

Chapter VIII

“ONE, TWO, THREE, WHAT ARE WE FIGHTIN’ FOR?”:

CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE VIETNAM ERA

Perhaps the greatest transformation in American life in the 1960s was cultural. Liberalism waned, Civil Rights suffered under a backlash, people’s movements were suppressed or they faded away, but American cultural life is distinctly different after the Vietnam War and other upheavals of the sixties. During that decade, the foundations of American life were challenged, and often rocked, to their core. Dissent, youth culture, music, sex, film and other media--indeed the very politics of culture--all changed markedly because of the war and attendant movements, and today, as we remember the 1960s, it is such cultural images that constitute our most public history of the era.

Make Love, Not War: From the Beats to the Hippies

In the 1950s, conformity reigned, or so it seemed. The “man in the grey flannel suit” went to work and came home to his mate, who was a “housewife,” and his kids in their suburban home. *I Love Lucy*, sock hops, hula hoops, and Beaver Cleaver seemed to be the cultural paradigms of the day. Beneath the acceptable surface, however, beyond where politics and the media examined American life, there was a cultural revolution developing. By the end of the 1960s, the way Americans dressed, talked, played, loved, entertained, and thought would all be dramatically different. The movements of the 1960s, layered on top of the Vietnam War, would create a new political culture.

Signs of the coming tumult were already visible in the 1950s. “Hipsters” listened to jazz, smoked marijuana, and went out in interracial groups. The Women’s Strike for Peace and Bertrand Russell’s “Ban the Bomb” movement publicly criticized America’s Cold War military policies. Most notably, a group of poets and literary figures directly confronted the conformity of American life and helped usher in a new youth culture. Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, William Burroughs, and, of course, Allen Ginsberg--collectively known as *beatniks*--were appalled by McCarthyism, the arms race, the Cold War, elite institutions and universities, corporate America, and racism. All authority should be questioned and conformity was a disease. Ginsberg, in the famous collection of his peyote-induced poems, *Howl*, and Kerouac in *On the Road* mocked consumerism and suburbia. To Ginsberg, it was a generation “destroyed by madness” because of the conformity and hatred. Instead of going along with the crowd, the beatniks urged personal and sexual freedom. And in the 1960s, as the war in Vietnam grew, many took an active role in the Peace Movement.

By the mid-1960s, the beatniks were replaced, in the media at least, by the *hippies*, a loose, unorganized collection of young people who developed their own way of life. Some took drugs, others got high on Jesus. Most wore their hair longer than usual, but did not have to. Some participated in sex orgies, or lived in communes, and almost all listened to rock music. There were no hippie organizations, meetings, age limits, or membership requirements--just a commitment to personal freedom and peace. The hippies constituted the most public group in what came to be known as the *counterculture*, the 1960s movement in general that challenged the traditional values of U.S. society. Often caricatured as nothing more than advocates of “sex, drugs, and rock and roll,” counterculture youth indeed had a political awareness and engaged in

cultural political activity. Andrew Kopkind, a leftist journalist, described this “new culture of opposition” which “grows out of the disintegration of the old forms, the vinyl and aerosol institutions that carry all the inane and destructive values of privation, competition, commercialism, profitability and elitism.”¹ As with other movements, the war was an essential aspect of hippies’ lives.

Many young people in the early 1960s were already disturbed over America’s racial policies and would become even more disenchanted by the Vietnam War. Some joined Civil Rights groups to try to change American society, and at least hundreds of thousands protested the war actively. But even more expressed their resentment culturally, by rejecting the look and the values of a society that had attacked black children in the south or peasants in Vietnam. John Kenneth Galbraith--eminent economist, policymaker and liberal icon--explained that the youth of the 1960s “were in general retreat from the values of the consumer society. One manifestation was the rejection of its manners and dress. Nothing caused my generation such discontent as the sudden abandonment by the young of razors, haircuts and regular bathing and the seeming satisfaction in shabby clothes. But in the United States the Vietnam war and the hot breath of the draft boards were probably more important.”² All over America--in New York’s Greenwich Village, San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, and countless smaller and less famous locations--hippies and other countercultural and antiwar movements came into existence. They may not have had a political program like SDS or SNCC but, through their politics of personal expression, bucked the system just the same. Men broke down gender lines by wearing their hair long, often in ponytails. Students no longer wore the traditional clothing of a previous generation: ironed pants, oxford shirts, full-length skirts that fell below the knee, bobby socks

and saddle shoes. Now they wore bell-bottomed jeans, tie-dyed shirts, and short skirts. Some, such as the Bay Area *Diggers*, rejected the system of private property and money and lived communally, recycling surplus goods procured from local stores to hand out to the public for free. Instead of writing their congressman to express their opinions, the counterculture acted outrageously or staged guerrilla theatre, as when Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin threw dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange or women demonstrated at the 1968 Miss America pageant. Indeed, Hoffman became something of a hippie superstar with his antics. Dressing in a shirt that looked like the American flag; protesting traffic in New York by calling for a rally and transforming the streets into a dance stage and pedestrian mall; stopping traffic to “plant” a tree in the street because he wanted more green space; bringing a duck onto a television interview in a spoof of Groucho Marx’s “You Bet Your Life,” he never failed to gain attention.”³

Such cultural outrages were being conducted on a national scale by the mid-1960s. As Vietnam raged, hippies urged Americans to “make love, not war” and in 1967, a time of death in Indochina, celebrated a *Summer of Love* in San Francisco. Thousands of young people poured into Haight-Ashbury, some in psychedelic vans, others hitchhiking. They protested the war, meditated, took large amounts of LSD, and daily listened to the best music around: the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, Country Joe and the fish, and so many others. They held “be-ins” and “love-ins” to give off peaceful vibes and protest the war and to celebrate individual freedom. Alas, the Summer of Love, good intentions notwithstanding, also included numerous drug overdoses, sexual exploitation of teen-aged girls and runaways, soaring rents, and even violence. Indeed, the Diggers became so distraught they announced a “Death of the Hippie” ceremony at the end of the summer. “Hippiedom,” however, did not end. Thousands of youth

returned home from San Francisco in 1967 to bring new values to their own communities and campuses. They continued to listen to rock and roll, take drugs, have sex, and question and reject “mainstream” values. And they continued to protest the war in Vietnam. The counterculture, as it were, was making a clear mark on American society.

The Sounds of Protest: From Folk to Rock

Music has always had a political aspect to it, and never more so than in the 1960s. In that decade both traditional folk music and the newer rock and roll began to reflect political themes such as Civil Rights and pacifism. By decade’s end, music was a vital part of the national cultural rebellion and of the antiwar movement. Folk singers like Woody Guthrie, Huddie Ledbetter, and Pete Seeger had been singing protest songs throughout the 20th Century, challenging racism, attacking bankers, decrying conformity. By the early 1960s a full-blown folk revival was in bloom. The arms race, segregation, and commercialization all became targets of folk singers. “A person shouldn’t have more property that he can squeeze between his banjo and the outside wall of his banjo case,” was Pete Seeger’s advice.⁴ During the monumental Civil Rights struggles and anti-Vietnam rallies, Seeger and others such as Peter, Paul, and Mary or Joan Baez or Phil Ochs were always present, protesting U.S. policies while entertaining the demonstrators. A new musical culture was being born.

A young man from Minnesota, however, would define the musical politics of the era. Robert Zimmerman of Hibbing had listened to the early rockers of the 1950s and African-American blues musicians. His biggest influence, however, was Woody Guthrie, and he imitated his folk style and shared his progressive beliefs. Adopting the stage name *Bob Dylan* [from the poet

Dylan Thomas] he embodied the musical and political changes of the 1960s. He first emerged in 1961 with the album *Bob Dylan*, which paid homage to Guthrie. Within the next few years, Dylan assumed a central place in the nascent counterculture and political opposition. He wrote about the horrors of nuclear war in “A Hard Rain’s a Gonna Fall”; the military-industrial complex in “Masters of War”; the violence of racism in “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game.” He touched upon the national sense of anxiety and hope in the anthemic “Blowin’ in the Wind” and the alienation of youth in “Like a Rolling Stone” or “Gates of Eden.” On July 25, 1965, Dylan entered a new phase. Appearing at the Newport, R.I. Folk Festival, he came out in black leather and boots instead of the traditional folkie jeans and flannel workshirt. More shockingly, he plugged in an electric guitar--eschewing the acoustic version that was a staple of folk music--and lit into a raucous rendition of “Maggie’s Farm.” Through Seeger and other purists were furious and Dylan himself was booed off the stage, the conversion to rock symbolized the power of the new music, the new generation, and the new culture.

Rock had been around since the early 1950s when artists such as Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, and especially Elvis Presley had adapted older African-American blues songs and sanitized them for middle-class white audiences. In the early 1960s, rock took off like a rocket, especially with the emergence of *The Beatles*. Singing simple and sometimes silly love songs like “I Wanna Hold Your Hand,” “She Loves You,” or “Love Me Do,” the group--like Frank Sinatra or Presley in earlier decades--captured the national imagination and announced another progression in the new youth culture, full of energy and imagination and, especially, fun. Rock soon took a more serious turn, however. Musicians began to incorporate larger social themes--

race, alienation, the war--into their songs and both educated and created a shared experience for their listeners. Indeed, the music became a defining characteristic of the counterculture. In the Bay Area alone, the Dead, Airplane, and Janis Joplin embodied hippie lifestyles and urged nonconformity and drug use. The *Rolling Stones* used Mick Jagger's overt sexuality to challenge traditional values, though not without a backlash. Before appearing on the "Ed Sullivan Show" the band had to change the lyrics to "Let's Spend the Night Together" to "Let's Spend Some Time Together." Similarly, *The Doors*, featuring the brooding poet Jim Morrison, disturbed listeners with haunting songs about the hostility of modern life, and their music would become intricately linked to the Vietnam era through Francis Coppola's use of "The End" as a theme song in *Apocalypse Now*. Even the Beatles got into the new culture, moving away from simple love songs to experiments with Eastern music and religions and, with 1967's "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," into the hippie and drug worlds.

Vietnam obviously had a tremendous impact on this musical transformation as various artists began to protest the war through song. Folkies like Dylan, Ochs, Baez and others either indirectly criticized the war through pacifist songs like "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" or more directly, as with Ochs's "Talkin' Vietnam Blues." By 1965, as Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" became one of the fastest-selling, and most banned, songs of the era, Vietnam had a central place in counterculture music. When *The Animals* sang "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," who could not think of Vietnam? Their "Sky Pilot" moved listeners with its tale of a military chaplain sending pilots off on bombing missions. Motown, best known for its ballads and dance music, got into the act. Marvin Gaye's pathbreaking album *What's Going On?* included songs about the war, ecology, and urban violence, included despite CEO Berry Gordy's fears that

such political music would bring on commercial disaster, while The Temptations made listeners think about American society with their song “Ball of Confusion.”

The Beatles, especially John Lennon, became vocal critics of the war too. In 1966, the original album cover for “*Yesterday*” . . . and *Today* pictured the group with slabs of raw meat and decapitated dolls, but Capitol Records forced them to change it. To Lennon, the cover was a comment on American butchery in Vietnam and The Beatles announced at a press conference that “we think of it [the war] every day. We don’t like it. We don’t agree with it. We think it’s wrong.”⁵ Other artists surely agreed. Joe McDonald and his band *Country Joe and the Fish* sang what is probably the best-known antiwar song of the era, the “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to Die Rag,” a tirade against the war, Wall Street, and the military. *Creedence Clearwater Revival* condemned the class nature of the war in “Fortunate Son,” decrying the ability of the rich to avoid service. *Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young* contributed “Chicago”--a tribute to the 1968 antiwar movement--and “Ohio”--a memorial to the students killed at Kent State. And Lennon, with songs like “Give Peace a Chance,” “Power to the People,” and “Imagine” was a visible symbol of the political power of the music.

Liberating Minds and Bodies

While rock and roll spoke to a new found cultural freedom on a society-wide scale, millions of young people looked for personal liberation through the use of drugs or a new sexual morality. Though drug use and premarital sex had not been uncommon in the 1950s, they were covered up by the media and polite society, which gave off the impression that mainly “delinquents, blacks, hipsters or bad girls” took part in such hedonistic acts. By the 1960s,

however, drugs and sex would be part of the countercultural revolution, endorsed and practiced openly as part of the larger generational struggle of the Vietnam era. Students on college campuses began to use marijuana with some frequency, a trend that grew especially in the later 1960s as drug use associated with the Vietnam War spiraled. Drugs in fact became a major part of hippie lifestyle. No “be-in” or antiwar rally was complete without easy access to weed or psychedelic drugs. The drug culture even had its own “guru”--Timothy Leary, an ex-Harvard professor who sang the praises of LSD and urged youth to “turn on, tune in, drop out.”

Dope was also seen as an agent of sexual liberation, releasing youth from traditional morals and anxieties over their bodies. In fact, sexual activity among young, unmarried partners was far more common in the 1960s, but that reflected many factors. Sexual standards had already begun to change in the aftermath of World War II, when women, many of whom had worked during the war, became more economically and sexually independent. In 1953, the first issue of *Playboy*, published by Hugh Hefner and featuring nude photos of Marilyn Monroe, further highlighted the growing sexual freedom. Hefner told his readers that sex should be a pleasure, for men and women both, and that they should not be afraid to express themselves physically. Still, millions of young people remained chaste, either for moral reasons or fear of pregnancy or disease, into the 1960s. The first effective oral contraceptive for females, the *Pill*, began to break down even those barriers, however. Introduced in 1960, millions of women would use the pill in the following decade, giving themselves levels of sexual liberation not imagined earlier. The pill seemed to be a “panacea for reproduction control” and was so easily used that it “allowed consumers to adopt this method without examining . . . their sexual behavior.”⁶

Though it was soon discovered that the pill had many side effects dangerous to women's health, the new contraceptive had created the scientific basis for a sexual revolution. Morally and politically, sex was changing as well. Young people, no longer so respectful of a generation whose values had brought on segregation and Vietnam, rejected their parents' sexual beliefs. Indeed, pleasures of the body became a vehicle for dissent, with speakers at political rallies often calling for "free love" as well as an end to the war. Politico-cultural groups like the "Neo-Naked Noisy Committee for Peace and Love" or the "Bare Breasts for Peace Brigade" emerged to link sex and antiwar thought in guerrilla theater. The "Sexual Freedom League" attacked "the double standards between the sexes . . . and the . . . hypocritical morality and diseducation on the subject of sex." Timothy Leary also explained the politics of sex: "the key energy in our revolution is erotic . . . The sexual revolution is not just part of the atmosphere of freedom that is generating with the kids. I think it is the center of it." And the "revolution" took in all comers. Orgies, oral sex, sodomy, gay and lesbian practices, and casual sexual activity all became more common and accepted as the decade progressed. Janis Joplin reflected on the new attitudes toward sex, observing that "my music isn't supposed to make you riot. It's supposed to make you fuck."⁷ Women in particular were given license to engage in and enjoy sex as many, but by no means all, double standards disappeared. Still, however, sexual abuse of women remained high and many hippie men had the misogynist values typical of male society.

Hollywood and the Sixties

Marlon Brando and James Dean--in *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*--had brought a new image to film. Outsiders, free, sneering, they reflected a new youth culture in

the 1950s. By the 1960s, again with the Vietnam War as backdrop, Hollywood would even more symbolize the growing counterculture. Though films such as “Where the Boys Are” and “Beach Blanket Bingo” were popular, cinema with a social conscience emerged as well. Many young filmmakers began producing low-budget 16 and 8 mm films about current affairs and showing them in art galleries and on campuses. Soon, major studios were producing movies with countercultural themes and influenced by the war. Though the most notable Vietnam films such as “Go Tell the Spartans,” “The Deer Hunter,” “Apocalypse Now,” or “Coming Home” would not be made for another decade, Vietnam was already making an impact on films in the 1960s. In 1967's *Bonnie and Clyde*, director Arthur Penn offered a raw and brutal depiction of the famed criminal couple, with the movie ending in a slow-motion shot of bullets ripping into the stars, Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, making clear connections for a public used to seeing war scenes on the nightly news. And leftist critics often raved about *Bonnie and Clyde*--the outlaws made revolution look like fun. That same year *The Graduate*, a Mike Nichols film, derided the conformist, corporate culture and urged personal and sexual liberation.

Perhaps the movie most associated with the 1960s counterculture was *Easy Rider*, a film in which Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper were hippies traveling by motorcycle, taking drugs, and celebrating individual liberation until blown away by rifle-carrying, truck-driving patriotic Americans. *The Wild Bunch*, a brutal western directed by Sam Peckinpah, also appealed to a society accustomed to the violence of Vietnam. It was a “revolutionary film,” according to radical Stew Albert, because it showed how “to pick up the gun.”⁸ Such films also appealed to a generation whose icons--JFK, Malcolm X, King, Bobby Kennedy--had been victims of violence or had become “doomed outsiders” like *Bonnie and Clyde* or Hopper and Fonda. As a result of

this new cultural era, Hollywood shifted markedly, making films such as *Catch-22* or *M*A*S*H* that may have been set in World War II or Korea but were, indeed, “about” Vietnam and the futility of wars.

The “Other” 1960s

Images of hippies, sex, drugs, and protests often dominate our memory of the Vietnam era, but it would be a mistake to assume that the counterculture was the only significant movement of the decade. Many, probably most, Americans, including the young, viewed hippie culture with revulsion, while corporate America took steps to use the cultural images of the decade for its own purposes. “Mainstream” political, entertainment, and media figures attacked the counterculture. Richard Nixon spoke of them as “bums.” Country singer Merle Haggard condemned hippies and drugs in “Okie from Muskogee.” Anita Bryant, a past Miss America and anti-gay crusader, led “rallies for decency.” Many fast-food joints banned young customers with long hair, beads, beards, flowers, or sandals. Police often harassed or arrested “freaks” for vagrancy or idleness. New Orleans cops arrested a female hippie in jeans for “wearing the clothes of the opposite sex.” Long-haired students were routinely hassled and even assaulted. Americans told pollsters that the three groups they most feared were “Communists, prostitutes, and hippies.”⁹

Some opponents of the counterculture organized politically. The right-wing John Birch Society, seeing JFK and LBJ as little better than Communists, had thousands of members. Mothers, businessmen, and professionals in towns throughout the United States organized

against the “red menace” in local communities and schools, trying to weed out “unAmerican” teachers or arguing for school prayer. Every major protest rally was sure to include right-wing demonstrators as well, carrying signs like “America--Love It or Leave It” or “Go Back to Russia, You Communists.” On various campuses, chapters of the *Young Americans for Freedom* popped up. Clean cut, conservatively dressed, wearing short hair and long skirts, these young people honored traditional values, rejected the hippies and worked for conservative causes like the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign or other anticommunist issues, or against sex education or pornography.

The counterculture was also commercialized and commodified during the 1960s. Images of hippies and “flower power”--prevalent in advertisements in the 1980s and 1990s--were already common in the Vietnam era. Despite the counterculture’s disdain for conformity and commercial society, its main symbols could be used to enhance the market. Corporate music companies rushed to San Francisco to sign and promote rock bands. Middle-of-the-road magazines and television specials focused on the antics of the Summer of Love, portraying its carnival atmosphere rather than discussing its political protest element. Big-city boutiques began to sell huge volumes of highly-priced bell bottoms, tie dyes, and mini-skirts, turning such clothing into a fashion rather than political statement. This was a period when “record companies, clothing manufacturers, and other purveyors of consumer goods quickly recognized a new market,” the counterculture.

Co-opting the language of youth, an automaker boasted of the “Dodge Rebellion.” AT & T ads featured the line “The Times, They Are A-changing.” 7-Up ran ads featuring one of its bottles surrounded by psychedelic images and called itself the “unCola” to consciously identify

its product in opposition to the establishment, namely Coke. Virginia Slims Cigarettes tried to convince females that smoking was part of Women's Lib with the slogan "You've Come a Long Way, Baby." Warren Hinckle, a left journalist, saw the connection between hippies and sales as early as 1967, writing that "in this commercial sense, the hippies have not only accepted assimilation . . . they have swallowed it whole . . . If the people looking in from the suburbs want change, clothes, fun, and some lightheadedness from the new gypsies, the hippies are delivering-- and some of them are becoming rich hippies because of it."¹⁰ Little surprise then that the Diggers lamented the death of "Hippie, devoted son of Mass Media."

Celebrating the Counterculture: "Hair" and Woodstock

As the Sixties drew to a close, the counterculture became a recognized segment of American life. Not only had Madison Avenue found ways to make the new culture marketable to a mass audience but virtually every high school yearbook included photos of class hippies and "freaks." The sounds of the new generation, which seemed raw and dangerous in the early 1960s, now constituted pop music. Perhaps the best examples of the new culture and its growing acceptance were the Broadway play *Hair* and the 1969 music festival at *Woodstock*, in upstate New York. Though both *Hair* and *Woodstock* were stridently antiwar spectacles, their message was diluted by the media. Rather than focus on the political statements made in both, mainstream cultural commentators talked about hippies, long hair, and nudity. The movement, as it were, had lost its teeth amid a co-optive and homogenizing media culture that ignored real politics and substituted image and sensationalism.

Hair told the story of Claude Bukowski, a Nebraska farmboy headed to New York to be

inducted into the service and presumably fight in Vietnam. Upon arrival, he meets a group of hippies led by George Berger, and they collectively introduce him to drugs and the counterculture. Antiwar themes and music pervade the play; Vietnam is a “dirty little war,” according to one of the songs. LBJ is mocked as a warmonger. The draft board is ridiculed in a brilliant homoerotic satire. Most powerfully, Berger, at the play’s end, takes Claude’s place on the plane headed to Vietnam. His headstone indicates that he was killed in action there. Not as bleak, but just as important, Woodstock signalled the merger and ambivalence of the counterculture and protest. The festival was billed as “three days of peace and love,” in contrast to the war and hatred in Vietnam. Festival organizers pointed out that anyone buying a ticket was contributing to a united front against the Vietnam War. Scores of acts played and made antiwar speeches, with Country Joe exhorting the crowd that “if you want to stop this fucking war, you’ll have to sing louder than that.” “Movement leaders” and other activists took their turns at the mike and “some of the young men destroyed their draft cards in protest of the Vietnam War.”¹¹ Yet, the media images and memory of Woodstock focus on the celebrative aspects of it: the rain, the music, nudity, drugs, free love.

Obviously, the counterculture’s political message was too dangerous and had to be sanitized and softened for the American public. Like the New Left, the counterculture developed a critique and alternative to the society in which they were raised. Where the political youth joined SDS or took over campus buildings, the cultural opposition dressed differently and dropped acid. Often, the two movements converged. Many hippies were indeed political and counterculture behavior was endemic in the antiwar movement. But often, the New Left saw hippies as apolitical, and hippies saw the political youth as bureaucratic and uptight. In the end,

though, the challenge they both posed to American society was resisted, or channeled into acceptable avenues.

Epilogue: At War With Vietnam . . . Still

By the mid-1970s, America, it seemed, wanted to forget the previous decade. The memories of Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, Kent State, drugs, hippies, and other symbols of the 1960s were painful and searing, reminders of an era when hope, anguish, love, and death were a daily part of life on a grand as well as personal scale. Around 1980, however, the 1960s reemerged, this time as the scapegoat and bogeyman for a new conservative generation. To be sure, there was already a backlash against the Vietnam generation in place, as Richard Nixon's famous charge that liberals stood for "acid, amnesty, and abortion" would attest. But it was the rise of Ronald Reagan and other conservatives that made the sixties the political and cultural centerpiece of their oppositional program. The Vietnam generation was unpatriotic, immoral, angry, they contended. Youth were disrespectful, blacks were ungrateful, women were too ambitious. Cherished values--paternalism, the nuclear family, patriarchy, deference, obedience--had been uprooted by too many young rebels without a cause, or with the wrong cause. To Robert Bork, failed conservative Supreme Court nominee, the 1960s had sent America *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, as his polemic on American life was titled. Allen Bloom, a right-wing scholar, likened the Woodstock generation to the Nazis and saw the sixties as an "unmitigated disaster" for American educational life. To Newt Gingrich, the speaker of the house of representatives, "countercultural McGovernicks," like Bill Clinton, had destroyed family values. Fred Barnes, a reactionary political commentator, saw the "counterculture [as] a momentary

aberration in American history that will be looked back upon as a quaint period of Bohemianism brought to the national elite.”¹²

Popular culture also reflected such antagonistic and patronizing themes. *Rambo* complained that American soldiers “weren’t allowed to win” in Vietnam; cowardly politicians and drugged-out protestors had ruined the war effort. Television shows such as *Family Ties* or *The Wonder Years* also rekindled interest in a safe version of the sixties. In the former, Michael J. Fox played a conservative youth amused by his hippie parents’ values of peace and love. Indeed, hippie parents became a staple on TV sitcoms like *Dharma and Greg* or *Murphy Brown*. *The Wonder Years* also weekly demonstrated the strength and triumph of the bourgeois, nuclear family amid the upheavals of the 1960s. Self-absorbed hippies, like the Arnold’s daughter (who ultimately chose the traditional path of marriage and motherhood), were exposed as inane and silly, all against the backdrop of songs from that era. *The Big Chill* featured old college friends from the 1960s who had reunited to agonize over, and in large measure renounce, their radical pasts. *Austin Powers*, the “international man of mystery,” saw the 1960s as little more than a time of good music, hot sex, and drugs.

“Classic Rock” radio stations popped up in every major market, introducing, and depoliticizing, songs of the sixties for a new generation. MTV likewise emerged, championing corporate rock but dubbing it “revolutionary” with memories of the sixties at the forefront. In fact, the MTV generation even tried to recreate Woodstock, holding a 25th-anniversary concert in 1994 that was a tribute to commercialism rather than the counterculture. Advertisers exploited the images of the 1960s too. Commercials featured rock music--the Beatles and Gil Scott-Heron for Nike, Sly and the Family Stone for Chevy, Janis Joplin for Mercedes Benz, War for Nissan--

to market their products to a generation nostalgic for the good old days of the sixties. But ads which used memories of the sixties to sell products did so selectively. Television and print media made frequent use of hippies, minivans, sandals, beards, wardrobe, or slogans from the counterculture, but consciously avoided any reference to America's racial struggles or Vietnam, which were clearly the two greatest legacies of the era. In one of the more ironic displays of such cooptation, the Washington D.C. Lottery Board "celebrated the dream" of Martin Luther King by invoking his name to encourage more people to play the lottery, an institution which exploited poor people and one which King almost certainly would have found repugnant.

Perhaps the most notable example of this cultural attack on the sixties came in the Academy Award-winning movie *Forrest Gump* in 1994. Hailed for its technological breakthroughs and simple messages, *Gump* actually was a reactionary assault on the 1960s. Young and mentally slow, Forrest was born in segregationist Alabama, and his mother had to sleep with the school principal to get him enrolled into public school. His best friend, Jenny, was a negative symbol of the women's movement of the era; she was variously a hippie, a slut, a drug-user, a disco queen and, ultimately, an early victim of AIDS. An antiwar leader, a caricature of Abbie Hoffman, used the "f-word" frequently and had no respect for authority. Gump, though simple, always succeeded and became rich, simply by doing what he was told to do and not thinking about the rules governing society. The 1960s, the movie suggested, was a dangerous time and the true heroes of that generation were obedient and nonpolitical.

While such caricatures of the 1960s can be appealing and amusing, they present an ahistorical and inaccurate historical record of the era. The 1960s, for all its shortcomings, was a decade in which masses of Americans tried to claim, or reclaim, their democratic rights as

citizens, end a bloody war, create racial and gender equality, and liberate themselves from often-repressive values. Millions of people--crossing class, racial, and gender lines--opposed the war in Vietnam, creating the largest political movement in U.S. history. Others, frustrated by the limited promise and abortive reforms of liberalism, took to the streets and campuses to call for a new kind of politics, one in which people had a voice in the decisions affecting their lives. African-Americans, Women, Chicanos, Gays, environmentalists, and other groups demanded recognition and rights of their own, creating a new America in the process. And countless numbers challenged the traditional U.S. culture, using music, dress, love, film and other medium to protest what they saw as the dangerous conformity inherent in society.

And they collectively left a legacy that cannot be ignored into the 21st Century. Because of the Vietnam War, American citizens are now far more likely to question their government's behavior. No longer does the public accept the "my country right or wrong" principle. National leaders are expected to explain and justify their actions and national debates precede military action, as with the Gulf War. The government too is less likely to get involved in larger-level wars as a result of Vietnam. Since the 1970s, U.S. military action has been confined to smaller engagements in which American success against weak enemies such as Libya, Grenada, Panama, or Iraq was certain. Likewise, the domestic movements of the 1960s have left their mark. Despite the use of the term "liberal" as a political slur, many of the reforms of the 1960s--Medicare, Medicaid, welfare programs, environmental programs, safety agencies and others--are still around and functioning. Many of the student activists of that generation are still engaged today, serving as professors, politicians, community activists, and businessmen, bringing the consciousness of the 1960s to their workplaces. Blacks and Women, despite the prevalence of

racism and sexism in American society, have made great strides. African-Americans and females have served as big-city mayors, representatives, even senators and business leaders.

When Martin Luther King spoke out against Vietnam in April 1967, he could not have imagined how the next decades would play out. He simply saw the intersection of the war in Vietnam and the other movements of the decade. The war had come along at a time of hope and promise and shattered the national sense of hope. It had become a spectre that was haunting American life. In many ways it still is today. The historical legacy of Vietnam continues to transform American life. The war, the movement against it, the radicalization of politics on both the left and right, the inclusion of outside groups, the exclusion of inside groups, the emergence of new cultures all came about because of the whirlwind put into motion by the Vietnam War. The war exposed America's liberal world mission, made clear the contradictions between foreign intervention and domestic reform, energized millions, especially the young, to become involved in the affairs of their country, and led to distinct and often dramatic new social relations and ways of thinking. Because of Vietnam and the 1960s, America is a vastly different place.

1. In Timothy Miller, The Hippies and American Values (Knoxville, 1991), 10.
2. John Kenneth Galbraith and Nicole Salinger, Almost Everyone's Guide to Economics (Boston, 1978), 143-4.
3. See Marty Jezer, Abbie Hoffman, American Rebel (New Brunswick, NJ, 1993),
4. In Robert Cantwell, When We Were Good: The Folk Revival (Cambridge, MA., 1996) 261.
5. In Jon Wiener, Come Together: John Lennon in His Time (New York, 1984), 17.
6. Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America (New York, 1990), 421.
7. In Miller, Hippies and American Values, 65-7; in Miller, On Our Own, 206.
8. In Gitlin, Years of Hope, Days of Rage, 360.
9. In Anderson, The Movement and the '60s, 283-4.
10. Tom Frank, The Conquest of Cool (Chicago, 1997), 8, 30.
11. Bob Spitz, Barefoot in Babylon (New York, 1989), 203, 426.
12. In Frank, Conquest of Cool, 2-3.