

◀ Some audience members make their own music.

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Remembering Woodstock

In the summer of 1969, hundreds of thousands of people gathered for a rock concert in Bethel, New York. Most of the media criticized the three-day event because of the concertgoers' widespread use of drugs and open displays of "free love." The people who went to Woodstock felt differently. For them, Woodstock showed that close to half a million people could come together peacefully. Twenty-five years later, many who attended Woodstock still remember their experiences vividly.

"Woodstock was a time of social changes in human freedom and expression. . . . We learned not to be ashamed of our bodies. . . . We spent time with our kids. . . . That festival set the standards for peace, music, people and expression and showed to the world that all was not just violence and hatred . . . it was LIFE!"

— Juan C. Morales

◀ A 1969 poster promises "3 days of peace & music" at the Woodstock concert.

The Counterculture

Objectives

- Describe the rise of the counterculture.
- List the major characteristics of the counterculture.
- Evaluate the impact of the counterculture on American values and society.

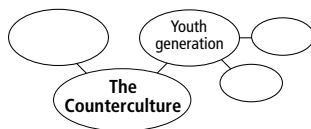
Terms and People

counterculture
generation gap
Beatles

commune
Timothy Leary

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas As you read, use a concept web like the one below to record main ideas about the counterculture.



Why It Matters Woodstock was a dynamic expression of a **counterculture** that arose in the 1960s. Members of the counterculture adopted values that ran counter to mainstream culture. They rebelled against long-standing customs in dress, music, and personal behavior. The counterculture both challenged the values of mainstream American society and unleashed a movement to reassert traditional values. **Section Focus Question: What was the counterculture, and what impact did it have on American society?**

The Counterculture Rises

The counterculture was rooted in the social and political events of the 1950s. The Beat movement had emphasized freedom from materialism and the importance of personal experience. The civil rights movement introduced the idea of social and political protest, which stimulated the Vietnam antiwar movement. Both movements prompted many people to question traditional boundaries, whether restrictions on rights or cultural norms in dress or hairstyles. It also heightened distrust of authority, leading some in the counterculture to declare, "Don't trust anyone over 30."

Members of the counterculture valued youth, spontaneity, and freedom of expression. Also called hippies, these young people promoted peace, love, and freedom. They experimented with new styles of dress and music, freer attitudes toward sexual relationships, and

the recreational use of drugs. Their values were so different from traditional ones that many social analysts described the resulting situation as a **generation gap**, in which there was a lack of understanding and communication between the older and younger generations. Jerry Rubin, a political activist, described how long hair divided parents from their children:

Primary Source

“Young kids identify short hair with authority, discipline. . . . Wherever we go, our hair tells people where we stand on Vietnam, Wallace, campus disruption, dope. . . . Yesterday I was walking down the street. A car passed by, parents in the front seat and a young kid, about eight, in the back seat. The kid flashed me the clenched fist sign. [Meaning: He identified with Rubin’s long hair.]”

—Jerry Rubin, *America in the Sixties*

The baby boom that followed World War II resulted in a huge student population in the 1960s. By sheer numbers, the baby boomers became a force for social change. The music industry rushed to produce the music they liked; clothing designers copied the styles they introduced; universities were forced to change college courses and rules to accommodate them.

 **Checkpoint** What factors influenced the rise of the counterculture?

Defining the Counterculture

Many people have used the so-called trinity of the counterculture—sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll—to define the youth generation. But the counterculture was also marked by an interest in spirituality.

Music and Art Shape Youth Culture By the 1960s, rock-and-roll had become a defining characteristic of the baby-boom generation. When the **Beatles** made a triumphant visit to the United States in 1964, more than 70 million Americans watched the English rock band perform on Ed Sullivan’s television show. The Beatles also had an impact on folk musicians like Bob Dylan, whose protest songs highlighted the civil rights and peace movements. As radical musician John Sinclair put it, rock became “a weapon of cultural revolution,” urging listeners to reject conventions and, in many cases, the political policies of the government. Even after the counterculture had declined in significance, rock music remained popular among baby-boomers as well as their children.

The art and literature of the 1960s and 1970s also displayed a rebellious side. Andy Warhol’s realistic paintings of common items of American culture, such as Campbell soup cans, questioned satirically what was “real.” In literature, the novels of Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson blurred the lines between reporting and political activism.

The Sexual Revolution Members of the counterculture rejected many traditional restrictions on sexual behavior in what became known as the “sexual revolution.” They called for the separation of sex from traditional family life and often advocated new living patterns. For example, many hippies lived together in **communes**, or small communities in which the people have common interests and share resources. The sexual revolution was one of the strongest indicators of the generation gap. One poll showed that nearly two thirds of all Americans over the age of 30 opposed premarital sex, whereas a majority of those under age 29 did not. Eventually, however, the sexual revolution led to a more open discussion of sex in the mainstream media.

Rock Art

The pop art that decorated concert posters, such as this one from the late 1960s, often challenged tradition.



in,” “turn on” to drugs, and “drop out” of mainstream society. The hippies of San Francisco attracted a great deal of media attention, much of it critical of the lifestyles they advocated. Life in Haight-Ashbury did prove to have unwanted effects. As in other enclaves of hippie culture, it experienced high rates of drug abuse which led to increased crime.


Exploring Different Routes to Spirituality Some members of the counterculture sought spiritual enlightenment outside of the Judeo-Christian traditions in which they had been raised. Many explored Buddhism and other Eastern religions, while others sought spirituality by living in harmony with nature. Particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some hippies established rural communes, seeking to live off the land as Native Americans had in the past. These beliefs had a lasting impact on the budding environmental movement.

 **Checkpoint** What characteristics define the counterculture?

The Counterculture Ends

By the end of the 1960s, many people, even those within the counterculture, had become disillusioned with some of its excesses. The utopian urge to discover a more authentic way of living had an unfortunate underside. Drug addictions and deaths from overdoses rose. A number of rock musicians, most famously Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, died of drug overdoses while only in their twenties. The downward spiral continued in 1969 with a tragedy at a music festival sponsored in Altamont, California. While the Rolling Stones played, members of the Hells Angels, a motorcycle gang that had been hired to provide security, stabbed to death a black man who had approached the stage. The ugly violence contradicted the values of “peace and love” that many hippies embraced.

At the same time, the movement’s values were becoming increasingly shallow and self-centered. When the counterculture fell apart, most hippies abandoned their social experiments and melted right back into the mainstream. Still, the seeds of protest they had sown would influence the growing “rights revolution.”

 **Checkpoint** Why did the counterculture fall apart?

Vocabulary Builder

contradict—(kahn truh DIHKT) *v.*
to go against expressed views

SECTION

1

Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1711

Comprehension

- Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining how it influenced the counterculture.
 - generation gap
 - Beatles
 - commune
 - Timothy Leary

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Identify Main Ideas Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: What was the counterculture, and what impact did it have on American society?

Writing About History

- Quick Write: Identify Issues** You are a teenager in the 1960s, and you’ve been invited to your father’s club to give a speech about the values of the youth generation. Identify the issues that you will address, keeping your audience in mind.

Critical Thinking

- Identify Assumptions** What assumptions about mainstream culture were made by the counterculture?
- Analyze Information** Explain whether you agree with the following statement: “The counterculture was a form of protest.”
- Recognize Cause and Effect** How did trends within the counterculture movement contribute to its downfall?