

Campus demonstrations, protests and student activism

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and
Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Philosophy

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Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

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Abstract

This paper explores the political and social climate of the 1960s in the US focusing on the US government's decisions regarding the Vietnam War, the students' anti-war protests, and the civil movements for equal rights. The unrest of the sixties was mostly due to people's dissatisfaction which resulted in massive marches and protests all over the US. The paper's analyses of selected poems from each of the movements shows how the current events influenced writers and their works as well as to illustrate the public reaction concerning the key issues. Particularly young Americans were determined to bring about changes. They were especially persistent in their efforts to make the government withdraw the US troops from Vietnam and to stop the war. The impact of the campus protests was so great that protests crossed the borders of universities and became a national issue. People were finally encouraged to fight for their rights, which is evident as the Black Power Movement and the Feminist Movement originated. The exploration of both the history and the literature of the turbulent sixties makes evident not only that the political and social situation shaped the literature but that the literature shaped public opinion and encouraged people to act.

Keywords: protests, students, movement, sixties, poetry

Introduction

This paper analyses the causes and the consequences of the biggest student demonstrations and activism in the history of the US concerning the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement, in the period from 1960 to 1970, and shows that university students' activism had a great role in forming the US social and war policies in the sixties. Also, it explains two big social movements happening in the sixties: The Black Power Movement and Feminist Movement. The sixties were a time of the great turmoil and political instability, which had a great impact on everyday life. People felt the need to do something about the injustices that were happening, especially concerning gender and race. The most rebellious ones were the campus students. Young, rebellious and revolted by the situation in their country, they believed they could introduce some social changes. Their activism can be seen as the trigger to all other protests in the sixties.

Chapter 1 presents the turbulent period between 1960 and 1970 highlighting the Vietnam War and the many social changes. To fully understand what caused the activism and demonstrations of the students' as well as the people's dissatisfaction in general, it is necessary to analyze the political and social situation in the US during this particular decade of turmoil and change.

Chapter 2 focuses on the campus demonstrations, in particular the demonstrations at the universities of North Carolina, Berkeley and Kent. The demonstrations and activism on those campuses were the loudest and perhaps the most significant at the time. This chapter focuses on the beginning of the protests and their spreading beyond the limits of the campuses.

Chapter 3 focuses on war poetry. The Vietnam War was the cause of many disagreements between the government and the people, and voices have been raised against it in many ways; one of the ways was through poetry. This chapter focuses on war poetry in general, but it also analyzes two poems: "Vietnamese Morning" by Curtis Bennett and "Five Day Requiem for Vietnam" by Nan Braymer.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Civil Rights Movement. It describes the main events of the movement as well as the forming of the Black Arts Movement. It also shows analysis of two poems: "I, too, Sing America" by Langston Hughes and "To a White Girl" by Eldridge Cleaver

Chapter 5 focuses on the Feminist Movement, describing the main causes of the movement as well as the main events that brought fundamental changes in the struggle for cultural, political, economic, and social equality for women. It also analyzes two poems: "Equality" by Maya Angelou and "With no Immediate Cause" by Ntozake Shange.

1. Social and Political Climate of the Sixties

The sixties were a decade of turbulence and great changes, which came as a result of massive anti-war protests, as well as activism for female rights and racial equality. In order to fully understand the background of demonstrations and movements happening at the time, we have to take into consideration all the events that triggered them, mainly the political and social situation in the US at the time, in particular the government's policies regarding the Vietnam War.

The beginning of the decade, the year 1960, was the election year which featured two candidates – John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Richard Nixon. J. F. Kennedy won and became the youngest person ever elected president. He was enthusiastic, and wanted to introduce lots of changes, especially social changes regarding equal rights for all races. However, the biggest changes during his term were in the area of civil rights. He could not ignore the racial issues in the South, especially not after Martin Luther King Jr. took the lead in demonstrations. That was the time of the first massive black movement in the history of the US. It all started with four black college students who entered a bar and “demanded service at a 'whites only' Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960” (Tindal and Shi 1049).

Except for the racial issues in the US during this time there were political issues as well. The US did not get along well with Cuba, which resulted in the Cuban missile crisis. Another disagreement was with the Soviet Union, which in the end resulted in the erection of the Berlin Wall, as well as the Cold War. In 1961, the secret military operation of the CIA was directed towards Cuba and its leader, Fidel Castro. The CIA had trained approximately 1,500 anti-Castro Cubans to invade their homeland. The invaders landed at Cuba's Bay of Pigs on April 19, 1961. However, their operation was not successful. Most of the men were captured. A couple of months after that failure, Kennedy had a meeting with Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier. Khrushchev threatened to limit Western access to Berlin (Tindall and Shi 1044). After the meeting, Kennedy was determined to show the American resolve by calling up the Army Reserve and the National Guard units. The Soviet leaders did not like that decision and they responded by erecting the Berlin Wall, which divided the East and West Berlin up to 1989. The wall became a “symbol of the chill in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States” (Tindall and Shi 1044). A year later, the threat became even more serious when Cuba made a deal with the Soviet Union and requested Russian nuclear missiles to protect them from the possible future actions the US may take against them. It was a serious threat with Cuba being only ninety miles from Florida. The US response was to pronounce the quarantine for Cuba and the Russian ships. But only a couple of days later,

the Russians suggested a deal – they would remove the missiles from Cuba if the US pledged not to invade it. After that, the US tried to improve relations with the Soviet Union. They installed a “hot line” between Washington and Moscow; they removed their missiles from Turkey, Italy and Britain; they also made a deal with the Russians to stop the nuclear testing in the atmosphere (Tindall and Shi 1045).

However, the crisis with the Soviet Union was not the biggest one in the sixties. The tensions in Southeast Asia, namely between North and South Vietnam, were getting worse every day. The US was an ally of South Vietnam, whereas the Soviet Union was an ally of North Vietnam. As already mentioned, by 1961 president Kennedy had already been defeated twice –the first time in the Bay of the Pigs and the second with the erection of the Berlin Wall. For this reason, he could not allow another defeat. That is why he felt strongly about defeating communism in Vietnam, as he saw it as a threat to the reputation and credibility of the US. The number of American soldiers in Vietnam rapidly increased, although Kennedy did not refer to them as 'soldiers,' but instead called them 'advisers.' “When he took office there had been 2,000 American troops in South Vietnam; by the end of 1963 there were 16,000”, (Tindall and Shi 1046). Maybe Kennedy would have sent even more 'advisers' to Vietnam if it was not for his assassination on November 22, 1963. He was in a car going through Dallas when he was shot twice and died on the spot. His assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was caught a couple of hours later. Kennedy's assassination had caused many controversies and conspiracy theories. Some claim that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone (as it is stated in the official police statement), whereas others blame the CIA or even Fidel Castro.

After Kennedy's death, Texan Lyndon Johnson was announced president and took oath on the plane that was taking Kennedy's body back to Washington. Johnson, unlike Kennedy, focused more on domestic politics, especially on poverty which affected approximately 40 to 50 million people in the US. He introduced the Economic Opportunity Bill which “incorporated a wide range of programs: a Job Corps for inner-city youths, a Head Start program for disadvantaged preschoolers, work-study jobs for college students, grants to farmers and rural business, loans to those willing to hire the chronic unemployed (...)” (Tindall and Shi 1046). At this time, the politics was more domestic-orientated, unlike during president Kennedy's term. But American troops were still present in Vietnam. This was just the calm before the storm, which would distract people's attention from the military actions in Vietnam.

After Johnson won a new mandate in the 1964 election, he felt like it was the right time to finally launch his great plan about the Great Society, which would focus on ending poverty and

improving the overall quality of life. It was supposed to “renovate the decaying central cities, provide every young American with the chance to attend college, protect the health of the elderly, enhance the cultural life of the nation, clean up the air and water, and make highways safer” (Tindall and Shi 1052). Johnson's plan also included 435 other bills that were carried in the next year in order to improve the quality of life in the US. Among the bills, was the new immigration bill, that president Kennedy had previously considered. It aimed at making life easier for the immigrants and redressing the wrong done to them over the years. At that time, immigrants from Britain were favored, unlike the immigrants from other parts of Europe, especially the east, as well as the immigrants from Asia and Latin America. This new immigration bill was supposed to fix the injustices that had been happening over the years. However, the government and the president himself did not expect a flow of immigrants to surprise them. A great number of people started coming to the US, demanding a visa for them and their families. Most of those people were from Asia and Latin America, despite the annual quotas for nations, which were set by the government.

At the same time, the war in Vietnam became more intense and destructive. President Johnson falsely claimed that two American destroyers were attacked by the North Vietnamese and that the attack was - unprovoked. The US government just needed an excuse to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression” (Tindall and Shi 1062). A couple of months later, the North Vietnamese attacked American soldiers, killing eight of them and wounding more than 120. It was the cause for the US army to bomb North Vietnam, which in the end was unsuccessful. As mentioned, in Kennedy's time there had been 16,000 American troops in Vietnam. By 1965, that number increased to 184,000, and by the end of 1966 the troop level reached a high of 385,000.

The government had no intentions of stopping the war, which caused massive demonstrations of the dissatisfied American people, especially the college students. People were outraged by the government's intentions, which were not even remotely close to ending the war. In January 1968, there was a surprise attack on the Americans and South Vietnamese, leaving enormous casualties. The American public was furious. It demanded an urgent withdrawal of the American troops. The situation in the country was chaotic. At that time Johnson lost half of the support that he had and in March he announced that he would not run for another term as President. By giving that statement, he indirectly confessed that the US was no longer seeking victory in Vietnam, although the troops would stay there for another five years. The only goal now was to withdraw from Vietnam with a minimum damage to the US reputation.

A couple of days after Johnson's speech, Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the Black Power movement, was assassinated. This caused big riots all over the US, in more than 60 cities, where furious blacks and whites were protesting in the streets. Only two months after, Robert Kennedy, a presidential candidate, was also assassinated. The atmosphere among the US citizens was full of fear and rage. At that time, Richard Nixon made a comeback to the political stage. After he lost in the presidential race to Kennedy in 1960, he thought this was his second chance since Johnson's popularity was declining. He won the election in 1968. Most people thought that he would end the war, as he had mentioned in his campaign, but he managed to avoid giving a straight answer when asked. However, it turned out that the situation would remain pretty much the same. He did not want a full retreat from militarization because he wanted to preserve the reputation of the US. All these political choices and unfulfilled promises caused more rage among voters, especially the college students. Demonstrations and riots were spreading throughout the country. In addition to the numerous anti-war protests, there were protests for the rights of women and black people. There was great dissatisfaction with the government's war and social policies. Besides protests, there were also different movements for different civil rights. People rose and demanded change which they desperately needed. After a decade of turmoil and thousands of casualties in the Vietnamese war, after decades of racial and sexual inequality, the American people decided that the injustices had to come to an end. The college and university students were the most rebellious ones, the ones that actively participated in the movements and organized the first sit-ins, which later spread all over the US.

2. Campus Demonstrations

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the political and social situation in the US in the sixties did not look very well - people were not satisfied with the government's war and social policies and they were not afraid to show it, students in particular. Students have always been a social group ready to protest and fight for their beliefs. "As a group, college students are generally one of the most activist segments of the population in both modern and developing countries" (Gusfield 1). Student protests in the sixties are largely connected with the political situation in the country at that time and with the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia, as well as with the issue of racial discrimination and female rights. Those issues were not present only at universities, but in throughout the country. Protests and activism at campuses is not a sudden, surprising event. Instead, it is an "evolving process rather than a fixed outburst of discontent" (Gusfield 30).

Some of the first major protests started at Berkeley University, California, in 1964. There were numerous protests there connected with the students' dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War, as well as a reaction to racial discrimination. The first Berkeley protests started as a part of the Free Speech Movement in 1964. Also, at that time, students of many universities were part of the Civil Rights Movement demonstrations all over the country. That was a massive movement against racial discrimination and segregation. Although African Americans were granted equal rights by the Constitution, there were still many places where they were not as welcome as the white people. There were bars which refused to serve African Americans, buses where they had to stand up for the whites to sit, and separate schools for blacks and whites. The division between people based on their skin color was present in everyday life and it was a trigger for the massive protests once the people had decided to put an end to segregation. Students were also a part of those protests and the ones that took part wanted to tell others to introduce them to the movement. However, the university administration did not let them. They were not allowed to have any political meetings or give political speeches on the campus grounds. Students saw these restrictions as a violation of free speech and that is how the Free Speech Movement originated.

In 1965, students organized a Vietnam Day March in Oakland, California. More than 10,000 people gathered to show their disagreement with the government's war policies. It was the first big student anti-war protest. Also, students were the ones who started the first sit-ins. The first sit-in movement occurred in North Carolina, where four black college students asked for service in a bar which served only white people. When the bartender refused to serve them, they did not leave. Instead, they sat there patiently and in that way they expressed their protest. After that event, many more sit-ins occurred all over the US. Also, there were numerous student anti-war protests all over the US. The protests gathered "members from college campuses, middle-class suburbs, labor unions, and government institutions" (Barringer). Student activists formed the Student Peace Union (SPU), which aimed to restructure American society. However, it did not have much success. In 1960, another group was formed – Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). They were not satisfied with the social and political situation in the US, and they "expressed disillusionment with the military-industrial-academic establishment" (Barringer). After US troops bombed North Vietnam in February 1965, the SDS organized massive student protests on terminals which were departure points for soldiers who were going to Vietnam. (Barringer). The anti-war movement was spreading, and on protests which were held in April 1965 in Washington, almost 25,000 people showed up to show their support for the cause. Encouraged by the large number of people who had joined the movement, the leaders, who were still mainly students, kept

on spreading their activities to other campuses and soon it crossed the border of campuses and spread all over the US.

Protests were first supposed to be a non-violent expression of students' disagreement with the government's war policies. However, things got more serious in 1970. The US was still sending troops to Vietnam, and people did not see an end to it, hopelessly waiting for the government to withdraw troops. However, in 1970 president Nixon declared that even more troops would be sent to Southeast Asia because they needed more soldiers to invade Cambodia. This decision caused massive riots in the streets of the US. At Kent State University in Ohio, student protestors even set one of the campus buildings on fire, which resulted in bringing security guards on campus. During the riots which happened on May 4, guards opened fire on the protestors, killed four students and wounded nine of them. That event caused chaos on campuses – almost 500 campuses all over the US were shut down or could not function normally because of the protests which were caused by the death of the four students. “The shooting at Kent State University in Ohio lasted 13 seconds. When it was over, four students were dead, nine were wounded, and the innocence of a generation was shattered” (Filo).

A similar incident happened a week later at Jackson State University, where the police shot and killed two students during the protest. However, that incident did not get much media coverage or attention because it was an all-black school, which once again showed that black people were not considered equal in the American society.

It is clear that students were very active and persistent in achieving their goals in the sixties – they wanted change and were very determined to get it. They were among the first ones to rebel against the Vietnam War, to fight for women's rights and to fight against racial inequality. If they had been silent in the previous years before – this changed in the sixties and the Vietnam War was the trigger of all campus activism and demonstrations. The students decided that they had had enough. “The Vietnam War produced a new kind of college student—an activist, a revolutionary and an independent thinker” (Schweitzer). And these are the kind of people that can change the world. The students of the sixties could not change the society by themselves, but they were certainly one of the factors that encouraged others to act and to fight for their rights.

3. War Poetry

In the time of revolutions, protests, and social changes, people have an urge to express themselves, to verbalize their dissatisfaction and frustrations in many ways. Literature is one of them. It might seem inappropriate to compare writing with demonstrations in the streets, which were violent at the times, but it surely makes sense. While people in the streets are trying to change something by marching through the streets holding up signs with strong messages, sometimes even with violence; writers tend to express themselves and their ideas in a different way. But both ways tend to start a revolution, to trigger some changes. While people in the streets tend to physically show that they want revolutionary changes, writers want to start a revolution in the minds of the dissatisfied people. It might not seem like a decent comparison to the street revolutions, but it indeed might be even more significant. For a revolution in the streets, first there ought to be a revolution in people's minds. And within that lies the importance of literature in the times of revolutions and social changes. Whether it is a novel, a poem or a short story, they all aim to evoke the nation's feelings and to ignite a spark in people's hearts. Poetry is perhaps a literature genre which had the most success in doing so. In the 60s, as it is mentioned, the Vietnam War was an issue which created a gap between the government and the people of the US. People were not satisfied with the government's policies and demanded the urgent withdrawal of the US troops from Vietnam. They were protesting in the streets, but also some of them put their feelings on paper, which resulted in a great number of war or anti-war poems. Poems were written not only by professional poets, but also by college students as well as soldiers who were serving in the Vietnam War. It seems like every poet's task was to write about the war. "So much antiwar poetry had been produced during this period, that in a 1972 *New York Times* book review . . . John Seelye could remark, 'Not since the Civil War has any American war inspired so much impassioned poetry as the struggle of Vietnam For a while there, to Write Against the War was rather expected of a poet'" (Bibbly 160). The importance and the impact of poetry during the war is also made evident by the fact that "antiwar rallies and marches regularly featured readings by such prominent writers as Robert Lowell, William Stafford, Robert Bly, Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg, and Robert Duncan" (Bibbly 160).

The Vietnam War was different from the previous wars. In the past, there have been poems that glorified war and its magnificence; however, that was not the case with the Vietnam War because people had an opportunity to see all the horrors of war on television. No matter how far Vietnam and its hell were, they felt so close when people saw horrible images on their screens.

Hence, poems about war became darker and more realistic. There was no more glorification of war. Instead, there were a great number of people judging the government's decisions and protesting against the war.

The following two chapters analyze two poems with the theme of the Vietnam War, but from different perspectives. The first poem, "Vietnamese Morning," is written by Curtis Bennett, a former US war pilot. It describes a different scenario in which war is barely mentioned. If not carefully read, the poem might seem like a simple glorification of the Vietnamese nature and landscapes. Set on a battlefield it barely mentions that the war is even happening. Instead, the atmosphere of the poem is peaceful and idyllic. In contrast, the second poem, "Five Day Requiem for Vietnam" by Nan Braymer gives a complete opposite representation and vision of the war. It describes a horrible reality of the war which is full of bloodshed, depression and desperation.

3.1 "Vietnamese Morning" by Curtis Bennett

This poem, perhaps unexpectedly, presents a different side of war, the one where no killing, bombing or guns are mentioned. The atmosphere of the poem is calm and peaceful, which is paradoxical and in complete opposition of what war is really like. Bennett describes an early Vietnamese morning, when everything is peaceful and quiet. That peacefulness and calmness of the early morning is the central theme of the poem. An uninformed reader might easily overlook the first verse of the poem and mistakenly believe that it is just another poem which celebrates nature. However, only the first two verses reveal that the war is happening:

Before war starts

In early morning

It seems as if the war stops every night and continues the next morning, like a routine. Soldiers are nothing but diligent workers who are there to get the job done. But that does not have an influence on the overall atmosphere of the poem, which gives an impression of calmness. The poem is celebrating the beauty of the Vietnamese nature, describing the breath-taking landscapes, sunrise, hills and waterfalls.

Rice fields glow sky-sheens,
 Flat, calm, mirrored lakes
 Reflect the morning peace.

Glow, calm and peace are not the words usually associated with war. Those are not the terms one would expect a former war pilot to use when describing a war scenery. Throughout all four stanzas, the nature and its calmness is described, with no signs of war. However, the last stanza gives a hint that the war is happening:

Sharp, rugged mountain peaks
 Sleep in a soft rolling blanket
 Of clinging, slippery, misty fog.
 Effortlessly, languidly, it flows
 Shyly spreading wispy tentacles out
 To embrace the earth with velvet arms.

Although everything seems peaceful and quiet, fog might be the representation of the war that is coming and the overall tone of the poem becomes gloomy and a bit darker. Fog flows and envelops everything it comes in contact with, and nothing in nature can escape it. It overtakes everything, wraps its tentacles in a firm grip. A similar thing happens in war, when it happens, there is not much you can do but to accept the reality of war and the fact that its destructive impact will be felt by all in every aspect of life.

3.2 “Five Day Requiem for Vietnam” by Nan Braymer

The complete opposite image of the war can be seen from Nan Braymer’s poem “Five Day Requiem for Vietnam.” This poem is everything but an idyllic representation of the war. When compared with “Vietnamese Morning” by Curtis Bennett it seems like the two poets are not describing the same event. While “Vietnamese Morning” depicts a relaxed, idyllic atmosphere, “Five Day Requiem for Vietnam” is a representation of horrific reality and brutality of the war.

The poem consists of five stanzas, each one representing one day of the week – from Monday to Friday. It is written like a soldier’s diary which describes events day by day in the hell of the Vietnam War. On Monday he describes how every day has become the same, death has become a usual thing:

(...) tabulating death like baseball scores
 one hundred gassed in tunnel, eighty bagged--
 the ghastly figures of the new arithmetic,
 the body count by ghouls.

People's lives are seen just as numbers; they have become statistics in the hell of war. Soldiers do not have names, personalities or importance. The way he describes the ones who have lost their lives is ghastly – he does not refer to them as people, but as plain numbers instead. The poem is written from the soldier's perspective and this indifferent feeling towards his comrades shows how war dehumanizes people and makes soldiers dull.

On Tuesday he describes all horrible things soldiers go through on a daily basis. He calls out politicians who sent them to fight their war, to die for their beliefs. They trained them to die or to return home with traumas, physical or mental. If they survive, he wonders what kind of life are they going to live after the war. They will have to live every day remembering the horrors they've seen. Some of them will return home blind or legless, and he wonders if it is really better to return home like that or is it more honorable to die as a hero.

On Wednesday he speaks directly to the government who sent them to fight their war.

What must we do before you hear us?
 we march, teach, write, sing our anger,
 paint banners in our blood,
 burn up cards that bid us to the slaughter
 and in the ultimate scream ignite our flesh.
 What must we do?

He speaks on behalf of all soldiers who are traumatized and scared for their lives every day. They have no control over their own destinies. They are far away from home, waiting for politicians to decide on their fate. They are desperate and do not want to fight anymore. But no one seems to hear their cry for help. Words "What must we do" are repeated at the beginning and the end of the third stanza, emphasizing the soldier's desperation. They do all they can to show that they've had enough of it – they "march, teach, write, sing" their anger, they are speaking up, but nothing seems to be changing. What else must they do, he wonders.

On Thursday he wonders again when the hell will end. He refers to the government as “the master” who “pulls the strings,” which means that soldiers are nothing more than puppets. They only do what they are told. He says that horrible things are happening.

and what will history tell of us
who let such monstrous things go on?

He is aware of the fact that what they are doing in Vietnam is “monstrous.” He knows that in the future people will wonder who let those things happen, and he feels trapped being part of the horrific event that he cannot do anything about. The last stanza describes Friday. It is the end of the poem but also the end of his hopes that something will change. He says that he is not very religious, and yet he prays because it is his last hope.

I who am not at home with prayer
find myself muttering, Lord, strike them
dead!

In the end of the poem he mentions countries where the US has sent its troops and soldiers to die.

Spain, Guatemala, Santo Domingo, Vietnam--
how many other stations of the cross?

He wonders when it will stop. One war after another, all for the sake of nothing. The last verse “stations of the cross” possibly refers to Jesus’ Way of the Cross, which consisted of 14 stations, and with each station he was closer to his death. Similar to that, the US is closer to its end with every new war in which it gets involved.

The mentioned two poems are just an example of the poetry that was influenced by the Vietnam War. A lot of people wanted to express their feelings and opinions about war by writing, as well as protesting. Poems were written by American soldiers who were directly involved in Vietnam; by American writers who strongly opposed the war; by students who felt the need to change something; by friends and families of the soldiers who fought every day for their country. Different poems show different perspectives of the war, as it is clearly seen on the example of the above poems. Although the mentioned poems are different in style and the message they convey, they describe the same event. The second poem, “Five Day Requiem for Vietnam,” is a depiction of the cold, harsh truth of the war, while the first poem, “Vietnamese Morning” is more optimistic and it is not based on the horrific descriptions of the battles. Instead, the author, who has survived

the war, tries to forget about it and writes only about things that are not directly connected with the battles. The poem may be seen as escapism, a release that soldiers need after traumatic months and years on the battlefield.

4. Civil Rights Movement

The sixties were a decade of changes. One movement led to another and soon there were different social groups all trying to fight for their rights. It seemed like everyone was finally aware that social changes are inevitable and that it was the right time to do something. One of the movements happening at that time was the Civil Rights Movement. It was one of the biggest and most significant movements in the US history. Starting in the fifties, the movement fought against racial inequality in all segments of social life. Black people had had enough. After years of repression and denial of equal rights it was time for change. Although the government introduced the “separate but equal” doctrine in the 50s, which aimed to abolish the segregation of schools based on race, little had changed until the sixties. The riots in the sixties were “all a surprise to those without deep memory of slavery, that everyday presence of humiliation, registered in the poetry, the music, the occasional outbursts of anger, the more frequent sullen silences. Part of that memory was of words uttered, laws passed, decisions made, which turned out to be meaningless” (Zinn 450). The riots were just a matter of time, and it all started with Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat in the bus to a white man. This occurred during the fifties but it had a major influence on the events and overall mindset of the protestors in the sixties. The Montgomery bus incident caused massive protests all across the US. Many of the protests were led by Martin Luther King, Jr. He was “the grandson of a slave and the son of a minister; King was endowed with intelligence, energy, courage and charisma” (Tindall and Shi 1022). Although riots and activism were often accompanied with violence, King’s approach was everything but violent. He did encourage people to stand up for change but he did that by promoting nonviolent speech, that would evoke compassion and understanding instead of rage and violence. He was a role model to all black people at that time and that was the reason why the opponents of the Black Power Movement saw him as a threat. As a result, they tried to assassinate him a couple of times, leaving dynamite on his front porch. Despite that, he had a strong message for them: “I’m not afraid of anybody this morning. Tell Montgomery they can keep shooting and I’m going to stand up to them; tell Montgomery they can keep bombing and I’m going to stand up to them” (Tindall and Shi 1024). People were persistent in the fight for their rights. In 1960, the first “sit-in” movements occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina where “four African American college students walked up to a whites-only lunch counter at the local Woolworth’s store in Greensboro, North Carolina, and asked for coffee. When service was refused, the students sat patiently. Despite threats and intimidation, the students sat quietly and waited to be served. The civil rights sit-in was born (“The Sit-In”). Once again, it is clear how big of a role the students had in every movement happening

in the sixties. Students participating in the sit-ins believed in King's politics of non-violence. They believed it to be the best and only way to truly show the world that all they are fighting for is peace and a harmonious life in a community. In 1960, King encouraged the forming of the SNCC – the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which organized many of the future sit-ins.

In the year 1963 the tensions culminated and the number of protests drastically increased. The biggest protest was held in Washington, where over 200,000 people gathered. Martin Luther King Jr. held his most famous speech, in which he expressed his expectations of the protest, as well as his dreams, literally. “I have a dream,” he said, “that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” (“I Have a Dream”).

Years of struggle led to the adoption of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 which “outlawed racial discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and other public accommodations” (Tindall and Shi 1056). It was a big step towards full legal equality of all people. A year after that Voting Rights Act was passed, ensuring all citizens the right to vote. Despite new acts, there were many protests and violent riots and as a result there were dozens of deaths, property damage and imprisoned people. From the Civil Rights Movement soon rose a new one - The Black Power Movement, which gathered radicals; it was in complete opposition to King's politics of non-violence. A new leader emerged – Malcolm X. His politics of violence and radicalism was not something he was trying to disguise. “Yes, I am an extremist,” Malcolm acknowledged in 1964. “You show me a black man who isn't an extremist and I'll show you one who needs psychiatric attention” (Tindall and Shi 1059). The black nationalism that awoke in the late sixties did not only concern equal rights, but they insisted on facing the real problems of all African-Americans, even if it meant facing them violently, with guns in their hands.

It was inevitable that black nationalism would come to an end since this kind of politics did not have many sympathizers, except for the radical blacks who saw Malcolm X as a courageous preacher of the black people. Others saw him as a violent and very dangerous radical. In 1965, he was assassinated. After his death, years passed and the situation was the same. Acts that were supposed to grant equal rights did not manage to stop the riots and the discrimination. Exactly three years after Malcolm X's assassination, in April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was also assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. His assassination was the cause of massive riots all over the US. At the same time, people were protesting against the current housing bill which was supposed to grant equal rights to everyone, but it did not. The same year, 1968, The Civil Rights Act was

passed that prohibited racial, gender or national discrimination regarding housing, such as sale, rental or financing.

After King's assassination the movement slowly faded. Although he was not the only leader of the movement, he was the most powerful one – people saw him as a kind of icon which represented the most important ideas of the movement. In 1968 he was killed and the movement lost its greatest leader. The Civil Rights Movement slowly lost its power and the eyes of the nation were on president Nixon and his next move regarding the Vietnam War.

4.1. The Black Arts Movement

In "Historical Overview of the Black Arts Movement" Sallam brings Ishmael Reeds quote:

I think what Black Arts did was inspire a whole lot of Black people to write. Moreover, there would be no multiculturalism movement without Black Arts. Latinos, Asian Americans, and others all say they began writing as a result of the example of the 1960s. Blacks gave the example that you don't have to assimilate. You could do your own thing, get into your own background, your own history, your own tradition and your own culture. I think the challenge is for cultural sovereignty and Black Arts struck a blow for that.

When there are protests, riots or activism, it is a sign that not everything is going well in the society. People are not satisfied and they want something to change. As it has been already explained, the sixties was a decade of various social movements, a decade when people courageously marched on the streets showing that they demand a change. However, marching was not the only way they expressed their opinions about social and political situation. It was the time when the Black Arts Movement arose from the Civil Rights Movement, as a literary response. In his essay "The Black Arts Movement" Larry Neal describes the movement as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal 1). It was the way for the black poets, writers, musicians and artists of all kinds to express themselves, to free their thoughts and shape them in the form of art. The Black Arts Movement is the expression of the Black Power Movement through art. As Neal claims, "the political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists" (Neal 1). People have realized that their protest and disagreement with racism should not only be shown by marching in the streets, but also by creating a whole new set of values, as a response to the "white people's values," which did not respect nor value anything coming from the black people. Their feelings and values are expressed not only in poems but also

in novels, songs, paintings, etc. However, poems are the ones that are able to reach the deepest feelings and to encourage people to act. “Poetry is a concrete function, an action. (...)

We want a black poem. And a Black World.

Let the world be a Black Poem

And let All Black People Speak This Poem

Silently Or LOUD” (Neal 32).

“Black Art”, the poem above, was written by LeRoi Jones, the founder of the Black Arts Theatre School and it became a parole of the whole movement. It is very energetic and determined to empower the black people to fight for their rights against the oppressing white people.

Black people united under the Black Arts Movement. In 1964 the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre School was founded. It promoted creativity of black artists, but also organized various poetry readings and concerts. Since it was clearly seen as a revolt against white people’s values, culture and art, it faced various attacks. However, they did not have any intentions to give up. More than ever, black people were united and determined to keep on creating their own set of values and promoting black culture and art. As a result, they started organizing public poetry readings, concerts and plays in the streets, which brought the whole movement closer to a wider audience. Those plays “shattered the illusion of the American body politic, and awakened Black people to the meaning of their lives” (Neal 32). This idea of creating a new black culture as well as their own set of values spread from Detroit to Washington D.C. The revolution in the streets became also a revolution in the minds and spirits of the black people. The movement also began on student campuses, such as San Francisco State College, Fisk University, Lincoln University, Columbia University and many others. Students also became aware of the importance of black people’s unity and creation of their own culture. “Without a culture Negroes are only a set of reactions to white people” (Neal 33).

The movement was not limited to poetry, but poetry was the most widespread and influential literary genre. Some of the most famous poets of the movement were Eldridge Cleaver, Etheridge Knight, Larry Neal, Ishmael Reed, Ntozake Shange, Quincy Troupe, and many others. “I, too, sing America” by Langston Hughes and “To a White Girl” by Eldridge Cleaver will be discussed as representative works of the movement. Although “I, too, sing America” was not written in the sixties and it is not a part of the Black Arts Movement, it was often used as a parole in the sixties, to encourage people to take action. The situation with racial segregation in 1926 when the poem

was written and in the sixties was pretty much the same, and if an uninformed reader were to suppose when it was written, one might easily think of the sixties and the time of great movements.

4.2. "I, too, sing America" by Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes' poem was written from the perspective of a black man, who is most likely a slave. The poem starts with a verse "I, too, sing America," showing that no matter the race, and no matter how they are treated, black people are a part of America. They feel like they belong there, like they are no less American than the other people, no matter the color of their skin. They might be oppressed, humiliated or insulted, but they are part of America. The second stanza might be understood in both a literal and metaphorical sense:

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Understood literally, it might represent years and years of slavery when black people were oppressed and served the white people. They used to send a slave away when guests arrived, because a slave had no right to be at the same table with them. The slave was not as important as them; the slave was not a human to them. If understood metaphorically, the context remains the same – black people are not equal to white people, not even years after slavery was abolished. It represents the social situation in the US at that time, when black people had to fight for their rights and equality. In the poem, they are not permitted to sit at the same table as white people and in real life they were not allowed to attend the same schools, bars or ride the same busses as the white people. If they were to take a bus ride, they were not allowed to sit in the white section, and if needed, they had to give up their seat in their section to a white passenger. The best example for that is Rosa Parks, and although the poem was written years before the incident it perfectly depicts it. However, despite being treated badly, the second part of the first stanza shows that black people do not let that humiliation break their spirit. They grow stronger every day; they laugh and show their oppressors that they cannot break them.

The atmosphere through the poem is very optimistic. Although the black people are oppressed and treated badly, there is an optimistic note in the second stanza:

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

The author believes that changes will come soon. He believes that everyone will be equal. Perhaps not literally tomorrow, but sometime in the near future. People who joined the Black Power Movement were enthusiastic and believed that change has to come, and when that happens, nobody will have the courage to oppose them once they see how determined they are. They will all be equal and the black man from the poem, perhaps the slave, will not have to eat in the kitchen – meaning that black people in general will not be oppressed anymore. They will not have to give up their bus seat to another based on skin color; they will not have to leave a bar because nobody wants to serve them.

The end of the poem also shows optimism, saying:

They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed –
I, too, am America.

The author believes that not only laws will change, but also the people. The oppressors will finally understand that they are all equal, no matter the skin color, and when they realize that, they will feel ashamed for not realizing it before. It might perhaps only be an author's dream, because as we can see, unfortunately, racial inequality is present in the US even today, 50 years after the Black Power Movement. The last verse again states that all the black people are, too, America. No matter how oppressed, discriminated or maltreated, they are also a part of the same nation as their oppressors and they deserve the same rights as everyone else. It suggests that in the end they will

finally be recognized as equal. Although this poem was written years before the Black Power Movement, it carried the same strong message during the movement. It gave courage to the protestors to fight for the cause, whether in the 1930s or the 1960s, inequality remained an issue of the society.

4.3. “To a White Girl” by Eldridge Cleaver

Eldridge Cleaver was one of the most prominent poets of the Black Arts Movement. His poem “To a White Girl” shows doubts and insecurities of black men regarding the white people, especially women. Their feelings about them were mixed and love was turning into hate; hate was turning into love. The poem consists of two stanzas, and each one tells a different perspective of the poet’s thinking and his feelings towards a white girl. The poem is talking directly to a white girl who is present in his life. She has no name, but her skin color is the only important thing. In the first stanza he expresses his love for her:

I love you
Because you're white,
Not because you're charming
Or bright.
Your whiteness
Is a silky thread
Snaking through my thoughts
In redhot patterns
Of lust and desire.

However, it is clear that he does not love her because of her personality or intelligence; the only thing he cares about is her skin color. He cannot stop thinking about her and her silky skin – lust and desire overwhelmed him. It does not matter what she is like as long as she is white. However, the second stanza reveals the completely opposite feelings:

I hate you
Because you're white.
Your white meat
Is nightmare food.
White is
The skin of Evil.

He is torn between feelings of love and hate for her. Although her white skin is appealing, he cannot forget how white people treated them in the past; that is why he calls her skin “skin of evil.” His mixed feeling can also be seen from the last part of the second stanza, which is also the end of the poem:

Loving you thus
And hating you so,
My heart is torn in two.
Crucified.

This poem is short but it shows very accurately the kind of struggle the black men were going through when loving a white woman. If we put aside the scornful looks of the people, the other struggle they had to go through was the one inside them. From the poem it is clear that he cannot forgive himself for loving a white girl – loving her white, silky skin, to be accurate.

However, the poem could be understood in a metaphorical way, not as lusting for a white girl but instead, lusting to be white. Here white skin is described as bright and silky, something that is good and pretty. Something that he should strive for. He might have felt that way because white people at that time were privileged, they had more rights than black people. It is not surprising that black people, sometimes, maybe wished to be white – equal and respected. On the other hand, in the second stanza, the poet remembers the evil that was done by the white people in the past. He remembers how much he hates them and refers to white skin as “evil” and “nightmare,” Also, he says that the white skin is a symbol of “the rope and a hanging tree,” perhaps alluding to Abel Meeropol’s poem “Strange Fruit,” which was written in the thirties in which Meeropol describes the hanging of two black men:

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
(Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,)
Black body swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

He is torn between feelings of love and hate. At one moment he wants to be white – meaning he wants to have the same rights as the white people – but then he remembers all the evil done by them and hates them and hates himself for wanting to be them. As he says, he is “crucified” and does not know what to think and feel. The two analyzed poems are just an example of literature written by black people at the time of their struggle for equal rights. Themes such as equality, hate for white supremacy and remembrance of the history of slavery helped them to express their

dissatisfaction and encouraged them to act, to fight for their rights. The Black Arts Movement had given many prominent authors which envisioned “an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America” (Neal).

5. The Feminist Movement

The sixties were a time for anyone feeling oppressed to do something about it. It was the time of great changes. Different social groups were feeling like it was the right time to take action and to fight for their rights. One of the movements that drew inspiration from the current protests and felt encouraged to change something was the new feminist movement. Women were gathering with great determination to change their social status. They organized protests and marches, formed new organizations, all in order to change social norms and rules that were not the same for both sexes. The movement was greatly influenced by Betty Friedan and her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, written in 1963. The book “launched a new phase of female protest on a national level” (Tindall and Shi 1078). It came as a result of a poll that she conducted, which showed that the whole idea of a happy suburban housewife that was present in the fifties, was just an illusion. At that time, to be a housewife was the fulfillment of a dream: “The suburban housewife – she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world” (Friedan 18). However, the idyllic vision of a housewife had a darker, hidden side. Friedman said that “the American middle-class home had become a 'comfortable concentration camp' where women saw their individual potential suffocated in an atmosphere of mindless consumption and affluent banality” (Friedan 18). She openly spoke of the issues that were not spoken about - women’s frustrations with everyday life. “The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction. . . As she made beds, . . . she was afraid to ask even of herself a silent question – ‘Is this all?’” (Friedan 15).

Friedman, together with a group of activists, founded an organization called NOW – National Organization for Women. The organization dealt with various issues, such as ending job discrimination which was based on sex, and they put their efforts to legalize abortion and obtain federal and state support for child-care centers (Tindall and Shi 1079). Their activism did cause some changes. In 1972 colleges were required to provide women with equal opportunities as men in areas such as admissions, faculty and staff hiring and athletics. They were not only protesting to demand equal employment rights. On September 7, 1968 hundreds of activists boycotted the Miss America Pageant. They considered it to be sexist because it objectified women, judging them on impossible standards of beauty. Hundreds of women raised their voice against it. Moreover, the pageant was also considered racist because not even once the winner was a black woman. Also, the protests were partially anti-war because the organizers of the pageant would later send the new Miss America to Vietnam to entertain the troops (Napikoski).

Many other protests were held, such as for the women's right to abortion, for employment equality and other problem issues. Women finally stood up and demanded respect and equal rights as men. It was a massive movement due to the fact that women were not a minor social group in the US. They were actually the dominant group which made up 51% of the US population. Years of protests which were a part of the feminist movement finally paid off. In the late sixties and early seventies women's political power was growing and a greater number of women were employed. It is safe to say that "women were changing traditional sex roles and childbearing practices to accommodate the two-career family, which had replaced the established pattern of male breadwinner and female housekeeper as the new American norm" (Tindall and Shi 1080).

University students also had an important role in the feminist movement. In 1968 students organized a sit-in at the University of Georgia that lasted three days. They protested because the female students were not treated equally. They had a dress code, which male students did not have, and were not allowed to drink or live off campus. Students decided that, once again, they had to react to injustice.

Encouraged and inspired by political and social changes, many women started expressing their feelings and thoughts in writing. Poetry was among the most popular literary genres. This decade has given some of the greatest feminist poets, such as Maya Angelou, Maxine Kumin, Denise Levertov, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, and many others. The following chapters analyze two poems: the first one is "Equality" by Maya Angelou, and the second one is "With no Immediate Cause" by Ntozake Shange.

5.1. "Equality" by Maya Angelou

"Equality" was written at the time of the Feminist Movement and strong messages that the movement was preaching can clearly be seen in the poem. Even the title states the main cause of the movement, the thing the activists strived to attain – equality. The first three verses reveal that the poet is talking directly to someone ("you" – not stating the gender or skin color of the person which might mean that the person represents all oppressors who treat people as unequal, whether it is based on gender, skin color, political beliefs or any other reason) who do not see her clearly in all her shine:

You declare you see me dimly
Through a glass which will not shine,

Though I stand before you boldly

The person she is talking to does not seem to see the good in her; does not see her full shine and her virtues. Instead, the person sees her as worthless, perhaps, through a glass which will not shine, although she stands before that person. The person she is talking to is not aware of any wrongdoing or maybe does not want to see it, since people tend to turn their heads away when they see an injustice happening. The second part of the first stanza indicated that the person she is talking to barely hears her call for help. Instead, only hears a whisper, barely, although she keeps repeating her message. The use of a word “drums” symbolize how forceful her message is. The drums are loud and powerful, just as her desire for equality, but no one seems to hear that:

You do own to hear me faintly
 as a whisper out of range,
 while my drums beat out the message
 and the rhythms never change.

The second stanza is repeated three times in the poem:

Equality, and I will be free.
 Equality, and I will be free.

Those words are repeated in order to emphasize the importance of the message. That is the only thing she wants – equality, and she sees equality as freedom. She wants to be free from discrimination and prejudices; she wants for all people to be equal. Although there is no explicit explanation in the poem to whom it might be directed, we can understand it in two ways – as yearning for the equality of black people, as well as the equality of women. As a black woman, Maya must have been revolted and frustrated because of the prejudices directed towards both social groups and desperately wanted change.

The next stanzas are her attempt to open the eyes of the oppressor to see the problem in the society. Despite the past, she is ready to move on. She is strong and ready to start over, but the chains of the past are still present in the society:

We have lived a painful history,
 we know the shameful past,
 but I keep on marching forward,
 and you keep on coming last.

That is why she encourages her listener to wake up and understand what is going on:

Take the blinders from your vision,
 take the padding from your ears,
 and confess you've heard me crying,
 and admit you've seen my tears.

The listener acts as though nothing is happening and refuses to see and hear what she has to say. Just like people who, even today, turn a blind eye to the injustices happening around them, just because they are not directly affected. If people in the past had reacted more to occurrences of injustice, it might have changed the lives of millions of people. The speaker did hear her cry, saw her tears – and did nothing.

The last two stanzas just keep repeating and emphasizing her true message:

Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
 and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
 Equality, and I will be free.

No matter what, she will keep on trying to change something, to fight for her rights until she achieves the goal – to be equal, to be free from discrimination of all kinds. This repetition of the last two verses also serves as a powerful message to the reader, intending to make a stronger impression and raise awareness.

5.2. “With no Immediate Cause” by Ntozake Shange

The poem “With no Immediate Cause” was written in the time when the feminist movement was spreading fast and women were encouraged to finally raise their voices and show resistance towards injustices. Unlike Maya Angelou’s poem “Equality,” this poem is full of aggressive feelings and doubts. It consists of three stanzas, which describe a day in the life of a poet, who is a woman – but also, a day in a life of any woman. It starts with a visual image of violence against women:

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
 every five minutes a
 woman is raped/every ten minutes
 a lil girl is molested

These crimes seem to appear only as statistics in a newspaper, instead of being a real social issue. Every three minutes, every five minutes, every ten minutes – the repetition of these verses through the poem emphasizes the frequency of attacks on women, and not only grown up women, but of all ages in general. It happens all the time, every couple of minutes. She notices it, but the society does not seem to react. The poet continues the first stanza with a very pessimistic, and yet brave tone:

yet i rode the subway today
 i sat next to an old man who
 may have beaten his old wife
 3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago
 he might have sodomized his
 daughter but i sat there

She sees every man as a threat. Every man might potentially be a rapist, a child molester; every man might have beaten his wife once. You never know when the violence might happen, but she is still brave enough to sit next to them. She does not fear them; she does not let it rule her life. Again, time reference is repeated – 3 minutes ago, 3 days ago, 30 years ago. No matter when the violence happened, it did happen. Those women who were the victims of their husbands, brothers, boyfriends or any other random man in the street are forever marked. Thirty years might pass, but the scars will remain – maybe not physically, but the mental scars are way worse. And the poet states that it does not make a man less of a bully if thirty years have passed; he cannot erase what he's done.

She continues the poem by describing all the horrible ways women are molested on a daily basis, and again expresses distrust in every man:

i rode the subway today
 & bought a paper from a
 man who might
 have held his old lady onto
 a hot pressing iron/i don't know

She bought the newspaper from him, the same newspaper in which she will read about the death of another woman.

i bought the paper
 looking for the announcement
 the discovery/of the dismembered
 woman's body/the
 victims have not all been
 identified/today they are
 naked and dead/refuse to testify

News of women's deaths have become common; nobody pays attention to them anymore. Women are raped, molested, killed. If they do survive, they are afraid to testify because they might get hurt again or the society will not believe them and will judge them instead of the perpetrator. The last part of the first stanza brings a total turning of the situation:

i found an
 announcement (...) there is some concern
 that alleged battered women
 might start to murder their
 husbands & lovers with no
 immediate cause

It turns out that the public is concerned regarding these matters. However, they do not care whether women are molested, raped or killed; they are afraid that this might hurt men. The verse "alleged battered women" shows that the public does not even believe those women were molested; society believes what men say. Women have no right to voice their thoughts. This poem perfectly depicts society in the sixties, before the feminist movement – women were oppressed and seen as second class citizens. If a woman happens to hurt a man, the society thinks she must have done it with "no immediate cause".

i spit up i vomit i am screaming
 we all have immediate cause
 every 3 minutes
 every 5 minutes
 every 10 minutes
 every day
 women's bodies are found

She feels angry, so angry that it makes her sick. Injustice happens every day and no one seems to care. It is like the society is blindfolded by ignorance when it comes to reacting to violence against women. Men are the only ones that count. But she screams, she yells, she wants them to hear her – women do have an immediate cause! Every 3 minutes, every 5 minutes, every 10 minutes, every day – every time a man hits her, every time he molests a child, every time a woman is raped – women do have an immediate cause. Men take away their dignity, their innocence, their lives and nobody cares. She wants the public to open their eyes or at least to stop pretending they do not see injustice happening. She is trying to send a strong message, to stop the hypocrisy in the media and society. Every life counts, no matter the race, gender or sexual preference. This poem carries a powerful message and perfectly depicts the horrors that were happening to women on a daily basis, without anyone to react to them. The message is directed towards us as readers to make us aware of what is happening around us and the time reference serves to emphasize how often it happens. It is a typical poem of the feminist movement, encouraging women to act, to fight for their rights and to speak up about violence that they were experiencing daily.

Conclusion

This paper deals with the events that happened in the US in the sixties – the political and social situation, the Vietnam War, students' anti-war protests, and civil movements for equal rights. The analyzes of the poems from each of the movements serve to illustrate the public reaction concerning the main issues. The unrest of the sixties was mostly due to the US fighting a meaningless war in faraway Vietnam. The people's dissatisfaction resulted in massive anti-war demonstrations all over the US. Young Americans in particular were determined to bring about changes. They were persistent in fighting for their cause – to make the government withdraw the US troops from Vietnam and to stop the war. Soon protests crossed the borders of universities and became a national issue. People were finally encouraged to fight for their rights, which is evident as the Black Power Movement and the Feminist Movement originated.

The sixties were a politically unstable decade as people took the risk to finally raise their voices against social injustices. The best example are numerous assassinations which occurred at that time. President J. F. Kennedy was assassinated, as well as his brother, and a couple of years later Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., as the most prominent black leaders were also assassinated by their opponents. Although Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X proposed different solutions to the problem of racial inequality, both empowered and encouraged black people to take action, to fight for their rights. This paper gives a historical and social overview of the sixties – the main political and social events, and provides analyses exploring the causes of the nation's disapproval with the government's social and war policies. Highlighting the cause and course of student's protests, as well as the student's participation in the social movements, brings to light the role of young Americans in the rebellion against the injustices. It is made evident that their sit-ins caused a reaction that spread all over the country and encouraged Americans of all ages to take action for causes that they believed in. An example to note is the stand of the four black students in 1960 who demanded to be served at the counter that served only whites. If it had not been for the bravery of those four young men, who knows how much time would have passed until people got enough courage to speak up for their rights. Students had an important role in the Feminist Movement as well, by organizing sit-ins and fighting for equal rights of female students at all universities.

The events of the 1960s are of great importance for the development of real democracy in the US. Because of the reactions of brave men and women changes were brought about. Public awareness was raised to encourage others to speak up, to rebel against injustices. As Martin Luther

King Jr. said in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” “One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws” (“Letter from a Birmingham Jail”). The people in the sixties truly did that, not out of the pure civil disobedience, but because they desperately wanted social changes which would finally make them equal.

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