

# Counterculture's Finest Moment

During the 1960s many young people embraced a lifestyle that was totally different from that of their conservative parents. They questioned everything and refused to conform to society's standards. These baby boomers developed a distinctive style of dress and music, as well as their own lingo. "Far out!," "Peace, brother," and "What's happenin'?" were three commonly heard phrases. Some adopted a hippie look and lived in communes while others joined



radical political groups. Each of these groups had one thing in common: they rejected all symbols of authority, especially their parents and the government. They became known as the "counterculture."

For three days in August 1969, Woodstock in upstate New York became the focus of the counterculture revolution. During the idyllic weekend 400,000 people partied peacefully and were part of one huge, loving community. Organizers Michael Lang and Artie Kornfield had spent six months planning the show at the 600 acre farm. Richie Havens, a little known African American folk singer, opened the proceedings which were stopped twice by rain. Musicians, including Janis Joplin; The Grateful Dead; Jimi Hendrix; Jefferson Airplane; Bob Dylan; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Joan Baez; Ravi Shankar; and Santana, entertained the crowd with their own personal styles. From protest to rock to psychedelic, all kinds of music could be enjoyed there. Santana stole the show with "Soul Sacrifice." Jimi Hendrix closed the adventure with an ear-splitting version of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Despite the lack of sanitation and low food and medical supplies, the concert-goers stayed and rocked on to the largest outdoor, overnight festival ever held. Later that same year, the Rolling Stones, unable to attend Woodstock, gave a free concert at Altamont, California. It turned deadly when a man in the crowd pulled a gun and was knifed to death by a Hell's Angel member. The spell of Woodstock was broken; it dealt a serious blow to future outdoor festivals.

## Suggested Activities

**Drug Scene** Drugs were rampant at Woodstock. LSD was used to spike drinks backstage. Audience members smoked pot openly. Have the students find out the short-term and long-term side effects of these drugs. For more information see *Focus on Hallucinogens* by Jeffrey Shulman (Twenty-First Century Books, 1991).

**Discuss** Ask the students if they think there could ever be another Woodstock. Have them defend their answers.

**Reunion** Woodstock II was held in 1994 for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original festival. Research to see who performed, who attended, and how it was similar to or different from the first Woodstock festival.