

Guided Readings: Major Social Issues of the 1960s

READING 1: CIVIL RIGHTS

The separate but equal doctrine has failed in three important respects. First it is inconsistent with the fundamental equalitarianism of the American way of life in that it marks groups with the brand of inferior status. Secondly, where it has been followed, the results have been separate and unequal facilities for minority peoples. Finally, it has kept people apart despite incontrovertible evidence that an environment favorable to civil rights is fostered whenever groups are permitted to live and work together.

President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947

READING 2: THE NEW LEFT

Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today....We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.

Port Huron Statement of Students for a Democratic Society, 1962

READING 3: WOMEN'S LIBERATION

We reject the current assumption that a man must carry the sole burden of supporting himself, his wife, and family, and that a woman is automatically entitled to lifelong support by a man upon her marriage, or that marriage, home and family are primarily woman's world and responsibility--hers, to dominate--his to support. We believe that a true partnership between the sexes demands a different concept of marriage, an equitable sharing of the responsibilities of home and children and of the economic burdens of their support....

In the interests of the human dignity of women, we will protest and endeavor to change the false image of women now prevalent in the mass media, and in the texts, ceremonies, laws, and practices of the major social institutions. Such images perpetuate contempt for women by society and by women for themselves.

National Organization for Women's Statement of Purpose, 1966

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Equal Rights Amendment

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Examine the origins of the struggles of blacks, students, and women for equal rights. What factors contributed to growing radicalization of these groups during the 1960s?
2. Which strategy--court battles, non-violent protest, or violent confrontation--was most effective in bringing about social change?
3. What do you think was the major goal of the struggles of blacks, students, and women for equal rights--a transformation of American society or equal participation within the existing order?