

Chronology, 1960–1970

1960 John F. Kennedy announces his candidacy for the presidency. Student sit-ins spread from Greensboro, North Carolina, to Nashville, Tennessee, and much of the South. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is organized to coordinate student civil rights protests. A San Francisco march protests Caryl Chessman's death sentence. University of California students are hosed and gassed as they protest the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAAC) hearings in San Francisco. U-2 spy pilot Francis Gary Powers is shot down over the Soviet Union. Elvis Presley is inducted into the Armed Forces. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the first birth control pill as safe for use. John Kennedy and Richard Nixon hold the first televised presidential campaign debates. The Kennedy–Johnson ticket narrowly defeats the Nixon–Lodge ticket. A congressional hearing exposes a disk jockey payola scandal.

1961 The United States breaks off diplomatic relations with Cuba. John F. Kennedy is inaugurated, and creates the Peace Corps by executive order. A ban against folk singing in Washington Square, New York City, is lifted after a successful protest. Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becomes the first human being to orbit the earth. The American-sponsored invasion of Cuba founders at the Bay of Pigs. The Freedom Riders leave Washington, D.C., by bus to confront segregation throughout the South; buses are temporarily halted by violent white mobs in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama. The black voter registration worker Herbert Lee is murdered in Mississippi. The Berlin Wall is built. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is published. Kennedy increases the number of American military advisers in South Vietnam. Student vigils protest the resumption of nuclear testing.

1962 American astronaut John Glenn orbits the earth. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) hold their first national convention in Port Huron, Michigan, and call for a "participatory democracy." Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is published, warning of the dangers of DDT.

Mass arrests of civil rights demonstrators take place in Albany, Georgia. The Supreme Court finds prayer and bible reading in schools unconstitutional. James Meredith becomes the first black to enroll at the University of Mississippi, forcing the Kennedy administration to send U.S. marshals and troops to protect him against segregationists' violence. The Twist becomes the latest dancing rage. Bob Dylan's first published song appears. The United States and the Soviet Union go "eyeball to eyeball" during the Cuban missile crisis. The number of U.S. military and technical personnel in Vietnam reaches 11,000.

1963

Michael Harrington's *The Other America* is published. A major voter registration drive begins in Mississippi, organized by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., leads a peaceful march against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama; Sheriff Bull Connor unleashes hoses and police dogs against the demonstrators. President Kennedy introduces the most extensive civil rights bill since Reconstruction. The first exhibit of Pop Art opens at the Guggenheim in New York. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is published. The first of several Buddhist monks immolates himself in South Vietnam to protest religious persecution. Civil rights leader Medgar Evers is murdered in Jackson, Mississippi. The United States, Soviet Union, and Great Britain sign a test ban treaty halting all above-ground nuclear testing. An estimated 250,000 attend the civil rights March on Washington, which culminates in King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Harvard terminates the contracts of Timothy Leary and Richard Albert (later known as Baba Ram Dass) for experiments with LSD. Four black girls are killed when a bomb explodes during a church service in Birmingham. Peter, Paul, and Mary's recording of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" makes the top-40 charts. The Commission on the Status of Women reports that there is discrimination against women in the United States. Over 80,000 black Mississippians vote in the "Freedom Ballot." South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem is murdered in a U.S.-supported coup. President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. Lyndon B. Johnson assumes office as a stunned nation watches the events on television. Kennedy's accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, is murdered by Jack Ruby. SDS begins the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), organizing poor communities in twelve northern U.S. cities.

1964

President Johnson declares an "unconditional war on poverty in America" in his State of the Union address. Dr. Strangelove is re-

leased. The Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" becomes the number one song, and the group makes its U.S. television debut on the Ed Sullivan show. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is published. The May 2nd Movement organizes against the War in Vietnam and begins gathering signatures pledging nonparticipation. LBJ signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater wins the Republican nomination for president. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party clashes with Democratic party regulars at the national convention. A major riot occurs in the Harlem section of New York City. SNCC launches the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project; thousands of students from northern campuses flock to Mississippi for the summer voter registration drive. Three civil rights volunteers—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—are murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing "all necessary measures" to "prevent further aggression" by North Vietnam. Only two senators vote against the resolution. Congress passes the Equal Opportunity Act, the centerpiece of President Johnson's War on Poverty program. The University of California at Berkeley bans political activity on campus. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement erupts with sit-ins and a call for a campus strike. Martin Luther King, Jr., wins the Nobel Peace Prize. Lyndon Johnson wins a landslide election.

1965

Malcolm X is assassinated in Harlem. LBJ orders bombing raids on North Vietnam culminating in the massive Rolling Thunder campaign of "sustained reprisal." A young black man, Jimmy Lee Jackson, is killed during a mob attack on black marchers in Selma, Alabama. On "Bloody Sunday," Alabama state police storm civil rights marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Boston minister James Reeb is mortally beaten by white toughs. A mass civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery follows under National Guard protection. Civil rights volunteer Viola Liuzzo is murdered in Lowndes County, Alabama. LBJ sends the first U.S. infantry troops, the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade, to Vietnam. The first campus teach-in on the Vietnam War is held at the University of Michigan. U.S. marines are sent to the Dominican Republic to help the military regime repel the return of reformist Juan Bosch to power. Three thousand join a SANE antiwar rally at the United Nations. Over 20,000 attend the SDS-sponsored Washington rally against the Vietnam war. Poet Robert Lowell and others boycott the White House Festival of the Arts in protest against the Vietnam War. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. A major black riot erupts in the Watts

section of Los Angeles. Twenty thousand attend a teach-in on the Berkeley campus, organized by the Vietnam Day Committee. The Los Angeles *Free Press* emerges as the first major underground newspaper of the 1960s, followed shortly by the Berkeley *Barb*, New York's *East Village Other*, Detroit's *Fifth Estate*, and East Lansing's *Paper*. The all-black Lowndes County Freedom Organization is founded in Alabama. Nguyen Cao Ky is appointed premier of South Vietnam. The Rolling Stones' song "Satisfaction" reaches number one on the charts. Bob Dylan "goes electric" at the Newport Folk Festival. SNCC's Julian Bond is elected to the Georgia state legislature, only to have his election invalidated because of his opposition to the War in Vietnam. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters hold the first public "acid test." Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" becomes the number one song. The largest draft call since the Korean War is issued. The first draft card is burned at a New York protest organized by the War Resisters League. Congress responds by passing a law making draft-card burning a crime. Quaker pacifist Norman Morrison burns himself to death in front of the Pentagon as an act of solidarity with the Vietnamese people. The Vietnam Day Committee organizes the First International Days of Protest against the war; more than 100,000 protest in over forty cities. Berkeley activists try to stop a train carrying troops en route to Vietnam. The U.S. death toll in Vietnam exceeds 1,000. A halt in the bombing of North Vietnam is ordered for Christmas.

1966 The bombing of North Vietnam resumes as "peace efforts" fail. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman J. William Fulbright opens hearings on the Vietnam War. SNCC denounces the war and supports draft resistance. A crowd of 50,000 attend the Second International Days of Protest march in New York City; nationwide participation doubles the previous year's totals. Four thousand protest outside as LBJ is given the National Freedom Award at a Freedom House dinner in New York. Johnson decries "nervous nellys" in a speech to a Chicago Democratic club. Students at the universities of Chicago and Wisconsin, and other campuses, stage sit-ins protesting the use of class rankings by the Selective Service. Three G.I.'s from Fort Hood, Texas refuse to go to Vietnam. Stokely Carmichael is elected chairman of SNCC and urges "black power." James Meredith is wounded by a sniper on his solitary march through Mississippi. Black leaders continue Meredith's March against Fear. "Black Power" slogan erupts during a Mississippi march following the attack on Meredith. Black riots erupt in Cleveland, Brooklyn,

and Chicago. Twenty-thousand march down New York City's Fifth Avenue in antiwar protest. The Supreme Court hands down the *Miranda* ruling specifying the rights of the accused. The National Organization of Women (NOW) is established. Lenny Bruce dies of a heroin overdose in New York City. The San Francisco *Oracle* emerges as the voice of the burgeoning Haight-Ashbury community. A Buddhist uprising is crushed in South Vietnam. The SDS convention at Clear Lake, Iowa, signals return to campus organizing. General Motors apologizes for their ungrounded attack on safe car crusader Ralph Nader. Martin Luther King, Jr., leads an antidiscrimination march in Chicago and is stoned by the hostile crowd. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense is organized in Oakland, California. Striking California farm workers march 250 miles to Sacramento. A sit-in takes place at the Dow Chemical Company, manufacturer of napalm and Agent Orange. *Ramparts* editor Robert Scheer runs for Congress on an antiwar platform and gains 45 percent of the vote. Ronald Reagan is elected governor of California. *Time* names the "under-25" generation Man of the Year (*sic*). The SDS national council condemns the Vietnam War and the antidemocratic draft. The U.S. troop level in Vietnam reaches 320,000.

1967 The first San Francisco "Human Be-in" is held. The first campus sit-in against Dow Chemical Company recruiters is held at the University of Wisconsin. The Resistance is organized in California and Massachusetts. *Ramparts* exposes Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) funding of the National Student Association. Over 100,000 attend an antiwar demonstration in New York City organized by the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam; Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Benjamin Spock, Stokely Carmichael, and others condemn the war, while over seventy students burn their draft cards in Central Park. Sixty-five thousand march in a similar demonstration in San Francisco. Muhammad Ali is stripped of his heavyweight boxing crown for resisting the draft. The International War Crimes Tribunal, sponsored by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, begins an investigation of the U.S. role in Vietnam. The "Summer of Love" attracts hordes of young people to San Francisco, and Scott McKenzie's song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" becomes a hit. John Lennon and George Harrison announce they have tried LSD. The Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger and Keith Richard are found guilty of minor drug charges. The *London Times* protests their jail sentences, which are later retracted. The Monterey

Pop Festival initiates the trend of large, outdoor rock festivals. The "long, hot summer" begins with a black riot in Boston's Roxbury section. Massive riots in Newark and Detroit leave sixty-nine dead, and millions of dollars in damage. Among the Detroit dead are three black youths murdered during a police raid on the Algiers Motel. From Havana, a Stokely Carmichael broadcast urges blacks to arm themselves for "total revolution." The first national Black Power conference is held in Newark. The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper" album heads the pop charts. The National Conference for a New Politics meets in Chicago. Although it is the largest gathering to date of black and white liberals and radicals, the meeting is plagued by division and confusion. Arlo Guthrie performs "Alice's Restaurant" at the Newport Folk Festival. Reverend Philip Berrigan and three others raid a Baltimore draft office and pour blood on the draft files. The movie *Bonnie and Clyde* is released. Woody Guthrie dies. Che Guevara is killed in Bolivia. American troop levels in Vietnam reach 460,000. U.S. deaths in Vietnam total 13,000. Over 1,000 college students turn in draft cards during church services in New Haven, Cambridge, and sixteen other cities. The cards are then turned over to the Department of Justice by William Sloane Coffin, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Marcus Raskin, Mitchell Goodman, and Arthur Waskow. Over 100,000 attend the March on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., organized by the National Mobilization Committee; its themes are "Confront the Warmakers" and "From Dissent to Resistance." A Ford Foundation study recommends a "community control" experiment in black sections of the New York City school system. The CIA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Army Intelligence begin surveillance of the antiwar movement. The Peace and Freedom party is organized in California. Allard Lowenstein organizes a "Dump Johnson" movement; Senator Eugene McCarthy is chosen as its candidate for President. The movie *The Graduate* is released.

1968 The U.S. intelligence ship *Pueblo* is captured off North Korea. Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam (CLCV) publish the report *In the Name of America*, condemning the United States' "consistent violation of almost every international agreement relating to the rules of warfare." LBJ calls up 14,787 Air Force and Navy reservists. The massive Vietcong Tet Offensive begins, stunning American decision-makers and the general public. Three black students are shot dead during a student protest at South Carolina State College; the "Orangeburg Massacre" is virtually ignored by the national

media. Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* is published. The Kerner Commission report on urban riots decries white racism and a rapidly polarizing society. Eugene McCarthy startles the press and the Johnson re-election campaign by finishing a close second in the New Hampshire primary. Robert Kennedy announces his candidacy for the presidency. LBJ stuns the American public by announcing he will not run for a second term. Students at Howard University seize a university building in protest against the institution's lack of "commitment to the black community." Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated in Memphis; violence erupts in cities across the country. Black Panther party member Bobby Sutton is killed in a police shoot-out in Oakland, California. Coffin, Spock, et al. are indicted for conspiracy for counseling draft resistance. Columbia University students strike and take over school buildings. One million college and high school students stay away from classes in a one-day boycott against the war. Student revolts erupt in Germany, Italy, and France; French students join with workers to bring the French government to the brink of collapse. One hundred thousand march in New York City. *Hair!* opens on Broadway. Hubert Humphrey announces his candidacy for president, calling for the "politics of joy." Norman Mailer's *Archie of the Night* is published. The Poor People's Campaign establishes Resurrection City in Washington, D.C. The Reverends Philip and Daniel Berrigan and seven others raid the Catonsville, Maryland draft board and destroy draft files with homemade napalm. The Vietnam War peace talks open in Paris. Robert Kennedy is assassinated at the end of a successful California primary campaign. The Vietnam War becomes the longest war in U.S. history. Protesting students and workers bring Paris to a virtual standstill. Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew gain the Republican nomination. Black Panther party leader Eldridge Cleaver is chosen as the presidential candidate of the Peace and Freedom party—Black Panther party coalition. Soviet troops and tanks crush the liberalization movement in Czechoslovakia. The Democratic presidential convention in Chicago nominates Hubert Humphrey amidst massive demonstrations organized by antiwar groups and the Youth International party (Yippies); street disorders and police brutality ensue while demonstrators chant "the whole world is watching." A state of civil disaster is declared in Berkeley following recurring police-student confrontations. Olympic track stars Tommie Smith and John Carlos are suspended for giving the black power salute as the U.S. national anthem is played. Black Panther party leader Huey Newton is sentenced to fifteen years in prison for killing a policeman. Women's liberation activists picket the Miss America

pageant. New York City teachers strike over the actions of the black Ocean Hill–Brownsville community board. G.I.'s and vets hold a peace march in San Francisco. The first women's liberation conference is held in Chicago. Richard Nixon is elected president by a very close margin.

1969

After weeks of publicized debate, negotiators at the Paris peace talks agree on the shape of the bargaining table. American troop levels in Vietnam reach a peak of 542,000. Ten thousand march against the tide on Pennsylvania Avenue during a “Counterinaugural” protest. The radical Catholic group the DC 9 break into the Dow Chemical Company, wreck equipment, pour blood on files, and post pictures of maimed Vietnamese victims on the walls. As police storm People’s Park, created from vacant land in Berkeley, demonstrators are gassed and wounded and one student is killed. California governor Ronald Reagan applauds the police attack. The movie *Easy Rider* is released. President Nixon authorizes the development of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system against the prevailing advice of scientists. A Gallup poll shows 58 percent of Americans oppose the Vietnam War. Vice-president Spiro Agnew denounces the media’s critical bias against the Nixon administration. American casualties in Vietnam exceed those of the Korean War. Black students exit an occupied building at Cornell University carrying guns. The Russell War Crimes Tribunal issues its report *Against the Crime of Silence*, condemning U.S. war crimes in Vietnam. A conference of the Underground Press Syndicate adopts a series of resolutions condemning male supremacy in the ranks of underground papers. Hundreds of black leaders from diverse groups gather for the Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin become the first human beings to walk on the moon. Four hundred thousand attend the massive Woodstock rock concert. The Chicago Eight (later the Chicago Seven) trial begins in the courtroom of Judge Julius Hoffman. An SDS splinter group, the Weathermen, organize the “Days of Rage” in Chicago, resulting in violent rampaging in the streets. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) charges Chicago police with murdering Black Panther party leader Fred Hampton during a raid. The Vietnam Moratorium Day is observed by millions of Americans in thousands of cities, towns, and campuses across the country; one hundred thousand gather on the Boston Common. The New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam organizes the March Against Death in Washington; about 500,000 protesters attend weekend-long demonstrations. The American Indian Move-

ment (AIM) occupies the abandoned Alcatraz prison. The American massacre of My Lai villagers in Vietnam is publicized by journalist Seymour Hersh. The first draft lottery of the decade is held. A black youth is stabbed to death by Hell’s Angels during a Rolling Stones concert at Altamont. The Charles Manson gang goes on a murderous spree in Los Angeles.

1970

The militant Puerto Rican group the Young Lords issues a thirteen-point platform of liberation demands. Seven of the Chicago Eight are acquitted of conspiracy charges; convictions on lesser charges are later overturned. A University of Wisconsin Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) building is fire-bombed, beginning a wave of some 500 bombings or arsons on college campuses. The Bank of America branch in Santa Barbara, California, is burned down by students. Nixon aide Daniel Patrick Moynihan urges “benign neglect” of racial issues in a memo to the President. Three are killed when a Greenwich Village townhouse is destroyed by a bomb being constructed by the Weathermen. The first Earth Day is held with environmental celebrations nationwide. Seventy-five thousand rally against the war on the Boston Common; subsequently, a splinter group rampages through Harvard Yard in nearby Cambridge. Amidst growing campus violence, Governor Reagan threatens: “If it takes a bloodbath, let it begin now.” The Shea–Wells Bill passes the Massachusetts legislature, enabling Massachusetts men to refuse combat duty in the absence of a declaration of war. Thousands converge on New Haven to protest the murder trial of Black Panthers Bobby Seale and Erica Huggins. Yale President Kingman Brewster clashes with Vice-president Agnew over whether black revolutionaries can receive a fair trial in the United States. President Nixon announces the “incursion” of U.S. combat troops into Cambodia. Princeton University students organize an immediate protest; Oberlin College students occupy the administration building demanding a faculty meeting to discuss the invasion. An average of twenty campuses initiate strikes each day after Nixon’s announcement. Four students are killed by the National Guard at a Kent State University protest. Two black students are killed and nine wounded by police gunfire at Jackson State College in Mississippi. Thirty ROTC buildings are burned or bombed during the first week in May. Over 450 colleges and universities close down. Hard-hat construction workers attack peace demonstrators in New York City. In Washington, D.C., 100,000 protest the invasion of Cambodia. Striking students converge on the Capitol to lobby for passage of the Cooper–Church and Hatfield–McGovern amendments to cut off funding

for the Cambodian invasion and all Southeast Asian operations. U.S. troops withdraw from Cambodia. Black militants escape from the courthouse in San Rafael, California; a judge and three of his kidnappers are killed in the ensuing shootout. A warrant is issued for the arrest of Angela Davis. Twenty-five thousand attend the National Chicano Moratorium antiwar demonstration in Los Angeles. The Army Mathematics Research Center, an object of antiwar protests at the University of Wisconsin, is blown up during the night, killing graduate student Robert Fassnacht. Jimi Hendrix dies of a drug overdose in London. Janis Joplin dies of a drug overdose in Hollywood. The President's Commission on Campus Unrest issues its report calling the gap between youth culture and mainstream society a threat to American stability. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover accuses the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives of terrorist tactics and a plan to kidnap Henry Kissinger; the group is led by Catholic priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan.

The Sixties Experience

We shall overcome, we shall overcome

We shall overcome some day.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

We shall overcome some day.

—“We Shall Overcome” by Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton,

Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger ©

On February 3, 1960, one month after the junior senator from Massachusetts, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, announced his candidacy for President, the *New York Times* reported in a brief, back-page article from Greensboro, North Carolina, “A group of well-dressed Negro college students staged a sitdown strike in a downtown Woolworth store today and vowed to continue it in relays until Negroes were served at the lunch counter.”

Ten years later, the *Times* devoted four front-page columns to a lead article headed, “4 Kent State Students Killed by ‘Troops.’” Most startling of all was the photograph that appeared nationwide of a young woman screaming for help while kneeling over the body of a slain student.

These two events framed the decade of the 1960s. The Greensboro sit-in evolved out of the civil rights activities of the 1950s and was the spark that ignited a wave of student sit-ins across seventy cities of the South. The Kent State killings occurred during one of several hundred campus protests against the American invasion of Cambodia. After the shock of Kent State, and the subsequent deaths of two black students at Jackson State in Mississippi, over 450 college and university campuses shut down—fifty-one of them for the remainder of the academic year—in what proved to be the largest strike action in United States history. An estimated four million students were involved in the protests of May 1970.

Each event represented an important historical and psychological milestone in this era of protest. The Greensboro sit-ins marked the entry of students

into full-scale participation in the civil rights movement. As sociologist Aldon Morris notes,

Nineteen sixty was the year when thousands of Southern black students at black colleges joined forces with “old movement warriors” and tremendously increased the power of the developing civil rights movement. . . . From the privileged position of hindsight, it is clear that the student sit-ins of 1960 were the introduction to a decade of political turbulence.¹

Similarly, although antiwar activity continued until the last American troops were brought home from Vietnam in 1973, the Kent State and Jackson State killings marked a psychological turning point in the student revolt. Many students realized for the first time that they could die because of their activism, that their government was capable of gunning them down in cold blood. The contrast between Greensboro and Kent State suggests the scale of change over the course of the decade—Greensboro symbolizing the hope and energy of the early Sixties, Kent State the nightmare of repression and social disintegration.

In between these events, the Sixties were stained by assassinations of public figures like John F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. They were years of mass protest, for civil rights and black power, for liberated education, for poor people, women’s liberation, gay rights, Chicanos, American Indians, and against the Vietnam war. A host of activist groups of all persuasions materialized, from the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Women Strike for Peace, to the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (New Mobe), the Weather Underground, the Black Panther party, and the Radicalesbians.

The Sixties’ claim for historical distinction rests on the combination of enormous cultural ferment and political upheaval within a single decade. In effect, the Sixties combined qualities of the 1920s and 1930s. Movements of the Sixties converged while grappling with the most pressing and intractable dilemmas of the post-war world—racism and poverty, pervasive dehumanization in the developed world, and Third World liberation. At their revolutionary peak in 1968, these movements sought to launch, in Daniel Cohn-Bendit’s words, “an experiment that completely breaks with that society, an experiment . . . which allows a glimpse of a possibility.”²

The Sixties were also years of enormous musical energy, from the folk revival in Greenwich Village in 1960 to the British invasion in 1963–1964 and

the emergence of rock music in 1965 to the rock festival Age of Aquarius. Marijuana and hallucinogens like LSD were widely used by the young, and sexual experimentation was openly embraced by the youthful counterculture. Scores of underground newspapers appeared across the country, providing a community forum and network for various elements of the Movement. Rules, laws, and social norms changed with staggering speed. Traditional boundaries of acceptable expression were shattered in an enormous burst of innovation and experimentation in literature, theater, and the visual arts. As Michael Alden described it, the Sixties represented the chaos of a world “coming more and more out from under wraps.”³

From Martin Luther King’s “Now is the time!” to the antiwar cry “Peace Now!” to the counterculture’s query “Why wait?”, movements of the 1960s were attuned to the present, the immediate. As the forces of change gathered momentum, the sheer barrage of events swept aside time for reflection. The world seemed upside down. Change became the only constant, and deviance became the rule. Sixties troubadour Bob Dylan put the fleeting feeling into his famous song, “The Times They Are A-Changin’.”

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now will
Later be fast.
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin’
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin’.

Although this book focuses on the United States, virtually all aspects of the decade’s movements in the United States were echoed throughout the western world. The Sixties were, in brief, the West’s “pro-democracy movement”—or at least its first phase. The civil rights movement inspired South African liberationists and the European disarmament movement. The United States and its war in Vietnam became prominent targets for international protest. University campuses in both capitalist and communist systems were the scene of growing student agitation, culminating in the upheavals of 1968. The counterculture spread throughout much of Europe. The women’s movement began to emerge

in much of the world at about the same time that it flourished in the United States. Ecology activism set the stage for the West German Green movement that arose in the latter 1970s.

Explaining the Sixties: A Movement Perspective

These tumultuous years have inspired reactions ranging from nostalgic recollection to fierce denunciation. In the heat of the times, many commentators attempted to explain the youthful behavior so strikingly characteristic of the age. Some argued that the values, attitudes, and behavior of young people in the Sixties were the product of immaturity and permissive upbringing. The youth revolt was a passing phenomenon; young people would soon grow up and embrace the society they rebelled against.⁴ Others emphasized the distinctive generational socialization of those coming of age during the 1960s—the post-World War II environment and parental influences that encouraged personal honesty and moral antipathy toward discrimination and violence.⁵ Each of these explanations contained a kernel of truth. Each observer could point to youthful behavior that corroborated his or her theory. However, each explanation was inevitably colored by the observer's ideological leanings.

Ideology that was sometimes subtle and unobtrusive in early scholarly works on the Sixties became overt and strident as the reformist legacy of that decade became part of the political battlefield of the 1980s. The resurgent American Right focused public discontent on excesses of the past, encompassing both liberal Democratic administrations and Sixties movements in their sights. Sixties-bashing was popularized by figures as diverse as President Ronald Reagan and philosopher Allan Bloom. At the same time, a host of twentieth anniversaries of Sixties events provided a focus for activists' reflection as well as mass media oversimplification.

We may distinguish three basic perspectives on the 1960s that reflect distinct social and political outlooks. Two of these—viewpoints we may call "liberal" and "conservative"—lie within the American political mainstream.⁶ Citing factors like early socialization, changes in the institutional environment of American life, or simply the pendulum of history, American liberals tend to see the decade as a time when millions of Americans refused to tolerate the gap between institutional practice and the fundamental American ideals of equal

rights, free speech, and a foreign policy grounded on universal human rights. Inspired by early civil rights activism and Kennedy rhetoric, young people demanded that their country live up to the values they had been taught.

To a considerable degree, the nation responded with liberal institutional reforms. Unprecedented civil rights legislation permanently changed the face of the Old South; the federal government launched a massive assault on poverty and inadequate education, housing, and health care; universities modified their curricular requirements and social regulations; the draft was replaced by a volunteer army; and the War in Vietnam—a tragic mistake in the view of many liberals—finally ground to a halt. In effect, despite mistakes and short-circuited social programs, the system worked.⁷ The Sixties were essentially a noble era of reform.

With remarkable success in the mainstream media,⁸ contemporary conservative critics have engaged in a sustained assault on the Sixties, determined to roll back its surge of liberal social and foreign policy,⁹ aggressive civil rights enforcement, federal involvement in social services for the poor, affirmative action policies, profit-reducing federal regulations, abortion rights, and most notably, public reluctance to support military intervention overseas, the so-called Vietnam syndrome.⁹

Conservatives argue that the liberal policies of the Sixties and the youth revolt were connected, and that both were carried to excess. The youth revolt was essentially apolitical and self-indulgent, spawned by post-World War II affluence and permissive childrearing. Liberal reformers in government and academia legitimized and thereby helped to unleash the self-indulgent impulses of the young. Liberal political values like free speech, equal rights, and individualism were distorted to justify excessive antisocial behavior.¹⁰ During the early to mid-1980s, a handful of former radicals denounced their earlier political stance while embracing the rising tide of Reaganism.¹¹

Both interpretations have merit. Liberals can point to significant accomplishments in civil rights and social welfare legislation. There is also ample evidence that many protesters espoused liberal values, denouncing the hypocrisy of government officials. Conservatives can point to flaws in Great Society programs and instances of excessively self-indulgent or violent behavior on the part of the counterculture and New Left.

However, to limit one's concern to the relative effectiveness of the era's liberal reforms, or to concentrate on the manifest behavior of young activists while overlooking the crucial events of that time, is to miss entirely the

point of the 1960s revolt. Since both are fully grounded in mainstream institutions, neither perspective can adequately explain movements that launched a fundamental critique of those very institutions.

A third view, and one with many variants, has arisen from within the 1960s movements themselves, and has emerged in a host of books that assess distinct movements or recount personal voyages through the Sixties. This view is grounded in the *experience* of the decade's movements and the hard lessons learned about modern America. For many, especially those who were young during that time, the experiences of the Sixties were a formative political education that taught not only painful lessons about American institutions but lessons about themselves.

What can be learned from a systematic review of the Sixties experience? First, young people need to understand, rather than ignore or imitate, the movements of the 1960s—where they came from, how they evolved, and why they evolved as they did. Second, by examining the connections among the movements of that time, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the 1960s in history. And third, the experiences of Sixties movements can provide future movements of human liberation with important lessons about the American political system and its potential for change.

What became known simply as the Movement began with two proactive struggles for change—the civil rights movement and the student New Left. Both were rooted in the postwar world of the 1950s. Each contained an expressive or prefigurative strain—an effort to build and enjoy new democratic social relationships—within an instrumental or political strain aimed at transforming American society.¹² The electric combination of expressive and instrumental strains is one main reason for the enormous energy unleashed during the decade.

The two groups most synonymous with youthful Sixties activism, SNCC and SDS, were acutely affected by the tensions between these two strains. Both expressed an instinctive mistrust of authoritarian rule and hierarchy, a need for loving connection with others, and an emphasis on individual creativity and integrity. These values not only foreshadowed what a “post-revolutionary” America should look like, but they prescribed how the movement to change America should go about this instrumental task. Therein lay the fundamental dilemmas that confronted all movements of the 1960s: how to effect change on a national scale through movements founded on personal relationships and

grassroots organizing, a utopian vision, and personal spontaneity; what to do when confronted by a repressive state; how to extend a qualitative, post-scarcity critique of society to those still wanting to be included in that society.

As events unfolded in the 1960s, the relationship between expressive and instrumental politics changed. Initially, activists believed the two were compatible, that they could succeed in transforming society. The result was a contagious, hopeful energy and committed idealism. Over time, buffeted by evasion and resistance, the horror of the Vietnam War, and crushing repression, the hope for fundamental political transformation was shattered; the gap between prefigurative and instrumental politics widened. One outcome was disillusionment, rage, and either disassociation from or aggressive militance toward society. Another was a radicalized critique of modern America, a shift from liberal to radical democracy. The Sixties experience taught activists that their expressive democratic vision was fundamentally incompatible with the root assumptions of American institutions.¹³ Let us examine these points in greater detail.

THE SIXTIES DEMOCRATIC VISION

The two seminal movements of the 1960s, civil rights and the student New Left, expressed a vision of democracy rooted in but distinct from prevailing political values in modern America. At their core, both movements were grounded on four primary values:¹⁴

- (1) *equality*, or the full inclusion of society's dispossessed;
- (2) *personal empowerment*, or the liberation of each person from psychological constraints as well as social oppression—a shift from the masculinist “power over” to the feminist “power to”;
- (3) a *moral politics* grounded on belief in individual growth, compassion for one's fellow human beings—indeed for all life—and intolerance of injustice; and
- (4) the central importance of *community* as a locus for meaningful engagement in life and politics.

In sum, the Movement encompassed both a distributive and a qualitative critique of the United States. It railed against the exclusion of black Americans

and other groups at the same time that it criticized deep-seated flaws in the very society that excluded these groups.

In its drive to bring American blacks into the mainstream, the civil rights movement insisted that the United States live up to its liberal democratic values of equal rights and universal citizenship. However, it sought equality in a manner that embodied the distinctive Sixties vision of democracy—through direct action that liberated black (and white) Americans from patterns of self-denial and accommodation, through an inspiring moral vision that insisted on justice instead of delay and evasion, and through participatory engagement in one's community.

From Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus, to the young students who sat in at lunch counters in the face of white violence, to black sharecroppers' defiant determination to register to vote, direct action broke the bonds of accommodation to oppression and forged a commitment to work for justice. It also represented an inspiring "vision of citizenship and selfhood that assumes the free individual has the capacity to manage social affairs in a direct, ethical, and rational manner"¹⁵—an implicit statement of belief in direct or participatory democracy.

The civil rights movement derived much of its persuasive power from a moral vision of politics based on love rather than an instrumental politics of self-interest, a vision articulated most forcefully by Martin Luther King, Jr. Often overlooked in the post-1960s mass media adulation of King was his, and the civil rights movement's, stubborn insistence on "freedom now" rather than business as usual.

Finally, the civil rights movement sought to transform the experiences of everyday life through engagement in the institutions of community, whether these were the church-based communities of Montgomery's bus boycott, the churches and schools of Birmingham, or the "beloved community" sought by the field workers of SNCC. Community building was an inherent part of working for democracy. As one Freedom Summer volunteer recalled, "You've got to build community above all else. If you give people a taste of it, there's nothing you can't do. It's that rich and, I should add, that rare an experience in our society. I never had it until I went South and I . . . haven't been able to live without it since."¹⁶

The civil rights movement was the formative catalyst for sustained activism throughout the rest of the decade. For many white student activists, the call to heal one of America's deepest wounds was the primary inspiration for their

own political activism. In the early to mid-1960s both black and white students flocked to the civil rights cause. The other influential student organization of the decade, SDS, was closely tied to SNCC in its formative years and was responsible for the community organizing effort Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) in a variety of inner city communities. Indeed, the early years of SDS were patterned after SNCC's emphasis on participation and organizing for empowerment. Like SNCC, SDS was pulled in different directions by its expressive and instrumental objectives.

In addition to racial and social differences, three qualities distinguished SDS and the New Left from SNCC and the civil rights struggle: the articulation of a New Left manifesto in the *Port Huron Statement*, concentration on the political implications of college and university life, and its transformation to a mass movement in the wake of the Vietnam War. While unremarkable in its policy recommendations, the *Port Huron Statement* nonetheless captured the distinctive flavor of youthful dissent: generational dissatisfaction with an impersonal and acquisitive society, an emphasis on values and human relationships, and the unifying vision of participatory democracy. Reflecting the initial rumblings of campus discontent, SDS decried student apathy, in loco parentis university regulations, and an academic experience that prepared students to adapt to the corporate economy. The latter two themes would be played out on college campuses throughout the rest of the decade. It remained for the war in Vietnam to sharpen the student critique at the same time that it drew thousands of new recruits into the New Left, exacerbating its internal tensions.

Colored by experiences within the civil rights movement and New Left, and battered by the war in Vietnam, all major 1960s movements—from civil rights and New Left to the black power and antiwar movements to the counterculture and the women's and environmental movements—converged in embracing variants of these values.

The antiwar movement rejected a foreign policy that elevated instrumental rationality above moral compassion, and corporate and strategic interests above the right of national self-determination. The counterculture embraced the intuitive wisdom of the people over the technocratic rule of experts, the liberation of the physical and spiritual person from psychological repression, and the quest for loving union with a community of others. The women's movement championed the liberation of women from masculine domination and patriarchy in all cultures. It came to advocate the transformation of society according to a feminist ethic of caring and a community-based feminist praxis.

The ecology movement broadened the definition of domination to include human exploitation of nature, and it extended the notion of community to the entire ecosphere.

From a perspective outside the mainstream, Sixties movements expressed the voices of those whom society had systematically treated as "other"—black Americans, Latinos, the poor, Native Americans, women, gays, Vietnamese peasants, the intuitive and spiritual primitive, and nonhuman nature. In opposing domination, the rape metaphor applied not only to women, but to nonwhites, Vietnamese, and nature.¹⁷ In place of domination, the Movement sought community and celebrated eros, or the union of equals.

In addition to the decade's turbulence, this convergent vision is what distinguishes the 1960s and lays the groundwork for its democratic legacy. The energy from all these movements revitalized the critical left at the same time that prevailing powers were shifting rightward.

PRECONDITIONS FOR THE SIXTIES: POST-WAR MODERNITY

The great sinfulness of the modern way is that it renders concrete things abstract.

—Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit peace activist

This is the age of machinery, mechanical nightmare,

The wonderful work of technology,

Napalm, hydrogen bomb, biological warfare.

This is the Twentieth Century, too much aggravation,

This is the age of insanity,

I'm a Twentieth Century man, but I don't want to be here.

—The Kinks, "Twentieth Century Man," © Daway Music, Ltd.

Both the specific issues and movements of the 1960s and the distinctive combination of expressive and instrumental politics can be traced to conditions in postwar America. World War II was a watershed in modern history, a turning point that unleashed many of the contradictory impulses of the modern world. The experience of the Holocaust and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki left an indelible mark on the human psyche. The introduction of biological, chemical, and atomic weaponry erased forever the notion of combat essentially limited to military personnel. The triumph over Nazism, exclusive possession of the bomb, and the resurgence of capitalist

affluence left the United States in a position of economic and military preeminence in the world. The result was a heady belief in the "American Century" and a prevailing liberal consensus in American politics.¹⁸

The experiences of the Second World War triggered a variety of phenomena that emerged (or re-emerged) over the following twenty years: resurgent anti-communism, Keynesian management of economic growth fueled largely by defense expenditures, rising prosperity, the spread of American economic and strategic interests throughout the noncommunist world, the growth of mass marketing and the medium of television, the entry of millions of Americans into the home-owning middle class, a major investment in scientific and technical research, and the baby boom. Neocapitalism, or the postwar corporate system, was firmly in place.¹⁹

Yet all was not rosy. As Langdon Winner has observed, life in the 1950s "tended to inspire a fast belief in the religion of progress. Modern was always thought to be superior to 'old fashioned.' The pattern, however, was certainly not one of tailoring technology to suit human needs. Instead, the practice was that of renovating human needs to match what modern science and engineering happened to make available."²⁰ And, as Richard Flacks has argued, the contradiction between the "technological capacities and social organization of society" under advanced corporate capitalism feeds aspirations it cannot satisfy. Specifically, the liberating promise of modernity held out by technological capitalism is grounded on imperatives—profit, consumption, and uninhibited economic growth—that undermine the very promise of human liberation. The resulting "irrationalities and barbarities," in turn, feed a heightened desire for liberation. Nowhere were these contradictions more apparent than in the university, where students simultaneously became aware of an alternative future while being channeled into existing and narrowing career opportunities.²¹

The Second World War unleashed forces that would kindle fundamental challenges to the mainstream consensus. The war set in motion the unraveling of the colonial empires of Western Europe, a surge in Third World independence that would ultimately clash with American corporate and strategic interests. The war also wove science, industry, and government together in the management of American foreign policy. These developments would bear bitter fruit in Vietnam.²²

The boom of suburban living spawned a young middle-class generation comfortably affluent but troubled by a gnawing sense that something was miss-

ing from the lives that lay before them. As Greg Calvert and Carol Nieman have contended, this postscarcity outlook ultimately posed a fundamental challenge to postwar capitalism

When Establishment sources express the fear that a new generation of young Americans is rejecting consumption as a goal and definition of their lives, it expresses a very real concern on the part of the corporate establishment about its economic future and its historical *raison d'être*. In place of isolation, powerlessness, meaningless work, and lives defined as the production, ownership, and consumption of commodities, they are demanding community, love, creativity, and power over their own lives.²³

In the postwar era, the social and physical landscape of traditional communities was being uprooted at the same time that television mesmerized children with shows like "Lassie" and "Leave It to Beaver." The post-Sputnik education boom spawned a new emphasis on efficiency that accentuated the bureaucratization of schooling. Fathers were caught up in the rat race, while middle-class mothers were encouraged to abandon their wartime employment for the new full-time job of housewife and primary parent. Working-class mothers, of course, could not afford such a luxury, and instead were bumped down to unskilled jobs by returning male workers.

These changes bore fruit. Dr. Benjamin Spock and the new domestic realm of middle-class motherhood encouraged child care approaches that focused attention on the individuation of each child, yet the constraints of mothers' sex roles would later generate a rebellion by their daughters. A booming mass-market economy accelerated the environmental crisis that erupted in the early 1970s.²⁴ Perhaps most important for the political struggles to come, the war made many aware of the price of racism, stimulating resurgent racial consciousness and assertiveness among black Americans. Both culminated in the modern civil rights movement.

Although the 1950s seemed like a Great Sleep in which millions of Americans went about the business of providing for themselves, and social scientists proclaimed the "end of ideology," both strains of the Sixties revolt—its push for democratization of American society and its expressive emphasis on personal relationships, community, and moral politics—were evident. The civil rights movement, most especially the Montgomery bus boycott and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, anticipated and stimulated much of the democratic impulse that was to come. The antimaterialism of the Beats,

the emergence of rock and roll music, the rebellious personas of Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, and James Dean, and the appearance of *Mad* magazine all tapped into the discontent of the young that snowballed into the expressive, countermodern culture of the 1960s.

Although the Old Left had been decimated by the Truman-McCarthy anticommunism purges and deeply fractured by both the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Joseph Stalin's brutality, journals like *Dissent* and organizations like the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) nurtured a critical perspective that influenced young New Leftists. A variety of left and pacifist figures—C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Michael Harrington, A. J. Muste, I. F. Stone, Norman O. Brown, Paul Goodman, Staughton Lynd, Howard Zinn, and others—articulated critical insights that continued to inform activists throughout much of the Sixties.²⁵

The seeds of a radical rebellion were present. The contradictions of modern technocratic institutions spawned movements that would struggle to contain their own internal tensions.

JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE PROMISE OF THE EARLY 1960S

There was a definite flowering-out of positive feelings when John Kennedy became President. The Civil Rights movement was giving off positive vibrations. There was a great feeling of reform, that things could be changed. . . . Things looked incredibly promising.

—Phil Ochs, folksinger

It is precisely when things are beginning to go better that the contradictions and demands of the situations will explode at once.

—Andre Gorz, *Capitalism in Crisis*

Several forces came to a head with the election of John Kennedy as president in 1960. The resurgent civil rights movement gained new steam, feeling it had found a sympathetic ear in the White House. Young Americans were inspired by the personable young president's call to serve their country's best interests. A new wave of managerial technocrats were drawn to the analytical pragmatism of the new administration, while died-in-the-wool liberals found government niches from which they could advance the cause of human justice. In effect, Kennedy's pragmatic liberalism (followed by the early years of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society) activated the heady promises of liberal gov-

ernment and scientific progress: social problem solving and a compassionate welfare state, assertion of U.S. preeminence in defense of the "free world," and a belief in economic growth as the key to opportunity for society's dispossessed.

Much of Kennedy's impact derived from his distinctive personality—his mastery of rhetoric and his ability to inspire the public with his vision; the constant image of an administration in motion, tackling crises (some of his own creation) and solving problems that obstructed social progress; his quick intelligence and ability to appear in command of an enormous flow of information; his personal charm and ready wit, especially effective in encounters with the press; and the important fact that he seemed to be responsive to a world in flux.

Kennedy had a particularly poignant effect on the disaffected young who, in Paul Goodman's terms, had been deprived of the romance of patriotism during the 1950s. As Goodman remarked in the mid-1960s, "John Kennedy hit on the Posture of Sacrifice, which was what young people wanted to hear, something to give meaning to the affluent society."²⁶ Novelist Norman Mailer also sensed the significance of a Kennedy election for the America that was emerging from the 1950s. As he wrote in 1960,

Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical, and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation. . . . I knew if he became President, it would be an existential event; he would touch depths in American life which were uncharted . . . and we as a nation would finally be loose again in the historic seas of a national psyche which was willy-nilly and at last, again, adventurous.²⁷

Significantly, Kennedy's rhetoric awakened hope for an expansion of liberal democracy; more Americans would be able to enjoy the benefits of full participation in public life and more people around the world would be able to live and breathe free from poverty and oppression. Despite Kennedy's conventional politics and his cautious pragmatism, his administration gave "unwilling charge," in Mailer's term, to energies previously underground.²⁸

Initially, the confidence that things *could* change came from leaders like

John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. In different ways, these two men were gifted with an remarkable ability to convey confidence to their audience; their leadership was a catalyst for many to discard habitual accommodations to the deprivations or petty preoccupations of everyday life. Thus the fight for justice seemed more plausible and rewarding than the more typical flight from injustice. Young people drawn to activism could for a time believe (or want to believe) that their expressive politics would ultimately prevail, that democracy grounded on community and moral purpose was possible. Expressive and instrumental politics were joined.

The result was the high-energy, optimistic early Sixties, the time Carl Oglesby called the Heroic Period of the Movement, its Bronze Age.²⁹ It seemed, in short, as if America were reclaiming its idealistic heritage, its moral purpose, its promise. Martin Luther King's memorable "I Have a Dream" speech captured the infectious feeling of the time. The vitality and optimism that came to pervade American society is precisely what seems so remote and so improbable when viewed from afar. For many, these qualities define the Sixties they recall fondly. Tom Hayden recalls, "I still don't know where this messianic sense, this belief in being right, this confidence that we could speak for a generation came from. But the time was ripe, vibrating with potential."³⁰ As Morris Dickstein has observed of the primary form of cultural expression during these years,

Folk music was the perfect expression of the green years of the early sixties, the years of integration, interracial solidarity, "I have a dream," and "We shall overcome"; the years of the Port Huron statement and the early New Left; the years of the lunch-counter sit-ins and ban-the-Bomb demonstrations. Folk music was living bridge between the protest culture of the New Left and the genuinely populist elements of the Old Left of the 1930s and after.³¹

Few in the shining moment of 1960 could anticipate the degree to which the awakening of the Sixties would come to pervade all areas of American society in the decade to come. A significant source of energy came from the expressive side of emerging activism. As Wini Breines observes, young people were caught up in the creative spirit of defining new forms of social relationship: "The release of suppressed expression was liberating. Most had never experienced anything like it. It went against all the formal and controlled notions of liberal politics, releasing genuinely political, democratic instincts

while underscoring the manipulated and anti-political nature of the American political system. . . . Participatory visions and experiments were the fuel that fired the movement's grass roots. . . .³² Over time, the Movement produced endless alternative or counterinstitutions: co-ops and communes, grass-roots and community organizing efforts like ERAP, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party, free universities and experimental colleges, community control experiments, store-front schools, underground newspapers, feminist consciousness-raising groups and collectives, and ecology action alliances.

Again and again, activists testified to the powerful emotions unlocked by their engagement in community: Jack Weinberg recalled of the Berkeley Free Speech movement, "The FSM . . . has been the most complete experience of my life, the most all-encompassing. . . . It gave me a sense of comradeship we had not known existed."³³ Freedom Summer volunteer Neil McCarthy described his time in Mississippi as "the most frightening and rewarding thing I've done in my life. . . . the richest part [of the experience] was the bond you felt with everyone in the project. We were really a family."³⁴

In their initial forays into activism, the young began a journey that, as Kenneth Keniston observed, would later evolve into a quest for new pathways of personal development, new values for living, new ways of knowing, new kinds of learning, new formulations of the world, new types of social organization, new tactics of political action, new patterns of international relations, and new controls on violence.³⁵

This journey brought them increasingly into conflict with the social and political mainstream, for the Kennedy—Johnson legacy also lay the foundation for the democratic revolt of the disillusioned. As Allen J. Matusow argues, "By his heroic poses, his urgent rhetoric, his appeal to idealism and the nation's great traditions, Kennedy inadvertently helped arouse among millions a dormant desire to perfect America. . . . Only later, during Lyndon Johnson's term as president, would the limits of liberal good will become apparent and the flaws of liberal reform be exposed."³⁶ Kennedy's was a legacy of rising expectations and shattered illusions, of magnificent promises yet modest results. For many dispossessed people, it was an experience much like opening a long-locked door only to have a chain-lock snap the door back in their face. Sixties movements began *within* the system they were trying to change and ended up *struggling against* that system.

THE PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION

Through our involvement in specific struggles, then, we came to understand that what we were opposed to was a system.

—Dick Cluster, *They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee*

The process of radicalization began with three crucial ingredients—*belief in a community-based, egalitarian democracy; a sharp personal awareness of social ills; and a feeling of confidence that something could be done.* As new activists joined the civil rights movement in the South (or the Peace Corps overseas), they came face to face with the compelling need to uproot and eliminate appalling conditions of oppression and powerlessness. Others were moved by the suffering they witnessed at greater distance. For both, what had once been vague and abstract, even invisible, became more immediate and concrete as oppressive conditions came to the surface. In parallel ways, those in other movements were moved by the contrast between their own concrete awareness of suffering, and the inadequacy, even callousness, of society's normal operations. The result was a powerful, personal sense that things had to change.

The combination of moral values, awareness of injustice, and confidence in change produced action, what George Katsiaficas has referred to as the "eros effect, the massive awakening of the instinctual human need for justice and for freedom."³⁷ In the 1960s, this meant joining activist organizations or more established service agencies like the Peace Corps, or, most profoundly, engaging in direct action or "putting your body on the line." Black sharecroppers risked death to register to vote, young men refused draft induction, women dared to leave abusive mates.

In a variety of forms, personal action set in motion the remaining stages of the radicalization process, although obviously not everyone traveled the same path or the same distance in that process. Initially, direct action produced a heady sense of empowerment, described by participants as a combination of fear and ecstasy resulting from taking risks to change one's environment. It also reinforced the personal commitment to work for justice. Out of this profound personal engagement came the distinctive personal politics of the Sixties.³⁸ In contrast to the more compartmentalized, abstract mainstream process, political action was bound up with personal authenticity.

The moral catalyst for change therefore came from outside the institutions of government. During the early years of the civil rights movement, the inter-

play between activists and liberal officials in the federal government was the primary dramatic setting for the contradictions of liberal democracy, a process later played out in the antiwar movement. For those who had been optimistic, disillusionment began to set in. Endangered SNCC field workers came to see the federal government as a disinterested observer rather than a participant in remedying the injustices of Southern racism. College students came to see the traditional curriculum reflecting the vested interests of future employers. Antiwar activists rejected the authority of an administration that continually promised "light at the end of the tunnel." Hippies fled from the nightmarish violence of society while also rejecting the increasingly violent tactics of the New Left. Women activists were appalled to discover that their New Left boyfriend mirrored oppressive strains of the larger society. Ecologists despaired at society's perpetual "progress" toward ecological disaster.

For activists, the encounter with official evasion and resistance often became a catalytic event, triggered by an existential act that forever changed the way the actor viewed the system. One such act was getting arrested. As writer Hans Koning recalls, "Getting arrested is a salutary experience. When it has happened to you, you have lost your political virginity and gained new perspective. . . . A political arrest here means a falling-out between an individual and the state on a moral issue, and with the individual rather than the state and its police force on the side of morality."³⁹ Similarly, demonstrators found themselves assaulted by police at nonviolent sit-ins or by National Guard troops marching into their ranks.⁴⁰ These were moments of remarkable moral clarity about one's self in relation to the larger society. They produced a deepening commitment and a sharpened awareness of society's determination to resist change. They fostered a growing sense of being outlaws in America.

TRANSITION TO THE 'HIGH SIXTIES'

This generation was unique in the conviction that it could do something about war, racism, and economic justice. We never asked, "Jesus, what are we talking about?" The assumption was, "Of course." We were never in doubt.

—Rennie Davis, SDS leader

While the process of radicalization took place at different times within each movement, it also colored the tone of the decade as a whole. In 1964–1965, events coming on the heels of the president's assassination signaled a

basic shift in the national dynamics of change. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, followed by the Voting Rights Act and an avalanche of social legislation including the War on Poverty. Yet civil rights activists involved in the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign were sharply alienated by the failure of the Democratic party to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party at the 1964 convention. The first major urban riots of the decade exploded in Harlem and Watts, and in 1965, the first cries of "black power" were heard. Freedom Summer veterans also returned to college campuses in the North and began to mobilize the student movement, beginning with the Berkeley Free Speech movement.

Most crucially, the United States unofficially declared war on Vietnam through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and began massive bombing and deployment of the first wave of ground troops. Nothing alienated, and in many cases radicalized, a broader segment of the young more than the war in Vietnam. The government's promise of winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese was shattered by the hideous experience of the war and of the young men who were shipped home in coffins or with broken bodies or damaged spirits.

These events helped usher in the "high Sixties," a time of mass movement characterized by two ultimately incompatible traits: a growing radical awareness of society's deeply rooted resistance to change, coupled with activists' still confident commitment to bring about change. As faith in leaders and the political process faded, the sense of efficacy came from participation in a momentous collective enterprise. As Ann Oakley recalls,

The extraordinary intimacy experienced by people who have fallen in love is akin to that felt by participation in great political movements: one's sensory world expands, becomes more intense, the boundaries between people become diffused, ordinary human selfishness is replaced by an unusual altruism, and everyday routines and language become inappropriate to the description and working out of a relationship that cancels time by becoming "an eternalization of the present."⁴¹

The euphoria was powerful. Yet the seeds of an apocalyptic vision and an exaggerated belief in one's own power lurked beneath the surface. The tensions of a darkening decade were captured in Graham Nash's lyrics to "Chicago":

We can change the world,
Rearrange the world,

It's dying
To get better.

As the promise of the early Sixties disintegrated, activists experienced what Todd Gitlin has called "radical disappointment." They came to see their liberal allies as morally hypocritical, and the system as deeply entrenched and in need of more fundamental or radical change. They discovered that liberal rhetoric obscured a determination to maintain prevailing institutional arrangements. The liberal establishment spoke the language of democracy, but meant a democracy in which the powerful continued to hold most of the power. When push came to shove, those who held power rebuffed the claims of those who sought change. In short, activists came to be radicalized when they realized that liberalism inspired a form of personal activism and democracy that it ultimately could not tolerate, much less satisfy.

The tension between expressive and instrumental politics became too strong. As SDS national secretary Clark Kissingger asked, "How can one live his values in the movement and yet change an industrial society of 180,000,000 people?"⁴² Activists increasingly felt the urge to disassociate from a society that seemingly expected them to "sell out" as a price for their participation. Many exercised a "great refusal," rejecting participation in society on society's terms. At different times, radical disassociation emerged in the black separatist movement, the creation of counterinstitutions like experimental colleges and free schools, the noncooperation or expatriation of draft resisters, the amazing and sometimes bizarre array of lifestyles in the counterculture, the creation of radical and lesbian feminist communities, and the total rejection of commercial technologies exhibited in elements of the counterculture and ecology movements. The only recourse, many felt, was to remove the stain of cooperation with a society that demanded amoral complicity in immoral acts.

Radical disappointment also fed activists' anger, not only at the system's injustice but at sympathetic liberals' willingness to compromise with the perpetrators of injustice. The result was renewed activism with a harder edge, a growing militance that in turn sharpened the conflict with society. Carnus' words, "There are times . . . when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt," describe a growing feeling in the decade's later years. As Todd Gitlin recalled, "The war was driving us nuts."⁴³ Something had to give.

TRANSITION TO THE LATE SIXTIES—1968

On August 28, 1963, the President welcomed civil rights leaders and 250,000 people to Washington for a sort of joyous celebration. On August 28, 1968 we were gassed in front of the Conrad Hilton and both Kennedys were dead. The difference between those two things, although they're only five years apart, is too staggering to sort out and fully understand right now.

—Tom Hayden, interview in *The Movement*, October 1968

In 1968, it all came apart. The bloody Tet Offensive exploded administration myths about the "light at the end of the tunnel" in Vietnam. Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy challenged the President for the Democratic nomination, and Lyndon Johnson withdrew from the presidential race. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, the two mainstream political figures who held out the greatest hope for change, were shockingly, yet almost predictably, assassinated. Students took over five buildings at Columbia University and defiantly held them until a brutal police assault ended the occupation. Americans became aware of the global extent of revolt as a student-worker strike immobilized Paris, and Soviet tanks rolled into Prague to crush the Czech uprising. Finally, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago itself grimly recalled Prague as National Guardsmen patrolled the barbed-wire city and Chicago police assaulted protesters and reporters outside the convention hall. As Hans Koning recalled, "The essence of 1968 was a clarity of perception. It was as if a curtain had been raised, a veil lifted. The clichés, platitudes, and myths of our public life . . . were suddenly seen as such."⁴⁴ The late Sixties were ushered in by the election of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. The Movement began to spin out of control.

While the mid-Sixties had taught activists that the system was capable of enormous evil, it had also seemed responsive to mass movements that clearly demanded change, especially as the numbers of those demanding change swelled. The late Sixties taught activists that the system was only symbolically responsive. Also, as Richard Flacks argued in 1966, the Vietnam War revealed a fundamental dilemma for the New Left:

It has helped to build the Left. But people on the Left can't responsibly worry about much else as long as it goes on. And the more they accept the responsibility for trying to end the war, the more militant they become—and the more they sense their own impotence, isolation, and alienation

from the larger society. . . . The war helps to build the radical movement, but the necessary obsession to work to end it is, in many ways, incompatible with *achieving* such a movement.⁴⁵

By this time, the system was fighting back, seemingly determined to crush the Movement. Government repression was pervasive. Under Director J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI not only kept Movement activists under surveillance, they used provocateurs to instigate violence at innumerable demonstrations, and infiltrators who fanned the flames of factionalism within the black power movement and underground press. They pressured corporations like Columbia Records not to advertise in the underground papers, and planted damaging disinformation about Movement activists in the mainstream press. Local police, most notoriously in Chicago and Oakland, harassed and arrested black and white radicals, shut down underground newspapers, and even killed several Black Panthers in dubious shoot-outs. The conspiracy trial of the Chicago Seven provided an insane kind of comic relief within the Movement, yet sent the clear message that there was a conspiracy by the Nixon administration to eradicate the Movement.⁴⁶ Movement paranoia increased apace. It all became terribly real at Kent State in 1970.

As society's resistance stiffened, the tendency to disassociate led to a splintering of Movement alliances. Black militants clashed with feminists, as did one SDS faction with another, hippies with politicos, men with women, straights with gays—each with its own agenda. Ultimately the disassociation could not be sustained. Abe Peck recalls,

Movement politics had taken on an edge of violence and frustration. Talented underground staffers chafed under collectivity. Music, sweet rock music, was slipping away from political ties that had been amorphous even at their peak. Underground-press staffers felt besieged. Various alliances—acidheads and Panthers, gays and socialists—were forming, then blowing apart. The Panthers—the very vanguard party—had finally suffered a split caused by ideology, ego, the isolation of their militant position, and ceaseless government repression.⁴⁷

More generally, the Movement's twin strains, the prefigurative creation of a new democratic community and the instrumental drive to transform institutions, fractured. As hope died late in the decade, the personal politics of the 1960s tended to become *either* personal or political, either expressive or

instrumental. The movements of the Sixties evolved toward two opposite extremes. One extreme expressed a militant perseverance to change society even if it meant abandoning the personal morality that originally inspired Sixties movements. The organized New Left, the heirs of SNCC and SDS, emphasized an instrumental revolutionary politics in which the ends justified the often violent means. The politics of experience was replaced by borrowed dogma from the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Amidst squabbles over "Revolutionary Correctness," in Abe Peck's phrase, the New Left embraced "tyrannies in the name of democracy." It thereby left itself open to the accusation that it mirrored the moral degradation of the system it opposed so violently. And the New Left provided an obvious scapegoat for the effort to turn the United States to the right.⁴⁸

The opposite extreme, represented by counterculture dropouts, championed an abandonment of political concerns and a preoccupation with inner or private reality. Recoiling from the heavy turbulence of political struggle, many young people (especially the younger phalanx of the Sixties generation) abandoned the Movement's declining political hopefulness and demonstrated little awareness of the economic roots of the social mores they rejected. This was the key to the counterculture's vulnerability, the reason it deteriorated into excessive disassociation only to be largely absorbed by the mainstream culture. However short-sighted, excessive, or naive the counterculture may have been, it represented a deeply felt need to escape the alienating mainstream culture, to turn inward and explore personal qualities repressed in conventional society, and to live in more intimate connectedness with others, all of which were elements at the core of Sixties prefigurative politics.

Most of the young did not move to either extreme. Seasoned activists clung to whatever sense of community they could find, even if that community was largely defined by what it was not. Many continued to turn out for massive antiwar protests while grappling with issues closer to home. The period of radical disassociation also provided the psychological space that enabled many to see society more clearly, thereby revitalizing a Left critique. It nourished a vast multitude of experiments and meetings of the mind, all exploring visions of democracy, community, and personal empowerment. Together with feminism and ecology, which were the two new pro-active movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, these participatory experiments are part of the unfinished democratic legacy of the Sixties.

Meanwhile, as America went back to business, the Movement licked its

wounds and began to take a look at what it had and had not accomplished, where it had gone wrong, ways in which the system perpetuated itself, and the reasons for this perpetuation. As Hans Koning put it,

It is tiring to look reality in the eye, nearly as hard as looking at the sun, looking at death. No one can keep that up. Challenging it may be, but no one wants seven days a week of challenge.

The powers-that-be, whose empire had been shaken and threatened by our sixties insight, took advantage of our weariness and invited this nation to relax and feel good.⁴⁹

Since the Sixties, society has gone in two directions, one effectively rejecting the democratic and communitarian vision of the Sixties, the other continuing to embrace that vision in various forms.

■ **Hard Lessons**

For many activists—those who come together to reflect on Sixties movements and events, those who continue to embrace the prefigurative democratic vision of the Sixties in their lifestyles and their work, and those who are actively committed to any of the myriad movements that reflect those values—the Sixties experience is part of a continuing path of political commitment and personal growth. In large part, this movement for democracy is grounded on lessons learned through the experiences of the 1960s.

Many activists' experiences forged their consciousness of the underside of American life that has not been and cannot be obscured by politicians' rhetoric about standing tall, government propaganda about overseas ventures, or mass media hype about winning the Cold War. If the Sixties experience demonstrated anything, it was the dramatic difference between the "advertisement" and the "product." The intensity and emotion of Sixties experiences have, over time, led to a radical assessment of American culture and institutions.⁵⁰

At the core of Sixties' lessons was the awareness that, whatever virtues they might possess, American institutions are fundamentally incompatible with the democratic vision that inspired and drew so many to activism. Instead of eradicating racial oppression, a system under fire cautiously removed its most blatant forms of expression, ultimately rendering invisible those who bore the double burden of racism and class inequality. Instead of eliminating poverty,

this system, amidst great flourish and for a limited period of time, produced program after program that softened the cruellest edge of suffering for those fortunate enough to benefit. Instead of empowering people, the system relied increasingly on experts who in the best of times provided the needy with incremental material and psychological gains. Instead of a politics grounded on moral compassion, activists encountered resistance to their moral claims justified by the "higher good" of system maintenance. Instead of a culture that valued the full flowering of individuality, they found a society that purports to leave people alone yet barrages them daily with inducements to fit into the mass culture. Instead of the flourishing of community, they encountered faceless bureaucracy, distant arenas of political decision-making, and a marketplace that accelerated the extinction of traditional communities and the natural landscape. And, of course, instead of an America making the world safe for democracy, they discovered a bipartisan, elite-driven foreign policy virtually crushing the life blood out of a small Asian nation, all to prove its commitment to sustaining the American empire. These lessons were pounded home by the traumatic shocks of the decade: assassinations, sell-outs by party politicians, arrests, violent assaults by police or National Guard, and the searing reality of Vietnam.

These experiences converged to teach two deeper lessons. First, the oppression and dehumanization targeted by Sixties movements were not so much the result of bad men as they were sustained by the incentives and rewards that characterize America's most hallowed institutions—free elections, two-party competition, representative democracy, a free press, universal education, a capitalist economy, and the American tradition of political liberalism. Second, these institutions are inherently incapable of eradicating the ills that so galvanized activists—poverty, racial and sexual inequality, narrowly technocratic education, an aggressive foreign policy, and the destruction of community and the environment.

In part, these institutional limitations are rooted in a liberal political system sustained in the aggregate by the individual pursuit of self-interest. From John Kennedy's inauguration to Lyndon Johnson's call for a Great Society, Sixties activists encountered a political process that binned with hopeful rhetoric yet repeatedly responded to the imperative of system maintenance. All of the most hopeful and seemingly idealistic programs, from Kennedy's Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress to Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, reflected not only an effort to do good but also an insider's response to threats to the sys-

tem. Overseas crises rested on the “hoariest of Cold War myths: the idea of a monolithic communist drive, headed by the Soviet Union, to achieve world domination.”⁵¹ The antipoverty bill was, in the words of the *New York Times*, an “anti-riot bill.”

The objective of defending the system repeatedly overrode more progressive intentions whenever the two came into conflict, which they invariably did. Thus when Peace Corps volunteers began to protest publicly against the war in Vietnam, the Johnson administration tried to silence them. When military dictatorships were seen as the only alternative to social revolutions in Latin America, they were found to be compatible with U.S. intentions despite their brutality and systematic oppression of peasants. When community action agencies articulated the demands of poor people against big-city Democratic mayors, the Johnson administration placed them under the authority of mayors, and the Nixon administration later targeted the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) for elimination.

In the case of Vietnam, successive administrations deceived their antiwar critics and manipulated public support with increasing intensity and vindictiveness. Again and again, the purpose of executive action and rhetoric was to limit awareness of U.S. policy and its effects. Examples of executive deceit, suppression of information, and manipulation of the public during the Vietnam War were legion.⁵² The result was that traditional liberal-democratic checks like congressional oversight and a free press were rendered virtually impotent until late in the 1960s when antiwar-sentiments had spread to a majority of the public and elite groups were themselves sharply divided over the wisdom of continuing the war.

A second reason for the primacy of system maintenance is procedural, innovative and redistributive policies have traditionally been designed and implemented through a pluralist process dominated by powerful interest groups. Thus the Alliance for Progress, advertised as lifting Latin America out of poverty and desolation, was sold to skeptical American corporate interests with guarantees that loan recipients would maintain a good investment climate, which meant, for example, no deficit spending for agrarian reform or unemployment compensation.⁵³ For their part, the participation of Latin American officials was secured with generous economic and military aid. Thus, progressive reform in Latin America was stifled while military aid increased by 50 percent. Domestically, both Kennedy and Johnson instinctively resisted civil rights demands because they feared alienating the white South.⁵⁴ The one truly

participatory segment of the poverty program, the Community Action Program, was rapidly scuttled when big-city mayors complained that the program empowered poor communities independently of city hall. The potentially destabilizing demands of the poor were co-opted by those with a stake in the very institutions within which the poor were voiceless.

Finally, the liberal politics of the 1960s were permeated by the now dominant ethos of managerial technocracy. Problem areas like poverty, juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, Third World underdevelopment, and American strategic interests were isolated and studied through an allegedly objective social science. The poor were viewed abstractly as merely lacking in sufficient skills and motivation—which could be provided through programs engineered by trained professionals—rather than empathically as caught in systemic oppression. Third World nations were seen as simply lacking in the knowledge and investment capital for development based on the American model; these, too, could be provided by American experts. Programs were designed from the top down by an elite realm of decision-makers cut off from the world of their subjects, by insiders righteously unaware that their own subjectivity distorted the object of their analysis and policy. The Alliance for Progress, the vast Great Society programs, and, most blatantly, the war in Vietnam were suffused with a technocratic mindset caught up in its own logic and captive to its distorted world of statistics.⁵⁵

The combination of euphoric liberal rhetoric, programs designed and implemented by technocrats, and the resistance of powerful elite interests sharpened radical perceptions in the Sixties. When public officials pursued their technocratic visions in the face of mounting contradictory evidence, government policy seemed completely irrational. Again, the Vietnam War was the most blatant example of seemingly contradictory, illogical, and counterproductive policies. Perhaps the ultimate metaphor for the war was the oft-quoted commander’s report, “We had to destroy the village in order to save it.”⁵⁶ Similar examples of irrationality could be seen in the effort to end poverty through an educational process designed to separate “winners” from “losers,” or the short-sighted effort to quell urban riots with band-aid public services but no meaningful job opportunities, or the never-ending quest for technical fixes to solve environmental problems or meet energy needs.

The perception of government policy as permeated by irrationality suggested that either American policy makers were irrational or that there was a rationale for U.S. actions different from what most Americans were told.

Both explanations contain some truth. In the case of Vietnam, for example, the war's irrationality reflected the degree to which individuals deceived themselves in order to retain their belief in the rightness of their actions (and to avoid intensely uncomfortable self-scrutiny). Its rationality, on the other hand, reflected the superordinate goal of maintaining American hegemony, a willingness to use force to crush a war of national liberation and leave a nation so effectively disabled that it posed no danger of inspiring other Third World nations to follow a similar path.

Insights into the logic of seemingly irrational patterns of government behavior brought critics face to face with functional imperatives of a capitalist economy—a fourth and, some would say, ultimate reason for system maintenance. In the wake of Sixties experiences, a revitalized Left has scrutinized ways in which virtually all targets of Sixties concern are tied to imperatives of global capitalism.

This radical critique brings home some of the most enduring hard lessons of the 1960s, especially as these were confirmed by the rightist agenda of corporate retrenchment and Third World intervention during the 1980s. If anything like the hopeful democratic vision of the 1960s is ever to be realized, I would suggest that these are among the most important lessons to learn from that decade's experience.

At the same time, movements for human liberation, community, and ecological sanity can learn from the shortcomings of Sixties movements themselves. The day may come again when it seems feasible to "speak truth to power" with effective results. Yet the Sixties experience taught again and again that this is an unrealistic expectation that fueled painful disillusionment and self-defeating outbursts of rage and violence. The naïveté of early-Sixties hopefulness was one side of the emotional experience of the Sixties; apocalyptic rage late in the decade was another. Other things being equal, there is a crucial difference between controlled anger that produces determined activism and rage that strikes out at any and all targets.

Similarly, base-building is probably more fundamentally important than gaining short-term concessions or reforms from powerful elites, except as these demonstrate the efficacy of political mobilization. Put somewhat differently, progressive action should focus its attention and energy laterally as well as vertically—addressing the need to build connections with others in the process of demanding change from "above." At least, all forms of political action should bear in mind a lesson from their most successful Sixties predecessors:

for action to be persuasive, the psychological distance between activists and audience must be smaller than the distance between audience and target.

Finally, the rapidly changing world offers expanding opportunities for mobilization in small communities and across national borders. In the absence of a powerful communist "menace," a truly global capitalist economy is likely to highlight the contradictions of capitalism—providing glimpses of human liberation while undermining its achievability, requiring the exploitation of many for the benefit of relatively few, and, driven by market and growth imperatives, progressively destroying the ecosphere. Unless persuasive new demons are promulgated to divert attention from these contradictions, an aroused public will be more likely to demand human and social control of market forces, both at the global level and in the local community.

All this is, of course, conjectural. It is, however, a good deal more realistic than the myopic optimism of those who, like their "end of ideology" predecessors in the 1950s, assert that we are at the "end of history." They would have us ignore history—including the history of the 1960s.