I. As an enlightened scholar / discerning historian of the twenty-first century looking back on the 1950s, how would you critique the decade?

II. Defining the Beats:

• Defined in the Random House Dictionary by Kerouac as “members of the generation that came after WWII, who, supposedly as a result of disillusionment stemming from the Cold War, espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions.”
  - A group of disillusioned young writers and poets who felt that the world around them was hypocritical and restrictive
  - They had a new vision for America that they expressed through their writing

• “Beat” meant to be exhausted, as if you had been all night, emotionally and intellectually exhausted with life—exhaustion left Beat writers / generation more open and receptive to a deeper perception

• “The point of Beat is that you get beat down to a certain nakedness where you actually are able to see the world in a visionary way, which is the old classical understanding of what happens in the dark of the soul.” (Allen Ginsberg)

• “Any attempt to label an entire generation is unrewarding, and yet the generation which went through the last war, or at least could get a drink easily once it was over, seems to possess a uniform, general quality which demands an adjective ... The origins of the word 'beat' are obscure, but the meaning is only too clear to most Americans. More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself. A man is beat whenever he goes for broke and wagers the sum of his resources on a single number; and the young generation has done that continually from early youth.” (John Clellon Holmes)
• “The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous Roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars…” (Jack Kerouac)

III. The Beats

a. Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*
b. Allen Ginsberg, *America* and *Song*
c. J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*
d. Gregory Corso, *Marriage*

THMES/MESSAGES OF BEAT AUTHORS/POETS: ____________________________________________

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IV. A Little Bit of Art History

a. **Jackson Pollack**: influential American painter and key figure in the abstract expressionist movement. Known for his “drip painting,” a technique which he abandoned at the peak of his fame following a *Life* magazine spread which asked if he was “the greatest living painter in the United States.” Frustrated with the pressure and commercialism of society, Pollack numbered his paintings rather than titling them in an effort to end viewers’ search for representational elements in his paintings. Pollack instructed viewers to "...look passively and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what they are to be looking for." Reclusive, with a volatile personality, Pollack was also an alcoholic who died in 1956 at the age of 44 in an alcohol-related car accident.

> "The method of painting is the natural growth out of a need. I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them."

> "When I am in a painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."

b. **Andy Warhol**: Well known for his leading role in the “pop art” movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Warhol began as a commercial illustrator and became a renowned and controversial artist. His art (painting, printmaking, sculpture, film, and music) explored the relationship between artistic expression, celebrity culture and advertisement. Warhol refused to explain his work instead said, "Just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it."
“When you do something exactly wrong, you always turn up something.”

“What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it…. Sometimes you fantasize that people who are really up-there and rich and living it up have something you don’t have, that their things must be better than your things because they have more money than you. But they drink the same Cokes and eat the same hot dogs and wear the same … clothes and see the same TV shows and the same movies. … All of this is really American.”