



The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s (American Century Series)

By David Farber



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In this book, David Farber grounds our understanding of the extraordinary history of the 1960s by linking the events of that era to our country's grand projects of previous decades. Farber's important study, based on years of research in archives and oral histories as well as in historical literature, explores Vietnam, the Civil Rights Act, the War on Poverty, the entertainment business, the drug culture, and much more.



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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Farber (Chicago '68) writes that "with President Kennedy's death, Americans confronted a grim reality: not all of America's possibilities were good." Following the country's unprecedented prosperity and world influence after WW II, the '60s were marked by emerging violence and discontent--the Watts riots, brutal political killings--the fearsome responses to shattered hopes. Farber sketches an arresting picture of a national midlife crisis recorded and disseminated in part by an infectious TV culture that, for the first time, provided the majority of Americans with their news, and hit an unlikely nerve with the ever popular story of a poor family making good-- The Beverly Hillbillies . Beatniks, Beatles, Timothy Leary and marijuana busts shared prime time with Vietnam, Mario Salvo's Free Speech movement, Black Power and the landmark Civil Rights Act (Lyndon Johnson reportedly said to segregationist Sen. Richard Russell, "get out of my way. I'm going to run over you"). The great dreams of the '60s, like Johnson's Great Society, collided with the explosive realities. With deft overview, Farber explores the many intertwined movements, including Kennedy's strident anti-communist election campaign that later contributed to his committing combat troops in Vietnam. Although the complex arts and letters get short shrift in favor of pop culture, and a sense of pastiche is inevitable, readers who lived through the '60s--or wish they did--will relish this work.

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From Library Journal

In this reasoned and readable survey of the momentous social and political events of the 1960s, historian Farber sympathetically looks at this period without rose-colored glasses, critically analyzing it without assigning blame. He treats the decade as a critical period of change--of creativity and chaos--that grew out of an increasingly consumer-oriented post-World War II, society reaching out to absorb all Americans. The civil rights revolution, the Vietnam War, the urban riots, the rise of rock music, the decade's rise and fall of the Great Society, and the assassinations are all woven together masterfully in a historical narrative that successfully communicates the era's zeitgeist. Especially interesting is Farber's final chapter explaining how the 1970s and the beginning of the Reagan era evolved from the burned-out fragments of the 1960s. A synthesis of late 20th-century American political and social history against which future books on the decade will be measured.

- *Jack Forman, Mesa Coll. Lib., San Diego*

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From [Booklist](#)

Farber's impressive overview of the U.S. in the 1960s represents a significant contribution to the scholarly analysis of an ever-intriguing decade. The author places the 1960s in proper historical context, defining that turbulent era as the logical extension and culmination of an earlier epoch that encompassed the Great Depression, World War II, and the postwar prosperity boom. As the U.S. attempted to adjust to an increasingly international role as a global superpower, the evolution of an extremely complex, consumer-oriented economy, and the emergence of a much stronger, more centralized federal government, an explosive political and cultural reaction proved to be all but inevitable. The domestic tensions and contradictions that were the natural by-product of that struggle generated a wave of social unrest that produced both the triumph and the tragedy of this paradoxical juncture in history. An insightful social chronicle. *Margaret Flanagan*

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