1962

**Students for a Democratic Society deliver Port Huron Statement**

920

**CHAPTER 31 The Politics of Protest**

1970

On December 2, 1964, Mario Savio, a 20-year-old philosophy student at the University of California at Berkeley, stood before a supportive crowd at the school’s administration building. The massive “sit-in” demonstration was the climax of a month-long battle between school officials and students over unpopular campus policies. Facing the crowd, Savio urged them to continue pressuring school officials. In his speech he called the university a cold and heartless “machine” that deserved to be shut down.

“There’s a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you ... can’t even tacitly take part,” he declared. “And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels ... you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free the machine will be prevented from working at all.”

—quoted in *Decade of Shocks*

**The Student Movement and the Counterculture**

The 1960s was one of the most tumultuous and chaotic decades in United States history. The decade also gave birth to a conspicuous youth movement, which challenged the American political and social system and conventional middle-class values. Perhaps no other time in the nation’s history witnessed such protest.
The Roots of the Movement  The roots of the 1960s youth movement stretched back to the 1950s. In the decade after World War II, the nation’s economy boomed, and much of the country enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. Prosperity did not extend to all, however, and some, especially the artists and writers of the “beat” movement, had openly criticized American society. They believed it valued conformity over independence and financial gain over spiritual and social advancement. Meanwhile, such events as the growing nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union made many more of the nation’s youth uneasy about their future. Writer Todd Gitlin, who was a senior at the Bronx High School of Science in 1959, recalls the warning that the editors of his student yearbook delivered.

“In today’s atomic age . . . the flames of war would write finis not only to our civilization, but to our very existence. Mankind may find itself unable to rise again should it be consumed in a nuclear pyre of its own making. In the years to come, members of this class will bear an ever-increasing responsibility for the preservation of the heritage given us.”

—from The Sixties

Concern about the future led many young people to become more active in social causes, from the civil rights movement to President Kennedy’s Peace Corps. The emergence of the youth movement grew out of the huge numbers of people of the postwar “baby boom” generation. By 1970, 58.4 percent of the American population was 34 years old or younger. (By comparison, those 34 or younger in 2000 represented an estimated 48.9 percent.)

The early 1960s saw another phenomenon that fueled the youth movement—the rapid increase in enrollment at colleges throughout the nation. The economic boom of the 1950s led to a boom in higher education, since more families could afford to send their children to college. Between 1960 and 1966, enrollment in 4-year institutions rose from 3.1 million to almost 5 million students. College life empowered young people with a newfound sense of freedom and independence. It also allowed them to meet and bond with others who shared their feelings about society and fears about the future. It was on college campuses across the nation where the protest movements would rage the loudest.

Students for a Democratic Society  Some youths were concerned most about the injustices they saw in the country’s political and social system. In their view, a few wealthy elites controlled politics, and wealth itself was unfairly divided. These young people formed what came to be known as the New Left. (The “new” left differed from the “old” left of the 1930s, which had advocated socialism and communism.) A prominent organization of this group was the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). It defined its views in a 1962 declaration known as the Port Huron Statement. Written largely by Tom Hayden, editor of the University of Michigan’s student newspaper, the declaration called for an end to apathy and urged citizens to stop accepting a country run by big corporations and big government.

SDS groups focused on protesting the Vietnam War, but they also addressed such issues as poverty, campus regulations, nuclear power, and racism.
In 1968, for example, SDS leaders assisted in an eight-day occupation of several buildings at Columbia University in New York City to protest the administration’s plan to build a new gym in an area that served as a neighborhood park near Harlem.

Another group of protesters who captured the nation’s attention were members of the Free Speech Movement, led by Mario Savio and others at the University of California at Berkeley. The issue that sparked the movement was the university’s decision in the fall of 1964 to restrict students’ rights to distribute literature and to recruit volunteers for political causes on campus. The protesters, however, quickly targeted more general campus matters and drew in more and more supporters.

Like many college students, those at Berkeley were disgruntled with the practices at their university. Officials divided huge classes into sections taught by graduate students, while many professors claimed they were too busy with research to meet with students. Faceless administrators made rules that were not always easy to obey and imposed punishments for violations. Isolated in this impersonal environment, many Berkeley students found a purpose in the Free Speech Movement.

The struggle between school administrators and students peaked on December 2, 1964, with the sit-in and Savio’s famous speech at the administration building. Early the next morning, California Governor Pat Brown sent in 600 police officers to break up the demonstration. Police arrested more than 700 protesters.

The arrests set off a new and even larger protest movement. Within a few days, thousands of Berkeley students participated in a campus-wide strike, stopping classes for two days. Much of the faculty also voiced its support for the Free Speech Movement. In the face of this growing opposition, the administration gave in to the students’ demands shortly before the Christmas recess.

The following week, the Supreme Court validated the students’ First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and assembly on campus. In a unanimous vote, the Court upheld the section of the Civil Rights Act assuring these rights in places offering public accommodations, which, by definition, included college campuses. The Berkeley revolt was one of the earliest outbursts in a decade of campus turmoil. The tactics the protesters used there—abandoning classes and occupying buildings—would serve as a model for college demonstrators across the country.

The Counterculture

While a number of young Americans in the 1960s sought to challenge the system, others wanted to leave it and build their own society. Throughout the decade, thousands of mostly white youths turned away from their middle- and upper-class existence and created a new lifestyle—one that promoted the virtues of flamboyant dress, rock music, drug use, and free and independent living. With their alternative ways of life, these young men and women formed what became known as the counterculture and were commonly called “hippies.”

Hippie Culture

Originally, hippie culture represented a rebellion against the dominant culture in the United States. This included a rejection of Western civilization, of rationality, order, and the traditional values of the middle class. At its core, the counterculture held up a utopian ideal: the ideal of a society that was freer, closer to nature, and full of love, empathy, tolerance, and cooperation. Much of this was in reaction to the 1950s American stereotype of the man in the gray flannel suit who led a constricted and colorless life.
When the movement grew larger, many of the newcomers did not always understand these original ideas of the counterculture. For them, what mattered were the outward signs that defined the movement—long hair, Native American headbands, cowboy boots, long dresses, shabby jeans, and the use of drugs such as marijuana and LSD. Drug use, especially, came to be associated with the hippie culture.

Many hippies desired to literally drop out of society by leaving home and living together with other youths in communes—group living arrangements in which members shared everything and worked together. A number of hippies established communes in small and rural communities, while others lived together in parks or crowded apartments in the nation’s large cities. One of the most popular hippie destinations became San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district. By the mid-1960s, thousands of hippies had flocked there.

**New Religious Movements** In their rejection of materialism, many members of the counterculture embraced spirituality. This included a broad range of beliefs, from astrology and magic to Eastern religions and new forms of Christianity.

Many of the religious groups centered around authoritarian leaders. In these groups, the leader dominated others and controlled their lives, sometimes to the point of arranging marriages between members. Religion became the central experience in the believer’s life. The authoritarian figure was a sort of parent figure, and believers formed an extended family that took the place of the family into which a member had been born. This could lead to painful conflicts. Some parents accused religious sects of using mind-control methods; some attempted to recapture and “deprogram” their children.

Two new religious groups that attracted considerable attention beginning in the 1960s were the Unification Church and the Hare Krishna movement. Both were offshoots of established religions, and both came from abroad. Members of the Unification Church were popularly known as “Moonies,” after their Korean-born founder, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. He claimed to have had a vision in which Jesus told Moon that he was the next messiah and was charged with restoring the Kingdom of God on Earth. The Hare Krishnas traced their spiritual lineage to a Hindu sect that began in India in the 1400s and worshiped the god Krishna. In dress, diet, worship, and general style of living, Hare Krishnas tried to emulate these Hindu practitioners of another time and place.

**The Counterculture Declines** After a few years, the counterculture movement began to deteriorate. Some hippie communities in the cities soon turned into seedy and dangerous places where muggings and other criminal activity became all too frequent. The glamour and excitement of drug use soon waned, especially as more and more young people became addicted or died from overdoses. In addition, a number of the people involved in the movement had gotten older and moved on in life. Upon witnessing the decline of Haight-Ashbury, one writer dismissed the one-time booming urban commune as “the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community out of a social vacuum.” In the end, most of the young men and women of the counterculture, unable to establish an ideal community and unable to support themselves, gradually returned to mainstream society.

**Impact of the Counterculture**

In the long run, the counterculture did change American life in some ways. Over time, mainstream America accepted many of these changes.

**Fashion** The counterculture generation, as one observer of the 1960s noted, dressed in costumes rather than in occupational or class uniforms. The colorful, beaded, braided, patched, and fringed garments that both men and women wore turned the fashion industry upside down. The international fashion world took its cues from young men and women.

**Reading Check** Summarizing What were the core ideas of members of the counterculture?

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**New 1960s Words** During the 1960s, Americans coined a host of new words and phrases. The word *hippie*, used to describe members of the counterculture, probably originated from the 1930s term *hep*, for “those in the know.” Other people believe *hippie* may have evolved from the 1950s word *hipster*, which referred to members of the beatnik movement.

Hippies themselves introduced a few terms to the country. They often uttered the phrase *far out* to indicate anything that was very good or very bad. Individuals who rejected the free-living counterculture lifestyle were considered *straight* or *square*.
women on the street. As a result, men’s clothing became more colorful, and women’s clothing became more comfortable.

Protesters often expressed themselves with their clothing. The counterculture adopted military surplus attire not only because it was inexpensive, but also because it expressed rejection of materialist values and blurred the lines of social class. For the same reasons, clothing of another age was recycled, and worn-out clothing was repaired with patches. Ethnic clothing was popular for similar reasons. Beads and fringes imitated Native American costumes, while tie-dyed shirts borrowed techniques from India and Africa.

Perhaps the most potent symbol of the era was hair. A popular 1967 musical about the period was titled, fittingly, Hair. Long hair on a young man was the ultimate symbol of defiance. Slogans appeared, such as “Make America beautiful—give a hippie a haircut.” School officials debated the acceptable length of a student’s hair—could it curl over the collar or not? Once the initial shock wore off, however, longer hair on men and more individual clothing for both genders became generally accepted. What was once clothing of defiance was now mainstream.

**Art** During the 1960s, one art critic observed, the distinctions between traditional art and popular art, or **pop art**, dissolved. Pop art derived its subject matter from elements of popular culture, such as photographs, comic books, advertisements, and brand-name products. Artist Andy Warhol, for example, used images of famous people, such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, and repeated them over and over. Warhol also reproduced items such as cans of soup, making the pictures as realistic as possible. Roy Lichtenstein used frames from comic strips as his inspirations. He employed the bold primary colors of red, yellow, and black, and put words like **blam** and **pow** into his paintings in comic book fashion.

Pop artists expected these symbols of popular culture to carry some of the same meaning as they did in their original form. The artists sometimes referred to themselves as only the “agents” of the art and said it
was up to the observer to give meaning to the work and thus become part of it.

**Music and Dance**  Counter-culture musicians hoped that their music, rock ‘n’ roll, would be the means of toppling the establishment and reforming society. This did not happen because rock music was absorbed into the mainstream, where it brought material success worth billions of dollars to performers, promoters, and record companies.

One of the most famous rock groups, the **Beatles**, took the country by storm in 1964. “Beatlemania” swept the country, inspiring hundreds of other rock ‘n’ roll groups both in Great Britain and the United States.

Many of the new groups combined rock ‘n’ roll rhythms with lyrics that expressed the fears and hopes of the new generation and the widening rift between them and their parents. **Bob Dylan** provided these lyrics, as did the Beatles and many other musicians, while spirited performers like Janis Joplin made the songs come alive.

The use of electrically amplified instruments also drastically changed the sound and feel of the new music. One master of this new sound was **Jimi Hendrix**, a guitarist from Seattle. Hendrix lived overseas and achieved stardom only after returning to the United States with the influx of musicians from Great Britain. His innovative guitar playing continues to influence musicians today.

At festivals such as **Woodstock**, in upstate New York in August 1969, and Altamont, California, later that year, hundreds of thousands of people got together to celebrate the new music. Though the fast-paced, energetic beat of rock ‘n’ roll was made for dancing, the style of dancing had changed dramatically. Each person danced without a partner, surrounded by others who also danced alone—a perfect metaphor for the counterculture, which stressed individuality within the group.

Headline-grabbing events such as Woodstock made it difficult for the nation to ignore the youth movement. By this time, however, other groups in society were also raising their voices in protest. For example, many women began renewing their generations-old efforts for equality, hoping to expand upon the successes gained during the early 1900s.

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**History Through Art**

**Pop Art**  Artists like Roy Lichtenstein mocked certain aspects of American life by using common examples of commercial art, such as comics and advertisements. What statement is this piece of art making?

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**Reading Check**

**Evaluating** What lasting impact did the counterculture have on the nation?

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**Checking for Understanding**

1. Define: **counterculture**, **commune**.
2. Identify: **Port Huron Statement**, **Tom Hayden**, **Haight-Ashbury district**, **Jimi Hendrix**.
3. Summarize two legacies of the counterculture movement.

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**Critical Thinking**

5. **Contrasting**  How were hippies different from members of the New Left?
6. **Analyzing**  Why did the counterculture movement decline?
7. **Organizing**  Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the causes of the youth movement.

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**Analyzing Visuals**

8. **Analyzing Photographs**  Look closely at the photograph of a group of hippies and their bus on page 922. How does the bus itself represent values of the counterculture?

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**Writing About History**

9. **Descriptive Writing**  Imagine you are a journalist in the 1960s. Write an article in which you visit a commune and describe the hippie culture you see.