

## STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY, Port Huron Statement

1962

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was formed at the University of Michigan in 1962 as a student organization concerned with American domestic politics and foreign policy. By the late 1960s, SDS had chapters on American universities across the nation and functioned as the epicenter of the student antiwar movement.

We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world: the only one with the atom bomb, the least scarred by modern war, an initiator of the United Nations that we thought would distribute Western influence throughout the world. Freedom and equality for each individual, government of, by, and for the people—these American values we found good, principles by which we could live as men. Many of us began maturing in complacency.

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, 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 ourselves, 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.

While these and other problems either directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and became our own subjective concerns, we began to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in our surrounding America. The declaration “all men are created equal . . .” rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South

and the big cities of the North. The proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo. . . .

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"Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, 1962," courtesy of the Office of Senator Tom Hayden, [www.h-net.org/~hst306/documents/huron.html](http://www.h-net.org/~hst306/documents/huron.html).

### **PRACTICING Historical Thinking**

**Identify:** List the major forms of "degradation" that are listed in the Port Huron Statement.

**Analyze:** How does the statement's use of the word "complacency" represent a changing position toward domestic and foreign policies?

**Evaluate:** Was the Port Huron Statement a function of Cold War politics? Consult your textbook and class notes for additional information.