

Lecture 10: The Life of the Baby Boomers, 1954-1980

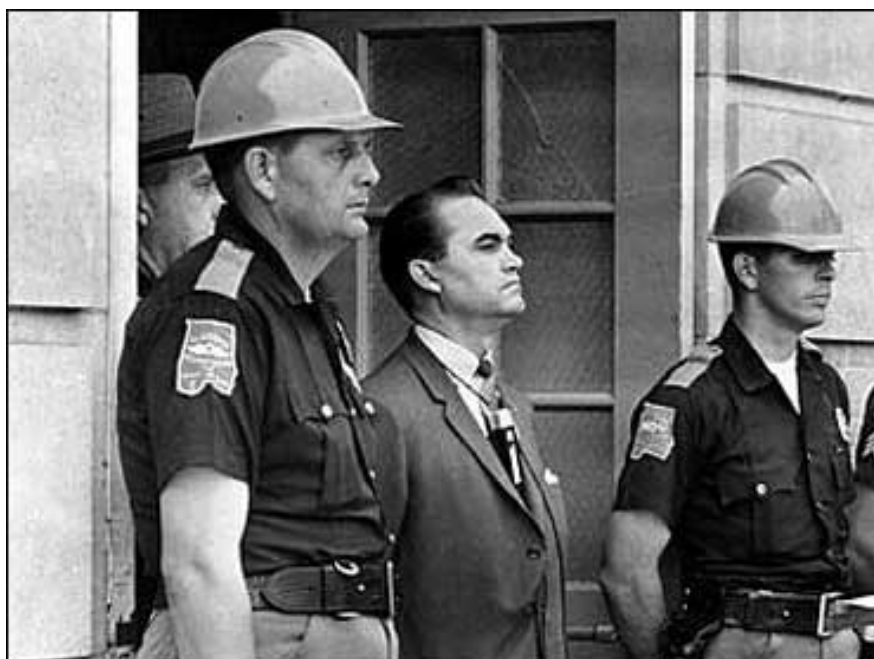
In the last lecture, we talked about how World War II, not Roosevelt's New Deal, ended the Great Depression. We also talked about the origins of the Cold War, the fear of communism, and the decision by the United States to attempt to contain the spread of Communism at all costs. This idea of containment led to the Korean War, and as we will soon see, led to other conflicts in the 60s and 70s. We also talked about the post-World War II Baby Boom, and about the technologies, developed during the war, that changed the lives of Americans after the war.

One of the effects of the war was the real start of the Civil Rights Movement. Black soldiers were treated well in Europe, and risked their lives in Europe fighting for democracy, only to return home to discrimination. Their experiences in Europe made them brave and taught them that there was another way to do things. WWII also gave the blacks a sense of entitlement. They fought, and sacrificed and died for democracy, and they wanted a piece of it.

The Civil Rights movement officially began in 1954 with a court decision known as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which overturned the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision and made school segregation illegal. No longer was separate but equal the law of the land. Instead, it would be together and equal. But just because the court passed a law did not mean that the people would abide by the law. For the law to work, whites would have to accept it and enforce it. They did not. In fact, 100 Southern Congressmen signed a manifesto denouncing the *Brown* decision. By late 1957, only 700 of 3,000 school districts had begun to desegregate. Whites protested outside of the schools, blocking their entrances so black students could not enter.



They even closed schools rather than opening their doors to blacks. One of those who physically blocked the doors was the governor of Alabama, George Wallace, who was elected on a platform of racism and the continuation of segregation.



So blacks would have to fight for their rights, but this fight would take the form of non-violent protest.

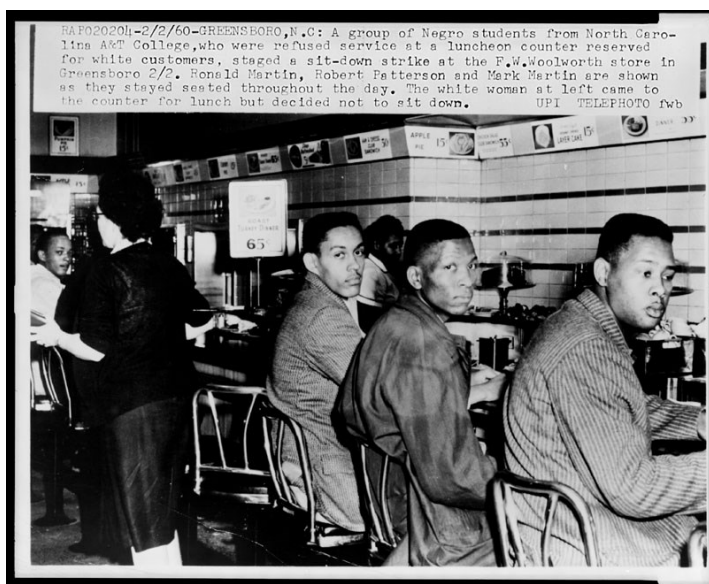
The first person to do so was Rosa Parks, a middle-aged black woman who decided that she would not give up her seat on a bus to a white person. She was arrested, and she became a symbol.



Blacks responded by boycotting buses in Montgomery. They walked or rode their bikes instead. Under the leadership of a young black minister named Martin Luther King, Jr., the boycott lasted a year, but the city finally gave in and changed the rules.



This success was followed by other non-violent protests, such as the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960, during which four black students sat at a whites-only lunch counter and refused to leave until they were served. The next day, more blacks joined the sit-in, and the movement quickly spread throughout the South. Whites reacted with violence, beating and spitting on the students, spraying them with ketchup, spilling drinks on them. But the blacks just continued to sit there peacefully. You see, blacks learned that the best way to promote social change was to hit the white man not in the face but in the wallet. The Greensboro sit ins took 6 months, but ultimately the lunch counters were desegregated.



As peaceful as the blacks were, whites often responded with violence, a tool that had worked well in the past. They were not going to give up on their world view so easily. For whites, especially in the South, blacks were still lesser life forms, good only for hard labor and servitude. They did not deserve equality. Whites responded by joining the KKK in large

numbers. Lynchings also increased, as did bombings and beatings. Even the police got involved in suppressing peaceful black protests.



In 1955, 14-year-old Emmitt Till was kidnapped, beaten, shot in the head, and then his body thrown in river, simply because he whistled at a white woman in a convenience store in Mississippi. The white male perpetrators were arrested and tried and found innocent. No white jury was going to convict whites of killing a black boy.



The Eisenhower administration was conservative, and did little to help the blacks. It would take other leaders, both black and white, to push the Civil Rights movement forward. One such leader was John F. Kennedy, no stranger to discrimination- he was discriminated against for being Catholic.

Kennedy, a Democratic Senator from Massachusetts, ran for president in 1960, and narrowly (by 1/3 of 1% of the popular vote) defeated the Republican candidate, Vice President Richard Nixon. It was the first time that Americans got the chance to see their candidates debate each other on the television.



Most scholars agree that it was Kennedy's good looks and ease in front of the camera that ultimately won the election for him. During his campaign, Kennedy promised to help the black people, but after he was elected, he backed off the promise. It would take the Russians, using blacks in their anti-American propaganda to push Kennedy into being more supportive of black rights.



Kennedy was a Cold War warrior, and a big supporter of not only containing communism (Truman Doctrine) but of spreading American democracy around the world. Kennedy firmly believed that the United States was a City Upon a Hill, that it was blessed by God and given the responsibility, as the peak of civilization, to show the world “the way, the truth, and the light.” Of course, in 1631, Winthrop confined his wishes simply to religious freedom. But in

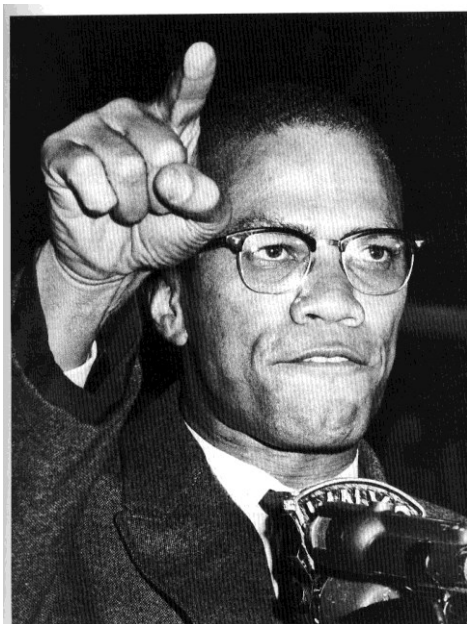
Kennedy's hands, the City Upon a Hill was a beacon of democracy. The enemy was not the Anglican church, but communism.

Of course, Kennedy immediately went about defending democracy. He sent soldiers to Vietnam to help the democratic South Vietnamese defend themselves against communist North Vietnam. And then in 1962, the Russians tried to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, just 150 kilometers off the Florida coast. Khrushchev thought this was fair, as the U.S. had missiles in Turkey. But Kennedy wouldn't stand for it. The result was the Cuban Missile Crisis, which is generally recognized as the closest America and Russia came to starting World War III.



Most people think that Khrushchev backed down, and that Kennedy won, but we now know that Kennedy and Khrushchev negotiated a deal whereby the Russians wouldn't put missiles in Cuba if the Americans would remove their missiles from Turkey. Both sides upheld their agreement, yet the Cuban Missile Crisis went down in American history as an American victory.

In the meantime, two black men, with two very different philosophies, became leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the men was named Malcolm Little, but he renamed himself Malcolm X because he didn't like the last name that his ancestor's white owners had given him. Malcolm X who grew up in a lower class family in Northern ghetto, and who had a very difficult childhood, believed in the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth Old Testament philosophy. He told the blacks to do whatever it took to get equality, even if it meant killing whites. The Black Panthers, a militant black organization, heard his call, and began intimidating whites.



On the other hand, there was Martin Luther King, Jr., a middle class, well-educated black Christian from the South who preached that the best way to achieve equality was through non-violence, like marches and boycotts. After the bus boycott, King organized Freedom Rides, during which an interracial group of students rode buses throughout the South in an attempt to desegregate bus stations. This attempt was met with violence, and Kennedy had to call in federal troops to patrol the bus stations and keep the peace. In 1963, King organized a series of peaceful marches in Birmingham, Alabama. The police attacked the marchers with dogs, tear gas, stun guns and fire hoses. And all the violence was caught on tv for all the world to see. Again, Kennedy was forced to send federal troops to Alabama to maintain order. He also went on tv asking the whites to do the right thing and allow integration. In August 1963, 200,000 people peacefully marched on Washington DC, an event which culminated in King's I have a dream speech.

King, Jr. is known today as the father of the civil rights movement, but civil rights would have never been achieved without both King and X.

Of course, as you all know, Kennedy didn't live to fulfill his promise to help blacks. In 1963 he was assassinated by a lone gunman in Dallas. No, there was no conspiracy. It was just a communist, Lee Harvey Oswald, who made a lucky shot. And this would be just the first of many bullets that to change the course of history in the 1960s.



When Kennedy was killed, Lyndon Johnson became president. It was under Johnson that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, giving blacks, along with women and other minorities, legal equality. This was followed in 1965 by the Voting Rights Act, which gave all American citizens over age 18 the right to vote, regardless of race, sex, or creed. He also passed the Hart Seller Act of 1965, which reversed the anti-immigration act of 1924 and opened immigration to all, not just Europeans. But passing these laws did not just immediately change the minds of white people. Whites felt threatened and strongly resisted, and the result was race riots across the United States, in Los Angeles in 1965, in Chicago in 1966, and in Detroit in 1967.

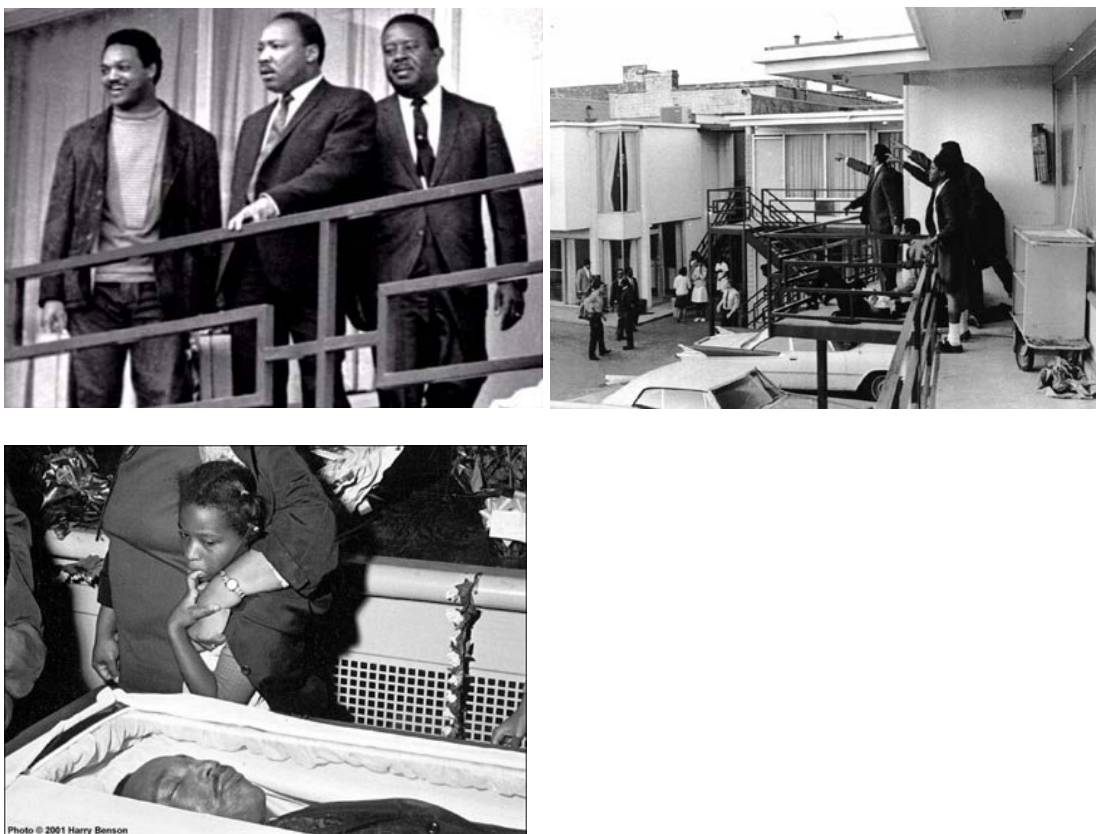


Furthermore:

Malcolm X was assassinated in New York in 1965.



Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Tennessee in 1968.



And Robert Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's brother who ran for president on the Democratic ticket in 1968, was assassinated in California.



In fact, many leaders who tried to help the cause of black people in the United States were shot and killed. Lyndon Johnson survived, but he was so unpopular by 1968 that he decided not to run for re-election.

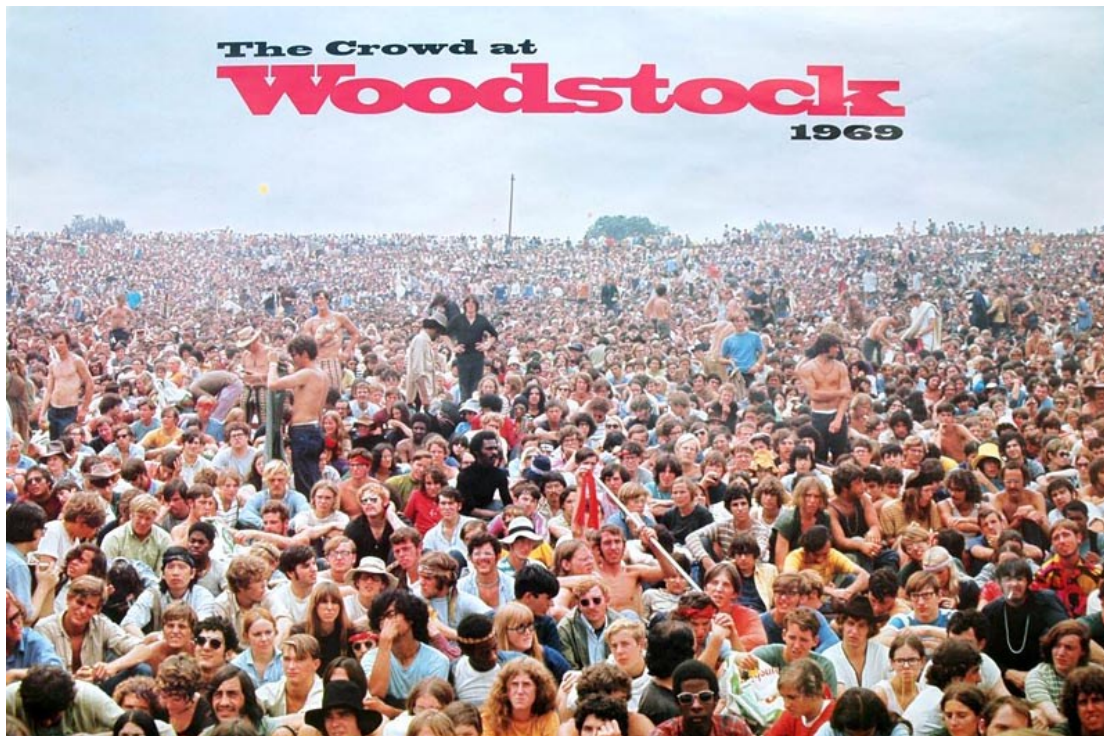
Johnson had been re-elected in 1964 by a huge margin. Only the deep South voted against him. Following in Kennedy's footsteps, Johnson ran as a Cold War warrior. He scared Americans with images of the nuclear bomb, and then told Americans he alone could save them from it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riDypPIKfOU>

Johnson's opponent in 1964 was a Republican and a western man. Barry Goldwater, who benefited from the "white trauma" that resulted from the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Goldwater opposed Brown vs. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act, on the grounds that the federal government did not have the right to dictate social policy. He was a strict constructionist. That is why he won several southern states

In his second term, however, Johnson saw his popularity diminish, not just because he supported non-whites, but because, in an attempt to contain the spread of communism, he escalated the Vietnam War. By 1967, the Vietnam War was incredibly unpopular in the United States, especially among younger generations. In fact, the youth of America became disillusioned and joined what is referred to as the counterculture. Many became hippies, flower children or beatniks. They took drugs (like LSD), experimented sexually, and "dropped out" of life. The summer of 1967 was known as the summer of love, during which over 100,000 hippies, led by Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, congregated in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco.

Rock and roll became an expression of protest, with Bob Dylan and his girlfriend Joan Baez ("We shall overcome, and we shall live in peace someday") leading the way. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGFagK-LuQo>

It was this environment of hippies and protest that led to one of the most famous concerts of all time: Woodstock.



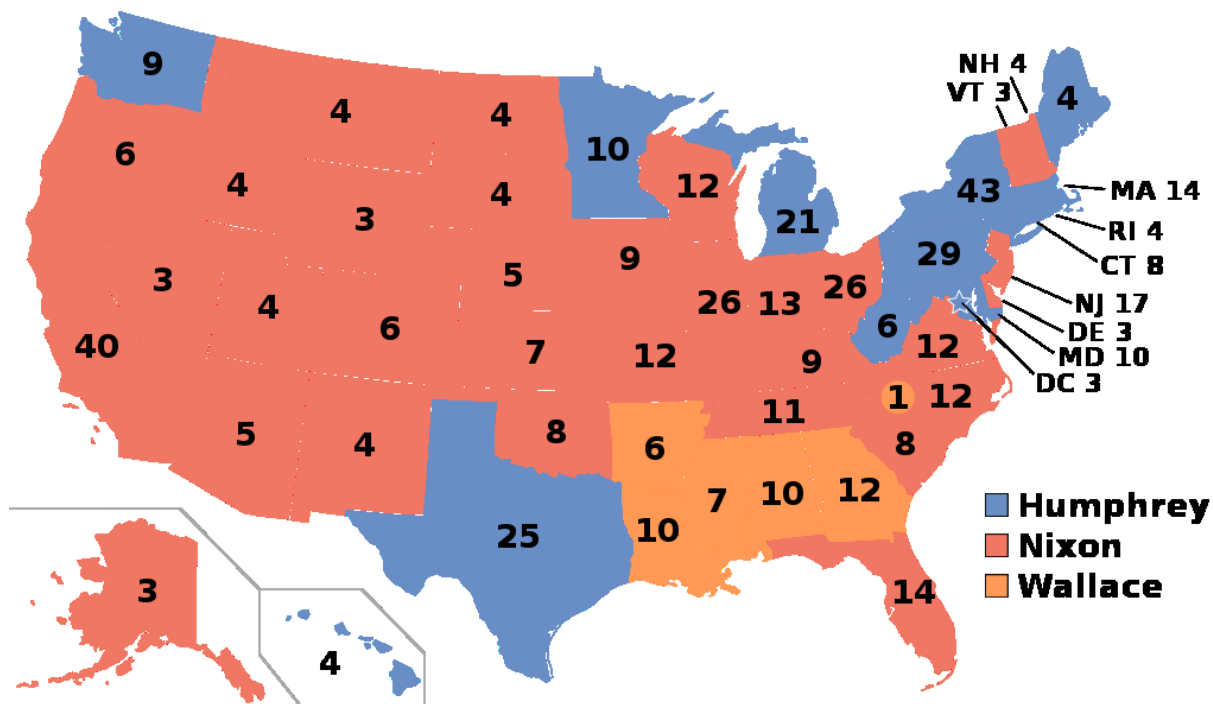
But it also led to deadly violence at the 1969 Rolling Stones concert at California's Altamont Speedway, which seemed to have exposed the dangerous, drugged-out underside of the counter culture movement, marking the symbolic end of the hippie era of peace and love.

Of course, older generations and conservatives were against the hippies and supported the Vietnam War, despite the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre, which involved the mass murder of over 500 South Vietnamese civilians by U.S. troops.

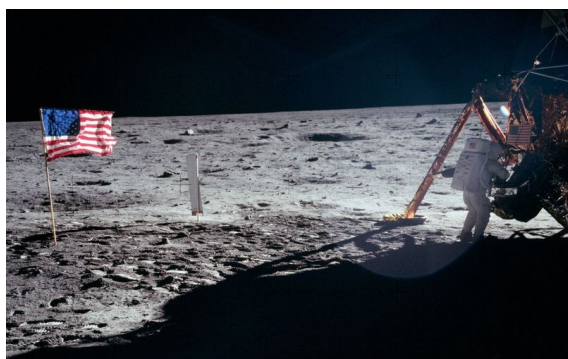


These older conservatives were known as the Silent Majority, because they did not join in the counterculture or in demonstrations. In 1968, they elected Republican Richard Nixon president over Hubert Humphrey and 3rd party candidate Gov. George Wallace, the same man who had blocked the door to the school so that blacks could not enter. Wallace ran on a

segregationist, racist, state's rights platform. He won 5 states in the South and 13% of the national vote, proving that many Americans in 1968 were still not willing to accept racial equality. Nixon won because he promised to win the war and bring the troops home. To do so, he escalated the war once again. But it didn't help.



1969 was also the year of the moon landing, which fulfilled a promise that Kennedy had made back in 1961 to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. The moon landing was proof positive that America was winning the Cold War, but at the same moment that Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon, other Americans were being shot and killed on Earth, not just in Vietnam, but in America.



Students began protesting the war on campuses throughout the United States, sometimes with deadly results. In 1970, U.S. troops fired on a crowd of unarmed students in Ohio, killing 4.



Vietnam aside, the 1970s seemed to get off to a positive start, at least in terms of U.S. foreign policy. In February 1972, President Nixon visited China and met with Chairman Mao, thawing Sino-American relations. Then, in May 1972, Nixon became the first Cold War president to visit the Soviet Union. He met with Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow, in an event that came to be known as “détente,” an effort to replace the hostility of the Cold War with a “peaceful coexistence.” They agreed to increased trade and to two arms-control treaties: SALT froze each country’s construction of missiles that could carry nuclear warheads, while the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty banned the development of systems designed to intercept incoming missiles.

But then Nixon got in trouble for covering up the fact that Republicans had broken into the Democratic National headquarters and stolen secrets. He resigned in 1974 before being impeached.



Gerald Ford became President and immediately pardoned Nixon, an extremely unpopular move.

Vietnam ended in a loss in 1975. The first time the United States had ever been defeated. And the U.S. left in a hurry, even leaving valuable equipment behind.

The economy by then was terrible. The United States had a gas shortage, and Americans had to line up for hours to get gas.



In the late 70s, the US dollar lost half of its value.

Then rebels attacked the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran and took all of the employees hostage. The United States was powerless to do anything about it. President Carter sent a rescue mission, but it failed miserably, and more soldiers died.



The symbolic end to a very bad decade came in 1979, when a reactor at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant in Pennsylvania suffered a devastating core meltdown that predated Chernobyl by 7 years. This was Pennsylvania's second major ecological disaster. In 1962, a coal mine in Centralia, Pennsylvania caught fire. It is still burning. By the way, one river in Ohio was so polluted that in 1969 it caught fire.



As a result of such environmental disasters, Americans focused on protecting the environment again with many hippies in the 60s becoming tree huggers in the 70s. In 1970, Earth Day was established, and groups like the Sierra Club and Audubon Society became popular. All Americans in the 70s remember the tv commercial made by environmentalists which depicted an old Indian man crying because of all of the pollution in America.



But the 70s weren't all bad. The 70s gave us disco music



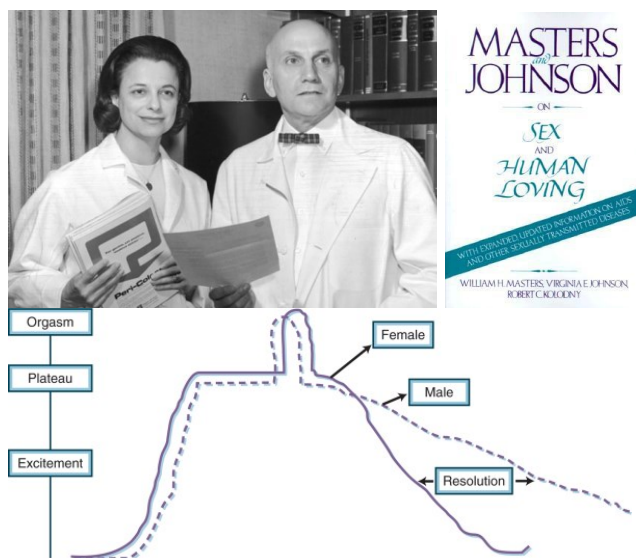
and the top-rated television show, *All in the Family*, which document the relationship between older, conservative parents and their younger, liberal children.



And after the successes of the black civil rights movement, other minorities began fighting for their rights. American Indians staged their own civil rights movement in the 70s, forcing the

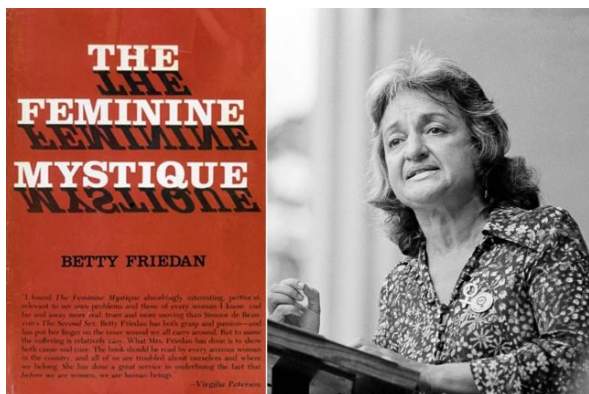
government to make several concessions, including the establishment of new reservations. And Hispanics also fought for their rights. But the two groups that achieved the greatest successes were women and gays. This leads me to the so-called sexual revolution.

Masters and Johnson had started the ball rolling between 1957 and 1965 when they researched and published on sex, proving that women are sexual beings who were capable of orgasms and who enjoyed sex just as much as men. Previously, the woman's job was to service the man, but after Masters and Johnson, the service had to be reciprocal. However, Masters and Johnson also classified homosexuality as an illness that could be cured. Indeed, they spent years trying to cure it, supposedly achieving a 70 percent success rate.



In New York in 1969, after police went to a gay club, the Stonewall Inn, in New York and arrested and beat people for being gay, a pro-gay riot broke out, which was the first time in the U.S. that people openly expressed support for homosexuals. This was the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement, with activists arguing that homosexuality was not a sin against God or an illness. People began “coming out of the closet” and demanding recognition and equal rights. By the early 80s, this movement had achieved a great amount of success, but it suffered a setback when the AIDS epidemic convinced many Americans that God was punishing homosexuals.

And Betty Friedan in 1963 published her now infamous *Feminine Mystique*, which brought feminism and the demand for female equality to the main stream. Friedan discovered that American women tended to be unhappy. She advocated a new plan for women, outside of marriage, motherhood, and housework.



Friedan's book launched the Second Wave of Feminism. In 1966, the National Organization of Women was founded, which demanded greater educational opportunities and rejected the 1950s' domestic ideal that a woman's place was in the home. The late 60s saw the rise of radical feminism, with bra-burnings and sexual promiscuity. After all, if it was OK for men to sleep around, why couldn't women do it too. Lesbians started coming out of the closet as well, and it became popular for women in the 70s to NOT change their names when they got married.



These waves of sexual freedom and feminism led to Title IX in 1972, which granted education equality regardless of sex, and to 1973's Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, which made abortion legal and gave women control over their own bodies by giving them the right to choose.

Despite these women's rights advances, As the 1970s came to an end, the U.S., as I mentioned, was at a low point. The economy was in the dumps, sparked by high rates of inflation, fuel shortages and sharp increases in energy prices. U.S. embassy employees in Tehran were still being held hostage, and Russia attacked Afghanistan, prompting President Jimmy Carter to impose sanctions on Russia and cancel American participation in the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow. With all of this, and with Carter's inability to solve the nation's problems, Americans felt once again that their world was out of control, and so they turned to religion and to the Republican Party to solve their troubles.

A religious revival took place in the late 70s, centered around the growth of evangelical Christianity but also including the development of fringe faiths, such as the Church of

Scientology. Evangelical Christians believe in being “born again” through direct communication with God. By the late 70s, more than 70 million Americans called themselves born-again Christians “who had a direct, personal relationship with Jesus.” These born-again Christians established their own newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television networks, and they helped to elect Jimmy Carter, a “born again” Christian, as president.



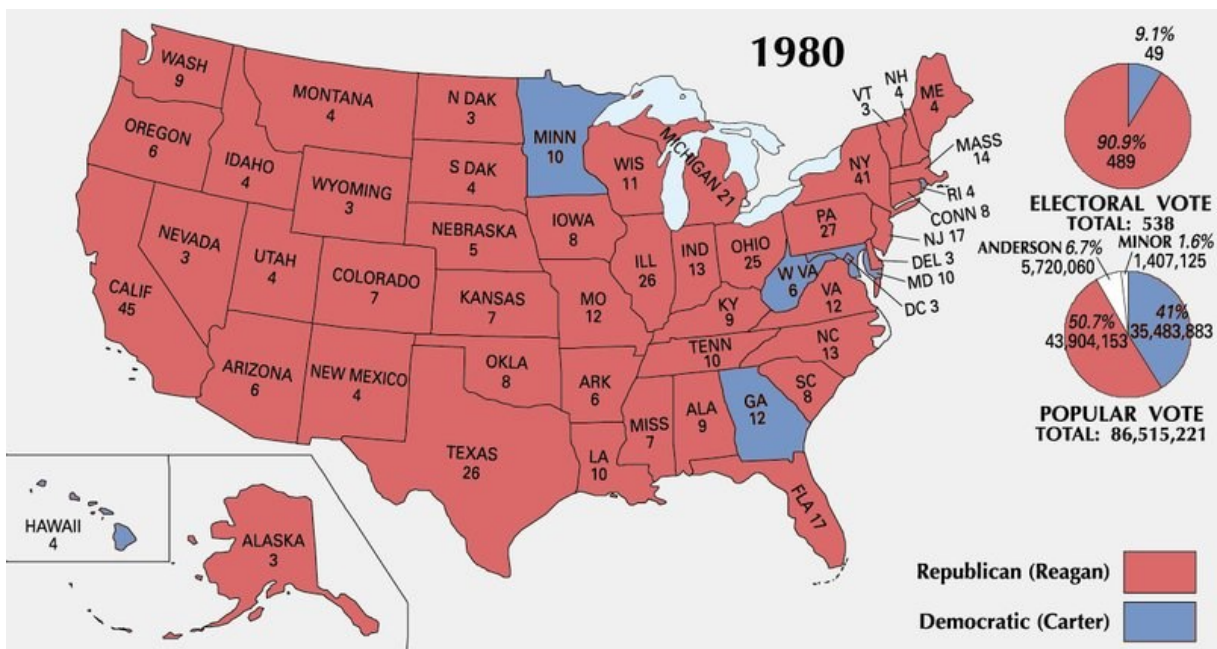
By the late 70s, many evangelicals had turned against Carter and become politically and culturally conservative. They were alarmed at the immorality of American society, alarmed at the spread of feminism which challenged traditional American values and family values, and upset by Supreme Court decisions that eliminated religion in public schools and allowed women to have abortions.

By the late 1970s, the Christian Right (think Czech Christian Democrats) was a powerful political force opposing government interference (*laissez faire*), denouncing abortion as a sin against God, opposing divorce, feminism, and homosexuality, and supported unrestricted business and a strong foreign policy- *City Upon a Hill*- America has a responsibility to show the world how to do things. They also denied evolution and urged the teaching of the Biblical Creation Story.

These conservatives were Republican, and they rallied behind a strong candidate, an actor turned politician who had served two terms as governor of California- Ronald Reagan.



Jimmy Carter was in deep political trouble, demonstrated by the fact that he had a difficult time even winning his party's nomination. He faced a tough challenge from a younger Kennedy brother, Edward Kennedy. None of this mattered, however, because Ronald Reagan, who was against big government, who promised tax cuts, and who promised a restoration of American strength and pride in the world, was bound to win. Americans realized that Reagan had a plan, whereas Carter did not. And he won the election of 1980 without difficulty.



This set the stage for what would become known as the Reagan Revolution.