

# The 1960s: An Era of Social Change

by Irma Bocard

## Introduction

Camelot and Vietnam, Martin Luther King Jr., the New frontier and the Great Society were the focus of this decade in the United States. The music- songs like "I Want to Hold Your Hand", and "Imagine" and the Beatles were all a part of this exciting decade. The images and events of the 1960s were linked to the events and trends of the forties and fifties. If we take a look at our society today, then we can see the shadows and influences of the past which exist today and influence the present. For example, civil rights became a national priority in the 1960s, although this particular issue began in the decade of the 1950s. The development of the microchip revolutionized the computer industry and started us on our present course being on the information super highway by the ever-approaching twenty-first century.

Similarly, the Cold War continued to drive America's foreign policy. After the anti-colonial forces in French Indo-China defeated the French in 1954, the United States supported South Vietnam over Ho Chi Minh's communist government in the North. By 1965, President Lyndon Johnson had committed the U.S. troops to the struggle, and the war steadily increased as the decade wore on and the war seemed ceaseless.

By the middle of the decade, 1965, many Americans wanted the troops home. However a majority of Americans supported the war until 1968. The war had taken a disastrous toll on the lives of the young men involved in the war. Support of the public began to drop in 1968. After the Tet, fewer than half approved of America's involvement in South East Asia. Actually President Nixon was reducing U.S. troop strength by 1970, but war was still going on and, in some cases, being intensified. There were conflicts on college campuses, a widening gap between college age baby boomers and their parents. This unit will have a focus on the issues between parents and students/children which created the Generation gap.

The 1960s were the high point of the civil rights movement, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There were marches, freedom rides, voter registration drives, and sit-ins, all of which demonstrated the need for effective legislation which led to the passage of the federal Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This unit will present the idea that the sixties were fascinating, violent, and a decade of turmoil.

This unit on the 1960s will encompass specifically the following:

- I. An Era of Social change
- II. New Frontier And the great Society
- III. Civil Rights
- IV. Vietnam War Years
- V. Pop Culture of the 1960s
- VI. The Women's Movement

Objectives:

I have six objectives for this unit, which will give the student a sweeping view of the 1960s. They are:

1. To get students involved and informed in and about the culture of the 1960s so that they may form creative opinions about the 1960s. With knowledge, students are able to come up with some interesting and insightful opinions and deep thoughts about particular issues.
2. To get students to describe the advances in the Civil Rights movement made during the Kennedy and Johnson years. These two Presidents had a profound effect on the outcome of the struggles for first class citizenship for blacks and other minorities
3. To get students to appreciate the sacrifices made by those involved in the struggles for equal rights in the 1960s, which had the effect of and translated into a much better life for them today.
4. To help the students to become informed about why Vietnam was a long unpopular War.
5. To get students to identify the forces that created the women's rights movement and discuss some of its aspects, successes, and ongoing influences today.
6. To get students to define the language of the pop culture of the sixties, its values, beliefs, attitudes, and music.

Strategies

Primary sources will be very important in the teaching of this unit.

The issues we will be discussing are those that were reported daily in the mass media. Student will read at least two sources each week of this unit. This material will be discussed and summarized by the student with guidance by the teacher. The background information will be taken from the United States history book which we will be presently studying. Lectures, by the teacher, the class will get involved in role playing, and personalities from the school's faculty and the community will be invited to share their experiences of the sixties. A written quiz or test will be given, on Friday of each week, the test will cover the major points in the week's discussion where students will demonstrate what they have learned, as a result of class lectures and discussions. Most questions will allow for some critical thinking, and formations of good, sound opinions about what we have studied. During the final week, students will be asked to dress in the sixties style and to present a paper on one aspect of the sixties which they would have liked to participate in or one aspect of the 1960s which they found to be particularly disheartening.

## The New Frontier

This week's work will focus on the election of President Kennedy and his programs for the nation. The personality of the President Kennedy and his family had much to do with his eventual election. The Kennedys were a wealthy family from Massachusetts, all of them vigorous, energetic, and cool looking. He was Catholic, but the problem was certainly not insurmountable. Kennedy was young and had a beautiful wife, who caught the imagination of this nation. They looked the part!

We will discuss how the 1960 television debates helped Kennedy and hurt Richard Nixon. We will discuss the impact that television can have on an election.

We will also take a look at the economic policies of the New Frontier legislation; the increase in the minimum wage and the increased of government expenditures for housing for the poor. The space program will also be discussed. There were some weaknesses and failures of the short, Kennedy years. We will discuss the assassination of the President by Oswald and the conspiracy theories.

As an exercise to get into the 1960s, the students will interview their parents, who probably grew up in the 1960s, to get their impressions of this decade of social change.

1. How did television influence the debate and the final outcome of the 1960 Presidential election?
2. What were the goals of Kennedy's New Frontier?
3. What were the plans of the administration for America's space program?
4. What were President Kennedy's foreign policy goals? Discuss the Bay of Pigs and military intervention in Cuba (by teacher).
5. How did the Kennedy administration impact the civil rights movement?

## The Civil Rights Movement

After the Civil War, Blacks were given their citizenship by the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and Black males the right to vote as provided by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Blacks became active in the political arena for a short time, but after 1877 Black rights became a thing of the past as the South was "redeemed" by racist Whites. It became increasingly difficult for Blacks to exercise their rights as provided by the Constitution.

African-Americans have always heard their nation's call to arms in its fight against tyranny, yet the rights that were fought for were always for someone else, the Anglo Saxon. Whites represented home, mom, and apple pie. Blacks, after having been used and cast aside, decided that their rights were worth fighting, for and dying for, if need be.

Beginning in the 1950s, African Americans began using the sit-in to protest segregation. At these sit-ins, activists would sit at lunch counters in segregated restaurants and, when they were refused service, they simply stayed where they were. Some sit-ins were effective, but they were often met with violence, and the protesters were placed in jail. Other more effective forms of protest followed such as the boycott, marches, picketing etc., and eventually they were effective. There were many Black Americans who died, giving up there all for the freedom we enjoy today as Black Americans.

### Who are these Americans?

1. W.E.B. DuBois
2. Medgar Evers
3. Fannie Lou Hamer
4. James Hicks
5. Martin Luther King Jr.
6. Thurgood Marshall
7. Bob Moses
8. Roy Wilkins
9. Malcolm X
10. Jesse Jackson
11. Andrew Young
12. Rosa Parks

## The Great Society

At the time Lyndon B. Johnson became President of the United States, the American public had gone through an awful shock, with the assassination of President John Kennedy. Kennedy's presidency seemed to hold such promise. But Camelot was no more and the new American President had to move the country forward.

President Johnson had great political skills, which he put to good use in his efforts to get the legislation that President Kennedy had sent to the Congress, passed. Part of the reason for the passage of this legislation had to do with the country's reactions to the death of President Kennedy.

President Johnson's programs included working for improved education and schools, medical care for the elderly and to end poverty. The President persuaded Congress to vote for Medicare and Medicaid.

There were during the decade of the 1960s, some very important Supreme Court cases that helped to shape the American Society. We will discuss the following cases: Mapp v. Ohio (1961); Gideon v. Wainwright (1963); Escobedo v. Illinois (1964) and Miranda v. Arizona (1966)

## The Vietnam War

To stop the spread of Communism was the goal of the Kennedy Administration in its attempt to aid the South Vietnamese. He supported the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. At first only military advisors were sent to aid the South Vietnamese, but gradually this all changed. The Vietnam War was the most undesirable war America ever got itself involved in and Americans did not hesitate to protest.

Vietnam had numerous connections with other Eurasian countries and peoples. The conflicts were shrouded in antiquity. These were old fights, and conflicts from decades before that still brought bitter conflicts that increased as the years rolled into new decades. They were connected to France, China, to pro-American sentiments and anti-Vietnam sentiments. With this new conflict, with a divided Vietnam the American Government felt that it had to get involved.

As the war escalated, America's aid was not enough. The North Vietnamese gained control of more and more territory. President Johnson sent more and more troops to help in the defense of the South Vietnamese. Many Americans had no real idea why the United States was involved. I remember discussing the Vietnamese War in college, and one point was made by one of my fellow students, because she did not really know why we were involved, Why don't we allow those people to plant their rice patties and eat their bowls of rice in peace, because they don't want us in their country and we don't want to be there. "The Vietnam War seemed endless. It was the longest war and the least successful war in American history." (America Pathways To The Present; Guide: pp, Ch 3 1)

In our discussion of the Vietnam War we will focus on:

- (a) Reasons for United States involvement
- (b) Protest on college campuses
- (c) Young men who evaded the draft
- (d) Celebrity protest
- (f) Impact of the war on the Black community in the United States
- (g) The end of the war

## The Women's Movement

Before American Women received the right to vote, they were active in the pursuit of this right. There were those who took to the streets with signs in hand, demanding the right to vote. The women's rights movement did not have the support of all women, even some women thought that

women were asking for too much. The women's rights movement of the sixties was a different thing. There were those women who still thought that women were trying, to vacate the place set aside for them and this was unamerican.

The time was right and ripe for the women's movement of the sixties. Women had been in their place, for sometime and it was about time that they became more vocal. Betty Friedan book The Feminine Mystique, in 1963 condemned what she called the "domestic captivity of women." Women were ready to break out of the mold of being just "housewives." The status of women began to change in the American Society. Women's liberation, feminism became all the rage and being a woman meant more than it had in the past.

## Survey

1. What are women's positions or roles in today's society?
2. Do women have equal rights in the 1990s?
3. Are women given the same opportunities for jobs, careers, and education as men? If not explain.
4. Are women paid the same as men for equal work? Explain.
5. Are women treated the same as men where you work? Explain.
6. Have any women complained of sexual harassment? If so, explain.
7. How are women paid in professional sports in comparison to men?
8. Can you name any female currently holding political positions?

Review Worksheet:

Directions : Unscramble the following words.

1. n i s t i s
2. n l a x k u l u k
3. n t o I a I n I m r I d e s
4. s g t n h I g t I o r u
5. s t o i r e c a r
6. r e w o p k c a I b

Describe a Sit-in.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

The Civil Rights Movement

Review Worksheet:

- \_\_\_ Jesse Jackson
- \_\_\_ CORE
- \_\_\_ SCLC
- \_\_\_ Rosa Parks
- \_\_\_ freedom fighters
- \_\_\_ Stokely Carmichael
- \_\_\_ Fannie Lou Hamer
- \_\_\_ sit-ins
- \_\_\_ Civil Rights Act 1964
- \_\_\_ Elijah Muhammad
- \_\_\_ Malcolm X
- \_\_\_ Governor George Wallace
- \_\_\_ Martin Luther King
- \_\_\_ Klu Klux Klan
- \_\_\_ SNCC

\_\_\_ W.E.B. Du Bois

\_\_\_ James Earl Ray

\_\_\_ James Meredith

\_\_\_ Voting Rights Act 1965

\_\_\_ James Baldwin

(a) coins the phrase "black power"

(b) convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King

(c) activists sat peacefully and refused to move if they were not served at a lunch counter

(d) group dedicated to the harassment of Blacks, Asians, Mexicans, Jews and Catholics mainly in the South

(e) A Harvard -educated historian and early civil rights proponent, founder of the Niagara Movement

(f) grand wizard of the KKK

(g) founded the SCLC in 1957; believer in Gandhlian non-violence

(h) was jailed after refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger

(i) Black and white civil rights activists who traveled together on interstate buses throughout the south organized Operation PUSH and the Rainbow Coalition

(k) a powerful orator and critical thinker; Nation of Islam leading, spokesman

(l) legislation enacted by Congress, banning, segregation in public facilities as well as racial discrimination

(m) leader of the Nation of Islam

(n) nullified the local laws which discouraged Black Southerners from registering to vote

(o) governor of Alabama from 1963 to 1967; notorious foe of the Civil Rights Movement

(p) African-American writer who wrote of the ghetto of Harlem it "caged me like an animal" (q) Southern Christian Leadership Conference

(r) In 1962 became the first African American to enter the University of Mississippi

(s) Congress of Racial Equality

(t) Student Nonviolent Coordinating, Committee

(u) One of the few African-Americans to successfully register to vote after passing a literacy test