

A GENERATION?

the workplaces, the bureaucracies and the government. They felt the search for truly democratic alternatives, and a commitment to social experimentation, was a worthy, fulfilling human enterprise; one which moved them to conviction.

We as students of the 80's are well aware of the activist nature of our predecessors but we have also chosen to swiftly dissipate or entirely repel the energies of protest and reform, thus limiting human expectancies. Why is it that we, as a generation, are, more complacent about our environment, about war, hunger, racism, terrorism and other inequalities in our world? Although we do not have a Viet Nam, or as intense racial strife as the 60's, we do have El Salvador, Lebanon, Grenada and countless other violations of human rights occurring as well as an intensified nuclear arms race beyond the expectations of even the most radical student of the 60's. Have the inequalities of that era vanished?

"While these and other problems directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and become our own subjective concerns, we began to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in our surrounding America. The declaration 'All men are created equal...' rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South and the big cities of the North. The proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo."

"Agenda For a Generation"

What, if anything, did we learn from the campus radicals of the 60's? Were they able to change anything or were they just voices lost in the conservative tradition of American life. It is accepted that America could never accommodate the "radical left" but these students saw no alternative within the existing institutions of political life and were searching new roads.

With the end of Viet Nam, much of the student movements' moral support turned to more traditional pursuits. The reality of an increasingly technical world created a new generation of students, more pre-occupied with individual success than social equality. Methods for voicing displeasure became more passive and people began to settle into a vacuum of complacency and indifference. We are the modern day youth, the generation landslide that was to change the world. Instead, we are holding on to tradition, intent on the

pursuit of individualism, for all intents unorganized and ineffective as a voice for liberal thought. Why did such a scenario develop after such a radical preceding generation? Could it be that our fears rest more with the uncertainty of the future than the security of the past? Flower power has been replaced with computer power, rock and roll with new wave, hallucinogenics with milder pursuits, sit-ins with stay homes, all the while, nothing has really changed. We still have massive inequalities, rampant abuse of political power, racial strife and modern Viet Nams. So, where is our modern voice, our inherited tradition of free speech and our pursuit of values?

It has been said that the downfalls of all great civilizations have come from within. Maybe our predecessors from the 60's were attempting to warn us, and to prepare us for an uncertain future. The massive support garnered by the anti-war movement was unparalleled. It toppled presidents and gave Americans a moral prerogative and a sense of unity built on a belief in justice and citizen power. We as a modern generation of students are also born to be the vanguards of a future society. It is our actions that will dictate what type of society that will be. Unfortunately, we do not live in the utopia of "WALDEN" and we must find the energy to tackle issues of importance to all mankind. It is obvious that we do not, as a student body, support radical alternatives as our 60's counterparts did. But we can, as a generation, become more conscious of our world through dialogue and a pursuit of what is right. We cannot and should not ignore what is wrong in the world by hiding in the virtues of individualism.

One important question remains to be answered and that is: Are we so different from the students of the 1960's or were they even more different than the students of the 50's? I believe that the upheavals of the 1960's were much more pronounced as a rejection of perceived values inherited from the 1950's, a time of peace and prosperity unparalleled in American history. The events that took place in the 1960's amounted to an enlightenment, a re-awakening of traditional values that had become lost in the post-war prosperity, a desire to qualitatively change the world, to pursue peace and equality. Modern day issues we face as students such as

double-digit inflation and unemployment were almost non-existent in the 1960's prosperity. This is a central point in understanding our own pre-occupations with the modern world, fear of getting a job, of being able to compete. In the 1960's a university degree literally guaranteed employment, thus more energy was expounded to tackle the issues of society and less toward where the individual will fit into it. Although these are structural variants they still offer some degree of insight into fundamental differences in situations. A movement such as the S.D.S. would not have been feasible in the universities of the 1980's mostly because we are not as a body as idealistic as our predecessors, nor do we want to radically transform our world in the same manner. I do believe however, that the university as it existed in the 1960's is still a bastion for free thought, a place where we can question the world around us and formulate opinions, while learning and digesting all the while.

As a final aside, although we differ from the activist students of the 1960's we too possess an "Agenda For a Generation." We have the power to transform the world around us as a generation destined to inherit the institutions of our world. It is our pre-occupation with structural variants that has quieted the voice of discontent and it is this pre-occupation that has led to passive indifference. If we are to change the world it must be in a qualitative manner, one which transcends our structures and moves us to commit energy and belief to what is right and what is wrong, if we do so the lessons learned from our activist predecessors will not be lost in time but will be held as a tradition meant to exist in institutions of higher education.

The opinions held within are those of the Features Editor and by no means represent those of the Brunswickan staff or university community.

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