

Cultural life in the 1960s



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Jackson. Anonymous US History May 2, 2003 The 1960s™ decade was an era of impacting change. Throughout the sixties new ideas and beneficial events took place.

White Americans began to expand their limitations and live new outgoing lives. While white families were prospering, African Americans were fighting for civil rights, seeking to be treated equally. The sixties was an experimental era of change influenced by fighting for civil rights and entertainment becoming a huge roll in the typical American™s lifestyle. During the 1960s™ Whites and African American did not receive the same rights. African Americans were treated poorly and unfairly. No laws or acts had yet been passed to grant whites and blacks equal rights. In 1954 The Brown vs. Board of Education ruling was created.

The ruling meant African Americans had, for the first time, a legal civil right to attend any public school. The Brown vs. Board of education decision gave legal support to these first black and white students who had the courage to integrate public schools. On Dec. 1, 1960, white students began a boycott when the first black students enrolled. Many parents kept their children at home rather than sending them to a class with black children.

Individual acts of defiance that gained attention in the fifties gathered tremendous support in the sixties when integrating not only schools but any public facility. By September 1961, thousands of African American and white protestors joined a sit-in movement fighting for civil rights. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a civil rights leader of the 1960s™ who lead by a highly effective method: Passive Resistance, or nonviolent civil disobedience.

King studied many of the famous methods of Mahatma Gandhi of India.

Passive Resistance requires great self-discipline and became a powerful tool for change. King raised the civil rights movement to high moral ground and kept it there. He forced people to focus on the issues of fairness and justice, jobs and freedom, rather than on fighting or fighting back. King's work gained national attention beginning with a Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, sparked by a black lady named Rosa Parks. Dr. King became the boycott's most visible spokesperson and helped achieve national attention and support for this cause.

The black community of Montgomery walked to work for almost a year of its boycott, refusing to ride the buses. Ultimately a law suit was filed forcing Montgomery to integrate its buses. Many Americans already believed in the constitution where all men are treated equal. However, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech televised across the nation inspired many blacks and whites to seek equality for all. In order to succeed, the civil rights movement had to win the heart of the country. It required the goodwill of American voters and the support of the federal government. In the summer of 1961, young black volunteers called Freedom Riders began to use nonviolent demonstrations to prick the conscience and raise the consciousness of many Americans.

These volunteers tested bus segregation in the south with a Freedom Ride Campaign. They harassed the South in racially integrated busses and challenged illegal "white only" bus stations. The Freedom Riders were attacked and harassed throughout their journey. They endured this suffrage to prove their cause. Since the Civil War, southerners had made literacy tests

an especially effective tool to keep African Americans from voting and sharing political power. Many civil rights leaders thought voting was the key that would unlock the handcuffs of racial segregation.

They reasoned that if African Americans were able to vote, they could receive political power in their own communities, state, and nation. Robert Moses joined forces with Allard Lowenstein, where the two men from Harvard and Stanford, decided to run a mock election called the Freedom Vote of 1963. `Around ninety-thousand blacks ??? voted??? in the pretend ??? freedom??? election in Mississippi, run along side the real vote. This illustrated that blacks would vote, if allowed. The Freedom Vote also hinted that the real election was not legitimate.

The next summer, Moses and Lowenstein worked to register blacks for legal voting. Freedom summer was not only designed to register more black voters, but, to show the country that African Americans in the South wanted to vote but faced great danger when they tried to do so. The decade of the 1960??™s began with African Americans working to put their court-won equal rights into practice across the country. It ended with increased political strength for black Americans, and a deeper exploration and affirmation of African American heritage and culture. Throughout the sixties, music and entertainment began to change drastically. New bands began to form while new types of entertainment began to form.

Watching television had become popular by the 60??™s. CBS dominated television during the decade, airing 13 of the most popular fifteen shows.

NBC enjoyed good rating with western Bonanza and Laugh-In, while ABC had a strong response to Bewitched.

All of the following shows amused, entertained, and continued to reflect a certain innocence. Most shows were family oriented entertainment with formula plots punctuated by commercials. Watching TV programs, was difficult to imagine that any Americans were discontent with their way of life. Each television show began to portray a certain satire. Laugh-In, starring Dan Rowan and Dick Martin had a five-year run starting in 1967.

It also used political humor to amuse audiences and highlighted social issues of the time. Although many of the shows were controversial, they were still primarily aimed towards a white middle class audience. African Americans rarely saw themselves reflected in these shows and there were virtually no colored people portrayed in family life. Music, in contrast to television, demonstrated the tremendous variety of cultural influences and styles that were actually available in the US. As the culture became dominated by the country??™s biggest demographic group, the baby boomer??™s favorite music exploded in variety. Rock ??? n??™ Roll became the most popular genre, but country, rock-a-billy, folk, blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, gospel, Motown, and California surfer music, all found air time and an audience, challenging conventions and often making older generations complain about the ??? noise.

??? Rock ??? n??™ Roll melded other genres into a sound that was vibrant and alive. New dances such as the Watusi, the Chicken, the Jerk, and the Pony??!all got kids out on the dance floor. All of these dances didn??™t hold

their popularity to the degree that the Twist did. Before the Twist could become a national dance craze, it had to win mainstream approval to be acceptable to the middle class.

Dick Clark of American Bandstand allowed this to all occur. His show featured famous artists such as Chubby Checker, Angelo Saxton, Hank Ballard, and Elvis Presley. Checker had taken Hank Ballard's, The Twist and turned it into a number one song in the nation. An international fad, one of the first connections of the international youth culture, the Twist could be done alongside a partner, in a group, or on one's own. Music, more than any other medium, was tying the youth of the world together.

The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other British rock groups listened to the black roots of American music and then brought it back to the US with a British twist. After Dick Clark-style Rock and Roll was becoming bland, the British invaded with their own high energy version. American teens were electrified. The Beatles combined distinct sounds of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, and others and shaped a sound that dominated the sixties with its creativity and style. They exploded into the international music world in 1961, causing a sensation called Beatlemania wherever they went. The group released eighteen record albums from 1963 to 1970.

They also starred in four action movies; A Hard Days Night, Help, Magical Mystery Tour, and Let it Be. The albums revealed their evolution through their exposure to drugs and the rewards of fame and fortune. The music of Rock groups reflected their greatest fans, the baby boomers.

The message of their music shifted as the counterculture became more revolutionary. The Beatles sang of the desire to change the world they shared with their generation but declared they wanted no part in violently tearing down the system. The music finale of the sixties was a rock festival held during the summer of 1969 outside a town near the Catskill Mountains, New York. A large crowd was expected to join on August 15th for several days of music. Close to half a million people showed up, and Woodstock Nation became the largest be-in of the decade. (O'Connor-109)

Woodstock was a party of coming together for the baby boomers. Crowds of counterculture youth flooded into the area, although most were relaxed and peaceful.

Traffic jams and rain became a burden, and instead of becoming angry and competitive, people shared with one another and enjoyed the music. Jimi Hendrix turned ordinary melodies into strange and powerful improvisations with unusual sound, trailblazing a new genre called Acid Rock. In spite of the overwhelming crowd, there were no riots, and only one accidental death. Helicopters were brought for ill people, and trucks of water came to care of the people's needs. These services aided for the several drug overdoses during the festival.

Woodstock Nation seemed a fitting climax to a decade that found its young people exploring alternative lifestyles. Many had tried to band together to end racial injustice and war, live in peace, and celebrate life. At Woodstock, they could demonstrate their communal values, reveal in their music, and give life to the Beatles' refrain, "all we are saying is give peace a

chance.??? The decade of the sixties changed through movements for civil rights and new forms of entertainment.

The decade began with African Americans working to put their court-won equal rights into practice across the country. It ended with increased political strength for black Americans, a deeper exploration and affirmation of African American heritage and culture. The sixties saw a change in attitudes about racial segregation. Television and music in the sixties also brought a new way of expressing feelings. Artists and actors were able to expand beyond the boundaries and create new standards for the entertainment business.

Ultimately, the sixties was tremendously impacted by new ??? revolutionary??? music and television, and the great civil rights leaders, groups, and movements.