

Read the “Conformity or Individuality” passage set.

Conformity or Individuality

Source 1: The 1950s Part Three: The Rise of the Counterculture

By Alan Brinkley, adapted by Newsela staff

1 Beneath the shining surface of the public nation of the 1950s was another America, a shadow nation which was gradually building up a critique of American society. This critique, which would burst into national consciousness in the 1960s and beyond, took many forms. African-Americans would demonstrate in Montgomery, Ala., and elsewhere, beginning the Civil Rights Movement. Women would protest obstacles they faced in the workplace and in the larger culture as they attempted to move out of their roles as wives and mothers. Scientists and ecologists would voice concerns about the environment as they saw, much earlier than most Americans did, the dangers of heedless economic growth.

A fear of being different

- 2 But equally important were critiques that expressed a series of anxieties and thwarted desires that were particular to the white male culture of the time. There was a growing fear that the modern world threatened their freedom, their independence, their authenticity.
- 3 Critics of the 1950s and early 1960s argued that employees of large corporations lost their individuality. Employees learned to dress alike, to adopt similar values and goals, and to “get along” at work. Complaints about the pressure to conform, to obediently fall in line with others, was one of the biggest criticisms of corporate culture in the 1950s. Social scientists said this culture made it difficult for individuals to retain any psychological autonomy or the freedom to make choices about their own lives. The organization, they argued, created conformists who feared to be different.

The Beats rejected values of the middle class

- 4 In 1950, the sociologist David Riesman wrote in his influential book "The Lonely Crowd" that modern society was giving birth to a new kind of person. In earlier eras, most men and women had defined themselves largely in terms of their own values and goals. Now, most people defined themselves in terms of the opinions and goals of others, or of the organization. Perhaps the clearest example of dissatisfaction with this way of life was a group of young writers and artists who called themselves "the Beats." Although they emerged from the middle class, they rejected middle class culture. They criticized social and political values such as material success, technology and organization. Many of the Beats embraced an alternative lifestyle that involved rootlessness, anti-materialism, drugs and sexual freedom.
- 5 The poet Allen Ginsberg became the most influential figure in the Beat world, the man many people considered the founder of the movement. In 1955, Ginsberg wrote "Howl," a famous poem that came to represent the Beat generation: "Howl" was an attack on every aspect of modern middle class culture and society, and even on rationality itself.

- 6 The Beats themselves attracted relatively little attention from the American mainstream in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, they were significant because they paved the way for the counterculture that emerged in the late 1960s.
- 7 The image of the 1950s as the age of ideal family life and middle-class comfort is not entirely false. It was the image that many middle-class Americans accepted at the time, and a reflection of the way many of them lived. But it would be a mistake to accept that interpretation of American life in the 1950s at face value. To understand the realities of society in the 1950s, it is important to understand that the middle-class worldview that seemed so powerful at the time was not fully accepted, even by many members of the middle class itself.

Source 2: Student protesters arrested for giving "Mockingjay" salute to leaders

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff

- 8 Life is imitating art in Thailand, where students protesting against the military have adopted a hand gesture from the "Hunger Games" movies. Protesters are using the three-finger salute of defiance from the movie to protest a military coup that removed the country's elected leaders. The Thai army has banned the three-finger salute.
- 9 Three students were arrested in the capital city of Bangkok at a movie theater showing "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 1," the latest film based on the trilogy of books by author Suzanne Collins about a rebellion against a dictatorship. The students were the latest accused of using the gesture of rebellion against tyranny from the movies.
- 10 Military officials took over the government on May 22 and imposed martial law, cutting back civil liberties and banning protests. The military said it was necessary to restore order after months of disruptive political protests.

Symbols Of Defiance

- 11 Since 2013, Thailand had been affected by demonstrations and fighting between opponents and defenders of the previous government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Opponents of the government claimed it was corrupt and should go, while supporters defended the government, saying it was elected democratically and should stay.
- 12 Gatherings of five or more people have been banned since the military took over in May. Frustrated by not being able to gather and demand a return to a democratic government, young protesters are using symbols of defiance.

13 Some protesters are reading in public George Orwell's "1984," a novel about a fight against a dictatorship. Other protesters are raising the salute against repression borrowed from the movies to protest reality.

Five Other Protesters Arrested

- 14 In Thailand, five other student protesters were arrested for using the three-finger salute during a speech by the army's leader, Prayuth Chan-Ocha.
- 15 The "Hunger Games" gesture is now banned in Thailand, at least in practice, if not in the movies. Prayuth told journalists that the young protesters' use of the hand gesture as a sign of defiance only bothered him for its potential to "ruin their future." Prayuth also told reporters that the restrictions of martial law will continue until the time is right to lift them. Human rights advocates have criticized the Thai authorities for trying to stop even symbolic protests.
- 16 Matilda Bogner, of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said this crackdown is part of a pattern of human rights violations. The effect of these actions is to shut down critics and independent voices, she said.

Source 3: Opinion: The athlete as agent of change

By Lonnie Bunch and David Skorton, Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff

- 17 An athlete silently protests during the national anthem. People respond with angry taunts of "traitor," "you're a disgrace" and "leave our country!"
- 18 Are these angry tweets aimed at National Football League players kneeling during the national anthem? Or heated statements about National Basketball Association players not visiting the White House? No. These insults were thrown at Toni Smith, the then- 21-year-old senior guard on the Manhattanville College women's basketball team, who expressed her opposition to the Iraq War in 2003 by turning her back on the flag.
- 19 The history of protest in sports, much like that across society, holds many lessons for us that we can apply to the nation's current anger. Sport has always been a way used to challenge convention. The institution has also been used to prove the worthiness of a marginalized group and prod the nation to live up to its stated ideals.

Athletes Use Platform To Address Injustice

- 20 Even before Colin Kaepernick took a knee to highlight police brutality, disagreement had been a part of sports. For decades, athletes have used their fame as a platform to address injustice. Tommie Smith and John Carlos, for instance, raised their fists during 1968 Summer Olympics to protest the unfair treatment of African-Americans. Tennis champion Billie Jean King advocated for Title IX to bring about more gender equality in college athletics. The Phoenix Suns wore Spanish-language versions of their jerseys to protest racial-profiling laws.
- 21 If we are to move past reactionary anger, we must acknowledge the fact that the American experience differs among people and groups. Nothing brings that home quite like Jackie Robinson, a hero for breaking the Major League Baseball color barrier. He, too, saw the flag in a different light due to the racism he faced every day. As he wrote in his 1972 autobiography, "I cannot stand and sing the anthem. I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a black man in a white world."
- 22 Robinson and many other athletes have played critical roles in enabling the social change that has created a more inclusive society, often at great risk to their careers. Any suggestion that athletes should "stick to sports" diminishes their courage. The argument also ignores the deeply held tradition of disagreement and debate that makes democratic countries, like the United States, different from dictatorships.

United States Not Living Up To Its Principles

- 23 Our nation has always struggled to equally apply the ideals embodied in our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The United States was founded on the principles of individual liberty, freedom of expression and democracy. Still, people of color, immigrants and women have struggled to receive the full benefits of citizenship. The struggle to perfect our union continues on. Admitting our flaws is not a weakness, nor is it unpatriotic.
- 24 As Toni Smith said in a statement following the uproar over her protest, "It is my right as an American to stand for my beliefs the way others have done against me. Being patriotic cannot simply be an empty slogan. Patriotism can be shown in many ways, but those who choose to do

so by saluting the flag should recognize that the American flag stands for individuality and freedom."

- 25 To many who profoundly love the United States, protest is one of the highest forms of patriotism. The need to "form a more perfect Union" is enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution. The framers knew that the only way to improve our democratic republic is to continuously assess it and work to make it better through principled disagreement and vigorous debate. Such improvement happens regardless of whether the debate comes from the halls of Congress or a football stadium. Increasingly, though, many of us seem to be ignoring the lessons that history has to offer.

Learning From Lessons Of The Past

- 26 Museums and other cultural institutions are a potential solution for this. Sport is a powerful way to do so because it resonates with people and passes through the generations. We can display Tommie Smith's warm-up suit and explain why he and Carlos raised their fists at the Olympics. We can also explain the costs they incurred by doing so. Then, generations of people who were not yet born can see both the progress made and the unfinished work ahead of us.
- 27 In some ways, sports are conducted on the ultimate level playing field, a fair place where ability outweighs backgrounds, beliefs, race and religion. Athletes have unique insight into working toward a goal and looking past individual glory for the greater good. As such, they have something profound to say about our nation, our freedoms and who we aspire to be. We should listen.

Writing Prompt

The issue of conformity creates conflict for individuals and for society as a whole. We are continually faced with choices about conformity—such as when to embrace, accept, question, or challenge it. Questions about the value of individuality versus conformity persist throughout life.

Write an explanatory essay that informs readers about the struggle between conformity and individuality. Your essay must be based on ideas and information that can be found in this text set.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages
- plan your response
- write your response
- revise and edit your response

Be sure to

- use evidence from multiple sources
- avoid overly relying on one source

Your response should be in the form of a multi-paragraph essay. You may use 1 sheet of paper for planning, and up to 3 pages (one side each) for your essay.