>37</sup> his charm, good nature, and spontaneity won her over; they married in 1948<sup>38</sup> and subsequently had three children.<sup>39</sup> Carolyn longed for permanency and a middle class life, which she later managed to achieve only by separating from Neal.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps feeling confined by his new domesticity, Cassady again married someone else while still married to Carolyn<sup>41</sup> and encouraged her to have an affair with Kerouac, which she did.<sup>42</sup> Though by then, you would think she would have had enough of Neal, she stood by her man while he was serving time in San Quentin (1960) for a drug charge and remained married to him so that he could get out on probation. Finally, disgusted, and maybe having read Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*,<sup>43</sup> she divorced him in 1963,<sup>44</sup> and later wrote her own memoir of her entanglements with three of the major Beats, *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg*.<sup>45</sup>

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35. *Id.* at 26–27.

36. *Id.* at 32–33.

37. *Id.* at 31 (observing that Cassady returned home early from a trip they had planned together, leaving her stranded). *Id.* at 74–77 (describing how he used all their savings to buy a car to make a cross country trip with friends, leaving her alone and penniless with their two month old baby).

38. *Id.* at 62–66 (explaining their courthouse wedding).

39. *Id.* at 21 (explaining that their relationship was predestined).

40. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 89.

41. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 116–21; MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 48–49; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 364–65, 386. Neal persuaded Carolyn to divorce so that he could marry the pregnant New York fashion model, Diana Hansen, to legitimize his child with her. After that he would remarry Carolyn (who was having his second child) and move Diana to California to set up a second household for him. Though Carolyn petitioned for divorce, she ultimately stayed with Neal who divorced Diana. Carolyn and Neal had a third child shortly afterward. *Id.*

42. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 162–73; MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 67–68; JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 89–90 (describing this experiment as a period of “temporary domestic harmony” which turned out to be “another failed utopia”).

43. BETTY FRIEDAN, *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE* (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. 2013) (1963) (positing that women suffered from an unnamed malady—beliefs and institutions that undermined their confidence in their intellectual abilities).

44. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 371; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 369 (noting that the author later tried to rehabilitate Neal's reputation in an essay *Danger: Unexploded Myth in Beat Angels* 89, 99 (Arthur and Kit Knight eds., 1982)).

45. CASSADY, *supra* note 3.

B. Edie Parker Kerouac (1923–1992)  
*"A Sunny Housekeeper"*

Jack Kerouac's first wife was a child of a rich family in Grosse Pointe, Michigan.<sup>46</sup> Sent to New York to live with her grandmother while ostensibly attending Columbia,<sup>47</sup> the high-spirited Edie discovered that she preferred nightlife and clubs to school.<sup>48</sup> She met Kerouac through Henri Cru, a boyfriend who was also a merchant seaman, and fell hard for his good looks and charm. When Kerouac shipped out she discovered she was pregnant, but she did not know which of the two men was the father;<sup>49</sup> so, encouraged by her grandmother, she had an abortion.<sup>50</sup> When Edie told Kerouac on his return, he was enraged.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, when he helped dispose of the evidence in Lucian Carr's murder of David Kammerer,<sup>52</sup> Kerouac knew he would face charges of being an accessory and would need bail.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, he told Edie he would marry her (something she had long hoped for),<sup>54</sup> and they obtained blood test certificates in order to get the marriage license.<sup>55</sup> But before they could enter the state of holy matrimony, the police arrived and took him off to jail.<sup>56</sup> Falling for his con, she borrowed the money from a family trust fund to bail him out<sup>57</sup> and they married in August 1944,<sup>58</sup> all of which she describes in her colorful autobiography, *You'll be Okay: My Life with Jack Kerouac*.<sup>59</sup>

After Kerouac's release, he went to Grosse Pointe and worked with Edie's father to pay off his debt.<sup>60</sup> But Kerouac deceived Edie yet again by making her think he was out at sea when he had, in fact, returned early to New York and resumed his writing.<sup>61</sup> Edie finally saw the light and

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46. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 39–42, 47, 185; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 76, 78 (describing "fancy people and elegant parties").

47. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 62, 75.

48. *Id.* at 70; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 76–77.

49. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 72; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 77.

50. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 71–72.

51. *Id.* at 72–73; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 77; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 140–41 (noting that decades later when she publicly divulged her abortion Edie expressed certainty that Jack had been the father).

52. See COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 3–15 (describing the murder).

53. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 159, 188; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 78.

54. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 141, 142; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 78.

55. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 142.

56. *Id.* at 147, 153.

57. *Id.* at 156–58, 206–207.

58. *Id.* at 193–99.

59. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3.

60. *Id.* at 225; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, 78–79.

61. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 241–42.



applied for an annulment.<sup>62</sup> She kept in touch with him, however, through letters, phone calls, and friends<sup>63</sup> and attended his funeral many years later.<sup>64</sup> After they split up for good, Kerouac wrote to Cassady: "My wife, if not Edie again, will be someone like her . . . wild . . . crazy . . . rushing off to mad bars, yet at the same time a sunny housekeeper."<sup>65</sup>

*C. Joan Haverty Kerouac (1931–1990)*  
*"A Smart-Aleck Basketweaver"*

Joan Haverty, Kerouac's second wife and mother of his only child, was not the sunny housekeeper he had hoped to find. Before they met, Joan had been having a soulful but zany relationship with Bill Cannastra, a gay attorney and friend of the Beats,<sup>66</sup> who died suddenly in a freakish accident. Cannastra was the love of her life, though she had concurrently started a brief but passionate affair with Herb Lashinsky, a physics graduate student at Columbia.<sup>67</sup> Joan moved into Cannastra's apartment not long after his death. Kerouac, remembering his friend Castrana who had told him about Joan, stopped by the apartment on his way to a party being thrown by Lucien Carr.<sup>68</sup> Lashinsky, upset by Joan's attraction to Kerouac, eventually ended their relationship. Within a few weeks, Joan and Kerouac decided to marry in November 1950 although later neither knew why.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps Joan was on the rebound from her breakup with Lashinsky<sup>70</sup> while Jack longed for domestic stability.<sup>71</sup>

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62. *Id.* at 245–47; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 79.

63. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 257–59; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 79.

64. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 22 (reporting that even after his subsequent marriages to Joan Haverty and Stella Sampas, Kerouac "persisted in calling me his 'life's wife'"); KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 79 (reporting that "Edie ran toward the casket screaming, 'I'm the wife of Jack Kerouac—the only wife of Jack Kerouac!'").

65. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 247.

66. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 25, 50–51.

67. *Id.* at 51–72, 77–79 (describing how a spark between them ignited into open passion). Lashinsky, frustrated by Joan's nonlinear thinking, considered her a "primitive" who couldn't understand his scientific explanations but challenged them nonetheless. He later sent her a postcard with a cartoon picture of an Indian woman weaving a basket on which he wrote, "One thing I can't stand is a smart-aleck basketweaver." See Jan Kerouac, *Introduction* to HAVERTY, *supra* note 3.

68. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 69, 71, 73.

69. *Id.* at 95–96, 108, 132–33, 137, 196–97. See COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 106–07 (quoting Haverty reflecting on their marriage: "We made a commitment to marriage, but none to each other . . . . The whole thing had been Jack's idea, and I had seen it as his party, and his wedding . . . none of it seemed to have anything to do with the rest of my life.").

70. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 109.

71. See COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 105 (quoting Haverty: "I was acceptable to his mother . . . . It helped that I could cook and that I was no threat to him, would not upstage him. And it was convenient that we shared a dream of children.").

Later, when they needed to move in with Kerouac's mother, Joan realized how much of a momma's boy he was.<sup>72</sup> Never passionately in love,<sup>73</sup> their marriage began to erode.<sup>74</sup> They broke up after she told him she was pregnant.<sup>75</sup> He demanded that she have an abortion—evidently having changed his Catholic view about the practice—but she refused and gave birth to her daughter, Jan.<sup>76</sup> It took ten years before she was successful in getting a court to award her child support, which Kerouac managed to evade by moving from one place to another.<sup>77</sup> He saw his daughter only twice, never acknowledging that he was her father but letting her use his name.<sup>78</sup> Jan Kerouac became a successful novelist but died young from kidney failure,<sup>79</sup> adoring the father she never really knew.<sup>80</sup>

Taking courage from her daughter's success and finding the first biographies of Jack to be hero-worshipping and inaccurate, Joan began work on her own memoir to be called *Nobody's Wife: The Smart Aleck and the King of the Beats*.<sup>81</sup> Published in 1990 after her death, her recollections are tough-minded and blunt.

Early in their marriage, Jack had criticized her writing after reading it without permission. When she expressed her anger about it, he said, "I won't read your stuff anymore, as long as you don't have any high-flown ideas about being a serious writer. I can't stand women who think they

72. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 164, 168, 170, 189; KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 241 (also noting Kerouac's mother's possessiveness about her son); JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 155 (the only person he took "on the road" was his mother as they moved from place to place across the country); JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 174 (commenting that "no one could say a [harsh] word to him about his mother"); MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 17 (noting that Burroughs urged Kerouac to "free himself from his mother's apron strings").

73. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 128.

74. *Id.* at 162–63.

75. *Id.* at 205–08 (describing how Haverty became pregnant during a period when Kerouac was writing about a steamy previous relationship in *On the Road*. But later he denied paternity and accused Haverty of having sex with a Puerto Rican man who worked at a restaurant with her); see also MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 57.

76. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 205.

77. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 66, 67, 73, 75, 91–92, 118, 130; JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 413–414 (noting that on one occasion Haverty was successful in getting a court to serve a summons so that he was taken to the Tombs, known as the alimony jail, and mandated to pay weekly five dollar support payments).

78. Ann Charters, *Foreword* to HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at ix–x (1990) [herein after Charters, *Foreword*]; JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 136 (describing how Kerouac showed her a photograph of a five-year-old girl, who bore a strong resemblance to him which he carried in his wallet, but denied that she was his daughter); JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 414 (claiming that Kerouac knew he was the father).

79. Charters, *Foreword*, *supra* note 78, at xi.

80. KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 309.

81. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3.

can write. It's all just so much sentimental bullshit!"<sup>82</sup> But later, in a letter to Neal Cassady in 1950, he acknowledged Joan's talent as a writer: "She really knows how to write from instinct [and] innocence. Few women can do this. Joan Kerouac . . . a new writer on this old horizon. I see her [and] me cutting around the world in tweeds. . . ."<sup>83</sup>

*D. Joan Vollmer Adams Burroughs (1924–1951)*  
*"Stand Still, Dear"*

Daughter of an economically privileged family, Joan Vollmer had a socially ambitious mother. A precociously intelligent young woman with a questioning mind, she entered Barnard College at the age of fifteen and was married twice by nineteen—all between 1939 and 1943.<sup>84</sup> She and Edie Parker shared an apartment a block away from Columbia University, which became a center for students and hangers-on, including Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs.<sup>85</sup> Though she was not an artist or a writer, she read widely, sometimes holding court in the bathtub and influencing the direction of many conversations that took place in that apartment.<sup>86</sup>

Though she was attracted to Kerouac, the man she eventually ended up with was William Burroughs,<sup>87</sup> courtesy of Ginsberg who thought they belonged together.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, during a relationship based more on intellect than sex, they studied Mayan Codices<sup>89</sup> and claimed to have a psychic connection, often playing a game for their friends by finishing each other's sentences. However, by the time she met Burroughs in 1946, she already had a child, felt burdened, and turned to drugs. She took

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82. *Id.* at 146.

83. See Charters, *Foreword*, *supra* note 78, at xi; see also HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 201–02 (describing an evening when she helped get him through a clutch of writer's block during composition of *On the Road* during the early months of their marriage).

84. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 142.

85. KEROUAC-PARKER, *supra* note 3, at 73; MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 8, 9; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 77.

86. COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 149–50 (describing her probing intellect); *Morgan*, *supra* note 2, at 61 (commenting on reactions to Joan's death and the high regard in which she was held).

87. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 190, 192.

88. COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 150 (observing that "Burroughs and Vollmer were so intellectually compatible that Ginsberg, like a scheming *Yenta*, worked to hook them up"). See MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at xvii (describing Ginsberg's desire to unite his friends in friendships with each other). For Ginsberg's arrangement of a blind date between Joyce Johnson and Jack Kerouac, see *infra* note 100 and accompanying text. The poet Allen Ginsberg was homosexual; prodded by psychiatrists early in life, he fooled himself into believing he was bisexual.

89. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 192.

enough Benzedrine, the then drug-of-choice, to cause hallucinations<sup>90</sup> and ended up in the mental ward at New York's Bellevue Hospital.<sup>91</sup>

After rescuing her from Bellevue, Burroughs took her to a small town in Texas where he expected to set up a clandestine marijuana farm.<sup>92</sup> There, they awaited the birth of Billy Jr., whom they conceived in New York after her release.<sup>93</sup> Though she already had a child, Burroughs would not let her have an abortion.<sup>94</sup> Neither Joan nor Burroughs were cut out for parenthood. As one visitor described it, they would both be stoned—she on Benzedrine, he on morphine—and let the kids run around naked in the yard, defecating in pots that she scrubbed out and used for cooking. The little girl, Julie, had a habit of biting herself on her arm.<sup>95</sup>

While living in Mexico in 1951 to escape Burroughs' drug trial back in the States,<sup>96</sup> the couple attended an alcohol-fueled party where they played a game of William Tell, whereupon Joan placed a glass on her head. Burroughs, being an expert shot, took out the gun he always carried, aimed it at the glass but missed, shooting her in the forehead and killing her.<sup>97</sup>

Joan's daughter went to live with her parents, while their son went to live with Burroughs' parents.<sup>98</sup> At the age of thirty-three, Billy Jr. died from alcoholism and liver failure after having written a book and lived an addicted life somewhat like his father's.<sup>99</sup>

*E. Joyce Glassman Johnson (1935–Present)*  
*"Keeper of the Flame"*

The only child of Upper West Side parents, Joyce Johnson attended Barnard in the late 1950s, began a novel at age twenty, worked for literary agents, and met Kerouac on a blind date arranged by Ginsberg, who

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90. *Id.* at 207.

91. *Id.* at 221, 259; MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 22.

92. Burroughs, though a self-professed homosexual, was seemingly a rescuer of women. Before World War II while in Europe, he married a woman to "help her escape fascism." MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 4.

93. *Id.* at 22.

94. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 226.

95. *Id.* at 314 (citing Barry Gifford & Lawrence Lee, Jack's Book 133–34 (2005)).

96. COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 152.

97. *Id.* at 154–56.

98. *Id.* at 159.

99. See WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS, JR., CURSED FROM BIRTH: THE SHORT UNHAPPY LIFE OF WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS, JR. (David Ohle ed., 2006); Gerald Nicosia, *Beat Writer's Legacy to His Son —Talent and Self-Destruction: William S. Burroughs Jr., Dommed from the Start, Wrote Amazing Novels Before he Died at Age 33*, SF GATE (Dec. 24, 2006), <http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Beat-writer-s-legacy-to-his-son-talent-and-2464816.php>.

took a lively interest in the sexual fortunes of his heterosexual friends.<sup>100</sup> She later became a professor at Columbia. Though she was quite a bit younger than Kerouac and came into his life at a later stage, her importance lies in her observations about the Beat scene and her recent biography of him, entitled *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac*.<sup>101</sup>

Kerouac borrowed money from her for a bus ticket to return to New York from Orlando for the long-awaited publishing debut of *On the Road* in 1957. Earlier that year, he had hit her up to pay for his coffee at Howard Johnson's in the Village on their first night out, something he was used to doing with other female admirers. She had confidently established her own bohemian life near NYU at Washington Square before moving uptown. On September 4, 1957, they read Gilbert Millstein's rapturous review of *Road* in the *New York Times*, and afterward spent the night and the next two years together.<sup>102</sup>

### III. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN

Though the postwar years from 1945 to 1960 seemed to be a period of stability and conformity, it also saw early questioning of women's roles and their quests for meaningful lives. In France, Simone de Beauvoir had begun mapping out a new way to think about *Being* and womanhood. In answer to the question "does essence precede existence," or is it the other way around, she stated that "one is not born a woman but becomes one."<sup>103</sup>

This led much later to Catharine MacKinnon's theory on the social construction of woman—"femaleness = femininity = sexual attractiveness = sexual availability" in male terms.<sup>104</sup> "What defines women as such is what turns men on," wrote MacKinnon.<sup>105</sup> As Bill Morgan noted: "Many of the Beats saw women only as sex objects, providers, and mothers, and rarely did they believe that they could write as well as their male counterparts."<sup>106</sup> Commenting that the Beat men viewed work as a

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100. JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 126; KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 168. For Ginsberg's matchmaking between Joan Vollmer and William Burroughs see *supra* note 88 and accompanying text.

101. JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3.

102. JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 180-85; COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 282-287.

103. SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, *THE SECOND SEX* 767 (transl. H.M. Parshley 1972) (1949).

104. Martha Chamallas, *Introduction to FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY* 46 (2003).

105. CATHARINE MACKINNON, *supra* note 14, at 530-31.

106. MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 155; see also JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 170 (describing the depiction of Beat girlfriends as "old ladies," as in "my old lady"; depicting them, most of them young, as the person who would "clean up the studio, contribute to the rent, have a baby or

series of “brief engagements,” Joyce Johnson wrote: “It was all right for women to go out and earn wages, since they had no important creative endeavors to be distracted from. The women didn’t mind, or, if they did, they never said—not until years later.”<sup>107</sup>

During the late 1940s in post-World War II America, however, women’s roles went largely unquestioned.<sup>108</sup> Privileged white women were pushed by their families to go to college,<sup>109</sup> not so much for education as to meet and marry the right sort of man who would provide the kind of home and life to which the women had been accustomed as children. And to have children of their own, many of them, perhaps two, three or four,<sup>110</sup> as well as to buy the refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines produced by the post-war economy.<sup>111</sup> Even a decade or two later, women getting married received no college scholarships.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, they might be asked, “What will you do with a Ph.D. if you’re married?”<sup>113</sup> A married woman could not obtain a credit card until 1974;<sup>114</sup> even if she worked fulltime and her husband part time, he would get the card. Once in the marriage, she could read a column called “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” in her monthly copy of the *Ladies Home Journal*.<sup>115</sup> If she worked she might have to disclose to employers that she was not pregnant, or that she did not plan to have a baby while on the job.<sup>116</sup> Women writers had to fight against stereotypes that cast them as

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two, become one of those weary, quiet, self-sacrificing, widely respected women . . . in their limp thrift-shop dresses made interesting with beads”).

107. JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 207.

108. See Alessandra Stanley, *The Sane Women Behind the Unraveling Men*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 4, 2013 (describing the AMC series *Mad Men*. Standing by your man was a continuing trope that went on well into the 1960s, with sensible, tradition-oriented women hooking up and trying to domesticate wild and talented men.).

109. JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 47–48 (describing college life at Barnard during the early 1950s with girls wearing plaid skirts, knee socks, and lamb’s wool sweaters; going to proms and football games; meeting their boyfriends in beau parlors in the dorms; and studying with famous “Prufrockian professors” in tweed jackets who educated these young women of the Silent Generation).

110. See *People & Events: Mrs. America: Women’s Roles in the 1950s*, PBS, [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/p\\_mrs.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/p_mrs.html) (discussing PBS documentary, *The Pill*, and the change in women’s lives that was to come with the invention of the birth control pill).

111. See Delgado, *supra* note 12, at xlv–xlv (noting that the dominant sex roles of this period served important corporate interests).

112. Personal communication with The Cleveland Foundation, circa May 1958.

113. Personal communication with Elizabeth Jackson, circa May 1960.

114. Equal Credit Opportunity Act, 15 U.S.C. section 1691 et seq. (1974).

115. Paige Guthrie, *Can This Marriage be Saved?*, LADIES HOME J. BLOG (June 1, 2012), <http://www.lhj.com/blogs/ladieslounge/tag/can-this-marriage-be-saved/> (discussing history of the column).

116. Personal communication with Royce Butler, circa August 1967.

sexual adventurers,<sup>117</sup> or against interpretations of their work as little more than the autobiographical record of their neuroticisms.<sup>118</sup>

The Beats, especially the men, bought into that dream—hook, line, and sinker. Kerouac's second wife, Joan Haverty, recalls him telling her:

Marriage isn't the same for a man as it is for a woman. For a woman it's her whole life, but a man has other things to do. His home and marriage serve as a pivot point. . . . A woman gets her view of the world from the information her husband brings back to her. It's in her own best interest to keep him comfortable and satisfied in the place he emanates from. He goes out into the world and does things in it and brings the results back to her.<sup>119</sup>

When she asked him what Bill Cannastra had told him about her, he replied:

I told him what kind of girl I was looking for, and he said I had described you perfectly . . . . A sweet little, nice little home-type girl, just like you. Not clever or witty, not worldly or jaded, and . . . not forward, you know? Not a manchaser . . . he said you were a great cook! If I were married to you, I wouldn't be in places where I'd need an excuse, I'd be home with you.<sup>120</sup>

Though Kerouac never achieved his dream marriage and family, Cassady, according to his wife, seems to have been "a wonderfully loving father" whose children adored him and said they'd rather have had him as father than anyone they knew of and that the knowledge of his behavior away from home had done nothing to diminish their love.<sup>121</sup>

By the same token, Ginsberg (then in a bisexual period), rhapsodized to Neal Cassady:

When I get married, I want everybody I know to be there and watch including all regiments of family, in synagogue, where there will be great groaning choirs of weepers, sacraments, everybody in flowers

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117. See Dwight Garner, *Seeking the Ardent Life, Finding It and Sharing It*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 30, 2013, at C3 (noting Irish author Edna O'Brien's relishing "dismissals from the blockheaded critics who said . . . that her 'talent resided in my knickers.'") Somewhat reminiscent of what Kerouac said to Haverty after reading her journal, O'Brien's writer-husband is reported to have told her, "You can write and I will never forgive you," after reading her first novel. *Id.* For Kerouac's comment to Haverty, see *supra* notes 82–83 and accompanying text.

118. See Liesl Schillinger, *Seeing Sylvia Plath with New Eyes*, N.Y. TIMES, May 5, 2013, at 2 (Sunday styles section) (noting that after Plath's death her husband, poet Ted Hughes, chose and ordered her poems in *Ariel*, directing the shape that her fame would assume).

119. HAVERTY, *supra* note 3, at 142–43.

120. *Id.* at 89–90, 94–95.

121. CHRISTOPHER FELVER, BEAT: PHOTOGRAPHS, COMMENTARY xii (2007); see also CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 73 (Carolyn describing Neal's complete rapture with their first baby and quoting a glowing letter from Neal to Kerouac about her).

and dress clothes, slightly awed by the presence of eternal vows, chastened by tradition and individuality of marriage.”<sup>122</sup>

The Beats were not the only males to hold these views. One need only recall Henry Miller in France, his wife June, and his lover Anais Nin;<sup>123</sup> or American cultural critic Paul Goodman, whose 1960 book, *Growing up Absurd*, brought him a coterie of young students, mostly male, doting on his every word;<sup>124</sup> or the bad boys of British literature. Clive James, a premier Australian cultural critic, when asked by an interviewer: “Why were there no women in your famous lunch group with Amis, Hitchens, Julian Barnes, and others?” responded: “It was a male chauvinistic culture. It’s a reprehensible answer. And we wanted to talk about them. It wasn’t the main subject, but it was one of them. I have no excuse, and nobody who was there has an excuse. Times have changed. Thank god.”<sup>125</sup>

But to picture the women as dumb and passive partners to the men does them no justice. They commiserated with each other over being the sole financial supporters in their marriages while their husbands indulged in infidelities, excessive drinking, and male bonding. Many marriages broke apart.<sup>126</sup>

Joyce Johnson, Kerouac’s lover in 1957, and a half a generation younger than the first wives and lovers discussed above, reflected on what drove women to the Beats:

Those of us who flew out the door had no usable models for what we were doing. We did not want to be our mothers or our spinster schoolteachers or the hard-boiled career women depicted on screen. And no one had taught us how to be women artists or writers . . . . Naturally, we fell in love with men who were rebels. We fell very quickly, believing they would take us along on their journeys and adventures. We did not expect to be rebels all by ourselves; we did

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122. COLLINS & SKOVER, *supra* note 1, at 180 (citing letter written on Nov. 18, 1950).

123. ANAIS NIN, HENRY AND JUNE: FROM “A JOURNAL OF LOVE”: THE UNEXPURGATED DIARY (1931–1932) OF ANAIS NIN (1990).

124. See Documentary: PAUL GOODMAN CHANGED MY LIFE (Zeitgeist Films 2011); see also MORGAN, *supra* note 2, at 52 (listing names of “intellectual hipsters”, including Goodman (all male except for Judith Malina, cofounder with her husband Julian Beck of the Living Theatre, and one other woman) who formed a loose subgroup of Greenwich Village Beats that Ginsberg called the subterraneans).

125. Dwight Garner, *Up Late with Clive James*, THE NEW REPUBLIC, Feb. 25, 2013, at 34, 37, available at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112363/dwight-garner-interviews-clive-james>; see also JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 79 (quoting a letter from novelist John Clellon Holmes: “The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang.”).

126. CASSADY, *supra* note 3, at 105–15 (describing how she and Helen Hinkle shared all their grievances against their husbands and against men in general); JOHNSON, VOICE, *supra* note 3, at 402 (describing similar conversations between Joan Haverty and Marian Holmes).



not count on loneliness. Once we had found our male counterparts, we had too much blind faith to challenge the old male/female rules. We were very young and we were in over our heads. But we knew we had done something brave, practically historic. We were the ones who had dared to leave home.<sup>127</sup>

During the Beat era, the old order started to crumble.<sup>128</sup> Many white males from the educated, privileged class rode trains to corporate offices in big cities while others hit the open road in the new cars of the post-war era. Men who had gone to war and the women who had waited for them couldn't wait to put it all behind them. They settled down quickly, took advantage of the GI bill, saved a little money, got married and had babies—one, two, three, four. But some of the women who had worked during the war missed the freedom and independence they had enjoyed before.

Soon Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* would land like a bombshell in the suburban backyards of America, giving legitimacy to the intuitions, feelings, and desires of women to make their own maps for their lives, and the road began to open for them. Less than a decade later, young women were striking out on their own with less trepidation. Still, the old dilemmas remain but in a different form.<sup>129</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Many women gravitated to the early Beat writers like moths drawn to a flame. And for good reason: they themselves were rebels and the writers were talented, charismatic men. But the women paid a price for

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127. KNIGHT, *supra* note 2, at 177 (quoting an excerpt from *Minor Characters*).

128. Though the conformity of the 1950s is usually taken for granted, changes came more swiftly than most acknowledged at the time. The Beat Generation of the early post-war period of the 1940s quickly morphed into the Silent Generation of the 1950s, during which an undercurrent of nonconformity laid the groundwork for the racial and social reform movements of the 1960s. See JOHNSON, MINOR, *supra* note 2, at 70–71 (noting the quick transition between her generation and the one before).

129. See Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Why Women Still Can't Have It All*, THE ATLANTIC (July/Aug. 2012), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/> (discussing her frustrations at attaining a career-family life balance); Gail Collins, *At a Time When Women Can Be Free, Finally, to Move on to Something More*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Jan. 27, 2013, at 42 (reviewing the history of women's progress in the U.S. on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*); Katha Pollitt, *Who's Afraid of Sheryl Sandberg?*, THE NATION, Mar. 25, 2013, at 10 (discussing the controversy over Sheryl Sandberg's new book *Lean In*, encouraging women to assert themselves more in the workplace); Dan Nakaso, *Uproar over Firing of Female Techie Who Tweeted About Slurs*, SEATTLE TIMES, Mar. 23, 2013, at A6 (reporting on vicious backlash against a woman who posted a picture of men making sexual slurs about women at a male-dominated tech industry conference); Katharine Q. Seelye, *School Vote Stirs Debate on Girls as Leaders*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 12, 2013, at A12 (lamenting defeat of a girl who ran for school president of prestigious Phillips Andover Academy. Only four girls had been elected in the school's 235-year history.).

the excitement of living through a turbulent period. The men railed against conformity while protected by tolerant professors, psychiatrists, creditors, judges, and parents. A few of the women rebelled too, but for them the road was harder. They had fewer allies, less-supportive parents, and their partners clung to traditional views of women's roles. Fewer job opportunities came their way, most of them as waitresses, seamstresses, and low-level clerks. It was only many years later that some of them emerged as writers and memoirists in their own right.

But not all did. One was shot to death by her drug-addled husband. Others dropped out of college. Some had to raise children on their own without resources. Society thus missed out on many of the contributions that these talented women could have offered.

Today we believe that women deserve equal opportunities. The tale of the women of the Beats is a stark reminder of how important this task continues to be, both for women and for society at large.

