**Shmoop.com’s “Society and Culture in 20th Century”**

In the 1970s, women and homosexuals took advantage of the liberal momentum of the counterculture to express their own views. In the **feminist movement,**women started reacting against all the things they felt had shoved them into a little box labeled "woman." They proclaimed their equal fought against employment discrimination and against sexist culture. They "invented" the words "sexual harassment" and the idea of "rape" in marriage. They actually started to address those issues, which *hadn't*been acknowledged before, and they demanded an end to them.

They also demanded full equality, by pushing for a constitutional amendment that had been written way back in the 1920s: the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).**This would prevent states or the federal government to discriminate on the basis of sex. Sounds good, right? Not to all women. Many women, led by anti-feminist activist **Phyllis Schlafly,**protested that it hurt more women than it helped.

First, many of these women did feel that their place was beside their husband as helpmeets. Many did believe in the "feminist mystique," and that a woman's place was in the home with her kids. Others, however—even women like Eleanor Roosevelt and other New Dealers and liberals—opposed it for other reasons. They worried that it would take away certain privileges women enjoyed, like maternal leave, exemption from the draft, and the "dependent wife" status under Social Security, so the ERA actually never passed.

They also argued for their abortion rights, and finally won in the ***Roe v. Wade***Supreme Court Case. By saying women had a right to an abortion under the privacy clause of the 14th Amendment, the government struck down state and federal laws that prohibited them. This was a *big*win—but, unfortunately, it was also in the Supreme Court. There was still a possibility it could be overturned, and the debate over abortion still rages today.

The gay community's movement was sparked in the **Stonewall Riots**in 1969, when homosexuals fought back against the police. Suddenly, all over the country, homosexuals united in a movement to protest their repression and announce their "pride" (this became the by-word) in their sexuality. They insisted on their rights to have their own gay bars and clubs, they collected in gay neighborhoods like the **Castro**in San Francisco, and they staged large **Gay Pride Parades.**

They still were subjected to discrimination in American society, however, especially with marriage and the military. Debates about the fairness of the "**Don't Ask Don't Tell"**policy in the military, as well as over homosexuals' rights to get married, are still hot topics today.

**Demographic Changes**

On the one hand, a number of minorities achieved some gains in the last decades of the 20th century. One big change was the **24th Amendment,**which eliminated things like poll taxes and literacy tests that Southerners had used to keep blacks from the polls. The result was tons of African Americans pouring out to vote, and many individuals were elected to political offices at the local, state, and national levels

**Reverend Jesse Jackson**became the first black man to run for the Democratic presidential nomination. **Condoleezza Rice**and **Colin Powell**were both secretaries of state. Then, of course, **Barack Obama**became the most powerful man in the country by winning the presidency in 2008.

Unfortunately, racism hasn't been magically eliminated in America. In the 90s, a huge wave of race riots swept LA. A lot of the problems were due to **de-industrialization.**Suburbanization had led to white flight, which had in turn had led to business flight as industries ran off to join their main employees, buyers, and tax base. Downtown urban areas started to decay: what had once been bustling streets had no more businesses, and became poor slums left only to poor African-American communities.

Race relations simmered as white suburbanites jealously protected their areas and stayed away from primarily black urban areas. When the Supreme Court in ***Milliken v. Bradley***in 1974 decided to counter this kind of thing by **busing**black students to white schools in white neighborhoods to force racial integration, people freaked out. They attacked the buses and police, and when that didn't work, they pulled their white kids out and put them in private schools.

In Johnson had passed the **Immigration Act of 1965,**opening America's doors to anyone—first come, first served. This sounded nice, but the problem was that all sorts of problems were exploding around the world. Refugees from places like Vietnam, Cuba, Mexico and the Philippines poured into America looking for political asylum or a better life. They swelled the ranks of the welfare system, and many Americans began to say "hey. You're not even American. Why do *you* deserve my tax money?

A big problem was illegal immigration, most of which came from Mexico. In 1986 Congress passed the **Immigration and Control Act,**hoping to put a plug on the flow. Didn't work—immigration problems still pose major issues today.

Americans were migrating too—from the "steel belts" (the places they had gone around the wars to acquire jobs at big industries) to the "sun-belt." Why? One big thing: *air conditioning.*Suddenly, it was totally cool to move to Florida, New Mexico, Arizona or Texas, because you could shut yourself in a nice little icebox. The so-called "steel belt" started turning into the "rust-belt"—more victims of de-industrialization.

You all know who especially came to the "Sun Belt” – the Baby Boomers, because the Baby Boomers were turning gray. Since they comprise such a big group, *America* is turning grey: people actually talk about the **"greying of America."**This is bad news for Social Security, which just can't support all those numbers. On the one hand, it's nice, especially became better health systems mean that people are living way longer. On the other hand, a whopping 1 out of 4 people are expected to be *over 85 years old*in the very near future.

Go to Florida. Look around. Ahh, yes, the wave of the future.

To us, the world seems to be changing more rapidly than ever before. For this we can especially thank the **Internet,**which connects the world to a global system—**globalization**—in a totally unprecedented way. Sure, the railroads were great. Sure, the airplane was great. Now, however, we can text each other with our new **cell phones**across the *world,*taking a nanosecond to go thousands of miles. Thanks, iPhone.

Our society is also continually becoming even more of a **melting pot.**First, when laws against miscegenation (racial mixing) were shot down in the 60s, people started having bi-racial kids. Then those kids started having their own bi-racial kids, so that whole new groups of people who don't fall under a neat category of "white," "black," "Asian," etc. have sprung up. Americans have had to change their ideas about race and the systems by which they quantify it.

Finally, as we continue on this road of Progress and Plenty and Nice Cell Phones That Can Text Your Mom and Sing You Songs and Play You Videos and Make You Blueberry Pancakes, we notice uglier issues rearing their heads. Besides the problems of unstable governments, sexist, religious extremism, and genocide still existing in the world, there's a growing realization that our environment has developed a hacking cough.

Nuclear Power seemed the answer to the smog-clogged world Americans were noticing, but a meltdown at **Three-Mile Island**shocked everyone. Clouds of radioactive gas poured into the atmosphere. Was that area about to turn into Hiroshima? Today there is a new push to find alternate sources of power and fuel—especially because oil continues to be America's life blood, but other, rather unfriendly countries happen to be sitting right on our arteries.

The Canadian and Mexican economies didn't exactly worry Americans because of the threat they posed to consumers or business. Fact is, their economies weren't as ginormous as America's, so they weren't going to be serious competition. Plus, the agreement said nothing about an "open door." Nonetheless, Americans definitely felt threatened by the fact that labor there (especially Mexico) was way cheaper than in America. Would the American labor force be hurt because more people used foreign labor to manufacture their goods?