day of their lives. Curiously, the greatest disaffection from the
system is found today among its most pampered beneficiaries in
the upper middle class. This is decadent. Even more so is the
remarkable inability of the business class to defend itself
against its adversaries. Sometimes these days it seems as if
even the capitalists have lost their belief in capitalism.

Closely related to this is the "hollowing out" of broader cul-
tural symbols. Prominent among these are the values com-
monly called (since the work of Max Weber) the "Protestant
ethic". It is precisely this ethic (as Weber showed) that has been
very instrumental in bringing about modern capitalism, espe-
cially in America. It fostered virtues such as hard work, saving,
discipline, individual self-reliance and the urge toward
achievement. Now, there is a long tradition in western coun-
tries that has stood in opposition to this value system, which it
denigrated as "bourgeois culture". This tradition (Lionel Tril-
lung called it the "adversary culture") has been particularly
strong in the intellectual elite, which prided itself on having
values supposedly more civilized and more humane than those
of the bourgeoisie. The latter was perceived as a money-
grubbing group devoid of an understanding of the higher values
of culture. Sinclair Lewis has, as it were, codified the American
version of this negative perception in his figure of Babbitt; H.L.
Mencken coined the term "booboiserie" for the class thus denig-
rated. To an extent, then, there is nothing new in all of this.
What has happened since World War II, however, is that much
larger numbers of people have come to consider themselves part
of the cultural elite—and thus opposed to "bourgeois culture".
This, of course, is the result of the much greater accessibility of
college education, also of the elite influences diffused more
widely than ever before through the mass media of communica-
tion.

In consequence, the "Protestant ethic" has been under mas-
sive assault in recent years, with the assault reaching a certain
crescendo in the late 1960s. The value of hard work is put down
as dehumanizing, even pathological. Saving is but another as-
pect of "delayed gratification", ipso facto frustrating and de-
structive of the creative impulse. Discipline is identified with
"repression". Against these old values, a new, thoroughly
hedonistic ethic is propagated. The healthy life is one that is
lived "now", dedicated to the unrestrained expression of self.
Individualism too has come under attack, especially in its com-
petitive aspect, and achievement is now widely perceived as a
capitulation to the "rat race". This broadside attack on the
values of the middle class come to a climax, of course, in the
so-called counter-culture. It would be an error, though, to see it