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The Polarized Sixties: An Overview

The year 1960, one historian writes, marked "the definitive end of the Dark Ages, and the beginning of a more hopeful and democratic period" that lasted until the early 1970s. Another historian calls the 1960s a modern Great Awakening which ignited a "Burned-Over Decade" of cultural change akin to the turbulent 1840s. William Braden, a contemporary observer, labeled the era an Age of Aquarius that heralded "a new American identity—a collective identity that will be blacker, more feminine, more oriental, more emotional, more intuitive, more exuberant—and, just possibly, better than the old one."[1]

Cultural conservatives witnessed these changes with disgust. The sociologist Daniel Bell was appalled by young people who were trying to "transfer a liberal life-style into a world of immediate gratification and exhibitionist display." The "counterculture," as it was called, "produced little culture, and it countered nothing." The columnist George Will later dismissed the decade as an age of "intellectual rubbish," "sandbox radicalism," and "almost unrelieved excess." Braden worried that Americans who were forging the "new identity" might be mistaking "vividness, inten-

1. Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston, 1982), 3; Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York, 1991), 89–99; William Braden, *Age of Aquarius: Technology and the Cultural Revolution* (Chicago, 1970), 6.

sity, and urgency for cultural sensitivity and responsible morality. They don't know what they like, but whatever they or their emotions like must be art—or must be right, and certainly righteous."[2]

Both sides of this still acrimonious debate were correct in recognizing that unusually tumultuous events shook American life in the 1960s. Cultural and social changes seemed to accelerate rapidly in the early 1960s, to reshape public policies in the mid-1960s, and to polarize the nation in the last few years of the decade. By then the thrust of activism was dramatically shifting direction: backlash mounted rapidly against the public programs and ushered in a durable age of political conservatism in America. But the tumult of the decade nonetheless had unsettled much that Americans had taken for granted before then, including vestiges of what for lack of a better word can be called "Victorian." Thereafter, people seemed much readier to challenge authority. As Morris Dickstein, a perceptive scholar put it, "The sixties are likely to remain a permanent point of reference for the way we think and behave, just as the thirties were."[3]

Dickstein's view of the sixties has much to be said for it. Signs of dramatic change were gathering force even in 1960, when the sit-ins broke out in February. SNCC came to life in April. Enovid, the birth control pill, was approved by the government in May. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), later to be the most prominent of many "New Left" protest groups, was born in June. In 1961 social change gathered new momentum. The civil rights movement entered a bloodier stage, with racists attacking "freedom riders" who sought to integrate interstate travel: between 1961 and 1965, twenty-six civil rights workers lost their lives in the South. More than any other development of the early 1960s, the civil rights revolution spurred the idealism, egalitarianism, and rights-consciousness that galvanized many other groups and challenged social relations in the United States.

The early 1960s witnessed publication of extraordinarily provocative and influential books that questioned conventional notions about American society and culture. In 1961 Jane Jacobs brought out *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which skewered the grandiose pretensions of urban planners, and Joseph Heller published *Catch-22*, an unsubtle but hilarious and disturbing novel about the inanities of the military in World

2. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, 1976), 81; Wills, cited in Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*, 78; Braden, *Age of Aquarius*, 6.
3. Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York, 1977), 250.

War II. It sold some 10 million copies over the next thirty years, appealing especially to opponents of the Vietnam War. Two seminal books appeared in 1962. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* sounded an eloquent warning against pesticides and environmental pollution. Widely acclaimed, it spurred an ecological movement that gathered considerable force by the late 1960s. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* greatly dramatized the problem of poverty in the United States, adding to pressures for governmental action.[4] In 1963 James Baldwin's prophetic *The Fire Next Time* alerted Americans to the likelihood of violent racial confrontation. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* also appeared in 1963. A huge seller, it helped to launch a renaissance of feminism.

Reflecting the anti-Establishment spirit of these books, groups of protestors began to capture public attention in the early 1960s. In Michigan Tom Hayden and other young SDS radicals crafted the Port Huron Statement in 1962, a long, sometimes contradictory, but much-cited manifesto of New Left activism.[5] In Mississippi that fall, James Meredith, an air force veteran, sought to become the first black person to attend the University of Mississippi. When segregationists retaliated with violence, President Kennedy had to send in the army. Also in 1962, César Chávez and fellow migrant workers organized the National Farm Workers Association, thereby inspiring efforts that led to highly publicized strikes and boycotts later in the decade.[6] Early in 1963 Martin Luther King staged a dramatic protest against racial discrimination in Birmingham. It provoked white violence, worldwide television coverage, and rising outrage against racism in the United States. That August King and others took part in a March on Washington that attracted some 250,000 protestors.

Other, unrelated events added to a public perception—this was important—that the times were changing with especially accelerating speed in these years. The Supreme Court shocked conservatives—and others—in 1962 by ruling that public schools in New York could not require students to recite a State Board of Regents prayer in the classroom.[7] The Vatican Ecumenical Council, under the reformist leadership of Pope John XXIII, agreed to authorize use of the vernacular in parts of the Catholic mass. Traditionalists were amazed and appalled.[8] The folk-singer Bob Dylan, who had prophetically written "The Times They Are a-Changin'" in 1962, brought out "Blowin' in the Wind" in the spring of 1963. The version by Peter, Paul, and Mary, marketed in August 1963, sold 300,000 copies in two weeks and became the first protest song ever to make the Hit Parade.[9] Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, having helped to celebrate the virtues of drugs such as LSD, were fired from their posts at Harvard University that spring but continued to beguile acolytes, especially among the young.

Other blows to the familiar followed in early 1964. In January the Surgeon General of the United States issued a report by eminent scientists warning of the mortal dangers of tobacco.[10] It temporarily shook some of the millions of Americans (more than one-half of adult men, more than one-third of women) who smoked.[11] In the same month movie-goers began flocking to see Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*. It featured a crazed militarist, Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden), who refused to rescind an insane attack order because he was convinced that the "International Communist Conspiracy" was trying to "sap and impurify all of our precious bodily fluids." More effectively than any other movie of the era,

4. The year 1962 also witnessed publication of *Fail-Safe* by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. A popular novel, it centered on a nuclear disaster caused by mechanical failure. It was produced as a movie in 1964.
5. Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York, 1973); James Miller, *"Democracy Is in the Streets"; From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York, 1987).
6. Mark Day, *César Chávez and the Farm Workers* (New York, 1971); Juan Gonzales, *Mexican and Mexican-American Farm Workers: The California Agricultural Industry* (New York, 1985).

7. *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). The non-denominational prayer read, "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessing upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country." Prior to the decision, schools had had the option of using the prayer or not. Students who did not wish to recite it could leave the room. See *Newsweek*, July 9, 1962, pp. 21–22, 43–45, for vocal public reaction.
8. Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 134–36; James David Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, 1991), 67–106.
9. Maurice Immerman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, 1989), 212–42; George Lipsitz, "Who'll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock 'n' Roll, and Social Crises," in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 206–34.
10. *Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service* (Washington, 1964).
11. As noted earlier, Americans cut back smoking only temporarily; by 1966 per adult consumption of cigarettes had risen to pre-report levels. See James Patterson, *The Dread Disease: Cancer and Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 201–30.

the movie ridiculed the excesses of the Cold War. A month later the Beatles arrived in the United States from England and became an immediate sensation; a record 67 million people watched them perform on "The Ed Sullivan Show." In March Malcolm X, a charismatic black nationalist, broke with the Nation of Islam, formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and set about enlisting African-Americans in northern cities.

Young people seemed especially restless at the time. Gaining confidence in 1964, when a protracted "free speech" movement at the University of California, Berkeley, aroused nationwide notice, activist students—many of them veterans of civil rights protests in the South—began to demonstrate for a range of causes.[12] Some raged against poverty and racial discrimination, others (especially after escalation of American involvement in Vietnam) against American foreign policies, others against the flaws of universities themselves. By no means all campuses experienced significant unrest in the 1960s. But most of the elite colleges and universities did. These attracted many of the brightest and most privileged young people among the huge and expectant baby boom cohorts that were then swarming to the campuses. "If you are not part of the solution," the idealists believed, "you are part of the problem." Their engagement reinvigorated the political and cultural Left in the United States.[13]

These and other developments hardly added up to a coherent movement, or even a clearly visible pattern. But they came hard and fast on one another, and they received great coverage from television, which by then reached virtually all Americans, and from other sources of news that reached a more highly educated population.[14] It was in the 1960s that TV came into its own as a major force in American life, promoting a more national culture while at the same time casting its eye on profound inter-

12. W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York, 1989); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Rebellion in the University* (Chicago, 1971); Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition* (New York, 1971).
13. Kenneth Cmiel, "The Politics of Civility," in Farber, ed., *Sixties*, 263–90.
14. James Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America Since 1941* (Baltimore, 1992), 91, notes that 92.6 percent of American households in 1961 had one or more TV sets and that these were on for an average of almost six hours per day in 1963. Other useful sources include Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, 1980), 296; Michael Schudson, "National News Culture and the Rise of the Informational Citizen," in Alan Wolfe, ed., *America at Century's End* (Berkeley, 1991), 263–82; and David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York, 1994), 49–66.

nal divisions. Many Americans at the time indeed sensed that the times were changing, that a new if undefined *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times, was in the process of remaking society and culture. The restless spirit pushed with special insistence against the political center. In 1963 activists demanding racial justice forced President Kennedy to come out for civil rights legislation. Within a year and a half of Kennedy's assassination in November 1963—a shocking act that intensified the pressures for change—reformers in Congress managed to enact a spate of liberal legislation, including a "war on poverty," federal aid to education, Medicare for the aged, Medicaid for the poor, reform of immigration law, creation of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and two historic civil rights laws that would have seemed almost unimaginable a few years earlier.

Culturally, too, the center seemed in some disarray, especially after mid-decade. Large numbers of people, most of them young, began to find common cause in seeking relief from what they considered to be the vulgarity, impersonality, and overall dullness of middle-class culture. Some of these rebels adopted New Left political opinions, but many others resisted mainstream culture, not public policies. Millions found inspiration from rock musicians, especially (it seemed) from those who were loudly and angrily anti-authoritarian. A rock concert at a farm in Bethel, New York, in 1969 attracted some 400,000 people who wallowed happily about in the rain, some in various stages of undress and drug-induced haze, for three days. Traffic jams and police barricades prevented many thousands more from attending. "Woodstock" was the culminating event of "countercultural" celebration in the 1960s.[15]

Smaller numbers of young people "dropped out" of mainstream American life to join countercultural communes. They were a tiny minority of the overall population (which rose, a little more slowly than in the 1950s, from 180.7 million to 204.9 million during the decade), but they took pride in defying conventional mores. Many openly smoked marijuana; a few experimented with harder drugs and engaged in various versions of free love. Between 1965 and 1975, when the communal movement lost momentum, some 10,000 such experiments blossomed in the country. They received lingering if sometimes snide attention from the often voyeuristic mass media.[16]

15. Named after the nearby town of Woodstock.
16. Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*, 92–93. See Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York, 1970); and Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York, 1968), for contemporary accounts of countercultural activities.

Nowhere was cultural change more clear than in the realm of sexuality among young people.[17] The Pill assisted the spread of the already ascendant sexual revolution, but larger notions of personal rights and "liberation" contributed still more. So, as earlier, did agents of the consumer culture. In 1960 *Playboy* introduced its "Playboy Adviser" column, which offered explicit guidance to readers seeking new and more imaginative ways of practicing sex. (By the early 1970s the magazine was regularly reaching an estimated 20 percent of adult American men.)[18] In 1962 Helen Gurley Brown wrote *Sex and the Single Girl,* a message of female sexual liberation that she later introduced to *Cosmopolitan* magazine. In 1968 Broadway staged *Hair,* a rock musical that featured frontal nudity. Actors were paid extra for disrobing. The play became a hit in New York and in many shows on the road.

By then many university parietal rules were crumbling, often without a fight from authorities. Indeed, the sexual revolution assumed an unprecedentedly open and defiant tone, especially among women, increasing numbers of whom rebelled against the "feminine mystique" of deference and domesticity.[19] Some flaunted mini-skirts, a new style that entered the United States from France in 1965, and challenged their elders by living openly in an unmarried state with men. The mid-1960s, one survey of sexual behavior concludes, represented "perhaps the greatest transformation in sexuality [the United States] had ever witnessed."[20]

The mostly optimistic and reformist *Zeitgeist* that characterized the early 1960s weakened rapidly after mid-decade.[21] Only five days after signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in August, blacks began rioting in the Watts section of Los Angeles. By 1966 the interracial civil rights movement had split badly along racial lines, and advocates of "black power," among others, were renouncing non-violence. Waves of riots

17. Beth Bailey, "Sexual Revolution(s)," in Farber, ed., *Sixties,* 235–62; Edward Lauman et al., *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago, 1994).
18. John Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History* (New York, 1993).
19. Alice Echols, "Women's Liberation and Sixties Radicalism," in Farber, ed., *Sixties,* 149–74; Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise,* 85–87, 128.
20. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988), 302–53. Quote on 353.
21. The titles of two important histories of the 1960s stress the decentering of America after 1965. See William O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of the 1960s* (Chicago, 1971); and Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 1984). Also Hunter, *Culture Wars.*

engulfed central cities between 1966 and 1968. American involvement in the Vietnam War, which escalated greatly between 1965 and 1968, provoked angry confrontations and demonstrations on college campuses, at draft boards, and at massive rallies in Washington and elsewhere. A number of college campuses were racked by protest and closed down at various times between 1967 and 1970. Hispanics, Native Americans, and feminists added to the air of tumult by demonstrating to promote their goals. In June 1969 homosexuals at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village fought back against police harassment, igniting five days of rioting by hundreds of people and arousing greater group consciousness among the gay population.[22]

Confrontation, violence, and social disorder indeed seemed almost ubiquitous in America during the mid- and late 1960s. In 1965 protestors at Berkeley proclaimed a "filthy speech movement," a degenerate form of the free speech demonstrations a year earlier, thereby hastening a trend toward open expression of profanity in American life. Hollywood brought out *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 and *The Wild Bunch* in 1969, films that reveled in the choreography of killing. Rock musicians jettisoned the lyrics of Dylan and Joan Baez for "acid rock." Television shows featured more and more graphic violence. The SDS broke apart, with a few of its splinter groups practicing violent revolution. More alarming than these scattered phenomena were broader and apparently related social indicators: rates of violent crime, drug abuse, and alcohol consumption, especially among young people, rose sharply after 1963.[23] So did divorce and illegitimacy rates, which had been stable since the late 1940s.[24] Scores on Scholastic Aptitude Tests began to fall after 1964. Most shocking of all, both Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated in 1968. In December 1969, as if to close the decade on a specially uncivilized note, a group of Hell's Angels, acting as security at a Rolling Stones

22. O'Neill, *Coming Apart,* 269; Bruce Bawer, "Notes on Stonewall," *New Republic,* June 13, 1994, pp. 24–30; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 318–19.
23. Stephen Ruggles, "The Transformation of American Family Structure," *American Historical Review,* 99 (Feb. 1964), 103–28; Jack Katz, "Criminal Passions and the Progressive Dilemma," in Wolfe, ed., *America at Century's End,* 390–420; James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York, 1983), 23–44, 224–27, 238–40, 253–58; Charles Silberman, *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice* (New York, 1978), 3–6, 31–33, 424–55; and Charles Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare* (New York, 1980), 106.
24. Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York, 1983), 321–30; and Landon Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York, 1980), 304–10.

concert in Altamont, California, beat a few concert-goers savagely with pool cues, stomped a stoned and naked young woman who tried to climb on stage, and stabbed to death a nineteen-year-old black man. The featured performers looked on uneasily but kept playing, and the cameras—making a commercial film about the Stones—kept rolling. Most rock fans in the huge audience of 500,000 seemed unaware of what had happened.[25]

DRAMATIC THOUGH THESE CHANGES WERE in the 1960s, they represented only the most widely noted aspects of an increasingly polarized era. The vast majority of Americans had little if anything to do with campus rebels, counterculturalists, or anti-war protesters. They were very much aware of the tumult—television lavished attention on it—but they went about their daily lives in familiar ways.[26] As in the 1940s and 1950s, they celebrated traditional values and institutions such as the work ethic and monogamous marriage.[27] Although ever-increasing percentages of women entered the paid work force, thus altering the dynamics of family life (and contributing to the falling off of the baby boom), most continued to do so in order to augment family resources: earning money for the home, not deep dissatisfaction with life in the two-parent nuclear family, largely explained their behavior.[28] Feminist activism, while far more visible than it had been in the 1940s and 1950s, still engaged only a minority of American women, most of them young, white, well educated, and middle-class.

As they had in the 1950s, millions of upwardly mobile Americans rejoiced especially at the ever-enlarging capacity of a thriving economy to bring material comfort to their lives. The 1960s were the longest period of

25. Michael Frisch, "Woodstock and Altamont," in William Graebner, ed., *True Stories from the American Past* (New York, 1993), 217–39.
26. A statement supported by poll data. See Daniel Yankelovich, *The New Morality* (New York, 1974), xiii.
27. Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*, 181–91; Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York, 1980), 460–65.
28. Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune*, 60–61, 148–50. The percentage of women who had children aged 6 to 17 and who worked rose from 40 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 1970 (and to more than 70 percent by 1990). The percentage working who had children of less than 6 years of age was 20 percent in 1960 and 30 percent in 1970—and more than 50 percent by 1995. The birth rate declined from 20 births per 1,000 population in 1960 to 18 in 1970 (and to 13 in 1990). See Randall Collins and Scott Cottrane, *Sociology of Marriage and the Family* (Chicago, 1991), 178.

uninterrupted economic growth in United States history. Per capita income (in constant 1958 dollars) rose from $2,157 in 1960 to $3,050 in 1970, an unprecedented decadal increase of 41 percent. Prices remained stable until the late 1960s. Although unemployment among 16- to 19-year-olds rose alarmingly, overall unemployment stayed low, falling to 3.5 percent in 1969.[29] Poverty as measured by the government declined rapidly, from an estimated 22 percent of the population in 1960 to 12 percent in 1969.[30]

By this time the 1950s—then the Biggest Boom Yet—seemed almost dowdy to contemporaries who remembered them. Many of the industries that had boosted that boom, such as electronics, enjoyed even more fantastic growth in the 1960s. Well-placed business and professional people came to expect as a matter of course an amazingly comfortable world that featured high-speed air travel, credit card transactions, and generous expense accounts. Architects and builders flourished, not only by catering to the explosively growing suburbs but also by designing and constructing nests of high-rise buildings in the business centers of cities. It was in the 1960s, the most glittering of times, that piles of glass and steel literally reached for the sky in urban America.

The astonishing affluence of the 1960s did much to promote the grand expectations that peaked in mid-decade. Millions of middle-class Americans—especially the youthful baby boomers—had already experienced rising levels of prosperity during the 1950s. Unaffected personally by the Depression or World War II, the boomers matured in a very different world from that of earlier, more deprived generations. Moreover, the young and the middle classes became much more numerous—and therefore more self-conscious and self-confident. The number of people aged 15 through 24 increased from 24 million in 1960 to 35.3 million in 1970, a jump of 47 percent. By then they accounted for 17.5 percent of the population, an all-time postwar high.[31] Increasingly large percentages of these young people went to colleges and universities, which also boomed as never before in the 1960s. Many came to believe that they had

29. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime*, 9–10.
30. James Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900–1994* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 157–62; Sheldon Danziger and Daniel Weinberg, "The Historical Record: Trends in Family Income, Inequality, and Poverty," in Danziger, Gary Sandefur, and Weinberg, eds., *Confronting Poverty: Prescriptions for Change* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 18–50. The official poverty rate reached an all-time low of 11 percent in 1973.
31. Jones, *Great Expectations*, 80–81.

the knowledge and the resources to create a progressive, advanced society like none before in human history. Some identified themselves as participants in a "new class"—of experts in everything from engineering to social science to policy-designing. Their brimming, "can-do" certitude stimulated grand expectations about the capacity of government to solve social problems. Even more than in the 1950s, it seemed that there were no limits.

As these expectations expanded, millions of Americans began not only to anticipate ever-greater social and technological progress but also to believe that they had "rights" to all sorts of blessings, including profound psychological satisfaction. They imagined, often narcissistically, that they could achieve great personal "growth" and "self-actualization."[32] What earlier generations had considered as privileges, many in this one came to perceive as entitlements. In personal life this meant rapid gratification; in policy matters it meant deliverance from evil. Anything, it seemed, was possible in this protean time in history. People talked confidently about winning "wars" against contemporary problems, ranging from poverty to cancer to unrest in Vietnam. Some thought that they could combat not only the age-old scourges of human life—Disease and Disability—but also two others: Discontent and Dissatisfaction.[33]

These grand expectations also affected the behavior of groups. Government, many groups argued, must act to guarantee their "rights." The rights revolution that ensued engaged not only the established pressure groups—labor unions, corporations, farm organizations, blacks—but also others, including Native and Hispanic Americans ("red power" and "brown power") and feminists, who formed the National Organization for Women in 1966. Athletes, too, organized: the Major League Baseball Players Association came into being in 1966.[34] "Public interest" groups rose to demand laws to protect the environment and to improve the quality of life in myriad other ways. Elderly Americans, including militants who became known as the Grey Panthers, developed especially powerful lobbies. Even poor people got together, creating the National

32. Ibid., 254; Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*, 96; Yankelovich, *New Morality*, 188, 234–38.

33. Peter Conrad and Joseph Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness* (St. Louis, 1980); Renée Fox, "The Medicalization and Demedicalization of American Society," in John Knowles, ed., *Doing Better and Feeling Worse: Health in the United States* (New York, 1977), 9–22.

34. Randy Roberts and James Olson, *Winning Is the Only Thing: Sports in America Since 1945* (Baltimore, 1989), 135–39.

Welfare Rights Organization in the late 1960s and angrily denouncing Congress when it failed to meet their demands. The proliferation of these self-conscious groups, some of which (such as "seniors-only" enclaves) virtually excluded others, added to a perception by the early 1970s that the United States was becoming both a claimant society and an ever more openly balkanized culture.

The often utopian expectations stimulated in the rights revolution crashed against these and other forces by the late 1960s. Much of the rancor that thereafter roiled American life arose from the increasingly sharp disjunctures that developed between grand expectations and the more prosaic realities of American heterogeneity, notably the barriers erected by differences of class, region, gender, and race. Further rancor arose from the resentment of "ordinary" people against the special claims—many of them grandiose indeed—of the interest groups. There were limits after all. The disjunctures dominated American life for decades after the 1960s.

Still, the depth of these divisions was not altogether clear until the late 1960s, for progress before then seemed continuous and unending. Scientific and technological "breakthroughs" appeared regularly. In 1961 Haloid Xerox Corporation, started in 1959, became Xerox Corporation and transformed the ways in which institutions conducted their business. So did large, mainframe computers. Air-conditioning spread widely and promoted enormous economic growth in the South and Southwest. Television, equipped with videotape, began working wonders in its coverage of news and sports: "Wide World of Sports" appeared for the first time in 1961 and instant replay in 1963. In 1961 Dr. J. Vernon Luck, Sr., became the first surgeon successfully to reattach a severed limb—of a construction worker whose arm had been mangled in a freeway accident. Six years later a South African surgeon, Dr. Christiaan Barnard, presided over a team that managed the world's first successful human heart transplant. And the space program, set in motion by President Kennedy in 1961, captured the imagination of millions. On July 20, 1969, astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon. Americans were thrilled to hear him proclaim, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." President Richard Nixon, speaking for many, boasted that the moon shot was "the greatest week in the history of the world since the Creation."[35]

35. Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York, 1979); Michael Smith, "Selling the Moon: The U.S. Manned Space Program and the Triumph of Commodity Scientism," in Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of*

Many standbys of popular culture, too, offered reassuring continuities to Americans in the 1960s. Big-time sports captured ever-larger audiences, both live and on TV. Vince Lombardi, coach of the powerful Green Bay Packers football team, extolled the virtues of hard work and discipline and became something of a cult figure among Americans who proclaimed traditional values. Winning, he said, wasn't an important thing—it was the only thing. Television, too, continued to feature familiar prime-time programs along with its more violent fare. These included such hardy perennials as "The Lawrence Welk Show," "The Lucy Show," and "The Tonight Show" (which Johnny Carson took over in 1962 and stayed with for thirty years).[36] "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet," which had started in 1952, lasted through 1966, "Gunsmoke" from 1955 until 1975. Sitcoms such as "The Beverly Hillbillies" and "Petticoat Junction" retained solid followings for most of the decade.

The continuing popularity of other forms of popular culture also revealed the persistence of mainstream tastes. Millions of people showed little interest in rock, enjoying instead popular songs like Henry Mancini's "Moon River" (1961) and "Days of Wine and Roses" (1962).[37] In 1965 viewers flocked to see *The Sound of Music*, a happy, sentimental film about the singing von Trapp family. It earned more than $100 million on its first run and outdid *Gone with the Wind* as the all-time best-selling movie.[38] Four years later Walt Disney productions brought out *The Love Bug*, which became the top-grossing movie of the year, attracting far more people in that year than countercultural films such as *Easy Rider* and *Alice's Restaurant*. While attendance and sales figures do not tell the whole story, by any means, about popular tastes, they suggest an obvious continuity: millions of people still demanded non-threatening "family" entertainment. Sensational media accounts focusing on cultural "revolution" in the 1960s left a false impression of the decade: significant continuities were a feature of popular culture during the sixties.

Firmly established American attitudes toward world politics also

Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1940 (New York, 1983), 175–209.

36. "I Love Lucy" became "The Lucy Show" in 1962 and ran until 1974. The Welk show ran from 1955 to 1982. For solid data on such matters, see Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, eds., *The Complete Directory to Prime Time TV Shows*, 5th ed. (New York, 1992).

37. The lyrics to both were by Johnny Mercer. The songs were featured in the movies *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), respectively.

38. Baughman, *Republic of Mass Culture*, 139.

changed very slowly during the 1960s. While McCarthyite excesses had ebbed, a virulent anti-Communism still flourished at most levels of American politics and culture. Robin Moore's book *The Green Berets*, which celebrated the exploits of a big "Nordic type" in charge of America's Special Forces, sold 1.2 million copies within two months of its issuance in paper in late 1965. When the movie version came out in 1968, starring John Wayne, it did very well at the box office. *Patton*, which (somewhat ironically) highlighted the military exploits of "Blood and Guts" George C. Patton, was the Best Picture of the Year in 1970.[39]

Popular attitudes toward the Vietnam War especially revealed the persistent power of patriotic, anti-Communist opinion. The war sparked the most extensive protests in American history: at least 600,000 people joined "moratorium" demonstrations in Washington in late 1969. But anti-war demonstrators enraged millions of other Americans, many of them working-class people who were not necessarily pro-war but who deeply resented the fact that many of the young protestors ridiculed American institutions and avoided military service. "Here were those kids, rich kids who could go to college, didn't have to fight," a construction worker railed. "They are telling you your son died in vain. It makes you feel your whole life is shit, just nothing."[40] The anti-war protests especially angered the Cold Warriors who directed foreign policy in Washington, and until 1970 they had only limited effect on electoral politics: all three major presidential candidates on the ballot in 1968 opposed American withdrawal from the war. Significant reductions in American ground forces came only in 1969–70, by which time "cut-our-losses" realists began to coalesce effectively but very uneasily with moral opponents of the war. By then it was obvious to all but a minority of people that the United States had little chance of winning.

Political attitudes revealed other ambiguities in the 1960s. While contemporary accounts, especially in the mass media, lavished attention on the rise of the student and anti-war Left, conservative activists were also mobilizing. The Young Americans for Freedom, a right-of-center organization, was founded in 1960. It attracted as many members in the 1960s as the SDS, established in the same year. "Neo-conservative" intellectuals, regrouping to criticize the liberal programs of the early 1960s, gathered increasingly large audiences by 1970. The GOP, meanwhile, rebuilt itself after suffering serious defeats in the early 1960s; in 1966 it

39. Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990), 196–97.

40. Reider, *Canarsi*, 157.

scored impressive victories, and in 1968 it recaptured the presidency. Conservatives have often controlled national politics, especially the presidency, since that time.

A final, durable continuity: America remained one of the most religious cultures in the Western World. This religiosity assumed a large variety of forms. Religious leaders and church-goers continued to contribute to the civil rights movement. Norman Vincent Peale, still preaching the message of positive thinking, prospered as a much-admired figure. So did Billy Graham, whose evangelical crusades drew millions in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Although church-going in the United States fell a bit from its peak in the 1950s, it remained high. An estimated 43 percent of Americans regularly attended services in 1968, compared to approximately 10 to 15 percent in England and France.[41]

Less noticed at the time, but obvious later, fundamentalists of varied persuasions were becoming increasingly numerous and preparing to speak out. Some were super-patriotic and politically reactionary; others were scarcely able to contain their rage at the Supreme Court and at elites—governmental, corporate, educational, scientific—that they perceived to be ruining the nation. While the fundamentalist leaders were white and upper middle-class, the followers included large numbers of poor and working-class people.[42] The appearance in 1970 of Hal Lindsey's book *The Late Great Planet Earth* suggested the depth of fundamentalist feelings in the country. This was a pre-millenarian tract that foresaw a nuclear apocalypse caused by an anti-Christ, after which Jesus Christ returned to earth and saved mankind. The book became the best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970s and sold more than 28 million copies by 1990.

What these complex trends—the changes as well as the continuities—

41. Leo Ribuffo, "God and Contemporary Politics," *Journal of American History*, 79 (March 1993), 1515–33; James Hunter and John Rice, "Unlikely Alliances: The Changing Contours of American Religious Faith," in Wolfe, ed., *America at Century's End*, 318–39; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religious Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, 1991). A caution concerning church attendance statistics is C. Kirk Hadaway et al., "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance," in *American Sociological Review* (Dec. 1993).

42. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (New York, 1992), 5; Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York, 1992), 300; Stephen Bates, *Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of Our Classrooms* (New York, 1993), 50–60.

indicate is that the 1960s were an age of increasingly open polarization and fragmentation.[43] The decade, to repeat, ushered in unprecedented affluence and escalating expectations, and it left long-range legacies, especially in the realm of race relations and in the personal behavior—much more free and anti-authoritarian—of many young people. Yet well-entrenched older values, cherished by what Richard Nixon and others called the silent majority, persisted along with these changes. The conflict between older and newer mores, contested openly on the ever-broader and more sensational stage of the mass media, sharply exposed already existing divisions in the nation, especially along lines of age, race, gender, and social class. The center that had more or less held in the late 1950s cracked in the 1960s, exposing a glaring, often unapologetic polarization that seemed astonishing to contemporaries.[44]

43. Peter Muller, *Contemporary Sub/Urban America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981), 67–70.

44. Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review*, 99 (April 1994), 409–29; Leo Ribuffo, "Why Is There So Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything About It?" ibid., 438–49.