



Culture and Counterculture

MAIN IDEA

The ideals and lifestyle of the counterculture challenged the traditional views of Americans.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The music, art, and politics of the counterculture have left enduring marks on American society.

Terms & Names

- counterculture
- Haight-Ashbury
- the Beatles
- Woodstock

One American's Story

In 1966, Alex Forman left his conventional life in mainstream America and headed to San Francisco. Arriving there with little else but a guitar, he joined thousands of others who were determined to live in a more peaceful and carefree environment. He recalled his early days in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, the hub of hippie life.

A PERSONAL VOICE ALEX FORMAN

"It was like paradise there. Everybody was in love with life and in love with their fellow human beings to the point where they were just sharing in incredible ways with everybody. Taking people in off the street and letting them stay in their homes. . . . You could walk down almost any street in Haight-Ashbury where I was living, and someone would smile at you and just go, 'Hey, it's beautiful, isn't it?' . . . It was a very special time."

—quoted in *From Camelot to Kent State*

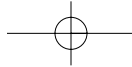


▲ Members of the counterculture relax in a California park.

Forman was part of the **counterculture**—a movement made up mostly of white, middle-class college youths who had grown disillusioned with the war in Vietnam and injustices in America during the 1960s. Instead of challenging the system, they turned their backs on traditional America and tried to establish a whole new society based on peace and love. Although their heyday was short-lived, their legacy remains.

The Counterculture

In the late 1960s, the historian Theodore Roszak deemed these idealistic youths the counterculture. It was a culture, he said, so different from the mainstream "that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbarian intrusion."



“TUNE IN, TURN ON, DROP OUT” Members of the counterculture, known as hippies, shared some of the beliefs of the New Left movement. Specifically, they felt that American society—and its materialism, technology, and war—had grown hollow. Influenced by the nonconformist beat movement of the 1950s, hippies embraced the credo of Harvard psychology professor and counterculture philosopher Timothy Leary: “Tune in, turn on, drop out.” Throughout the mid- and late 1960s, tens of thousands of idealistic youths left school, work, or home to create what they hoped would be an idyllic community of peace, love, and harmony.



“How does it feel to be without a home . . . like a rolling stone?”

BOB DYLAN

HIPPIE CULTURE The hippie era, sometimes known as the Age of Aquarius, was marked by rock 'n' roll music, outrageous clothing, sexual license, and illegal drugs—in particular, marijuana and a new hallucinogenic drug called LSD, or acid. Timothy Leary, an early experimenter with the drug, promoted the use of LSD as a “mind-expanding” aid for self-awareness. Hippies also turned to Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism, which professed that one could attain enlightenment through meditation rather than the reading of scriptures.

Hippies donned ragged jeans, tie-dyed T-shirts, military garments, love beads, and Native American ornaments. Thousands grew their hair out, despite the fact that their more conservative elders saw this as an act of disrespect. Signs across the country said, “Make America beautiful—give a hippie a haircut.”

Hippies also rejected conventional home life. Many joined communes, in which the members renounced private property to live communally. By the mid-sixties, **Haight-Ashbury** in San Francisco was known as the hippie capital, mainly because California did not outlaw hallucinogenic drugs until 1966.

DECLINE OF THE MOVEMENT After only a few years, the counterculture’s peace and harmony gave way to violence and disillusionment. The urban communes eventually turned seedy and dangerous. Alex Forman recalled, “There were ripoffs, violence . . . people living on the street with no place to stay.” Having dispensed with society’s conventions and rules, the hippies had to rely on each other. Many discovered that the philosophy of “do your own thing” did not provide enough guidance for how to live. “We were together at the level of peace and love,” said one disillusioned hippie. “We fell apart over who would cook and wash dishes and pay the bills.” By 1970, many had fallen victim to the drugs they used, experiencing drug addiction and mental breakdowns. The rock singer Janis Joplin and the legendary guitarist Jimi Hendrix both died of drug overdoses in 1970.

As the mystique of the 1960s wore off, thousands of hippies lined up at government offices to collect welfare and food stamps—dependent on the very society they had once rejected. **A**

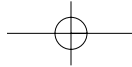
MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A What events and other factors hastened the decline of the counterculture movement?

A prominent symbol of the counterculture movement was bright colors. ▶





A Changing Culture

Although short-lived, some aspects of the counterculture—namely, its fine arts and social attitudes—left a more lasting imprint on the world.

ART The counterculture’s rebellious style left its mark on the art world. The 1960s saw the rise of pop art (popular art). Pop artists, led by Andy Warhol, attempted to bring art into the mainstream. Pop art was characterized by bright, simple, commercial-looking images often depicting everyday life. For instance, Warhol became famous for his bright silk-screen portraits of soup cans, Marilyn Monroe, and other icons of mass culture. These images were repeated to look mass-produced and impersonal, a criticism of the times implying that individual freedoms had been lost to a more conventional, “cookie-cutter” lifestyle.

ROCK MUSIC During the 1960s, the counterculture movement embraced rock ‘n’ roll as its loud and biting anthem of protest. The music was an offshoot of African-American rhythm and blues music that had captivated so many teenagers during the 1950s. **B**

The band that, perhaps more than any other, helped propel rock music into mainstream America was **the Beatles**. The British band, made up of four youths from working-class Liverpool, England, arrived in America in 1964 and immediately took the country by storm. By the time the Beatles broke up in 1970, the four “lads” had inspired a countless number of other bands and had won over millions of Americans to rock ‘n’ roll.

One example of rock ‘n’ roll’s popularity occurred in August 1969 on a farm in upstate New York. More than 400,000 showed up for a free music festival called “**Woodstock** Music and Art Fair.” This festival represented, as one songwriter put it, “the ‘60s movement of peace and love and some higher cultural cause.” For three days, the most popular bands and musicians performed, including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Joe Cocker, Joan Baez, the Grateful Dead, and Jefferson Airplane. Despite the huge crowd, Woodstock was peaceful and well organized. However, Tom Mathews, a writer who attended the Woodstock festival, recalled his experience there as less than blissful.



▲ The Beatles, shown here in 1967, influenced fashion with their long hair and psychedelic clothing.

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

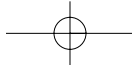
B What did rock ‘n’ roll symbolize for American youth?

A PERSONAL VOICE TOM MATHEWS

“The last night of the concert I was standing in a narrow pit at the foot of the stage. I made the mistake of looking over the board fence separating the pit from Max Yasgur’s hillside. When I peered up I saw 400,000 . . . people wrapped in wet, dirty ponchos, sleeping bags and assorted, tie-dyed mufti slowly slipping toward the stage. It looked like a human mud slide. . . . After that night I couldn’t get out of there fast enough.”

—“The Sixties Complex,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 5, 1988

CHANGING ATTITUDES While the counterculture movement faded, its casual “do your own thing” philosophy left its mark. American attitudes toward sexual behavior became more casual and permissive, leading to what became known as the sexual revolution. During the 1960s and 1970s, mass culture—including TV, books,



History Through *Music*

PROTEST SONGS OF THE SIXTIES

During the turbulent climate of the sixties, hippies and other activists used music as a vehicle for political expression. In bus terminals, in the streets, and on the White House lawn, thousands united in song, expressing their rejection of mainstream society, their demand for civil rights, and their outrage over the Vietnam War. Musicians like Bob Dylan stirred up antiwar sentiment in songs like “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” while Joan Baez and Pete Seeger popularized the great African-American spiritual “We Shall Overcome,” which became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

We Shall Overcome (African-American Spiritual)

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day.
(Chorus) Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe:
We shall overcome some day.
We'll walk hand in hand. . . .
We shall all be free. . . .
We are not afraid. . . .
We are not alone. . . .
The whole wide world around. . . .
We shall overcome. . . .



▲ Joined in harmony, African-American students in Selma, Alabama, gather on the steps of the Tabernacle Baptist Church to sing “We Shall Overcome.” (1963)



Joan Baez, 1965



Bob Dylan,
1966 ▶

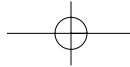
from *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (Bob Dylan, 1962)

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside
And it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.

magazines, music, and movies—began to address subjects that had once been prohibited, particularly sexual behavior and explicit violence.

While some hailed the increasing permissiveness as liberating, others attacked it as a sign of moral decay. For millions of Americans, the new tolerance was merely an uncivilized lack of respect for established social norms. Eventually, the counterculture movement would lead a great many Americans to more liberal attitudes about dress and appearance, lifestyle, and social behavior; yet in the short run, it produced largely the opposite effect.



The Conservative Response

In the late 1960s, many believed that the country was losing its sense of right and wrong. Increasingly, conservative voices began to express people's anger. At the 1968 Republican convention in Miami, candidate Richard M. Nixon expressed that anger.

A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD NIXON

“As we look at America we see cities enveloped in smoke and flame. We hear sirens in the night. . . . We see Americans hating each other at home. . . . Did we come all this way for this? . . . die in Normandy and Korea and Valley Forge for this?”

—Speech at Republican convention, 1968



CONSERVATIVES ATTACK THE COUNTERCULTURE Nixon was not the only conservative voice expressing alarm. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover issued a warning that “revolutionary terrorism” was a threat on campuses and in cities. Other conservative critics warned that campus rebels posed a danger to traditional values and threatened to plunge American society into anarchy. Conservatives also attacked the counterculture for what they saw as its decadent values. In the view of psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim, student rebels and members of the counterculture had been pampered in childhood; as young adults, they did not have the ability for delayed gratification. According to some conservative commentators, the counterculture had abandoned rational thought in favor of the senses and uninhibited self-expression. **C**

The angry response of mainstream Americans caused a profound change in the political landscape of the United States. By the end of the 1960s, conservatives were presenting their own solutions on such issues as lawlessness and crime, the size of the federal government, and welfare. This growing conservative movement would propel Nixon into the White House—and set the nation on a more conservative course.

▲ In contrast to the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, the Republican convention was orderly and united—particularly in the delegates' opposition to the counterculture.

MAIN IDEA

Forming Generalizations

C Why were conservatives angry about the counterculture?



ASSESSMENT

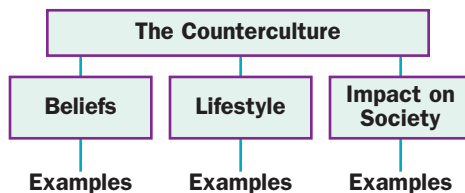
1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- counterculture
- Haight-Ashbury
- the Beatles
- Woodstock

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Re-create the tree diagram below on your paper. Then fill in examples that illustrate the topics in the second row of boxes.



Which example do you think had the biggest impact on society? Why?

CRITICAL THINKING

3. DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A stereotype is a generalization made about a group. What stereotype do you think hippies might have formed about mainstream Americans? What stereotype do you think mainstream Americans might have formed about hippies? Why? **Think About:**

- Alex Forman's comments in "A Personal Voice" (page 987)
- hippies' values and lifestyle
- mainstream Americans' values and lifestyle

4. MAKING INFERENCES

In your opinion, why didn't the hippies succeed?

5. ANALYZING ISSUES

What role did the counterculture and antiwar movement play in helping Richard Nixon win the presidency?