Flower Children

The love children or flower children movement began in the middle of the 1960s. This culture was estimated to have over 300,000 disciples, although some of them were confused high school dropouts who had run away from home. Many used drugs heavily, but most of the flower children had spent time in college or once held responsible jobs. They were, in fact, escaping from the middle-class materialistic world and chose to live a life that rejected middle-class values and responsibilities.

Many of these flower children (hippies) had shoulder-length hair and beards. These young men and women wandered the streets dressed in denim pants, flowered shirts, Navajo headbands, Mexican serapes, and second-hand clothing. Some of the women wore luminous body paint. Wherever they seemed to be, the smell of marijuana hung in the air, and hard rock music blared.

This hippie culture expounded a dominant mood of love and understanding. This love was proclaimed to be an all-embracing love of one's fellow man. The peace sign was their emblem. Many played musical instruments and sang the kinder, gentler lyrics of folk music. Peace and love, not war and hate, were the anthems of the movement.

This love culture was apparent in 1967 in the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco where people came by the thousands for a love-in. One of the most popular songs of that summer was "San Francisco" (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair) by Scott McKenzie. The same scene of wandering, lounging, lingering youth with long hair took place in New York City's East Village, the New England woods, Pennsylvania farmlands, and in the hills outside Los Angeles. The hippies lived in communes and lived a bohemian lifestyle.

All this was in opposition to basic American ideals and values. They called America "The Plastic Society" and found it wanting. They thought peaceful love was a social cure. Eventually some of these love children gave up on love and entered the more violent social protests of the New Left. Others never gave up on their basic belief of nonviolence. They were certain that in the end, love would triumph.

Discussion Questions

1. What was positive and what was negative about this flower children movement?
2. Is peace a better alternative to war? Which is the better motto, "An eye for an eye" or "Turn the other cheek"?
3. Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and St. Francis of Assisi were pacifists. Do you admire these people? Were their views correct? Did their beliefs cause any lasting effect?
4. In the summer of 1969 near the town of Woodstock, New York, 400,000 young people took part in a super love-in/rock concert. Woodstock became known as the biggest youth happening of the decade. Do you know anyone who attended? What did you think of this event? Have you ever attended a rock concert? What was it like? Do you remember who the musicians were?
5. Marijuana is illegal. Some believe it has some positive medical possibilities. Should marijuana be used for medical reasons? Should marijuana be legalized? Is marijuana any more harmful than tobacco or alcohol?

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