

Source, Story: History

: Teaching U.S. History in the Archives

A Home at 88 Main Street: 1970s Counterculture in Massachusetts

Context

This collections of documents from the Beth Hapgood Papers helps students and teachers to explore:

- Counter culture and youth movements in the 1960s
- Using video as a source of historical evidence

Introduction

Students should have a basic understanding of the development of counterculture movements in reaction to the war in Vietnam, the struggle for civil rights, and nuclear proliferation.

Background Information for Students and Discussion

Begin the discussion by asking students to vote “agree” or “disagree” for the statement, “Counter culture movements had a positive impact on American society and the individuals involved in them.” Ask volunteers to explain their answer.

Explain that the students will be assessing this claim using documents relating to a commune active in western Massachusetts in the 1970s called the Brotherhood of the Spirit. While sound quality for the Brotherhood of the Spirit documentary is quite poor, selections from the video give students a sense of the atmosphere and ideals of the community:

- 2:24 – 3:24: a man talks about the power of choosing to live together in the commune, over shots of cooking in the kitchen.
- 7:44 – 9:10: a woman talks about the commune's “ideal utopian community” which involves no drugs, alcohol or promiscuity
- 10:31 – 12:29: a member of the stage crew for the commune's band, Spirit with Flesh, talks about communicating the commune's message to people who attend the band's concerts
- 14:16 – 15:24: a young woman talks about the impact of speaking with Michael Metallica, the commune's most charismatic and controversial leader. The audio runs over shots of commune members gathered at the dormitory in Warwick, as Michael addresses the crowd.

Briefly summarize Beth Hapgood's involvement with the commune, drawing from the finding aid for the Beth Hapgood Papers. Do not reveal that Hapgood deeded her house to the commune, or was driven from her home by its members.

Divide the class into two groups. Provide one group with documents that portray the commune in a positive light, such as the self-published profile from *Free Spirit Press*, photographs from the document collection on *Source, Story, History*, or additional photograph from the [Daniel A. Brown Collection](#) online image gallery. Provide the second group of students with documents that show the commune's negative impact on Beth Hapgood's family, including excerpts from her oral history and memoirs.

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Background Information for Students and Discussion (continued)

Give students ten minutes to review their documents, and five additional minutes to develop an argument about the impact of counter-culture movements based on the documents.

Reconvene the class, and ask each group to summarize its findings and argument about the impact of counter-culture movements. Continue the discussion by asking individual students to what they found surprising, disturbing, or amusing about the documents.

Conclude the discussion by asking students to vote again, and, if any changed their position, to explain why.

Assignments and Additional Discussion Questions

- After viewing clips from the Brotherhood of the Spirit documentary, ask students to compare the film to other videos that document counter culture in the 1960s. What can we learn from a video made in the period, despite the poor quality of its sound and video? What does this source reveal that later, more polished depictions of the period, such as PBS' "[Summer of Love](#)" episode of the program, *American Experience* do not?