

Swinging sixties: the civil rights movement and war in vietnam essay sample



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Prior to the era of the 1960s, the people were conventional in voicing their opinion and believed in conforming. The 1950s was a conservative era as well as a time of changes; the music and fashion of the decade reflected the cultural changes that were happening whilst still holding on to the social norms of the past (The People History: 50's Music. 2013). On the other hand, the decade of the 1960s presented social and political changes that had never been seen before. Fisher (1988: 3) claims that the "Swinging Sixties" was one of the most dramatic and provocative decades in history.

The 1960s was a time of upheaval in society, fashion, attitudes and, especially, music. The generation did not uphold the social norms of the past resulting in the sixties being an age of experiment. The 1960's generation was liberal and believed in reforming (Wikipedia: 1960s. 2013). This climate of change led many, particularly the young generation known as the "Baby Boomers," to challenge social norms and "normal" behavior. The Civil Rights Movement and the escalating war in Vietnam were the two greatest catalysts for social protest in the sixties (University of Virginia: The Civil Rights Movement. 009).

The ongoing and escalating war in Vietnam was the focus of many of the major protests during the sixties as its effects were felt throughout the world. The Vietnam War was a war fought between 1964 and 1975 on the ground in South Vietnam, bordering areas of Cambodia and Laos and in bombing runs over North Vietnam. Fighting on one side was an alliance of forces including the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea.

Fighting on the other side was an alliance of forces including the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the National Liberation Front, a communist-led, South Vietnamese guerrilla movement. At the time of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, United States military forces in Vietnam numbered less than 15, 000. Under the control of President Lyndon Johnson the numbers grew dramatically and by 1966 more than 500, 000 troops were positioned in the area.

Media reports from overseas became increasingly gruesome and television transmissions showed the deaths and destruction created by the relentless bombing campaigns of U. S. forces. Opposition to the war grew from many regions as the nation began to take a hard look at the United States' involvement in Vietnam. The feeling among the youth was that America was murdering innocent people for an unknown reason (Montaigne. 2008).

Furthermore, the youth were involved in the Civil Rights Movement which may have been the most emotionally charged movement of the sixties (University of Virginia: The Civil Rights Movement. 2009). Since the end of the Civil War many organizations had been created to promote the goals of racial justice and equality in America.

There was little consensus on how to promote equality on a national level. Groups such as the NAACP, CORE, and Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Council were created and supported peaceful methods of protest. The charismatic Dr. Martin Luther King, who was assassinated on 4 April 1968 by James Earl Ray, was the most influential and well-known of the black leaders that emerged in the sixties as he managed to create

change through non-violent means together with the power of speech (University of Virginia: The Civil Rights Movement. 009).

There were numerous marches, rallies, strikes, riots and confrontations with the police in order to call attention to the systematic discrimination against minorities that was prevalent in American society. In the midst of the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements, the young generation of the 1960s questioned authority and rejected their parents' values. They were eager to break free from morality and values imposed upon them. The youth wanted to live in a state of love, peace, and freedom (Montaigne. 2008).

As a result, they rebelled against society whose morals they held in disdain and began to revolt against the conservative norms of the time as well as remove themselves from mainstream liberalism. This created a counterculture that sparked a social revolution throughout much of the Western world. LINK In the fifties, there was an explicit breakaway movement into fashions that sparked out of the ideas of youth. The 1950s styles were in some ways different from in the 1930s and the 1940s. This was the era of mass-produced clothing and also the decade of a revival for couture tailored to fit perfectly.

Women wore feminine, charming clothes with bows, flounces and frills.

Dresses in the decade would often feature stylish ruffles or lace accents and were usually knee-length. Young women put on trousers that ranged from ankle length to just below the knee and the Rockers, today's bikers, expressed their dissatisfaction with the current situation by wearing jeans and leather jackets. It has been said that if fashion of the 1950s first inspired

individual identity through style, the sixties fully embraced and encouraged it (Ewing: 1974: 27).

The 1960s was considered to be all about individual expression, inspired by the 1950s, and clothing definitely reflected that (The People History: Fashion and Accessories of the 1960's. 2013). During the sixties, the economic boom that began during the previous decade continued for the most part. With more people benefiting from wealth and the culture moving further away from the idea of being conservative, the way a lot of people interacted with fashion began to change.

Fewer people needed to, or even wanted to make their own clothes and the emergence of even more commercial fashion opportunities meant that using clothing as a status symbol was no longer confined to the wealthiest. Mary Quant, a Mod fashion designer, said, " Snobbery has gone out of fashion and in our shops you will find duchesses jostling with typists to buy the same dresses. " Fashion could now be used to distinguish between levels within the middle class and even within the poorest classes in the United States.

Although it was invented earlier, television dominated the 1960s. As technological advances made manufacturing easier and cheaper and as the middle class population and income grew, there was a sharp rise in the number of households that owned a television. This had a major influence on what people were exposed to, including fashion trends. With globalization and the massive changes to society occurring during the 60s, fashion, too, changed to cope with the differences.

It was a decade that broke many fashion traditions, mirroring social movements during the period. 1960s fashion, in general, set the mode for the rest of the century as it became marketed mainly to young people. Culture and society became more casual. Much of the clothing could overlap the line between formal and casual and clothing could be mixed and matched to make many outfits for different occasions. Fashion had never been so diverse and fast changing as the young adopted new, daring styles made from exciting materials. What was acceptable in terms of personal fashion changed quickly and often.

Clothing also reflected new freedom that people had especially after the introduction of contraceptive pill. Women's clothes became more revealing and carefree and the skirt lengths became shorter. This is clear as the bikini finally came into fashion in 1963 after being featured in the film *Beach Party* and became common swimming attire. Additionally, in 1969 transparent clothes were worn with nothing or next to nothing under them. In the early-to-mid-1960s, the London Modernists known as the Mods were shaping and defining popular fashion for young, British men.

It was one of the first modern cultural movements to emphasize special fashions for men and normalize men's interest in current fashions. Mary Quant is one of the people credited with creating the iconic mini-skirt of the mid-sixties that became the trend; some say that this introduction changed fashion of the 1960s forever (The People History: Fashion and Accessories of the 1960's. 2013). This could be due to the fact that it had nothing in common with past fashion motivation.

As a reaction to the Mod-look there were others who rejected that specific style and embraced the Rock 'n' Roll style. Rockers" in Britain and "Greasers" and "Jocks" in the United States rejected this style and rebelled in their fashion choices by focusing on leather and jeans or a look rooted in athletics and a clean-cut style as they did in the previous decade. In addition, at the opposite end of the consumer fashion spectrum from the Mods were the Hippies and their unique style. Hippie fashion represented a rebellion against consumerism and the clothes and accessories were often handmade or purchased from flea markets.

The conventional rules for presenting oneself were completely shunned and men wore long, unkempt beards with their long hair. Hippie women rejected make-up and revolted against the restricting shape-wear garments such as girdles, padded bras, nylons and controllers that had been considered the norm for the previous decades. A supporting woman stated, " We, women, have nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, we have everything to be proud of. And every women should be proud to display the natural form of her body" (Sunday Times: 2006: 253). This led to the abandon of bras; some women burnt their bras and girdles in a blow for freedom.

Overall, the fashion of the hippie counterculture demonstrated what they considered to be a more natural look that looked to turn pre-conceived beliefs around and have the mainstream culture questioning their own fashion rules (Wikipedia: 1960s in fashion. 2013). High fashion in the sixties would have been nothing without the iconic models that showed off new styles and inspired some designers and artists (Ewing: 1974: 75). In the opinion of some, many of the first models to be considered " supermodels" <https://assignbuster.com/swinging-sixties-the-civil-rights-movement-and-war-in-vietnam-essay-sample/>

came out of this decade (The People History: Fashion and Accessories of the 1960's. 013).

Some examples of famous models from the 1960s include Twiggy, Lauren Hutton, Jean Shrimpton and Naomi Sims. One of the most important fashion faces to come out of the sixties has to be Twiggy whose thin and boyish body, cropped, genderless hair and massive eyelashes made her a fashion icon in London and internationally. Twiggy popularized very short hairstyles towards the second half of the decade which was significant as short hairstyles were considered shocking up until then. Twiggy's thin body and short hair were perfect for designers to try new sexless and slimmer styles of clothing.

Unfortunately, many believe this change in fashion and the emphasis on extreme thinness was caused by extremely thin models that came out of the decade and new styles of clothes made to fit a thinner frame; it has been said that it all contributed to an increase of body image issues and eating disorders for youth since then and are prevalent in our modern society (Wikipedia: Twiggy. 2013). Music became important to the fashions of the 1960s. Many of the most popular genres were associated with specific fashion trends that emerged at the same time for example Mod to British Invasion as well as Hippies to Psychedelic and Folk Rock.

Music fans took fashion cues from their favorite artists in the same way television viewers looked for trends in their most loved programs. Waves of similarly dressed people would show up at concerts and festivals, bonding in the commonality of their individual fashion sense. Disco music and dance

music also influenced dresses with slender lines, flowing skirts and the shimmering fabrics that would look best in a nightclub. The 1950's was a time of changes and the music of the decade both reflected the cultural changes that were happening while still holding on to the societal norms of the past (The People History: 50's Music. 013).

Following the detrimental effects of World War II, the United States was about to embark on a musical journey that would change the face of music for decades to come (The People History: 50's Music. 2013). Racial tensions were being strained with the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement and music reflected many of those tensions. Rhythm & Blues and Rock 'n' Roll popularized "black" music and many African-American musicians rose to prominence and enjoyed success; although, while some were able to obtain the benefits of their work, many others were forgotten or denied access to audiences through segregation.

A lot of people believe that during the fifties many of the white artists stole music from African-Americans and capitalized on it for their own benefit in a way that the original artists could not. A perfect example of this happening is when Pat Boone was made to cover Little Richard's song " Tutti Frutti" and Boone's version topped higher on the charts, while considered by many to be the inferior version of the song. Others believe that the popularization of R&B and Rock 'n' Roll only helped to bridge the gap between black people and white people and further the Civil Rights Movement (The People History: 50's Music. 013).

Elvis Presley is thought to be the “ King of Rock ‘ n’ Roll” by many as he epitomized the Rock ‘ n’ Roll style and was the first rock symbol of teenage rebellion in the 1950’s. He characterized the sense of rebellion igniting the youth with his pelvic movement that alarmed parents who thought it was obscene as it was a highly-suggestive body movement. While Elvis is largely responsible for the popularization of rock music, it is important to remember the original African-American artists who created the genre and were pushed out of the rock scene such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry and The Coasters.

Music 1960s: Either way, this decade was a time of innovation that helped to influence everything that we listen to on the radio today. In 1963 and the years to follow, a number of social influences changed what popular music was and gave birth to the diversity that we experience with music today (The People History: 60’s Music. 2013). Music provided a support during the turbulent times of the Sixties. The music reflected the emotion of the youth. It became an outlet for teenagers to express themselves and voice their concerns about society.

Artists such as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan provided a soundtrack to the prevalent atmosphere of change and positivity. The rise of counterculture movement, particularly among the youth, created a market for Rock, Soul, Pop, Reggae and Blues Music. Sixties’ music changed the direction of popular music and America as a whole (Ginbson, P. & Norris, P. & Alcock, P: 1992: 112). The “ British Invasion” also began around 1963 with the arrival of The Beatles on the music scene and the type of intense fandom that followed them would change the way people would view and interact with music and musicians forever. Shaw: 1970: 58)

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The “ British Invasion” is the name given to the period of time in the early to mid-1960’s, during which many British Rock bands and Pop artists found mainstream success in the United States and worldwide. The Beatles were the most important and influential pop group of the decade and left an astonishing transformation in popular music (Ward, B. 2009). It has been said that no group has so radically transformed the sound of Rock ‘ n’ Roll. They were the first bands to write their own music and lyrics.

Their lyrics made a noteworthy impact on music and they sang openly about love, life, fighting for freedom and drugs, personal affairs that had never been sung about. They made rock respectable in that they gave adults an image of the music they could accept - white, well-groomed, well-spoken and charming. The Beatles were influenced by India and the generation opened their ears to African black soul and blues. Beatles used the sitar and other Indian instruments such as the tamboura and the tablas. These instruments became regular features in music.

The Beatles also let psychedelic influence their music which is clear in their song “ Norwegian Wood” as it uses a trance-like musical background and ambiguous, dreamlike imagery. The Beatles wrote the song “ Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” as a tribute to psychedelic effects of LSD. The Beatles often moved into new areas, musically and lyrically. They have led rock into new musical channels, promoting an interest in new instruments, new styles, new forms and now sounds that have given rise to different forms of rock.

When The Beatles hit international fame in 1963, the Rolling Stones were right on their heels. The longest performing rock band of all time, the Rolling

Stones have greatly influenced Rock ' n' Roll throughout the decades. The Rolling Stones acquired an image of sex, drugs, and wild behavior, quickly put them in line for the title of the group parents hated most. Their musical attitude, which was a mixture of rebellion and disrespect using guitars, tribal drums, forceful harmonicas and sexually tensed vocals, seduced the young and alarmed the old.

The Rolling Stones became the focus of the youth rebellion; they played black music to young, white audiences. Protests and demonstrations were the order of the day. Musicians often attended these protests and their songs illustrate this. The Rolling Stones song " Street Fighting Man" is inspired by the protests taking place in London that The Rolling Stones' lead singer, Mick Jagger, had attended. While Rock ' n' Roll music entered the popular music spectrum in the 1950s, rock music really came into its own in the 1960s.

Rock became a medium for political statements in 1967. It became a weapon wielded by the youth culture against the establishment. Rock music was building a bridge across the racial divide. Rock music dominated the popular music scene during the decade and as the genre grew and changed, many diverse and new subgenres emerged, all tied to original rock but each with their own unique style and purpose. These specific subgenres also had varying levels of popularity throughout the decade and many are still popular today.