

Where Did All the Hippies Go? From Privatism to Participation

By
Todd F. Eklof
November 15, 2009

Even though I was born in 1964, I was too young to be part of what we have since romanticized as the Sixties Generation. It wasn't until I was older and could look back upon what they did and stood for that I became an outside admirer looking in, and longed for the chance to be part of such an age and movement once again. But our society had learned its lessons through out failures in Vietnam, a war we that we could not win, which was a first in U.S. history, and a blow to our Nation's confidence and esteem, but also prompted unprecedented unrest in our own streets where hundreds of thousands, mostly young people, demonstrated and protested against it. And so, the children of the 60's have not emerged again since.

So, like many, I chalked much of this up to the rebellious nature of youth in general, to their psychological need to differentiate from their parents and other surrogate authorities in order to better define their own lives. Vietnam, Civil Rights, and other social issues simply provided them just causes to work out their teenage angst on a grand scale. They put an end to the apathy and complacency that had come to define Americans right up to the 1950's, so much so, that one of the names eventually assigned them was the *counterculture*. Their music alone, of peace, love, hope, loss, and anger, culminating in the historic *Woodstock*, is like none we had ever heard before or since.

Come mothers and fathers,
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
There's a battle
Outside and its ragin'
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Ah, their freedom! Their idealism! Their innocence! But alas, our nation had, again, learned a painful lesson in Vietnam and became gun-shy. It seemed a mistake our politicians were not likely to make again. Vietnam had left a nasty taste in our mouth, the taste of failure and uncertainty, and it didn't seem any of our leaders wanted to be responsible for reopening old wounds and jeopardizing their careers in the process. But then George Bush Sr. came along and led us into our first war with Iraq, the Persian Gulf War, also known as Desert Storm. When the mostly air-offensive began on January 17, 1991, I knew I was in luck, that all those rebellious youth would seize the moment once again and take to the streets to work out their individuation issues. I thought I'd soon be able look out my window and see throngs of them individuating all over the place. But

Where Did All the Hippies Go?

they never showed, and what's worse, President Bush managed to pull off Desert Storm with out a hitch. After a month of aerial bombardments, ground forces entered the region and proved so successful they were able to declare a cease-fire 100 hours after they began.

So, in little more than a month, hardly enough time to incite any real social unrest, the first President Bush helped Americans get over our Vietnam shellshock. He proved that we can go to war with other countries without massive military casualties, enormous expense, or much civil unrest. He redeemed our idea of ourselves as a nation of ass-kickers! And he made it look so damned easy. Bomb the hell out of the place for several weeks, then send in a few soldiers to sweep up the mess. Of course, we all now know it wasn't really that easy. Desert Storm created a wound that festered ten years until Bush II came along to reopen it. And now, after nearly seven years, the longest war in U.S. history, we find ourselves stuck in another quagmire of violence, expense, and loss we can't seem to climb out of.

Yet there remains a major difference between Vietnam and Iraq—the hippies are still nowhere to be seen. Why haven't our young people emerged en mass to revolt against society as they have in the past? I'll never forget a line from Dennis Hopper's old hippie character in the 1990 comedy, *Flashback*, saying, "Once we get out of the 80's, the 90s are going to make the 60's look like the 50's." But the 80's came and went, as did the 90's, and, soon the first decade of the 2000's will have passed, and the hippies haven't shown up.

This is so, not only of our youth, but also of the old hippies. The 60's isn't so long ago that most of them aren't still living. What happened to them? Where did all the hippies go? It's a question all of us have been asking since the first Gulf War in 1991, a question the Bellamy Brothers asked shortly thereafter in their 1992 song, *Old Hippie*.

He turned thirty-five last Sunday
In his hair he found some gray
But he still ain't changed his lifestyle
He likes it better the old way
So he grows a little garden in the back yard by the fence
He's consuming what he's growing nowadays in self-defense
He get's out there in the twilight zone
Sometimes when it just don't make no sense

He gets off on country music
Cause disco left him cold
He's got young friends into new wave
But he's just too friggin' old
And he dreams at night of Woodstock and the day John Lennon died
How the music made him happy and the silence made him cry
Yeah he thinks of John sometimes
And he has to wonder why

He's an old hippie and he don't know what to do

Where Did All the Hippies Go?

Should he hang on to the old
Should he grab on to the new
He's an old hippie...his new life is just a bust
He ain't trying to change nobody
He's just trying real hard to adjust

He was sure back in the sixties that everyone was hip
Then they sent him off to Vietnam on his senior trip
And they forced him to become a man while he was still a boy
And in each wave of tragedy he waited for the joy
Now this world may change around him
But he just can't change no more

He's an old hippie and he don't know what to do
Should he hang on to the old
Should he grab on to the new
He's an old hippie...his new life is just a bust
He ain't trying to change nobody
He's just trying real hard to adjust

Well he stays away a lot now from the parties and the clubs
And he's thinking while he's joggin' 'round
Sure is glad he quit the hard drugs
Cause him and his kind get more endangered everyday
And pretty soon the species will just up and fade away
Like the smoke from that torpedo...just up and fade away

He's an old hippie and he don't know what to do
Should he hang on to the old
Should he grab on to the new
He's an old hippie...his new life is just a bust
He ain't trying to change nobody
He's just trying real hard to adjust.

Is this the answer? Have the flower children simply spent all their free love? Have they been left daisy'd and confused? Is there a sense that it was all for not, that our society so quickly returned to its old ways that it's better to just to leave it alone and tend to our backyard gardens, making the best we can of our own lives? After turning on and tuning in, have our old hippie mentors done precisely what Timothy Leary ultimately recommended, dropped out?

Or was it all truly just a developmental stage they were going through at the time? Have they, over time, grown beyond the stage of rebellion? Developmental psychology tells us that differentiation is always followed by integration. So, perhaps, the old hippies have become part of society after all. But even if this were so, even if it was "just a phase," it doesn't explain why younger people at the same developmental stage aren't rebelling against the bureaucracy, violence, and injustice of our times. What better way to differentiate oneself from others, after all, than by pointing out what everyone else is doing wrong?

Where Did All the Hippies Go?

The answer to this mystery, I would suggest, might be that our larger society diagnosed the causes of the massive youth rebellion of the 60's and early 70's and has ever since learned to avoid them. This doesn't mean young people aren't rebelling in other ways; they're just not organizing and rebelling in groups. Developmental psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg once suggested that,

Each younger generation in America is diagnosed by its elders in academia in terms of its moral character, usually from a psychoanalytic perspective. In the 1950's David Riesman (1952) diagnosed the coming generation as "the lonely crowd," William Whyte as "the organization man." Their books bore those titles. In the 1960's Kenneth Kiniston diagnosed the coming generation first as "the uncommitted" and then as the "young radicals." In the late seventies the diagnosis is given by Christopher Lasch (1978) as "the culture of narcissism," or more popularly as "the me generation." At the top of the best-seller list is Robert Ringer's (1977) *Looking Out for Number One*.¹

How different this outlook that seems to have been dominating our culture ever since the mid 1970's. The old hippies have truly dropped out, and the youth have largely become yuppies, doing what it takes to make their own individual lives successful. How different this mindset of "Looking out for Number One" is from the lyrical clichés of the Sixties Generation, like, "He Ain't Heavy, He's my Brother." Perhaps other lyricists intuited this change a comin' and cryptically warned:

Now the valley cried with anger,
"Mount your horses! Draw your sword!"
And they killed the mountain-people,
So they won their just reward.

Now they stood beside the treasure,
On the mountain, dark and red.
Turned the stone and looked beneath it...
"Peace on Earth" was all it said.

Go ahead and hate your neighbor,
Go ahead and cheat a friend.
Do it in the name of Heaven,
You can justify it in the end.
There won't be any trumpets blowing
Come the judgment day,
On the bloody morning after....
One tin soldier rides away.

Have we become a society of lonely tin soldiers, barricaded within the confines of our private lives and interests, with little sense that we are responsible also for the world at large, for our neighbors? This is precisely what Kohlberg suggested has happened, "Today the major problem in developing youth is privatism," he said, but added that, "its

¹ Munsey, Brenda, ed., *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, Religious Education Press, Birmingham, AL, 1980, p. 460.

major educational solution is participation.”² Unfortunately, since he wrote these words nearly 30 years ago, in 1980, the education of our young people does not seem to have moved our society much toward a more participatory mindset. We are still enamored with the philosophy of privatism, of *looking out for number one*. And the result of looking out for Number One is that we are rapidly placing all the world’s resources into the hands of just one percent of the population, an injustice we voraciously protect in the preposterous hope that we too might someday become part of the number one. We have convinced ourselves that the evil of selfishness, of ethical egoism, is the highest good, and that the best we can do for society is to compete with others for resources and to get as much for ourselves as possible.

Kohlberg and other educators waited well until the late 70’s to begin calling for a more participatory pedagogy, because they felt it simply could not have been accepted before then. “What appeal would education for increasing participation have had in the sixties,” he asked, “when half the country wanted students to stop participating and making trouble, to settle down in the classroom?”³ Unfortunately, their appeals seem to have come too late, or have fallen on deaf ears, and those “elders” who initially “diagnosed” the problem 60’s children, have moved on to prescribing too many of today’s children with Ritalin to help them “settle down in the classroom.” Is there really any wonder why our children no longer take to the streets or openly reject the status quo when the status quo is being unjust?

The opposite of privatism is participation in society, by both having a voice and having our say. Participation means speaking up, not settling down. And, even more importantly, it means relating to others because that’s the very definition of participation. It means being part of something larger than our own interests. And participation means standing with those who are not allowed to participate in the full benefits of society simply because they are different in some way. But participation also reflects a much higher stage of moral development than does privatism. Privatism, at best, is stage four morality; that is, institutional morality, where we understand right and wrong only in terms of our social institutions. Or, more complexly, it is the stage in which our institutions are subjective, that is, the stage in which we have not differentiated ourselves from our institutions. We identify with our institutions. We are our institutions, be they educational, economic, legislative, or religious in nature. It is not until we mature enough to objectify our institutions, that is, to see them as something outside ourselves, that we are able to witness them and question them.

But once we do this, once we emerge from institutional morality, and move into stages 5 and 6, we begin to understand morality in terms, not of the rules, but of the principles behind those rules, principles like, love, equality, and justice that can be universally applied to everyone in all circumstances. “In the sixties,” Kohlberg, said, “we seemed to see youth groping toward principled fifth and even sixth stage reasoning, and recoiling from fourth stage political leadership while being misunderstood as immoral

² Ibid., p. 459.

³ Ibid., p. 460.

Where Did All the Hippies Go?

and lawless.”⁴ Today, our counterculture is no longer viewed so much as immoral and lawless, but as hyperactive and unable to pay attention, unable to “settle down.”

Fortunately, there are still a few old hippies around today, many of whom I suspect are right here in this room. Maybe our hair isn't as long, or as much as it was, and our clothes not as loud, and our music not as popular as then, but we're still here, rebelling in our own way, and, I hope, still showing the youth of today what it really means to be a citizen, what it means to participate in something bigger than ourselves. In the 1760's, we had our first American Revolution. In the 1860's we fought to emancipate our brothers and sisters from slavery. In the 1960's we demonstrated for Civil Rights. The 60's of every age has been a time of great chaos and change in our nation, but we don't have to wait until 2060 to ignite that same kind of transformation again. As time has proven, the hippies never went anywhere, but have been here with us throughout, looking for the opportunity to let their souls sing again. That time is now.

Sounds of laughter shades of life
are ringing through my open ears
exciting and inviting me
Limitless undying love which
shines around me like a million suns
It calls me on and on across the universe

Jai guru deva om
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Jai guru deva
Jai guru deva

⁴ Ibid., p. 463.