

Longwood University

An Analysis of Sources from 1960s America

Critical Source Analysis #3

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America during the 1960s was constantly changing, with countless new ideas being born. In this essay I will be analyzing three sources: The Kitchen Debate, the Port Huron Statement, and LBJ's Great Society Speech. All these sources discuss different popular ideas from the era in which they were published. Throughout my analysis I will connect views and ideas voiced within the sources to groups and events in history in the 1960s. I will also discuss the similarities and differences between the sources.

After World War II, the Cold War began and relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were tense. However, towards the end of the 1950s there was a "thaw" in the war and the two countries decided to exchange national exhibitions to allow the citizens of the two countries to see how the others lived. The Soviet exhibit opened in New York City and the U.S. exhibit opened in Moscow. Representing the U.S. at the exhibit in Moscow was Richard Nixon (Vice President at the time) who met with the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev; the two debated over what they believed to be the meaning of freedom. This debate later became famously known as the Kitchen Debate. During the exhibition, Nixon mentioned that the American technology shown was focussed on making the consumers life easy; specifically technology used by housewives. Khrushchev responds by saying that "[America's] capitalist attitude toward women does not occur under Communism". This shows how different the two countries are when it comes to how they look at consumerism and how they market their goods. The exhibit was a way to try and sell the people of the Soviet Union on a free enterprise system. It portrayed America as a place with economic freedom and prosperity which results in consumer choice. In America, there was a huge demand for housing, TVs, kitchen appliances, etc. and laws like the G.I. Bill and other programs were created to help the country afford these products,

turning the country into a society of consumers. In this source Nixon talks about the ideal America, where every family has a home with a kitchen full of new appliances and a car. In reality though, America was still poverty stricken and the privileged youth that made up the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) did not overlook that.

At one time, the United States was the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. Although, according to the young adults of the 1960s, the country failed to remain loyal to its democratic ideals. In order to voice their displeasure and share their agenda for social change, members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) drafted the Port Huron Statement. In their manifesto outlining the New Left's idea of freedom, the SDS cited examples of how the country was failing democracy as well as laying out their agenda for social change in America and their plan to recruit young students to help their cause. The SDS believed that America needed a change in democracy: "we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation". They also knew that many African Americans in the United States were unable to vote due to violence set against them and wanted to help them register so that they had a voice in the country's politics. In order to achieve their goals, members of the SDS stationed themselves outside the gates of Berkeley in 1964 to recruit other college students to be a part of the second Freedom Summer. However, the university did not want political groups organizing on campus and banned their presence on school grounds. This enraged the SDS and many other groups at Berkeley, resulting in massive protests held by students in the following months. Students used this oppressive action by the school to fuel a new movement which many became passionate about; the Free Speech movement. Across the country, people rallied to join the cause of the new movement until finally, the university abandoned the ban in early 1965.

This source is different from the Kitchen Debate in that it recognizes the country's major flaws and sets out a plan to fix them instead of glossing over America's imperfections. Though, it is similar to the "Great Society" source because both the authors of the Port Huron Statement and LBJ in his speech address America's struggles and state the importance of using its resources to create a better life for all Americans.

The 1960s was a time of economic growth and prosperity in the United States. It was because of this that President Johnson believed that he could use this economic growth to fund new government programs. The main focus was on enhancing quality of life for the American people. In his speech at the University of Michigan, LBJ stated that while it took years to achieve the country's current prosperity, Americans need to use that prosperity in the future to "move upward to the Great Society". He believed that we must work with what we have in order to make America better. However, while many were doing well, there were still Americans struggling with poverty. After reading Michael Harrington's 1962 book *The Other America*, the country became aware that 40 to 50 million Americans were living in poverty. In the north, impoverished African Americans were forced to live in second ghettos which consisted of poorly constructed apartments in bad neighborhoods. Underprivileged Americans that did not live in cities moved to isolated rural areas. Due to this disturbing realization, LBJ made his plan for the Great Society which focused heavily on the "War on Poverty". Instead of giving government handouts, he focussed on aiding the poor by teaching them useful skills and providing them with food stamps. He visited many poor areas and helped the people to see that the government does care about the wellbeing of the American people. In this source, LBJ confronts America's

problems and makes it clear to Michigan's graduating class that it is of the utmost importance to take action to solve this serious problem, similarly to the authors of the Port Huron Statement.

Throughout the 1960s, America was full of economic prosperity as well as many struggling for equality and living in poverty. As a result, there were many in the country who recognized this and stepped up to bring change to America and make it a "Great Society" for all. These sources all stemmed from different events in history but confirm that America is a capable nation that accepts and corrects its flaws in order to improve society.