

years later when several were charged with criminal activity and sentenced to prison terms.

THE COUNTERCULTURE

The counterculture paralleled and overlapped the political New Left. It was the counterpart in the realms of taste, behavior, and social values, to the political radicalism of the decade. It represented a revolt against the conservative ethical and cultural values that remained in place as the 1960s began.

During the previous decade, as we have seen, despite the public's overall conformity, a thin layer of dissenters, the beats, had defied the predominant conventional values of the day. Counter culture devotees, called hippies, borrowed from the beats and then went beyond them. Hippies dressed in colorful castoffs often accessorized with flowers and tattoos. They smoked marijuana (pot) like their predecessors, but their defining drug was lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), a chemical that produced powerful hallucinatory visions. LSD altered consciousness in seemingly wondrous ways, making the everyday world appear dull and tasteless. Many hippies were followers of Timothy Leary, a former Harvard professor of psychology. Leary made a religion of LSD and the "psychedelic" experience. Seeking to transform the world, he advised his disciples to "turn on, tune in, drop out." Abandon the "square" world of pointless striving and of "linear" thinking, he said, and access the inner world, the spiritual world, within their heads. Reject "civilization"; make contact with the primitive.

Haight-Ashbury

Every campus and every city low-rent district had its contingent of hippies. But none reached the critical mass of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. There, beginning in 1966, clusters of young counterculture acolytes created a community in a district already occupied by artists, students, and bohemians. "The Haight" was anchored by a number of stores that specialized in props for the hippie way of life: occult books, pot-smoking apparatus, incense, and psychedelic posters. Many had colorful names: the Blushing Peony, Far Fetched foods, the Print Mint, the Drog [sic] Store. Its population was fluid. Many of the young hippies were day-trippers from the Bay Area; others were more permanent residents. All were attracted by the availability of drugs—LSD, Marijuana, Speed, and others—and by the relatively tolerant attitudes of the police and adult residents. In 1967 the Haight became the magnet for hippies from all over the country. During "the Summer of Love" thousands of young men and women descended on the Haight expecting to find a preview of the countercultural utopia that

would some day prevail through the entire nation. The media were intrigued by the Summer of Love and reported on it extensively. The Haight became a tourist attraction plied by tour buses full of "squares" intrigued by the hippie phenomenon.

In fact most of the residents were disappointed with their experience. Many of the young hippies were exploited by drug dealers and sexual predators. "Bad trips" proved as common as ecstasy, and sexual diseases, encouraged by permissiveness and bad hygiene, sent many to hospitals. By the end of the summer many resident began to jump ship and leave for counterculture communes in northern California or in the desert regions of the Southwest. The hippie culture did not abruptly disappear, however. It continued to exert its appeal to the young and to older people as well, who found the hippie ethic liberating. Several interesting movies were inspired by the counterculture phenomenon. *Easy Rider*, starring Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, was a road movie about two long-haired, hippiesh drug dealers, sympathetically portrayed, who set out on their motorcycles from California to see the country. They visit a hippie commune in New Mexico and finally reach the French Quarter in New Orleans, where they have a profound psychedelic experience. On the way home they are waylaid and murdered by some southern "rednecks" who take an instant dislike to their looks and the liberated values they represent. Another interesting counterculture movie was the comedy *I Love You Alice B. Toklas* with Peter Sellers. Sellers plays a square Los Angeles lawyer who inadvertently eats some LSD-laced brownies and has his perceptions altered. He abandons his up-tight existence and falls in love with a hippie girl wearing love beads, an Indian head-band, sandals, and a flower tattoo.

Rock and the Counterculture

The counterculture message was amplified and disseminated by rock music. The Beatles, a British group whose music was already known in America from recordings, first visited the United States in 1964 to an outpouring of adulation by millions of teenagers. With their "mod" Edwardian clothes and long hair, they offended many adults. To the young, however, perhaps for that very reason, their music, their lyrics, their life styles, and their personas seemed irresistible. They conveyed a powerful message to the young. As one young woman declared: "It seemed to me the Beatles had the kind of freedom I wanted: No rules. . . ." Another declared: "I liked their independence and sexuality and wanted these things for myself." Eventually the "Fab Four" would covertly endorse LSD in their song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds."

In the San Francisco Bay Area "acid's" connection with rock music was even more explicit. Janis Joplin, a tortured, self-doubting young woman of immense musical talent, became a key performer in the San Francisco "acid"

rock scene with Big Brother and the Holding Company. Her gravelly, almost orgiastic delivery resonated with the counterculture young. Her record "Me and Bobby McGee" became a number one "single," but unfortunately by the time it did the troubled young performer was already dead of an excess of drugs and whiskey.

Wide diffusion of the acid rock sensibility came through such musical groups as the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, the Fugs, Country Joe and the Fish, and others. These performed to wildly cheering audiences of young people at Fillmore Auditorium and other Bay Area concert halls and were marked by flashing strobe lights and heavy LSD consumption that made them seem like psychedelic saturnalias. Beginning in 1967 Rock bands, "acid" and otherwise, began to hold massive festivals, successive days of music and "grooving" in open fields that resembled the religious camp meetings of an earlier century. In 1969 the festivals reached their apogee at Woodstock, an immense gathering of hippie "clans"—young rebels, and counterculture hangers-on—at Max Yasgur's farm in upstate New York. There were massive traffic jams on the way to the festival, and it rained during much of the conclave. Many attenders felt they were ripped off by the promoters; some could not hear the music. But many who came found it a liberating experience, where they could take drugs, indulge in casual sex, and feel at one with the universe. In later years the young people of this decade would sometimes be referred to as the Woodstock Generation.

The Sexual Revolution

Hippies were the beneficiaries—or the victims—of a sexual revolution that began in the 1940s and came to a crescendo during the 1960s. In 1949 Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist at Indiana University, published an influential book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* that discussed men's sexual lives with a frankness seldom encountered before. We now know the work was badly flawed by Kinsey's own personal biases and by his unscientific interview approach, but at the time his book seemed a revealing probe that showed American males as very active and very imaginative in their sexual expression. It also suggested that homosexual behavior was more widespread than commonly believed. During the 1950s the growing sexual freedom was also expressed through publisher Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*, a "girlie" magazine with pictures of alluring young women, bare above the waist, that aggressively promoted a hedonistic, pleasure-oriented way of life. Responding to the changing mood, the federal courts, in the name of First Amendment free-speech rights, began to strike down local obscenity laws aimed at "dirty books." Before long underground classics like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with esthetic or other "redeeming social value," began to appear on bookstore shelves.



Woodstock brought out the informality of its participants—as this parking lot scene suggests. (Charles Gatewood/Pearson Education/Prentice Hall College)

These were soon followed by a flood of outright pornography that displayed no "redeeming social value" at all. Meanwhile, in 1968, Hollywood chucked its self-censorship system, the long-standing "production code," and adopted a rating scheme that included an "R" category of movies allowing nudity and bad language and an "X" rating that permitted near pornography. Once the taboo was broken independent producers turned out hundreds of blatantly pornographic films that played in special theaters catering to "adult" viewers.

The Sexual Revolution undoubtedly had roots in the loosening restraints of authority and tradition. But it also reflected medical progress. Sexual behavior in the past had been constrained not only by religion and traditional moral values, but also by fear of pregnancy and disease. By the 1960s both of these fears had subsided. As for disease, it had always been a hazard of sex outside of marriage. Venereal infections—syphilis and gonorrhea—had been difficult to avoid as penalties of sexual permissiveness. With the widespread use of penicillin and other antibiotics during the 1950s, these afflictions were easily treated. The problems of pregnancy also abated. In 1960 the first "birth control" pill, to prevent contraception, was marketed. By 1968 more than six million American women were taking it. Most were married women, but many were also young, dating women who felt relieved of the danger of unwanted pregnancies as never before. In the 1960s, then,

antibiotics and the "Pill" together created a brief window of time—before the rise of AIDS, genital herpes, and other venereal infections—during which the sexually adventuresome felt they could ignore the physical dangers of sexual freedom.

For whatever reason, mass sexual behavior changed dramatically, especially among the young, during the 1960s. Words like chastity, virginity, continence, and celibacy came to seem archaic. Each year the average age of the first sexual experience declined among Americans. At the same time the average number of sexual partners increased and the number of children born to unwedded parents soared so that "illegitimacy" ceased to be a stigma. Divorce too leaped. In 1970 almost 15 percent of all marriages ended in divorce compared with 9.2 percent in 1960. Before long half of American marriages ended in divorce.

BACKLASH

By 1966 the many "freedom" or "liberation" movements of the decade had incited a set of reactions that contemporaries called a "backlash." The backlash mood prevailed widely among traditional white Americans, who deplored what they saw as the social, political, and cultural excesses of the day. Its political dimension drew strength particularly from resentment felt by many Whites against African Americans, student radicals, media liberals, and the civil rights movement. Its appeal among traditional white voters threatened civil rights progress and the entire liberal thrust of 1960s national politics.

Disproportionately, backlash voters were white blue-collar and lower-middle-class people. Some were union members who feared the admission of African-American workers into their protected occupations. Many were second-generation "ethnic" Americans whose parents or grandparents came from Europe early in the century. These people often nourished a strong sense that their own forebears had not received the kind of aid and largesse that African Americans were now receiving from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. They resented claims, increasingly heard from African-American militants, that white society owed blacks compensation for slavery and other past oppression. *Their* ancestors, they noted, had not even been in the United States during the slavery era! Backlash voters were deeply offended by the ghetto upheavals, which demonstrated, they felt, gross ingratitude for all the help recently accorded blacks in America.

Backlash voters also despised the liberal elite, whom they held responsible for the deplorable social trends of the day. The so-called "limousine liberals," the rich left-leaning suburbanites and academics who supported both the new permissiveness and the outrageous minority demands, had

themselves escaped the consequences of changes like desegregation and busing for racial balance and were now perfectly happy to let others suffer. Backlash voters deplored the permissiveness of the media and its seeming unpatriotic opposition to the Vietnam War. They despised the university administrators and faculty who alibied radical student disruptors. They objected to the decisions of the Warren Court, which in their view were destroying the orderly, respectful, and God-fearing society they cherished and encouraging crime, pornography, atheism, the rebelliousness of the young, the rising divorce rates, the disappearance of sexual taboos, and the soaring crime figures. The Chief Justice was demonized more and more as the source of all the dismaying social and cultural changes of the decade.

George Wallace

The chief political beneficiary of backlash discontent was George Wallace of Alabama, the man who in 1963 had promised to "stand in the door" to block the admission of African-American students to the state university. Wallace had not been a blatant racist until the *Brown* desegregation decision made race more of a hot-button issue than ever in southern politics. In 1958 he was defeated for governor by an opponent who had taken a more extreme anti-integrationist stand than he. When he ran for governor once again four years later, he told his friends: "John Patterson outniggered me, and boys, I ain't going to be outniggered again!" The tactic worked; Wallace was elected governor.

In 1964 Wallace challenged Johnson in the Democratic presidential primaries in Wisconsin, Maryland, and Indiana and won more than 30 percent of the vote in each. Many Wallace voters were crossovers from the Republican Party, but the rest were mostly blue-collar Democrats discontented with their party's social liberalism. On these forays into the North, Wallace attacked "the liberals and intellectuals . . . who had destroyed the federal government." In a speech in a blue-collar Chicago suburb he assailed "those newspaper editors, that look down their nose at . . . every workingman in the United States and calls them a group of red-necks or a group of punks." Johnson took note of his challenger in 1964 and used the phrase "white backlash" to describe the phenomenon.

THE GREAT SOCIETY IN RETREAT

As we saw, it was soon after his landslide 1964 presidential victory that Johnson enacted most of his Great Society programs. But after 1965 the president's support quickly eroded. Militant African-American leaders, as noted, came to reject the traditional political process in favor of revolutionary goals.

Meanwhile, a growing segment of radicalized white youth came to believe liberalism to be a feeble way at best to effect change. Other young Whites, influenced by the counterculture, abandoned all politics in favor of inner experience. At the other end of the political spectrum was the growing cohort of white backlash voters who, however, receptive to liberal change initially, had been repelled by what they saw as its excesses. And then, serving as an erosive force, there was the sheer fatigue of a public that could take only so much change in so short a time.

And yet the Great Society might have come in for a soft landing if not for Vietnam. We shall reserve a full discussion of that crucial event for the next chapter. But it is necessary to note here that by 1965 the United States was engaged in a full-scale land war in Southeast Asia that would soon drain funds and energy from the domestic reform agenda and deeply divide the nation.

Whether it was backlash, the Vietnam War, public fatigue, or the exhaustion of reform ideas, by 1966 the Great Society was receding. In the congressional elections of that year the Democrats lost 47 House and three Senate seats. Of the 44 freshman Democrats elected in the 1964 landslide, 23 went down to defeat in 1966. The administration retained a congressional party majority, but it was no longer a liberal majority. Some administration bills passed in the 90th Congress, especially measures concerned with protecting the environment and consumers, but no additional legislation emerged to right entrenched wrongs.

Inflation

After 1966 the administration found itself further undermined by inflation. The 1960s was an extraordinarily prosperous decade overall. The economic expansion would last longer than any previously in the century. Economic growth rates were extraordinarily rapid, a result many economists then ascribed to the tax cut of 1964 and the Keynesian fine-tuning by the Council of Economic Advisers. The growth of the Gross Domestic Product generated ever higher Treasury revenues, and it was from this increase that most Great Society programs had been funded. For a time, in fact, fearing public opposition, Johnson even hoped to finance the Vietnam War from ordinary revenues without asking for additional taxes. He claimed, to use a phrase of the day, that the nation could enjoy "guns" as well as "butter." But this maneuver proved impossible. With the economy at full employment and the federal budget going into deficit, inflation began to rear its ugly head. The president soon found it necessary to ask Congress to impose a 10-percent surcharge on income taxes to reduce consumer and business spending. Reluctantly Congress granted him his tax increase but insisted that he rein in costly government projects. Henceforth there would

be no room for ambitious new programs, even if the administration had had them in mind.

Johnson Retires

By 1968 Johnson was besieged. The Great Society had run its course; his popularity was in free fall; white backlash was growing; Vietnam was tearing the country apart. At the end of 1967 Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota decided to challenge the president for the 1968 Democratic nomination. His effort was considered quixotic, but McCarthy was able to mobilize the antiwar idealism of many college students and suburbanites. In the New Hampshire presidential primary, his enthusiastic young campaign workers pulled off an upset. On the New Hampshire primary day, McCarthy came within a few percentage points of defeating Lyndon Johnson. On March 16 McCarthy was joined by challenger Robert Kennedy, brother of the deceased president and now U.S. senator from New York. Faced with a possible humiliating defeat by one or another of his rivals at the Democratic convention, and concerned with his health, at the end of the month Lyndon Johnson, in a televised speech mostly concerned with peace initiatives in Vietnam, renounced a second full term. "I shall not seek and I will not accept the nomination of my party for another term as your president," he told the surprised TV audience.⁴

* * *

In January 1969 Johnson went home to his Texas ranch, where he died four years later. He had piled up a legislative record of reform exceeded only by his mentor Franklin Roosevelt. The Great Society left a deep mark on the nation, especially in the areas of civil rights, Social Security, aid to education, consumer protection, and conservation. But it had also unleashed the furies of racial anger, hatred of authority, ethical relativism, and inflation that would divide and wrack the nation for years to come.

⁴The ensuing 1968 election will be described in the next chapter.