THE AGENDA FOR

As the years pass by into a void of memories, it becomes more difficult to remember the way things were, the social upheavals of our youth and the learning experiences that touched our emotions and senses. In this week's feature, I have chosen to look 23 years back into history to a time much more radical and activist than the present; a generation frustrated with war, racism and exploitation who chose to speak out in anger over such inequalities. Our modern world of the 80's still holds many questions and paradoxes but the way in which we deal with them as a community is fundamentally different than our preceding generation. I hope to shed light on many of the issues that affected the students of the 60's and parallel them with current trends and priorities. Many of the issues that dominated the 60's still exist as proof of our inability to transform society into a more peaceful and humanist environment. It is the test for our generation to continue the quest for a better, more egalitarian world. I have chosen to evaluate a document released by the Radical Student Union at the University of Berkeley, Southern California, in 1962 as the "Agenda For A Generation." This manifesto, although extremely radical, was embraced by many students as a means to actively show their discontent with America and supply guidelines for change and unity of interest. America never did fully embrace the validity of the "new left student movement," but their impact on society and our generation will last forever as a testament to the decay of democracy in America

"We are people of this generation, bred in at least modern comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit," thus began the Port Huron Statement released by the Students for a Democratic Society. This opening remark outlines a time period where fear had come and trust had faded into oblivion.

An age of anxiety seemed to have been born in the 1960's. A time of mistrust and incivility existed between the races, the sexes and the generations. It became a cliche in those years to quote W.B. Yeats: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold/mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." But it was inescapable. On November 22, 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy thus ending his new "camelot" and the hopes of many Americans. The list of victims did not end. Martin Luther King Sr., Bobby Kennedy and Malcolm X. There seemed an endless supply of empty-eyed loners with guns and meaningless smiles to fire their shots and be led away.

The civil-rights movement swelled in 1963 around the "man with a dream" of non-violent protest and racial harmony." It soured in a wave of killings, and then with a litany of riot, looting and death; Harlem, Watts, Detroit, Newark, Miami. Terrorism became an extension of social injustice.

And as always, there was Vietnam, the paradox of American values and beliefs. U.S. soldiers were fighting civilians, napalmed babies, and Buddhist monks immolating themselves in protest. The war also kindled inflation. The anti-war movement grew increasingly strident, from candle lit protest marches to the mayhem of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The culmination was the killing of 4 students at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard.

Even with all these horrors, the decade wasn't totally bleak. There was the cheery irreverance and innovation of the Beatles, who stormed and transformed the world with their music, Woodstock and a new wave of riotous comics. There was the Vindication for America's technology: On July 20, 1969, Neal Armstrong became the first man on the surface of the moon, the eagle had landed.

But the exhuberance of an era of change faded quickly. The young people who had erupted to remedy the world's ills with love and idealism turned cynical when "the system" didn't respond; flower power yielded to drugs and acid rock, and the dissolusioned young retreated to hippie crash pads, communes and the "Road." Richard M. Nixon moved into the White House on the promise to "bring us together" and a "secret plan" to end the war. Instead he escalated it — and as the decade of the 60's ended, he was trying to shake off a petty, mosquito-like annoyance: the suspicion that the president was somehow involved in a burglary at Washington's Watergate complex.

The war against the war in Vietnam was at raucous full cry when the S.D.S. released its manifesto. Students in their mid 20's looked upon the antiwar movement as a revolt against everything their parents had taught them; the ethic of flag, country, duty and hard work. Vietnam divided families in the days when it seemed to be poisoning everything else in American life; it even set father against son. Many Americans felt little sympathy with the campus upheavals wrought in the name of peace by people they regarded as the children of the leisure class. When schools erupted over the American incursion into Cambodia and the ensuing killings at Kent State, handsome old campuses became combat zones, with students and militia men skirmishing on the lawns and fear was hanging the ominous clouds amongst the trees. Some students were against protest; they were there to get an education and their fellow students were literally standing in their way. The horrors of war had confused America and the eagle became an endangered species.

There is no doubt why a group like the Students For a Democratic Society was formed and gained marginal support. Students were unsure of the values of American Democracy, there were too many paradoxes to ignore:

> "As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degregation 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 ourseves, 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."
>
> "Agenda For A Generation."

Thus we see the compelling drive to activism become reality. An incredible lack of faith in American Justice had led much of its youth to embrace the "new left" as the only alternative they could visibly see. The "system" was not working and many of those individuals could not feel contentment amidst prosperity. Rather, they saw it as a glaze above deeply felt anxieties about their role in the new world. These people believed something could be done and they fought to dispel the indifference to human affairs while searching for an alternative that could change circumstances in the school,