1960s PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Were the movements of the 1960s responsible for progressive change or were they lessons in destruction?

Viewpoint: The youthful idealism of the 1960s sparked the mass movements against racial injustice and the Vietnam war.

Viewpoint: The tactics of the New Left inspired a vigorous debate and energized communities across the nation to seek social improvement.

Viewpoint: The progressive movements of the 1960s liberated only those who had no need of it—the well educated, elite, and politically powerful—while it created a new culture that disparaged the values of hard work.

The political movements of the 1960s, particularly the Civil Rights and the anti-Vietnam War movements, were different from earlier political movements. These movements were as much cultural as political. They sought not only immediate political goals (changes in the law, and end to a war) but ultimately cultural and social goals (equality of all, not only before the law but in everyday life; changes in the way people lived and worked). The movements seemed to emanate from younger people, from the generation born after World War II, which came of age in the 1960s. The lunch counter sit-ins of 1960, the "Freedom Rides" of the early part of the decade, led to the Free Speech movement at Berkeley, California, and the National Mobilization against the War in the late 1960s. By the end of the decade, college students were speaking out not only against segregation and the war, but against narrow curricula and rules in colleges; calling for the creation of programs to study African American and women's history; and for a more active social involvement of colleges and universities in redressing social wrongs.

In these three essays, David Steigerwald and Bryn Upton take differing views on the effectiveness of the political movements that originated among the students of the 1960s known as the "New Left." Upton sees the 1960s movements as part of a youthful, idealistic culture which achieved worthy ends. His essay is a concise narrative of events and ideas, putting the 1960s into historical context. David Steigerwald gives two analytical critiques of the movements. Steigerwald's first essay takes a longer view of the 1960s, and looks more at the tactics fo the New Left than at the agenda. Steigerwald sees that even the New Left's staunchest opponents learned something from the movement's strategy, and conservatives have used New Left tactics to energize their own counter-revolution. In his last essay, Steigerwald shows how a scholar looking at the same material can come to a completely different conclusion. The New Left, he argues, was a sham. Rather than seeking the equality of all and the creation of a new world, the New Left really sought more privileges for an already spoiled generation, which had grown up in prosperous times never knowing the hardships of the Great Depression or the mass sacrifices required during World War II.

Which is the correct interpretation? All three essays contain part of the truth. All three have definite points of view. It is essential to remember that all history contains the historian's own perspective, even if it claims objectivity.
Read the three essays critically and try to understand how scholars looking at the same set of facts can interpret them in such different ways.

**Viewpoint:**

The youthful idealism of the 1960s sparked the mass movements against racial injustice and the Vietnam War.

The promise of the New Left was that of youthful idealism. It was a movement based on the truly American ideas of liberty, self-determination, and rule of the people. Yet, the lofty goals of participatory democracy did not take hold in the American political scene, and at the end of the 1960s the New Left, and most of the counterculture revolution, had dissolved. The decade that produced the most significant civil-rights legislation in U.S. history also buried its most visible and powerful supporters. The generation that saw the collapse of legalized segregation also supported the presidential candidacy of a confirmed segregationist. The near decade-long cry for new politics ended in the nominations of two former vice presidents. In the end, the New Left helped initiate changes that stood the test of time, but the movement also failed to achieve many goals.

The 1950s was a time of change. After years of economic depression and wartime rationing, the United States experienced a time of unprecedented growth and consumer spending. A population explosion was another postwar phenomenon. These children, especially those of the middle class, grew up in a new world. They were free from many of the difficulties and responsibilities their parents had known, free from the effects of the Great Depression, and free from World War II. At the same time, they grew up in a world that seemed to have two clear sides, democracy and communism, locked in ideological combat.

The new generation was in many ways more privileged than previous ones. Their parents and grandparents had fought in wars on foreign lands, were convinced of the rightness of democracy and the American way, and had sacrificed during the 1930s and 1940s. Middle-class youths in the 1950s came of age in suburban developments with new schools, in families with enough food for all, and surrounded by material abundance. Cars, televisions, refrigerators, and dishwashers became normal possessions. Members of the New Left tended to come from middle-class families, with educated, liberal parents. These young activists frequently attended top-tier universities such as Berkeley, Michigan, Wisconsin, Harvard, and Columbia.

Ideologically, the New Left was influenced by the writings of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, C. Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse.

The New Left emerged from this climate, free from want, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the turbulent 1960s. There were leftist organizations in the early 1950s, and indeed throughout American history, but leftist student groups of the early 1950s were constrained by the fervor of McCarthyism. One example was the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID), which had to define its position within the emerging ideological dichotomy. In 1951 SLID released a statement drawing a clear line between their brand of liberalism and socialism and that practiced in the Soviet Union, which they branded as imperialistic. However, a series of events awakened middle-class America to the realities of life outside their experience. This awakening had more to do with creating the New Left than with organizations such as SLID.

In 1959 the revolution in Cuba, led by intellectual radicals Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Fidel Castro, awakened in the American intellectual community a greater sense of the excesses of capitalism. C. Wright Mills praised Castro's revolution in Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba (1960). This work brought into view, for the first time for most Americans, the harsher side of the capitalist system. Exploitation abroad was only the first part of the awakening.

Growing tensions over the struggle for equal rights for blacks in the South started to gain national attention. In 1960 groups of black students began sit-ins at lunch counters throughout the South. These protesters were in many ways similar to the white middle-class students of the New Left who were frustrated by the slow pace of change. The young activists not only generated sympathy for their cause, but also energized the New Left.

At the end of 1960 a ray of hope emerged for the New Left. The election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy to the presidency in November gave hope to many black, as well as New Left, activists. Kennedy was the first president born in the twentieth century; he was young and vibrant, spoke of the future, and represented hope. As 1961 began, the revolution in Cuba, the sit-ins in the South, and the election of Kennedy were much in the minds of a group of students at the University of Michigan. There they had founded the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960. The organization called for new politics and participatory democracy (eventually they
THE MAY 2nd MOVEMENT

On 2 May 1964 the first major student demonstrations against the war in Vietnam occurred in the United States. Students marched and held rallies in Boston, New York City, San Francisco, Seattle, and other cities. The May 2nd Movement denounced the war as a product of an imperialistic system.

We, as students in the richest but most brutally confused country in the world, cannot understand that world and our part in it with the ahistorical education we receive in our universities. In order to make ourselves into effective social beings and in order to discover, sharpen, and use the power of our knowledge, we should organize ourselves in the broadest possible way to combat that lack of education. For it is a lack, a vacuum, that leads to political degeneration and default. The May 2nd Movement was formed to fight against a politics of default, specifically by organizing student protest and revolt against our government’s savage war on the people of Vietnam.

The university offers no explanation of what’s wrong, of what’s happening in a world principally marked by revolution. Instead, it grooms us for places as technicians, managers and clerks within the giant corporations, or to be professional apologists for the status quo within the giant multivertices, or to fill some other cog-space that needs the special “sensitivity” that only the polish of factory education can bring. The university is doing its job, supplying the system with loyal, well-trained, intelligent servants—who are moral, cultural and social morons. Lest this job prove too much of a burden for overstrained college administrators, it is shared with other institutions, from the moves to the Peace Corps.

When the student protest movement refers to “the establishment,” we are not kidding. That which we are out to change—be it a university or a government—is built on a tremendously powerful structure of material and organization. The money and resources available to it are immense. We will change nothing unless we organize ourselves, forge ourselves into a united and disciplined force and match the strength of the establishment in confrontations. We can do so because our strength is based on people, not cash. May 2nd Movement is building an organization of students that recognizes, and works to satisfy, our needs as students and as men and women. These needs are inseparable from the worldwide struggle for liberation. One can choose to oppose this struggle, or to join it. To oppose it is to be a murderer. To join together and fight to change this murderous society is the only way for any of us to live with decency and dignity. We will succeed when large numbers of students have the insight, the dedication and the will to organize themselves, to join the struggle with their sections of the population, and to see it through.

B. Johnson. Civil-rights and voting-rights legislation were passed in 1964 and 1965.

With these successes and spirit of cooperation new groups began to pop up in attempts to add more voices to the movement. The hippies, yippies, and counterculture seekers of the mid-to-late 1960s had many of the same beliefs and desires, yet they did not always see eye-to-eye. New Left organizers did not like the hippies, who were more interested in sex and drugs than in community organization and participatory democracy. The yippies, brainchild of Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, were formed specifically to shock the world, and in order to do that they concentrated on creating media-ready events. Yippie activities were staged and drew press attention away from serious issues addressed by the New Left.

In 1968, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the New Left and counterculture came head-to-head with the Democratic Party power structure and Mayor Richard Daly. The year had begun with the Tet Offensive, and for the first time it seemed that the general public was turning away from supporting the war in Vietnam and beginning to side with the New Left in its opposition to the conflict. When Johnson announced, on 31 March, that he would not run for reelection, the New Left had, perhaps, its greatest victory. Johnson had become the symbol of the war and the old politics, and now he was gone. Just four days later, however, Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed in Memphis. King’s assassination was a serious blow to the black community, the Civil Rights movement, and the New Left. Hope faded but it did not disappear. Robert Kennedy entered the race for the presidency and in his candidacy the New Left saw much of the promise they had seen in John F. Kennedy just a few years earlier. Blacks and Hispanics saw a compassionate friend; peace activists saw a man who wanted to end the war; and blue-collar workers believed the young senator heard their voices. The flames of hope were extinguished in June when, after winning the California primary, Robert Kennedy was killed.

At the convention in Chicago there was violence in the streets between protesters and police. There, the yippies nominated a pig for president, SDS members denounced the war, and the police tried to keep protesters from the convention. The resulting violence was broadcast around the nation during the nightly television coverage of the convention. Hubert H. Humphrey was nominated by the Democrats in Chicago. Meanwhile, Richard M. Nixon secured the Republican nomination amid racial violence in Miami. A third candidate, former governor George C. Wallace from Alabama, emerged to make it a three-way race. All these developments represented serious blows to the New Left.

Many things that the New Left had been fighting for were in jeopardy. The idea of new politics was gone; the candidates consisted of two former vice presidents and an avowed segregationist. The antiwar movement seemed to be in trouble as well, and with Kennedy assassinated and peace candidate Eugene McCarthy out of the race, no candidate took a firm stance on ending the war. Participatory democracy suffered hits as many voters stayed home.

Although both Nixon and Humphrey had tried to identify themselves with the new politics, their nominations, and the election of the former, showed the tenacity of old politics. A study of the voting behavior of 1968 showed that the people most likely not to vote were young, poor, and black. Those most likely to vote were wholly unsympathetic to youthful radicalism and tended to identify the New Left and counterculture with ingratitude. By the end of the year the New Left and counterculture were beaten. They had failed.

The war in Vietnam would last for seven more years; student protests became more violent and were more often met with violence by police or troops. Nixon was reelected in 1972 with the lowest percentage of voter participation since 1948. The social policies of Johnson’s Great Society were gutted. The hippies and yippies faded away. Black Power replaced the direct nonviolent protests of the early 1960s. While the age of protest was not over, 1968 represented a change in radicalism and in the response to radicalism in the United States. The New Left hung on, but was never the same. New movements emerged, most notably the Women’s movement, but there was never the kind of cooperative effort that had existed between organizations just a few years earlier.

The New Left did have a lasting impact on the political and social fabric of America, but in the final analysis it failed in what it was trying to do in the 1960s.

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**Viewpoint:**

The tactics of the New Left inspired a vigorous debate and energized communities across the nation to seek social improvement.

The progressive movements of the 1960s changed America forever. By empowering several groups who had been previously
oppressed or unrepresented, and destroying many of the stifling moral demands that were holdovers from the nineteenth century, they made America a much better society. Their main themes of group empowerment and personal liberation have become the fundamental propositions of American life.

The movements transformed American political institutions. The African American freedom struggle altered national politics more profoundly than any other force. Taking it upon themselves to throw off the shackles of racism, which were locked in place by widespread disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South, the Civil Rights movement permanently destroyed Jim Crow segregation, not through court decisions so much as through gaining access to the ballot. Through grassroots voter-registration drives, movement activists not only forced the Johnson Administration to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965 but taught powerless people how to take power for themselves. After the Voting Rights Act was passed, African American voting in the South dramatically increased, which led in turn to the election of African American representatives on the local, state, and national level.

The incorporation of African Americans into the national political system served as an impetus for other previously marginalized groups to demand representation. Hispanics and Native Americans pressed for inclusion; feminists and gay-rights activists took their place in the system. The scope of change can be easily measured by looking at the dramatic transformation of the Democrats. At the 1964 national convention, the party refused to seat a delegation of Mississippians composed of African Americans as an alternative to the white-dominated state party; by 1972, racial and ethnic minorities, feminists, and gay-rights activists not only had infiltrated the convention delegations, but they were virtually writing the rules of representation.

Political parties and government at every level have never been the same. Both parties eagerly court activist groups, and neither can afford to snub the concerns of the newly empowered. Republicans might shun what they see as “extremists” among feminists and gays, but they try to promote conservative representatives of these groups while having “extremists” among their own activists. It is testimony to how successful the progressive movements of the 1960s were that the concerns of groups that were so recently oppressed or ignored have become mainstream, which the whole system is geared to addressing. As Terry H. Anderson has written in *The Movement and the 1960s* (1996), “the long era of white men exclusively controlling the body politic was over.”

More widely, the progressive movements forced the nation to give up the Cold War politics of fear and conformity and to accept dissent as the healthy, indeed, vital, circulation of ideas. Whereas the Cold War made even the most critical citizens circumspect and cautious, a refreshing expectation of vigorous self-assertion into political practice emerged in the 1960s. The practice of vigorous dissent crossed party and ideological lines. Even conservatives began to see it as their duty to organize and express their interests zealously. There is no better example of this than Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, which was organized to counter the movement toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the main cause of liberal feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Along with the demand for group empowerment and the assumption that vigorous dissent is a necessary part of a healthy society, progressive politics of the 1960s changed the basic disposition of Americans toward government in the abstract. Whereas the World War II and Cold War generations had been raised on the obligations of citizens to accept governmental control because of national emergency, the 1960s generation recognized that what should be temporary obligations had calcified into blind obedience and acceptance of the status quo for its own sake. Activists insisted that government should be responsive to the immediate needs of people, whether in the form of economic assistance or improving the quality of life through such measures as environmental regulations. Part of this new disposition toward government bred an intense desire for decentralized, community control of resources, and face-to-face discussion and debate. James J. Farrell, in *The Spirit of the 1960s: Making Post-war Radicalism* (1971), described this sensibility as “personalism,” the expectation that people can govern themselves. As with the drive toward activism, this sensibility informed conservatism as much as it did liberalism. One can argue, in fact, that the anti-Washington impetus that appeared in the conservative Ronald Reagan years and the liberal William J. Clinton years was a direct result of the 1960s.

The new disposition was not just directed at national politics or government. It was an essential part of the spirit of the day and informed how progressive-minded people addressed all the institutions in their lives. It was a constant theme of student activists, for example, that institutions should be run by the people for whom they were built—in the case...
of the university, that meant students. It is too easily forgotten just how deadening and unresponsive American institutions had become. Almost all universities exercised the duties of in loco parentis and dictated the personal habits of students. Dormitories were segregated by gender (not by race because so few minorities attended colleges); male visits to women's rooms were strictly regulated; and women often had curfews. Customary dress had men in coats and ties and women in knee-length dresses. Professors lectured; students dutifully wrote notes; and the two rarely interacted otherwise—a discussion group was a rare thing. The uprising of the 1960s blew the old educational system apart.

What can be said about the universities holds true, to some extent, for most other institutions, including one important example, the Catholic Church. Roughly one-quarter of all Americans identified themselves as Catholic in the 1960s. At the beginning of the decade, the Church exercised censorship power over the movie industry through the Legion of Decency; its lobbying was powerful enough to prevent distribution of birth-control information between doctors and their patients in some states; and the liturgy was still said in Latin, with the priest's back to the congregation throughout the mass. Responding to the winds of change, the Second Vatican Council unleashed an institutional revolution in 1963 that transformed the role and inner workings of the Catholic Church.

More than any other institution, the family was dramatically altered. Restrictive divorce laws were replaced, making it possible for women, who saw their economic prospects expanding, to escape abusive or unhappy marriages. The myth of the happy, patriarchal suburban family of the 1950s gave way to an image of shared burdens and roles (even if the reality was that women bore more of the household burdens). Alternative living arrangements, including heterosexual cohabitation and homosexual unions, became more common.

As important as their political legacy was, the progressive movements of the 1960s had an important effect on private life, forcing change in several areas—moral, familial, and sexual—where change is difficult and most directly felt on an individual level. Obviously this personal revolution expressed itself in the dramatic alterations in sexual attitudes. In fact, there were two sexual revolutions during the decade, which overlapped but were at odds in some ways. The first, the Playboy revolution (the name is derived from the adult magazine *Playboy*), aimed mostly at loosening heterosexual conduct, especially for men, by equating high living with beautiful women. The second, more democratic and important, rejected the dominance of heterosexual standards and called for the liberation of all sexual impulses. It was this revolution, of course, from which the gay-rights movement emerged, especially when relaxed taboos combined with political activism.

Nonetheless, the revolution in personal life was perhaps most important for women. "The personal is the political" was the feminist battle cry, and women worked from that slogan to publicize all restrictions and forms of discrimination against them. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on gender, along with race, but its inclusion was something of a legislative mistake. Women, however, made the most of the opportunity to call attention to the great discrepancies in pay. Before its passage, women were rarely hired as university professors, business executives, or for other prestigious occupations; in some professions they were not permitted to join male colleagues in essential meetings. Women struggled to break down these barriers and also endeavored to assert their private concerns with domestic abuse, child support, women's health issues, and other long-ignored issues.

When people criticize the 1960s as an age of extremism, they forget just how stifling American society was at the time. None but the most conservative Americans would ever want to return. All Americans, whether they admit it or not, are better off because of the energy and commitment of 1960s progressives, who by no means won all their battles or were flawless. However, they expanded the definition of what it means to be an American and broadened the chances for gaining the American dream in the bargain.

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**Viewpoint:**

The progressive movements of the 1960s liberated only those who had no need of it—the well educated, elite, and politically powerful—while it created a new culture that disparaged the values of hard work.

The progressive movements of the 1960s—the New Left, radical feminism, gay and lesbian rights, and ethnic and racial advocacy—
often are credited with forcing America to broaden its idea of citizenship in important ways, especially in the case of women and African Americans. Yet, any accurate historical assessment of the women’s and African-American movements reveals that the 1960s cannot genuinely claim either movement. The women’s movement reached back to the pre-Civil War era, and the renewal of female activism was only one of the several waves that rose and fell in the larger history of the United States. The Civil Rights movement, meanwhile, contained many parts, but its most dynamic aspect, that which groups in the 1960s claimed as their own, was actually part of the grassroots movement of working people who began protesting against racial oppression in the mid 1950s. That grassroots movement, made up as it was of mostly poor and working-class Southern blacks, was far removed from the high-blown media acts that made up much of the radical politics of the 1960s. These other movements merely tried to appropriate the moral authority that the Civil Rights movement rightly accumulated by imitating its strategies of protest and by claiming to work in its image.

When the young activists actually got hold of the women’s and Civil Rights movements, they did considerable damage to both. Indeed, the Civil Rights movement ended, for all intents and purposes, in 1965, when the Voting Rights Act was passed. In the shadow of that great victory, the movement fell apart. The main student wing expelled white members that year, Stokely Carmichael introduced the Black Panthers to the movement while disavowing the long commitment to nonviolence, and Martin Luther King Jr. was forced to adjust to the radicalization of the movement by moving his operations from Atlanta to Chicago, where he met nothing but frustrating failures. As the movement squandered its moral authority, radical black nationalists emerged who could deliver little by way of tangible improvements to African Americans, but they cleverly manipulated guilt-ridden whites and convinced fellow blacks that they were victims who deserved government programs and protection.

The real political legacy of the progressive movements of the 1960s was not the liberation of once-marginalized people but rather the refinement of the politics of splinter groups. Self-proclaimed representatives of allegedly victimized groups stepped forward to demand recognition and some form of compensation, while at the same time declaring America a morally bankrupt and hopelessly bigoted society.

The eruption of narrow-minded, interest-group politics can hardly be called a success. Practitioners of the so-called New Politics took over the Democratic Party but only succeeded in destroying it as the majority coalition. Since President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democrats had joined ethnic and working-class Americans to liberal intellectuals and Southern conservatives, and in this form the party dominated mid-century political life. But once New Politics activists got hold of the party, the majority status was quickly destroyed. Contemptuous of working people in general, the New Politics treated union leaders with particular scorn. By 1972, the year Republican Richard M. Nixon trounced the Democratic candidate, George S. McGovern, the activists had seized control of the party, driving out not only union leaders but the bulk of working-class, ethnic voters as well. Although they considered this a success, they failed to realize that now they only represented splinter groups that could never be formed into any meaningful coalition. Most Americans, one wag pointed out, were
“unpoor, unblack, and unyoung,” a truth admirers of 1960s politics never understood.

Once in position to influence government policy, progressives constructed a web of bureaucratic programs that greatly increased the scope of federal power and hamstrung economic growth. Most of the bureaucracy emerged out of the War on Poverty, which was designed to uplift the poor, especially urban blacks. In spite of their self-righteous talk of “participatory democracy” and “community control,” in the 1960s progressives were quick to rely on government bureaucracy to achieve their ends. Far from empowering America’s poor, the War on Poverty really benefited local activists and unelected federal officials, leaving the poor more dependent than ever.

Just as the supposed antibureaucrats took control of the most powerful bureaucracy, so too did those who derided many of the nation’s institutions gain control of some of the most important ones. Progressives assumed control of public schools, as universities churned out professional pedagogues schooled less in particular subjects than in popular teaching methods. They emphasized self-esteem enhancement at the expense of educational basics and the result has been a steady decline in academic performance, easily quantified in any transnational assessment of student achievement. Meanwhile, these progressives also dominated American law. University law schools focused overwhelmingly on two causes: furthering minority rights, including the rights of criminals and the mentally unstable, and the radical application of the First Amendment to include nearly all forms of expression, from pornography to flag burning. Moreover, the radicals who were dedicated to tearing down the universities became esteemed tenured professors who merely reshaped those institutions in their own image, hiding their power behind anti-institutional rhetoric.

What of the claims of liberation made on behalf of the 1960s activists? This liberation was conducted entirely in the cultural sphere. Radicals had ridiculed the nuclear family, commitment to work, the idea of deferring gratification for the sake of long-term goals, patriotism, religious faith, and other bulwarks of traditional American life. They insisted that these beliefs were false, hypocritical values that imposed conformity, stifled creativity, and excused the social domination of white, heterosexual males. They called for individual freedom, claimed the right to “do your own thing,” and announced the end of “shame-and-guilt culture.”

The counterculture became mainstream, with its core values diffused throughout society. What was supposed to become utopia, however, produced a nightmare. The sexual revolution brought skyrocketing divorce rates and pummeled family structure; mass media was saturated with sexual messages, and the promiscuity it fostered led to two decades of rampant illegitimate births and the explosion of AIDS. The demand for “expanded consciousness” led to a succession of drug epidemics, including the terribly destructive crack cocaine epidemic that scourged American cities in the 1980s and 1990s. The demand for personal freedom, especially when enacted in a political climate geared to advance grievances, destroyed the sense of community obligations and created a society-wide sense of victimization that devalued personal responsibility.

Of all the social destruction wrought by 1960s progressives, its worst consequences were felt by the groups that were supposed to benefit most from emancipation: women and poor minorities. The collapse of family structure, heralded as an historic liberation from the patriarchal male, has thrown more women than ever into poverty. Single-parent families, overwhelmingly female-headed, became increasingly common and financially worse off. In 1990, for example, these households had a median income totaling only 42 percent of that of two-parent families.

In 1965 Daniel Patrick Moynihan raised progressive hackles by releasing a Labor Department report on the black family that deplored the frequency of out-of-wedlock births. Illegitimacy not only fractured the family, Moynihan argued, but also increased child poverty, heightened the chances of children turning to crime, and fostered the “cycle of poverty” where young girls became pregnant though economically and emotionally unfit to raise children. Moynihan was appalled in 1965 that 25 percent of African American children were born out-of-wedlock. By the early 1990s nearly two-thirds of African American children were born to single mothers, and they have experienced all the social repercussions—higher crime rates, lower educational performance, and cyclical poverty.

While many would argue that the rise of female-centered poverty was a function of an unjust economy, this widespread dysfunction is actually a cultural aspect of America. After all, the national economy since the recession of the 1980s generated tens of millions of new jobs. It cannot be said that economic opportunities have been lacking. How otherwise to explain the great waves of immigration during the last two decades?

The values of the counterculture seeped down from progressive elites through Holly-
wood, television, and pulp magazines and eroded values that are essential for self-help. In a culture that devalued hard work and self-sacrifice, there was no encouragement for those at the bottom to undertake the struggle to raise themselves up. In a culture that ceaselessly claimed that sex without consequences was the key to happiness, there was no reason to expect a young unmarried girl to avoid pregnancy, particularly when her mother did the same thing and the government was willing to pay her for doing so.

Of course, the 1960s progressives, who were mostly social elites to begin with, enjoyed the benefits of the social changes they pushed. Well-to-do women benefited from loosened marital obligation, while poor and working-class women were "liberated" into a world of male irresponsibility and economic hardship. Upper-class minorities benefited from affirmative-action programs, but the programs did little for individuals whose background made them unlikely candidates for admission to Harvard or Yale.

Richard Hofstadter, esteemed Columbia University historian, reputedly called the 1960s "the age of rubbish." The progressive elites pushed their way into power and reshaped America to suit themselves. However, they left the rest of the nation to live, as Hofstadter suggested, in their trash.

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