

Hippies

A lot of baby boomers would like to forget that one of the watershed movements that defined the personality of this generation was the time frame dominated by, for lack of a better word, hippies. That term that seems somewhat quaint and antiquated now had a tremendous power in the mid to late sixties when it carried with it the impact of tremendous social change as well as a massive shift in public morality and consciousness. So while this is often a time of a bit of embarrassment for the baby boomer generation, it is also a formative part of their history and it deserves respect for that reason.

To be fair, not all baby boomers were hippies. As is often the case, the hippie movement was something that got tremendous media coverage but it represented only a small portion of the baby boomer population at the time. By percentage, very few of that age group actually joined the "tune in, drop out, turn on" society of the hippies. But because hippies were a colorful, eccentric, flamboyant and sinful crowd, they titillated the public interest any time there was a public spectacle brought on by hippie gathering.

But despite being few in number, the hippie culture did send waves of change into the society at the time. Part of that was because there was a general discontent with the Vietnam War. So when the hippie movement became linked with the antiwar movement, they blended to where there was virtually no distinction. Add to that big changes in youth culture brought on by the explosion of new musical styles and changes in lifestyle and worldview that the new cultural leaders in the rock music world promoted and you have a formula for the hippie movement becoming a watershed shift of social values in a generation.

Rather than just look back on the hippies with mild amusement and a little disgust, it may be best to review this important part of our past and notice the good this part of our history left for the boomer generation to carry forward. While on the surface we associate hippies with drug use and free love (e.g. sex), the actual movement itself was grounded in tremendous sense of value, morality and social responsibility.

The youth movement at the time held a mirror up to society and demanded we look. Moreover, for the first time ever, it held public figures accountable for actions that were taken that harmed the public good. This was revolutionary to be sure and it has made the public more demanding and scrutinizing of the government ever since. And that is a good thing.

There was a strong thread of ethics and philosophy in the hippie social system that, while different from what America and the world was used to, was grounded

in a fierce devotion to right and wrong in the hippie or counterculture movements. Along with a strong commitment to the values of that society, hippies and associated societies were fearless and uncompromising in their willingness to put themselves on the line to see their values translate into public policy. This was an element of the hippie subculture that made it so explosive. Because the youth movement was so willing to demonstrate and make grand and flamboyant public statements to emphasize their political, ethical or moral outrage, things changed in a way that the country had never seen before.

The counter culture of the sixties literally put the power for change back into the hands of the people. And that is in step with what the founding fathers wanted for America and something we can be thankful to the hippie movement for giving back to our society.

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