

INTRODUCTION

I was born into the crack that split America.

On one side of the chasm was the America my parents lived in. There, the country was still congratulating itself on winning the war after the War to End All Wars. Men wore suits and ties to work, or laborer's uniforms. Women wore stiletto heels, and kept themselves pure for marriage. Females did the housework, males did the heavy lifting. Blacks knew their place, whites knew theirs, and there wasn't much room between.

On the other side of the crack was the America I grew up in, bounded by anarchy and a passion for truth. In that America, all wars were meaningless, born out of governmental greed and disregard. Vietnam was just the latest in a series of events to help the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. People on my side of the crack wore colorful clothing and water buffalo sandals, made love not war, and believed in the family of man, unbounded by race, religion, or nationality. We lived through an adolescence tinged by the assassinations of those we held dear. We didn't know our place.

To my parent's generation, we had it all. They'd worked hard to give it to us, and they couldn't understand why we were busy throwing it away. What did we want? Didn't we have everything they'd longed for? The economy was booming. We were the strongest nation on earth. Why couldn't my generation just shut up and accept the good life we'd been given?

To our eyes, those things didn't mean as much as young soldiers dying in mosquito-infested jungles, or blacks being turned away at the voting booths. So despite our parents' love of silence, we never shut up. We marched, wrote polemics, started magazines, took over universities. And in between, we smoked a little pot, made a little love, and changed the world forever.

Like all good things, the halcyon days of the early 60's came to an end. Nixon came to power, and cast an ugly shadow over the fire of John F. Kennedy's memory. The women's movement disintegrated into half a dozen powerless fronts, as did the nascent gay rights movement. The peace movement was back-burnered when we pulled out of Viet Nam, and the civil rights movement fragmented with the death of Martin Luther King. Our parents were right: change is the only constant.

I was born into a country that would soon divide. In my parent's America, life was light and easy, and Mitch Miller ruled the airwaves. In my America, we lost all innocence, and pop music was king.

PROLOGUE

Nigger lover! Nigger lover! Nigger lover!

I was standing alone on a stage in Encino, California, halfway through the first verse of my song “Society’s Child.”

*Come to my door, baby
Face is clean and shining black as night
My mama went to answer
You know that you looked so fine
Now, I could understand the tears and the shame
She called you “Boy” instead of your name*

The problem had begun with a lone woman screaming out the words – *Nigger lover!* Then the people sitting around her had joined in, chanting as though they were at a religious service. They were even chanting in time to the song. “*Nigger lover! Nigger lover! beat beat beat beat Nigger lover! Nigger lover! beat beat beat beat.*” It was difficult to concentrate on keeping my own time.

The chant degenerated into yelling, twenty or thirty people in the sold out concert hall. I peered to the left, where the sound came from, and saw some of them beginning to rise. They were shaking their fists in the air as the rest of the audience looked on in stunned silence.

I was having a hit record.

I was singing for people who wanted me dead.

I was fifteen years old.

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