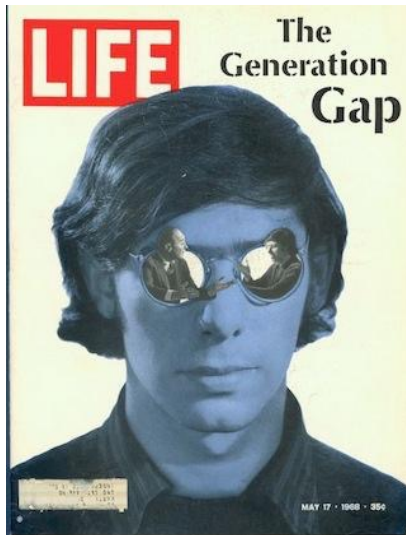




THE BEATLES

Handout 3 - The Generation Gap

In a study published in the early 1920s, sociologist Karl Mannheim introduced the idea of a social “generation,” a cohort of people of a similar age range whose outlooks are defined as much by notable events and the technologies of their lifetime as by family groups. The “World War II Generation,” also sometimes called “The Greatest Generation,” grew up during the Depression Era of the 1930s and then, mostly, either fought in the war or contributed to its efforts from home. Their children, part of a generation known as “Baby Boomers,” represented a sizable post-war spike in the American birth rate. Many of the Baby Boomers spent their childhoods in the 1950s, becoming teenagers in the 1960s. By 1965, more than 40% of the U.S. population were teenagers.



Unlike their parents, Baby Boomers grew up during an economic surge in the U.S. Most had televisions in their homes, and as a new demographic with notable spending power, they watched programs and advertisements marketed directly toward them. Perhaps more than any generation before them, the Baby Boomers reached adolescence with a well-defined sense of self as both individuals and a group.

By the time The Beatles landed in New York in February 1964, the “teenager” was a codified market category. Though the term had not gained traction yet, soon after magazines began referring to a “generation gap,” a fissure between the world views of the Baby Boomers and their parents signaled by markedly different responses to elements of American culture.

Questions:

1. How do you think the differences in the economic climates of the World War II and Baby Boomer generations might affect their personal outlooks?
2. In what ways do you think the size of the Baby Boomer generation might affect its members? How might the size affect it as a group overall?
3. What are some ways that television might have helped shape the Baby Boomer generation?



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The Baby Boomer generation was shaped in part by cultural events but it also shaped culture through its responses to events, many of which were in opposition to the responses of the World War II generation.

Timeline of major events in the early and mid-1960s

- June 12, 1963 - Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers assassinated
- August 27, 1963 - The March on Washington. 250,000 people gather on the National Mall. Speakers include Dr. Martin Luther King and John Lewis. Musical performers include Mahalia Jackson, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez.
- November 22, 1963 - President John F. Kennedy is assassinated
- February 9, 1964 - The Beatles make their American debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show*
- July 2, 1964 - Congress passes the *Civil Rights Act*
- July 16, 1964 - Race Riots erupt in Harlem, NY after police fatally shoot a 15-year old African-American boy. Riots follow later that summer in Philadelphia, PA, Rochester, NY, Chicago, IL and in several cities in New Jersey.
- August 7, 1964 - Congress passes the *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*, prompting the first large scale military involvement of U.S. forces in Vietnam.
- October 14, 1964 - Dr. Martin Luther King awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
- August 6, 1965 - Congress passes the Voting Rights Act, guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote for the first time
- January 9, 1967 - *Time* magazine announces that their 1966 "Man of the Year" is not a man but "a generation: the man – and woman - of 25 and under." The article goes on to state that the youth of this generation are "well-educated, affluent, rebellious, responsible, pragmatic, idealistic, brave, alienated, and hopeful."

