

Activity 8.4: American and National Identity in the 1960s

Disciplinary Practice: Argument Development

Reasoning Skill: Comparison

Theme: American and National Identity (NAT 1.0, NAT 3.0)

In this activity, you will analyze pairs of documents that reflect political debates in the period 1960-1975 and will try to determine to what extent these debates reflected different ideas about American and National identity. For each debate, you will identify the context, compare the two documents, and then reflect on how the debate related to questions of identity. (Key Concepts 8.1.II, 8.2.I, 8.2.II, 8.3.II)

Steps for Analysis:

Step 1: Read the pairs of documents for each topic and then complete the *Questions to Answer*. As you read the documents, consider the essay prompt in Step 2.

Step 2: Complete Part 2 - the LEQ essay outline for the following prompt: *Explain the extent to which debates over American identity shaped politics in the period 1960-1975.*

Comparison #1: Youth in the 1960s

Document 1. Young Americans for Freedom, *The Sharon Statement*, 1960

IN THIS TIME of moral and political crises, it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain eternal truths.

WE, as young conservatives, believe:

...

THAT liberty is indivisible, and that political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom;

...

THAT the market economy, allocating resources by the free play of supply and demand, is the single economic system compatible with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government, and that it is at the same time the most productive supplier of human needs;

THAT when government interferes with the work of the market economy, it tends to reduce the moral and physical strength of the nation; that when it takes from one man to bestow on another, it diminishes the incentive of the first, the integrity of the second, and the moral autonomy of both; . . .

THAT we will be free only so long as the national sovereignty of the United States is secure; that the history shows periods of freedom are rare, and can exist only when free citizens defend their rights against all enemies,

THAT the forces of international Communism are, at present, the greatest single threat to these liberties;

THAT the United States should stress victory over, rather than coexistence with, this menace...

--www.yaf.org/news/the-sharon-statement/

Document 2. Students For A Democratic Society, Port Huron Statement, 1962

We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world: the only one with the atom bomb, the least scarred by modern war, an initiator of the United Nations that we thought would distribute Western influence throughout the world. Freedom and equality for each

individual, government of, by, and for the people -- these American values we found good, principles by which we could live as men. Many of us began maturing in complacency.

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract "others" we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. We might deliberately ignore, or avoid, or fail to feel all other human problems, but not these two, for these were too immediate and crushing in their impact, too challenging in the demand that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution.

While these and other problems either directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and became 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....

--http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html

Questions to Answer

1. Identify at least three aspects of the historical context for these two documents:
2. Identify at least two areas of disagreement (or differences) between these two sources? Explain each.
3. Identify at least one similarity between these documents.
4. To what extent did this debate result from differing ideas about American and National Identity?

Comparison #2: Vietnam, 1964-1965

Document 1. United States Congress, The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, August 5, 1964

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and nations joined with them in the collective defense of the freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.

That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression....

Sec.3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

-- <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=98&page=transcript>
Transcription courtesy of the Avalon Project at Yale Law School.

Document 2. Paul Potter, Students for a Democratic Society, "Naming the System," 1965

The President says that we are defending freedom in Vietnam. Whose freedom? Not the freedom of the Vietnamese. The first act of the first dictator, Diem, the United States installed in Vietnam, was to systematically begin the persecution of all political opposition, non-Communist as well as Communist....

What is left to the people of Vietnam after 20 years of war? What part of themselves and their own lives will those who survive be able to salvage from the wreckage of their country....

WHAT IN FACT has the war done for freedom in America? It has led to even more vigorous governmental efforts to control information, manipulate the press and pressure and persuade the public through distorted or downright dishonest documents....

Perhaps the only freedom that this war protects is the freedom of the warhawks in the Pentagon and the State Department to experiment with counter-insurgency and guerilla warfare in Vietnam....

--Potter, Paul. "Naming the System" Speech. Students for a Democratic Society. April 17, 1965.

Questions to Answer

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4. To what extent did this debate result from differing ideas about American and National Identity?