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Extended Essay

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To what extent were the principles of Hippie culture reflected in Woodstock festivals in 1969
and 1999?

Topic:

Exploration of the Hippie Counterculture in the Woodstock Festival

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Introduction

I'm going on down to Yasgur's Farm,
I'm gonna join in a rock and roll band.
I'm gonna camp out on the land.
I'm gonna get my soul free.

“Woodstock” by Joni Mitchell is written to reflect the Hippie culture at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969 (*Joni Mitchell - Woodstock (Live In-Studio 1970)*). The festival shed light on the hippie counterculture that has arisen from the youth of the 1960s. Woodstock aimed to bring together the “Hippies” who embraced the values of free love, peace, freedom, and rejecting the social norms of society to create the anti-establishment (“What Is a Hippie?”). The need to get out of the encapsulated life and the criticism of the current political decisions of the government were inevitable for the hippies to join one of the biggest festivals during the 1960s. The festival has been rehashed four times, creating a different reflection of the principles of changing Hippie counterculture.

In this paper, I examined the reflection of the principles of Hippie culture in Woodstock Festivals in 1969 and 1999. The importance of this research is to illustrate the change of principles and the mindset of Hippies that has been reflected in the Woodstock festivals, in different eras of America. This particular topic is a special interest of mine because the values and the social system that the hippies defended at the time of Woodstock can still be observed in the modern world. From my perspective, unwritten social norms of society force people to earn more money to reach a particular status and have the desirable “good life” by consuming and owning property. The differences between social powers create

international social issues that can also be seen in today's world. From the 1960s to the 70s the counter ideas about the system and the norms of the society were expressed in different forms of arts such as dance, photography, film, music, and artworks to create awareness. Woodstock festivals are one of the crucial events in history in terms of social criticism. The Woodstock festivals and counterculture have revealed to me a culture deeply rooted in activism, and resistance for women's rights, marginalized groups' rights, racism, and the moral code of "making love, not war" in our lives (Creative Review). To provide a thorough understanding of this subject, it is necessary to examine the reflection of a arisen counterculture that has gathered people from all around America, on festivals. The diversification of the counterculture's identity and how it came to be the way it is in the modern world can possibly be seen in the shifted hippie values at Woodstock concerts. The values of these nonconformists and how they embrace their ideas through a form of art inspired me to value and find inner peace in myself and realize the social force behind academic validation, social status, and having a "good life."

In this essay, the question "To what extent were the principles of Hippie culture reflected in Woodstock fests in 1969 and 1999?" was analyzed through a close examination of the hippie culture and principles, Woodstock 1969, Woodstock 1999, and the comparison between the festivals. In order to answer the question, I have used the documentation from Netflix called "Trainwreck: Woodstock '99" alongside the discussion of Ben Wattenberg, James Miller, Kurt Vonnegut, Martha Bayles, and Morris Dickstein. The quotes of attendees from the festival and the media coverage from that time were also used to have a critical view of the interpretation of the events.

Hippie Culture and Principles:

Historical Context and Origin of the Hippie Culture

There are highlights of the Hippie movements and the formation of a counterculture in American society however, the birth of the Hippie culture cannot be explained with a specific start and end point. The values and the adaption of the lifestyle of Hippies gathered momentum in the 1960s in San Francisco, especially in the streets of Haight Ashbury (*The Birth of Hippie Culture In The 1960s*). In the 1960s Americans were facing many controversial issues such as civil rights, the Vietnam War, nuclear arms, the use of drugs, racism, consumerism, non-conformity, sexual freedom, gender rights, and the structural leading system of America (Poon) (“Lisa Law: The Counterculture”). These alternative lifestyles were mainly the youth and university students who defined themselves as “the rebels against their society” (*The Birth of Hippie Culture In The 1960s*) and got their influences from the Beatniks from the 1950s (“The Beat Generation · Music Propels the Counterculture · The American Century”). Hippies were searching for a cultural revolution to solve the social power imbalance and reach unlimited freedom by expressing their ideas through music, emblems, performances, and protests (Poon). The gatherings were made to celebrate the formation of a counterculture and being around people who share the same ideas.

Key Principles and Values of Hippie Culture

The birth of the Hippies originated new principles, understanding of lifestyle, and social structures that have been seen in the youth of the 1960s. According to John Robert Howard, the Hippies criticize the society of America in the words “Success in this society is defined largely in terms of having money and a certain standard of living. The work roles which yield the income and the standard of living are, for the most part, either meaningless or intrinsically demeaning.”(Howard, 45). As it seems in the quote from the paper, the Hippies

had anti-materialistic principles that were against the results of consumerism and capitalism. Hippies' critiques of the social norms of society also show that the success of a person and a country is based on the properties, assets, and economic power they hold. The unlimited desire to hold the power and materials dehumanized society, which created social differences and global tensions (Howard). The rejection of the social system and norms in America created the anti-conventional principles of the revolutionary subculture. Hippies tried to push the boundaries such as properties, prejudice, and biased views on the conceptions of what is moral and immoral (Howard); to reach pure happiness, peace, and love in the society. The ideas of the Hippies convey that they have tried to go back to the roots of humans' aims in living and their understanding of life. To protest their ideas for a cultural revolution in American society and the rights of each human being; they have adopted environmentalist, individualist (Poon), anti-consumerist, and urban living lifestyles.

The Hippies were also known as "dropouts" in the society. However, being a dropout for a Hippie was intentionally made because they were rejecting the government-controlled curriculum and the education system which prepares the students to have a specific job to earn money and be another cog in the capitalist machine (Howard). They believed in volunteerism which disrupted the status quo and allowed them to be satisfied as an individual and a group (Howard). The urge to belong in a community, where the social norms were united as a group, influenced people to gather together and celebrate their ideas through forms of art. These meetings and the evolution of the Hippie culture influenced American society and resulting in the formation of a new fashion, an alternative way of living, the youth being politically engaged, the use of psychedelic drugs, exploration of homosexual relationships, music voicing Hippie values, and meeting of minds through music festivals.

Woodstock 1969

Historical Context and Background of the Woodstock Festival

Woodstock Music and Art Fair was one of the biggest music festivals of the time during the 1960s which created a space for Hippies to unite, celebrate and understand the peace in music, and protest the Vietnam War in a non-violent way (Poon). The first festival took place on a farm in Sullivan County, New York (Lawrence) and welcomed 450,000 people for three days including artists such as Joan Baez, the Grateful Dead, and Country Joe McDonald with many more well-regarded performers (Lawrence).

Organization Planning and Execution of the Festival

The organization's financial aim initially was to raise money to buy a new studio for the founder of Woodstock (Leitch). Despite these financial purposes behind the set up of Woodstock, there was no huge advertisement about the venue and no sponsored products in the execution of the festival which of that time was groundbreaking (Leitch). The ethos of the Hippie movement's anti-capitalistic values meant that the festival did not function as a supportive event for money purposes. In my view, the fact that the festival was held on a farm and not in an unnatural place embodies the support of Hippies for the farm and rural lifestyle of the subculture.

Even though the festival reached its aim in terms of protesting and creating a community, the planning and the disorganization of the festival created difficulties for the festival goers such as traffic jams, lack of enough food, water, parking problems, and camping space which led to fatal consequences (Helfrich).

Attendance and Demographics of the Festival-goers

Tie-dyed print shirts, sandals, headbands, floral prints and materials, and long untidy hair (Menclová) are the key aspects of the fashion that Hippies created to support their identity in Woodstock in 1969. This unique approach to lifestyle, fashion, and alternative

values against social norms has resulted in a biased view of Hippies in American society. “The townspeople quite frankly were terrified at the prospect of the Hippie arrival” said ABC’s reporter Gregory Jackson (*ABC News coverage of WoodStock*) because they had seen the Hippies as peculiarly dressed dropouts (Helfrich). However, the positive values of the new youth society overcame the biased view of Hippies. The quote from the proprietor of Monticello Inn stated that the hippies were well-behaved, and some of them who stayed at the hotel even made their beds (Helfrich).

Performances and Music of Woodstock

The political statements at the festival were demonstrated by the music performances. The lyrics of the songs and the outfits of the performers were intentionally designed to provide a social commentary and consciousness to highlight what was going on in the US and around the world during that time. One of the examples of expressing the Hippie statements through a form of art was Jimi Hendrix’s performance in his version of “Star Spangled Banner” (Kropf). While performing on stage, Hendrix was dressed in red, blue, and white which are the colors of the American flag (Kropf). He improvised the song on stage to create a statement with the words “and the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting air” (Kropf). The guitarist created dramatic sounds of planes, bombing, crying, and screams (Kropf). These sounds were intentionally made to protest the involvement of America in the Vietnam War. My perspective on this matter is that the guitarist aimed to throw the audience into the atmosphere of a war zone and show the dehumanizing impact of violence. There were also other performances such as Country Joe singing “Fixin To Die”, and Richie Havens singing “Freedom” (Kropf) to express their ideas of embracing the counterculture and reflecting the values of the movement and formation of the youth.

Reflections of Hippie Principles In Woodstock 1969

The positive values of the Hippies spread outside of the community and overcame the difficulties of the festival's disorganization such as lack of water, food, and the defunct sanitary system. The older generation who had antagonist thoughts about the Hippies were enlightened and the good will circulated. This festival reflects Hippie culture in two major aspects. Firstly, the values of Hippies united everyone regardless of their thoughts about life. CBS News Correspondent John Lawrence reported "Housewives handed out hot coffee to stranded youngsters who had not eaten in days. Catholic nuns passed around sandwiches made by Jewish mothers." (O'Brien) offered adequate evidence for the movement of Hippie beliefs around the Bethel farm. I have come to appreciate that the counterculture principles brought all the people together and highlighted the importance of being human and helping each other to have the "good life". The way that the new youth united with people regardless of their status, age, and socio-economic differences, confirms the importance of defeating prejudice and materialistic values.

Secondly, the festival allowed the people to be who they are and created a safe place to protest their own thoughts. The Woodstock Festival in 1969 impacted American culture by showing how the new generation could celebrate life by uniting to protest war, nuclear technologies, and social norms in a non-violent way (Leitch). The festival goers were bonded together in peace and created a cultural identity where they felt they belonged to a community by celebrating their own values and principles.

Woodstock 1999

Historical Context and Background of Woodstock Festival 1999

Woodstock Festival was brought back to life to celebrate the original Woodstock Festival's third anniversary (Crawford). The festival took place in the Air Force base in Rome, New York (Petrusich). The event turned out to be mayhem that had sexual assaults,

riots, looting, arson, and many deaths (Petrusich). The ignorance of the basic needs of human life created the rage which resulted in violence, molestation, pollution, and destruction of the place within human values. The representation of the original festival shifted into the opposite of what the Hippie values stood for: destruction, consumerism, Frat boy culture, rage, and uncontrolled behaviors.

Organization, Planning, and Execution of The Festival

The Woodstock 99 aimed to satisfy the new young generation with the popular music of that time and promote the festival to gain the most profit. The organizer's financial aims were the priority when they saw the financial potential in 3 different Woodstocks. The cuts were made in the budget from the materials that were essential for safety and basic human needs. From my perspective, the value of human and Hippie principles have already been disregarded in the early planning stages.

Attendance and Demographics of the Festival-goers

The crowd at the festival was different than the 1969. The purpose of the attendees at the festival was far from celebrating Hippie values. Due to the fact that it was promoted all over the US and the changed line-up, this affected the profile of the attendees and resulted in a different demographic of the festival goers. The style of nu-metal music brought its own behaviors and culture such as moshing, mosh pits, spitting, and fighting.

The youth's behavior in the 1990s was shaped by the needs, demands, and popular culture of America. The change in the popular music style, character attributes in cinema, and development in technology influenced the youth's approach. America in the 90s has the highlights of Bill Clinton's scandal, and the birth of films like American Pie, and Fight Club which have an impact on changing the behaviors of society. According to the journalist in Woodstock Festival 99 "It is brimming sexuality from the male perspective."(Crawford). The new generation's interest in violence and toxic masculine behaviors was prevalent in the

attributes of the Woodstock Festival attendees in 1999. These new aspects of the festival goers are the polar opposite of the Hippie spirit. The toxic masculinity that has been seen in the attendees points out the reversal in the counterculture which has the greatest purpose “Make love, not war.” (Creative Review).

Performance and Music of Woodstock 1999

The performances at Woodstock 1999 have also changed with the materialistic purposes and the profile of the participants. The musicians were chosen to satisfy the audience; however, the attempts to support individualism, environmentalism, and peace have not been taken into consideration. The musicians and the response of the audience towards the artists were for the purpose of releasing the energy of the huge group of young people by expressing range and frustrations towards society. One of the performances that got a huge response from the audience was the song “Break Stuff” by Limp Bizkit (Petrusich). The lyrics saying “It’s just one of those days/ Where you don’t want to wake up.../ Everybody sucks,” (Petrusich) made the audience embrace the grunge and release it in a physical and aggressive way. Some attendees who were on drugs were furious about the disorganization of the festival, influenced by the lyrics, and actually started destroying festival property. The group “Red Hot Chili Peppers” sang “Fire”, the cover of Jimi Hendrix’s song, and it made the crowd go even crazier and actually set fire in the festival area (Crawford). The festival-goers failed to acknowledge the purpose of meeting and celebrating the principles of Hippie culture. The violence that the artists encouraged amongst the audience got out of hand and total mayhem between the attendees within the festival area. The social norms of the society, having been refused, took a different stance with the destruction and disobedience of moral values of society; disrespecting each other, and not caring about other people’s needs. At this point, the community that has no rules led to a riot in this case. The unexpected behaviors

exposed the change in the original principles of Hippies because of the changing generation and mindset of the attendees.

Reflections of Hippie Principles In Woodstock 1999

The festival reflects the shifted principles of Hippies in two major aspects. Firstly, the misunderstanding of freedom and lack of peaceful and idealistic spirits was seen. The festival resulting in riots, violence, destruction, and sexual assaults cast doubt on the principles of peace, free love, and the value of humans that were interpreted in the original Woodstock. The concept of volunteerism from the Hippie generation is non-existent in Woodstock '99 (Howard). According to John Robert Howard, the system of volunteerism in a society can only succeed if the society's members recognize the necessity of performing tasks they dislike for the system to function. The litter intensification in the festival area which was accompanied by the broken portable toilets, as well as the overflow negligence were the concrete proof of the mentioned disorganization. That shows the twisted understanding of volunteerism in Hippie society as nobody wanted to be involved in hands-on work. The documentary captured, Lisa Law who participated in the original and last Woodstock as the festival's photographer, was trying to clean the trash on the ground without receiving any help from the community of festival goers, which reflects the misperception of the Hippie values of the new generation. The concept of volunteerism aims to satisfy the individuals and the community without social differences, or status. Even though volunteerism satisfies the individuals, the need to do the unwanted work in society, created a new system that the festival-goers rejected. The attendees refused to introduce rules to the society to prevent the formation of possible power differences among people. The underlying factor of chaos and sexual assaults relies on personal priorities and pleasures. As a result, the evaluation of

freedom has created uncontrolled behaviors of attendees which is an outcome of the misunderstanding.

Secondly, the principles of anti-consumerism and anti-materialism were forgotten in Woodstock '99. The Hippies became a marketable item by their outfits, emblems, and slogans. The commercialist and materialistic ideas to create a Hippie market to gain profit first occurred in the organization part of the festival (Howard). The Assistant Site Manager of the festival, Lee Rosenblatt, addressed the purpose of the festival with the words “And that was the moment for me where it stopped becoming about the concert-goer or the festival-goer experience. It was just cutting budgets, cutting budgets. We need to make changes. We’re not making profits. Their goal was to make money. And what they ended up doing was selling the food rights.” (Crawford). This quote gives sufficient evidence of the change in the purpose of the festival and a reflection of the managers’ own desire to have economic and social power over society.

Comparing Woodstock 1969 and 1999

Examining the principles of the subculture in both festivals provides different reflections on the perception of the countercultural movement and the aim of the festival (Hiatt). The original festival was a symbol of love, peace, and cultural movement, whereas the festival in 1999 was depicted as a commercialized event for its money-making purposes. The aim to create a social message and stand for the anti-establishing messages was not seen in the last festival, where impacting the popular mainstream was more considered.

The principles of the subculture which were standing up for the freedom of the people and being opposed to the established social norms of the society were neglected in the last festival. Celebrating nudity, exploring your identity, and being your true self in a comfortable space were the fundamentals of the Hippies' principles which were seen in the original festival. They had a sense of belonging and a chance to share an identity which was a

resistance to the control of the traditional society (Xu). “To see that many people in one place, on the same page, for three days; laughing, crying, kissing, hugging, sharing. This was a Hippie attitude...” is a quote from one of the attendees of the original festival (Lemczak et al.) However, being naked and having the freedom to protest the social norms resulted in sexual assaults and inappropriate and disrespectful behaviors for the people of Woodstock 99. One of the attendees, 19-year-old Margaret Tea, commented, "In the '60s, it was the sexual revolution — that's one thing," Tea said. "But in the '90s, there's diseases and rapes and everything — it's different." (Hiatt) The festival's outcomes have changed the public's view on the new generation of Hippies, portraying violent-based and misogynistic aspects.

The original festival acted as an escape from the social and political pressures at the time however, (Ramsey) the press has focused on the negative consequences, such as safety issues, instead of the historical impact (Kropf). In the New York Times, the event reflected as “Waves of weary youngsters streamed away from the Woodstock Music and Art Fair last night and early today, as security officials reported at least two deaths and 4,000 people treated for injuries, illness, and adverse drug reactions over the concert's three-day period.” (Kropf). The negative portrayal of the Hippies actions has also been interpreted as “self-indulgent, childish, and irresponsible” by the media, creating a biased, stereotypical image (Kropf).

Conclusion

While investigating the reflection principles of the Hippie culture, I have come across the evolution of American society and the counterculture. The two events represent the youth of the late 1960s and late 1990s. The values, behaviors, ideals, and changing image of the festival project the evolving subculture in the United States.

The original festival in 1969, symbolizes the rejection of the conventional societal norms, independence, peace, love, and music. From my vantage point, although the

difficulties in the area are seen, humans respecting each other, and creating a space for everyone to express themselves and be accepted as they are was a remarkable move for social change. However, Woodstock 1999 has shown contradictory elements in terms of Hippie values. Violence, consumerism, and lack of care towards the attendees, artists, and organizers have projected opposite characteristics from the spirit of Hippies.

This essay highlights the need for further exploration of alternative cultures and their impact on society and the media. Future research could be done according to the evolution of counterculture in the modern world. The influence of the communal gathering events could also be deeply investigated in order to understand the legacy of the festivals and their impacts on societal change.

This exploration of Hippie values and principles also projects the countercultural ideals that are still relevant in today's society. The ideals that the Hippies were against such as materialism, commercialism, and social divisions could be seen in the modern world. The first Woodstock festival serves as a reminder of the encouraging ideals of social justice, peace, and love despite the passing of time. The last Woodstock on the other hand could be interpreted as a symbol of the new portrait of the society in which the consumerist and materialistic views took control. With regards to the comparison of the two festivals and the shift in the principles of Hippies, the original festival reminds us that the strength of togetherness and celebrating similar beliefs and ideals could be a solution to manage the challenges in today's world. We can take inspiration from the Hippie values and the countercultural movement to recapture the message of the original Woodstock: "Make love, not war."

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