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American Counterculture

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Reflection: Port Huron Statement

The Port Huron Statement, written by the Students for a Democratic Society, was a document, urging change in the values and actions of the United States. The manifesto addressed a range of topics including American values, civil rights, and politics. I believe the points made in the document helped urge a change of mindset for society in general, but failed to produce an adequate result though changes in actions. Although it was written in the 1960’s, the Port Huron Statement is still relevant to many of the concerns in society today.

American values in society have drastically changed since this document was written. As much as the sixties encouraged conformity and saw the world in black and white or right and wrong, the present day encourages individualism especially being respectful of views that differ from our own, and accepts the complexity of society. The author once notes is how out his “liberal and socialist predecessors were plagued by vision without a program, while our own generation is plagued by a program without a vision (Hayden 3).” Although our mentality has changed that shift has not influenced enough social or political change, leaving us in many ways similar to the Silent Generation, pathless with a vision. This is visible in our country’s politics. The voter turnout between 1960 and 2010 fell, about 25% to where only a little more than a third of the population bothered polling. This demonstrates that although individuals have their own ideas and values, society does not, as Hayden wants, “have the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community (4).” This is the product of apathy, an issue probably more common today the in the past, proof that the “social institutions” and “structure of higher education”, which influence these mindsets have still not improved.

Hayden’s analysis of politics in America is still almost entirely accurate, demonstrating how few advances we have made in the past forty years. The privatization of powers, and conflicts within parties often leads to a deadlock in decision-making (Hayden 8). This is visible even today, in the battle for the new healthcare reform. As seen a year ago, in an attempt to stop the implementation of the healthcare reform, congress delayed the approval of a budget and caused a temporary shutdown of the government itself. Another issue Hayden mentions is income inequality, which in fact has risen to its highest ever in 2012. This also has to do with the drastic increase in technology over the years. Atomization, a process briefly mentioned in the manifesto, of many simple tasks and factories over the years has led to a decline in the availability of jobs over years and made it increasingly difficult to earn a decent salary without any higher education. As we can see, some of the problems Hayden mentioned have actually worsened.

While society as a whole has changed between the 1960s and 21st century, we can notice here how many of the issues present then, especially political activity and lack of community involvement are still present nowadays. Despite how far we have come psychologically, the tentative results are still lacking. Thus it is still our responsibility to initiate this reform and work to “turn these mythic possibilities into realities (Hayden 26).”