

The political effects of the vietnam war on 1960's pop culture

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Tie Die, JFK, The Beatles, Drugs, Peace, Love, Dr. Martin Luther King, Woodstock, Go-Go Boots, Civil Rights, and Vietnam. When we say any of these words we think of the 1960's. The 1960's were a landmark in history remembered for effecting popculture. What lead to such a dramatic change? In the 1950's the style was scarves, poodle skirts, and letter sweaters. The popularmusicwas about teenage boyfriends and girlfriends. Then there was the 1960's. Could we have foreseen that people would wear mini skirts? Could we have foreseen that women would burn their bras in protest? Could we have foreseen that music would take a huge turn toward lyrics of peace, drugs, and mainly rock and roll? Probably not. What could have happened that would change American pop culture so much?

There were many events that took place in the 1960's that had an affect on American citizens. The death of John F. Kennedy surprised and upset many Americans. However, theVietnam Warhad the most profound effect on American pop culture. The Vietnam War changed music, fashion, and overall attitudes. Because of the Vietnam War and the undertones of the civil rights movement, 1960's pop culture significantly impacted our nation in a way that will be remembered for many years to come.

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The Vietnam War still effects many people. Today, Post TraumaticStressSyndrome is commonly associated with veterans of the Vietnam War. (Berk 346) During the 1960's there was an Anti-War movement that evolved from theFreedom of SpeechMovement. This movement began on college campuses and spread cross-country. (Radical

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Times) The Antiwar Movement took place because people didn't understand why American soldiers were in Vietnam. People wanted the soldiers brought home. The Freedom of Speech Movement easily converted to the Antiwar Movement because of the similarity. People felt that this was not right and the issue was of such great importance that it needed to be addressed. I feel that the Antiwar Movement was successful and important because it did bring a lot of change to the nation. This change was both political and pop cultural. The Freedom of Speech Movement had limited success. In fact, the Antiwar Movement as well as the protests had a large effect on the ending of the Vietnam war. (Radical Times)

In conjunction with the Antiwar Movement was the Civil Rights Movement. This event is commonly associated with Dr. Martin Luther King. However, the movement initially began with Rosa Parks and her ability to stand up for what she wanted, a seat toward the front of the bus. (Radical Times) At the time of the Black Civil Rights Movement a group called the Black Panthers evolved. This group arose as a militant group of young black men led by H. Rap Brown who risked his life to register blacks to vote in 1966. (USA Today) The difference between these civil rights groups is that Martin Luther advocated power through non-violence, whereas the Black Panthers promoted violence as a means to gain political footholds. (USA Today) For the African

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American race there was a lot of momentum gained in the 1960's and there was a lot of ground made politically.

The impact of these movements was phenomenal. The Antiwar Movement changed the dress, the music, and the style of nearly all college campuses in the United States. When a person would walk past a college dormitory there would be peace signs hung in windows. (Radical Times) The statement made was seen across America. A wonderful example of the effects of the Antiwar Movement on society is shown in Forrest Gump. There is a scene in which the audience sees an anti protest. The people there epitomize the effect that this had on pop culture. The clothes they wore and the music they listened to exemplifies the profound influence this had on the nation.

The Civil Rights Movement is one that also made a lot of headway during the 1960's. The assassination of Martin Luther King had a profound effect on the American Society. This event impacted all races. Martin Luther King stood for the feeling of that time. His emphasis on peace was one that effected the entire nation. (Carroll 173) Martin Luther King Jr. is a symbol of harmony, human understanding, tolerance, unity, justice and brotherhood-for every generation. (Albright)

Now that we have explored some of the political events that took place in the 1960's, we will explore some major changes in pop culture and how those relate to the political events in depth. The Antiwar Movement had a significant influence on the pop culture of the 1960's. This effect was shown through both music and fashion. The term "flower children" emerged from

the anti war protesters. (Radical Times) They stood for peace love and harmony. They were the first to make tie die and hip huggers extremely

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popular. They also had a large influence on the " natural look". Women without bras or makeup and men with long hair and grown out facial hair. Prior to the antiwar movement, appearance was valued when one was neat and cleanly. (Walley)

The pop culture of the 1960's was changed through the antiwar movement and one of the facets of pop culture changed was music. The following lyrics are from a popular song about the antiwar movement. " Come on people now, smile on your brother, everybody get together, try to love one another right now." (Forrest Gump) Popular artists such as the Beatles, Cat Stevens, and even the Righteous Brothers wrote music that inspired antiwar protesters and became associated with them. Further in this paper there will be information on Woodstock, a musical and historical event associated with the Anti War movement. The Antiwar Movement was not the only political event to have an effect on pop culture. Although the impact from the Antiwar Movement is seen the most the civil rights movement did have an important role in the evolution of the 1960's pop culture.

The Black Civil Rights Movement did have an effect on American Society. The effect of this was not seen as much on pop culture, but it was there. The true effect is shown in the dramatic increase of popularity in rhythm and blues. Prior to rhythm and blues, jazz music was associated as " black music." It

wasn't played very much on the radio. However, in the 1960's more black artists emerged. The Black Civil Rights Movement heavily effected music. Toward the end of the 1960's African American

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styles emerged as popular. " Afros" were a common and popular hairstyle. (NetFirst) The music styles of Jimmy Hendrix as well as many other African American artists became known as legendary. (SixtiesMusic. com) Albeit, the civil rights movement and the political ground it gained, put African American styles of fashion and of music in the American pop culture arena.

As touched on before, the effect of politics (namely the Vietnam War) had a significant influence on the fashion of that time. A feeling of the need for freedom... of expression and speech swept over the nation. Because of this feeling, people expressed themselves not only through words of protest and actions of protest, but through their clothing. This was the countries way of expressing themselves without saying a word, but through what they wore. As shown in an analytic pop culture web site, " Fashion is never just about clothes, but attitude and expression as well. Up until about 1967, fashion had reflected a period of discover for youth; fun-loving, outrageous and colorful."(Sixtiespopdiary. -fashion)

So, what were these fashions that were about " attitude and expression?" Miniskirts (and even later micro skirts), caused moral outrage and were one of the first dramatic styles to come out in the 1960's. Later, a sloppy look became popular with T-shirts and sandals. Skintight pants also became

popular, even so as a unisex article. (Sixtiespopdiary-fashion) The world was changing as fast as the fashions. In a personal opinion, looking back on this time of a political whirlwind, fashion was just as confusing as the world was.

In this subject having to with politics and society, Woodstock is able to show the political influence on pop culture in one single event. In a mere 3 days,

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thousands of people and influential artists were able to almost spontaneously put on one of the most historically significant pop culture events ever. The hippie look was dominant. Rock and roll and music of expression were the dominant sounds. A feeling of freedom was dominant. In one event, the world expressed the feeling of an era. (Interview) Today, the world of pop culture hails this event by trying to repeat it. Much to the dismay of many, the event cannot be repeated. The later generation looks at the event and realizes that this event was one of expression without even knowing the political events of that time.

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair in August of 1969 remain a legend even today. The spontaneous event captured a generation's good feelings. Ironically, there were nearly as many Americans at Woodstock as there were in Vietnam. (Interview) Woodstock took place for 3 short days and there was a lot of rain. People didn't care about the rain, food, or bathrooms. " No one wanted to let the essence or the aura go. Halfway through an era of bad news, in the middle of a horrible war, barely a year after the wrenching, terrifying assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, an

entire, desperately wished-for era of good feeling was compressed into a single place and time. That compression produced a corresponding intensity of wonder and delight." (Interview) The reason for Woodstock is well understood. However, it amazes me that such a spontaneous event could have such an unbelievable turnout.

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Jimi Hendrix was one of the most influential musicians associated with Woodstock. It was there that he played his rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner." Jimi's rendition was considered a brutal insult in its time. It was said that it sounded like a "blasted

seizure of the national anthem." (Interview) However, today Hendrix's national anthem is popular. When Hendrix performed this there were approximately 30,000 people left at Woodstock. His performance was spontaneous. It was described as "... his great No to the war, to racism, to whatever you or he might think of and want gone. But then that discord shattered, and for more than four and half long, complex minutes Hendrix pursued each invisible crack in a vessel that had once been whole, feeling out and exploring and testing himself and the music against anguish, rage, fear, hate, love offered, and love refused. When he finished he had created an anthem that could never be summed up and that would never come to rest." (Interview)

In summary, because of the Vietnam War and the undertones of the civil rights movement, 1960's pop culture significantly impacted our nation in a

way that will be remembered for many years to come. Throughout the nineties, the hippie look became a popular style as a way of expressing ourselves. Popular artists have redone music from the sixties. For example, Natalie Merchant has recently redone the popular sixties hit "Peace Train." The movie Forrest Gump, which is a summary of both the political and pop culture America in the sixties, won best picture in 1994. Even today, the sixties are a political and pop cultural landmark for the nation.

Does this say that the sixties were a period of more turmoil and more change than other decades? Does this say that the fashion change more dramatically and rapidly than

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other decades? Personally, I feel this decade did. From an outlook of a person who did not live during that time or during the time of many other decades, that decade stands out far above many others. Many political and pop culture figures are remembered and recognized by all ages today. In this era, the politics and pop culture overlap. To think that politics affected Americans so much that politics changed people's perspectives is remarkable, even profound. The death of Kennedy and Martin Luther King had a devastating influence over an entire nation. Yet, everyone soon focused on that feeling of freedom and love. This roller coaster of emotions had a roller coaster of an affect. Has any other decade changed a nation so much and so fast?