

## Overview of the 60`s

Many social changes that were addressed in the 1960s are still the issues being confronted today. the '60s was a decade of social and political upheaval. in spite of all the turmoil, there were some positive results: the civil rights revolution, john f. Kennedy's bold vision of a new frontier, and the breathtaking advances in space, helped bring about progress and prosperity. however, much was negative: student and anti-war protest movements, political assassinations, and ghetto riots excited american people and resulted in lack of respect for authority and the law.

The decade began under the shadow of the cold war with the soviet union, which was aggravated by the u-2 incident, the berlin wall, and the cuban missile crisis, along with the space race with the ussr.

The decade ended under the shadow of the viet nam war, which deeply divided americans and their allies and damaged the country's self-confidence and sense of purpose.

Even if you weren't alive during the '60s, you know what they meant when they said, "tune in, turn on, drop out." you know why the nation celebrates Martin luther king, jr.'s birthday. all of the social issues are reflected in today's society: the civil rights movement, the student movement, space exploration, the sexual revolution, the environment, medicine and health, and fun and fashion.

### The Civil Rights Movement

The momentum of the previous decade's civil rights gains led by rev. Martin luther king, jr. carried over into the 1960s. but for most blacks, the tangible results were minimal. only a minuscule percentage of black children actually attended integrated schools, and in the south, "jim crow" practices barred blacks from jobs and public places. New groups and goals were formed, new tactics devised, to push forward for full equality. as often as not, white resistance resulted in violence. this violence spilled across tv screens nationwide. the average, neutral american, after seeing his/her tv screen, turned into a civil rights supporter.

Black unity and white support continued to grow. in 1962, with the first large-scale public protest against racial discrimination, rev. Martin luther king, jr. Gave a dramatic and inspirational speech in washington, d.c. After a long march of thousands to the capital. the possibility of riot and bloodshed was always there, but the marchers took that chance so that they could accept the responsibilities of first class citizens. "the negro," King said in this speech, "lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity and finds himself an exile in his own land." King continued stolidly: "it would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the negro. this sweltering summer of the negro's legitimate discontent

will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality." when King came to the end of his prepared text, he swept right on into an exhibition of impromptu oratory that was catching, dramatic, and inspirational.

"I have a dream," King cried out. the crowd began cheering, but King, never pausing, brought silence as he continued, "i have a dream that one day on the red hills of georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

"I have a dream," he went on, relentlessly shouting down the thunderous swell of applause, "that even the state of mississippi, a state sweltering with people's injustices, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have dream," cried King for the last time, "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Everyone agreed the march was a success and they wanted action now but, now remained a long way off. president kennedy was never able to mobilize sufficient support to pass a civil rights bill with teeth over the opposition of segregationist southern members of congress. but after his assassination, President Johnson, drawing on the Kennedy legacy and on the press coverage of civil rights marches and protests, succeeded where Kennedy had failed.

However, by the summer of 1964, the black revolution had created its own crisis of disappointed expectations. rioting by urban blacks was to be a feature of every "long, hot, summer" of the mid-1960s.

In 1965, King and other black leaders wanted to push beyond social integration, now guaranteed under the previous year's civil rights law, to political rights, mainly southern blacks' rights to register and vote. King picked a tough alabama town to tackle: selma, where only 1% of eligible black voters were registered to vote. the violence, the march, the excitement all contributed to the passage of the second landmark civil rights act of the decade. even though there was horrendous violence, rev. king announced that as a "matter of conscience and in an attempt to arouse the deepest concern of the nation," he was "compelled" to lead another march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

The four-day, 54-mile march started on the afternoon of Sunday, March 21, 1965, with some 3500 marchers led by two nobel prizewinners, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. And ralph bunche, then u.n. Under secretary for special political affairs. in the march, whites, negroes, clergymen and beatniks, old and young, walked side by side. president johnson made sure they had plenty of protection this time with 1000 military police, 1900 federalized alabama national guardsmen, and platoons of u.s. Marshals and FBI men.

When the marchers reached the capital of alabama, they were to have presented a petition to then governor george wallace protesting voting discrimination. however, when they arrived, the governor's aides came out and said, "the capital is closed today."

About this same time, the term, "black power" was coming into use. it was meant to infer long-submerged racial pride in negroes. Martin luther king, jr. Specifically sought to rebut the evangelists of black power. "it is absolutely necessary for the negro to gain power, but the term black power is unfortunate, because it tends to give the impression of black nationalism. we must never seek power exclusively for the negro, but the sharing of power with white people," he said.

Unfortunately, the thing that really moved the civil rights movement along significantly was the murder of rev. Martin luther king, jr. In late 1965. cruelty replaced harmony with nightmarish suddenness. rioting mobs in the negro suburb of watts, california, pillaged, burned and killed, while 500 policemen and 5000 national guardsmen struggled in vain to contain their fury. hour after hour, the toll mounted: 27 dead at the week's end, nearly 600 injured, 1700 arrested, and property damage well over \$100 million.

The good that came out of all of this, is that thousands of negroes were flocking to register in the nine counties in alabama, louisiana, and mississippi where the government posted federal examiners to uphold the voting law. in four days, 6,998 negro voters were added to the rolls in counties where there had previously been only 3,857.

In that time of sorrow and guilt when King was murdered, there was an opening for peace between the races that might otherwise never have presented itself. president johnson pleaded, "i ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has struck dr. King." he went on to say that to bring meaning to his death, we must be determined to strike forcefully at the consciences of all americans in order to wrest from tragedy and trauma, the will to make a better society.

#### The Student Movement

Americans who were young in the 1960s influenced the course of the decade as no group had before. the motto of the time was "don't trust anyone over 30." another, "tell it like it is," conveyed a real mistrust of what they considered adult deviousness.

Youthful americans were outraged by the intolerance of their universities, racial inequality, social injustice, the vietnam war, and the economic and political constraints of everyday life and work. one group that formed during this time was s.d.s. (students for a democratic society). opposed

to "imperialism," racism, and oppression, the s.d.s. found the american university guilty of all three. they did do some good at the beginning like organizing northern ghetto dwellers in projects such as chicago's jobs or income, now (join). but the viet nam war led to a change in their tactics. they became an independent radical force against society. the deluge of disorders made it harder and harder for most americans to keep events in perspective. they tended to forget that most of the nation's 6,700,000 collegians were studying hard at school and not causing trouble. an underlying pattern emerged in the american university. The university suddenly became a political arena. the students wanted to address the national problems of war, race, and poverty. as a result, the university lost some of its neutrality. students created a new u.s. institution: the political university.

However, another element among youths was also emerging. They were called hippies. this movement marked another response to the decade as the young experimented with music, clothes, drugs, and a "counter-culture" lifestyle. in 1967, hippies preached altruism and mysticism, honesty, joy and nonviolence. they had a child-like fascination for beads, blossoms, and bells, strobe lights, ear-shattering music, exotic clothing and erotic slogans. they wanted to profess "flower power" and love. they were predominantly white, middle-class, educated youths, ranging in age from 17 to 25. Perhaps the most striking thing about the hippie phenomenon, is the way it touched the imagination of the "straight" society. hippie slang entered common usage and spiced american humor. boutiques sprang up in urban and suburban areas to sell the "psychedelic" color clothes and designs that resembled art nouveau.

A major development in the hippie world was the "rural community," where nature-loving hippie "tribesmen" escaped the commercialism of the cities in an attempt to build a society outside of society. another development was the illicit use of drugs, creating the slogan, "tune in, turn on, drop out." "better living through chemistry" was another advertising slogan that was a sly joke to the young, but a real worry