

GRADE 12 HISTORY**CIVIL SOCIETY PROTEST****IF. VARIOUS MOVEMENTS**

The major protest movements began with the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and early 1960s. The CRM fought to end long-standing political, social, economic, and legal practices that discriminated against black Americans. It influenced later movements for social change, both by inspiring Americans to fight for change and by using methods of direct action, such as protest marches, rallies, and nonviolent civil disobedience tactics like sit-ins.

In the 1960s, many Americans participated in more than one protest movement. Although their specific goals differed, all of the movements were built on the ideal of citizen-activism and a belief that social justice could be won through political change.

Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement was the first of the 1960s-era social movements. This movement produced one of the most important American social activists of the 20th century, Martin Luther King, Jr. The civil rights movement, as a national force, took root in the 1950s but greatly expanded in power in the 1960s. It originated among black Americans in the South who faced racial discrimination and segregation, or the separation of whites and blacks, in almost every aspect of their lives. In 1960 black Southerners often had to sit in the back of public buses, were refused service in most restaurants and hotels, and still went to racially segregated schools, despite the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed racially segregated education. Employment ads were separated into "Negro" and "white" categories, and black Southerners were openly restricted to the lowest paying and lowest status occupations. In addition, most black Southerners were effectively denied the right to vote.

Conditions in the North were somewhat better, but segregated housing and schools, as well as job discrimination, were commonplace.

Blacks fought in the courts, lobbied elected officials, and began a sustained campaign of nonviolent direct action.



Many blacks participated in major demonstrations, often led by King, in Albany, Georgia, in 1962; Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963; Washington, D.C., in 1963; and Selma, Alabama, in 1965. Young black activists also played a key role in the civil rights movement. In 1960 some of these students formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which fought for the right to vote and for an end to discriminatory laws and practices. The Civil Rights protesters focused the nation's attention on blacks' second-class citizenship. Most white Americans, including many white Southerners, were shocked

by the brutality that protesters endured in the Deep South. In 1963 horrified Americans watched on their television screens as Bull Connor, the police commissioner in Birmingham, Alabama, ordered dogs to attack peacefully marching black men, women, and children. The outrage of the nation and the determination of the activists led to the passage of civil rights legislation.

In 1964, pressured by the civil rights movement and under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited segregation in public accommodations and made discrimination in education and employment illegal. In 1965 Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, which suspended the use of any voter qualification devices that prevented blacks from voting.

While many battles still lay ahead, the civil rights movement had used a campaign of nonviolent direct action to end centuries of open, legal racism in the United States. The movement showed activists in other areas that they could work for change outside of the traditional political framework. They could use sit-ins, boycotts, marches, and rallies to focus attention on their cause and help initiate change in legislation and in society.

The Student Movement

The Student Movement was the next major social change movement to develop in the 1960s. Many of its early organizers had first become politically active in the early 1960s working alongside blacks in civil rights protests. Composed mainly of white college students, the student movement worked primarily to fight racism and poverty, increase student rights, and to end the Vietnam War. At the core of the student movement was a belief in participatory democracy, or the idea that all Americans, not just a small elite, should decide the major economic, political, and social questions that shaped the nation. In a participatory democracy, citizens would join together and work directly to achieve change at the local level. The students hoped to give power to the people so that they could fight for their own rights and for political and economic changes.

This democratic, activist faith led many student activists to reject government and school administration policies. Students sat-in to protest restrictions on students' rights to free speech and held rallies against the in loco parentis rules that allowed school officials to act like parents in setting curfews and dorm rules. They demanded that faculty and administrators stop all research and activities that contributed to the Vietnam War.

In 1960 a small group of young people formed Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). By 1968 some 100,000 young people around the nation had joined this organization. The SDS gained strength from the Free Speech Movement that occurred at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964. Berkeley students protested after university officials banned political leafleting on campus. They complained that they were treated like numbers, not people, at the overcrowded Berkeley campus. Other students around the country formed similar protest organizations, demanding an end to restrictive campus rules that failed to treat them like responsible individuals.

Many other student activists in the 1960s fought for social change by working for political candidates and by forming local reform organizations. For example, during the presidential primaries of 1968, thousands of student volunteers worked for Eugene McCarthy, who ran for the Democratic Party nomination on the issue of ending the war in Vietnam. By the early 1970s, student activists helped organize the Environmental Movement and the Women's Movement.

However, some student activists were frustrated by the escalating Vietnam War, widespread poverty amidst great wealth, and by continuing racial inequality; they became more extreme. They rejected the traditional American belief in private enterprise and argued that the economy should be organized by the government to guarantee every American a decent standard of living. Angered by most Americans' resistance to ending the Vietnam War and to the relatively slow pace of social change, some even lost their faith in democracy. The most radical students believed that Communist leaders, such as Cuba's Fidel Castro and China's Mao Zedong, offered better visions for bringing justice and equality to people. Some of the most extreme activists argued that only violent protests would lead to real social change. The Weathermen, a revolutionary group formed in 1969, advocated an armed struggle to overthrow the U.S. government. They were responsible for a number of bombings during the late 1960s and 1970s.



The Anti-War Movement

By 1965 a variety of people in the United States had become active in a vocal movement to end U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The U.S. government had become involved in the war because it did not want South Vietnam to be defeated by Communist North Vietnam. The United States government feared that if South Vietnam were defeated, Communism would spread throughout Southeast Asia. Those who protested the war argued that it was not, as government leaders argued, a vital struggle against world Communism. Many protesters believed that the Vietnam War was the last stage of a long struggle by the Vietnamese for independence. They pointed out that the Vietnamese had already, in 1954, defeated France, which had controlled Vietnam as a colony. Following their defeat of France, the Vietnamese had become engaged in a civil war in which, protesters insisted, the United States had no right to interfere.

The Anti-War Movement became a mass crusade in which millions of Americans participated. It involved people of all ages, organized in hundreds of diverse local and national groups, including the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, Women Strike for Peace, Resistance, American Friends Service Committee, and Business Executives Move for a Vietnam Peace. Among student groups, the SDS played a vital role. While anti-war activists came from all elements of American society, most were white, middle class, and well educated. Colleges and universities were among the most important sites of anti-war activism.

Protests against the war took many forms—marches, boycotts, rallies, and demonstrations. A key event took place at the University of Michigan in March 1965. Students and professors held a teach-in on Vietnam, where people gathered to examine America's Vietnam policy and discuss what they might do to change that policy. Within months, more than 120 schools held similar events. This spirit of questioning authority and determining how common citizens could affect policy-makers was at the core of the Anti-War Movement.

Between 1965 and 1971, many protests against the war took place. In April 1967 simultaneous marches in San Francisco, California, and New York involved some 250,000 Anti-War activists. In October 1967 about 50,000 more militant protesters marched on the Pentagon. As the war continued, more and more people began to question U.S. involvement. For example, in 1967 Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke out against U.S. government policy in Vietnam. Previously, civil rights leaders had been cautious about criticizing the war for fear of losing President Johnson's support of the civil rights movement. However, as the war continued, more and more spoke out against it.

In August 1968 around 15,000 Americans held demonstrations in Chicago, Illinois, during the Democratic Party's national convention, resulting in a violent confrontation between police and protesters (see Chicago Convention of 1968). On October 15, 1969, a national teach-in on Vietnam involved millions of Americans. In April 1970 President Richard Nixon, who had been elected in 1968, expanded the Vietnam War into neighboring Cambodia.

Millions of Americans staged protests against this widening of the war. In Ohio, the governor called out National Guard troops in response to a large student protest at Kent State University. Panicky National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of students, killing four and heightening tensions at campuses throughout the country.

Between 1968 and 1971, militant campus-based protests against the war were common. Students burnt their draft cards, picketed Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) buildings, petitioned against faculty research funded by the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and attempted to close down local draft boards. For many sixties-era students—approximately three-quarters of a million—protesting against the Vietnam War became a major part of their everyday lives. There is debate about the extent to which the Anti-War Movement influenced the Vietnam policies of the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Most scholars believe that the movement had little effect on presidential policies, but many other Americans believe that U.S. policy was influenced by the protest movement.

Within the country, a large number of Americans felt that public protest against the war, while American soldiers were fighting it, was unpatriotic. Nonetheless, the movement did greatly increase scepticism about the morality of American foreign policy and the purpose of sending American troops into combat. It also taught millions of Americans to exercise greater oversight of their nation's foreign policy. At the height of the Cold War, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Americans accepted their presidents' foreign policy leadership almost unquestioningly. After Vietnam, a far more sceptical citizenry expected—even demanded—that Congress, the mass media, and citizen groups openly debate every important foreign policy decision.

The Women's Movement

The contemporary women's movement began in the late 1960s. Many women who participated in the movement had also worked in earlier movements, where they had often been relegated to menial tasks, such as photocopying and answering phones. Some began to protest these roles and to question the traditional roles for women in U.S. society. During the 1950s and early 1960s, society pressured women to marry, have children, and then remain at home to raise those children. The prevailing view was that women's abilities in the workplace and in public life were limited by their physical fragility and by their roles as mothers. Women were expected to stay at home and to depend on men to provide their financial support.

As a result, women were routinely excluded from high status or well-paying jobs. They had only gained the vote in 1920 and had little voice in the nation's political and economic life. In 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan, was published and became a best-seller. This book spoke to many women's dissatisfactions with the role that society expected of them. The book encouraged women to work for change. One of the movement's first successes was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which, among other things, outlawed discrimination based on gender. However, government officials rarely enforced the anti-gender discrimination provision. As a result of this official indifference, in 1966 a small group of women led by Friedan formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) to demand that the government prosecute cases of job discrimination against women.

The Women's Movement was not a unified force with a single ideology or goal. Some activists fought for equal job opportunities; others focused on changing relations between men and women. They questioned traditional gender roles and tried to change society's view that a woman's worth was based on her physical attractiveness.

An important issue for many women was control over their bodies. Abortion was illegal in almost all states, rapes were rarely prosecuted, and domestic violence was widely accepted as a private matter. Some radical activists believed that American society would have to be entirely remade. They rejected what they called patriarchal values, or men's values, such as competition, aggressiveness, and selfishness. They believed that women were naturally more nurturing and compassionate and advocated a society based on women's values.

By the mid-1970s, feminists had achieved some change. In 1971 Congress banned discrimination against girls and women in schools. In 1973 feminist lawyers won a Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, in which the justices ruled that women had the constitutional right to choose to have an abortion. Millions of women who never attended a public demonstration used feminist rhetoric and legal victories won by women activists to create greater equality in their marriages and personal lives and to expand their economic and political opportunities.

Gay Rights Movement



In the 1960s laws in most states prohibited homosexual acts. State and federal laws often made it illegal for gay men and lesbians to work for the government, and private employers routinely discriminated against them. The armed forces did not allow gay men or lesbians to serve. And most Americans felt it was acceptable to scorn, ridicule, and even physically harass homosexuals. As a result, gay Americans usually hid their sexual preference.

Small, semi-secret gay rights organizations had begun to form in the post-World War II years. But a large gay rights movement began only in the late 1960s, when citizen activism had become more common due to the civil rights movement and other social change movements. The first major gay protest took place in 1969. At a New York City gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, gay men spontaneously protested when police attempted to arrest them and close down the bar.

Encouraged by this impromptu resistance, other gay men and lesbians, many of whom were active in other sixties-era protest movements, intensified their efforts to organize a gay liberation movement.

The gay rights movement had a dual agenda: to gain acceptance of homosexuality and to end discrimination against homosexuals. Activists sought to make homosexuality acceptable to the larger society and thus encourage gay men and lesbians to reveal their homosexuality. Once homosexuals were open about their sexual identity, then gay activists believed that they could work to end legal and social discrimination against homosexuals in American society through protests and lobbying.

By 1973 some 800 gay organizations existed; most were based in big cities and on university campuses. Many simply existed as safe and supportive environments for gay men and lesbians. But gay rights groups also lobbied local and state officials to pass non-discrimination statutes similar to those that protected women, blacks, and other minority groups. However, most Americans in the 1970s and in later decades did not believe that homosexuality was an acceptable lifestyle, often because of religious beliefs. As a result, gay activists' successes in winning special legal protection similar to that won by blacks and women has been limited. Still, the gay movement did succeed in its first goal: millions of Americans now live openly as homosexuals. Their visibility in the workplace and in communities around the United States has decreased discriminatory practices.

Environmental Movement

Americans' concern about the natural environment has a long history, but only in the late 1960s when so many Americans had become politically active did a mass movement emerge that focused on protecting the environment. Biologist Rachel Carson contributed to this awakening with her best-selling book, *Silent Spring* (1962). She detailed the use of chemical insecticides that killed birds, fish, and animals and endangered the human species. Dozens of other books followed Carson's, warning of impending ecological disasters. Televised coverage of environmental disasters, like the 1969 oil spill off the coast of southern California, further spread the alarm. In the late 1960s, environmental activists used this information to enlist an already politicized citizenry in a new mass movement. In 1970 some 20 million Americans gathered for what organizers called Earth Day to protest abuse of the environment. Borrowing a tactic from the anti-Vietnam War movement, students and teachers at over 1500 colleges and universities and at over 10,000 schools held teach-ins on the environment. Hundreds of thousands of other Americans staged protests and rallies around the nation. In another clear sign of a new environmental consciousness, millions of citizens joined environmental groups like the Audubon Society, whose membership grew from 41,000 in 1962 to 400,000 in 1980.

In response to growing citizen protests, Congress passed the National Environmental Act in 1970. The act created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate environmental health hazards and the use of natural resources. All told, in the 1970s Congress passed 18 new laws to protect the natural environment, including the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, which established national air- and water-quality standards. At both a local and a national level, citizens joined

forces to conserve natural resources, use and develop alternative, cleaner forms of energy, demand strict regulation of toxins, and promote a general awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependency of all life. By the late 1970s, much of the environmental movement's agenda had entered mainstream politics.

Conclusion

A majority of Americans disapproved of each of these social change movements when they emerged. The activists' reliance on protest tactics that disrupted business as usual angered many, as did their demands that Americans change their long-standing beliefs and practices. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the student movement, and the antiwar movement faced serious harassment and even persecution by local police forces, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other government agencies. The student movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the gay rights movement never succeeded in winning the approval of a majority of Americans, at least as measured by public opinion polls and surveys. Over time, however, the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, and, more controversially, the women's movement, did convert a majority of Americans to many of their views.

All of the protest movements of the 1960s captured public attention and raised questions that were important to the nation. The civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the gay rights movement demanded that Americans consider equality for all citizens in the United States. The student movement probed the meaning of freedom in the United States. The anti-Vietnam War movement asked Americans to consider the use of national power and the appropriateness of their government's foreign policy. Environmentalists asked what good America's economic growth was if it resulted in the destruction of the planet.

In an often confrontational manner, movement activists asked difficult questions that many Americans would rather have ignored. In answering these questions, Americans changed dramatically. Equal opportunity and equal rights became the law of the land for American citizens regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender. The veil of secrecy that surrounded much of American foreign policy was, at least partially, removed. The health of the nation's environment became a national priority. Democratic activism at the local and national levels and citizen oversight of government officials became accepted activities.

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