



# Venice West

*By John Arthur Maynard*



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**Venice West** By John Arthur Maynard

"A most remarkable book . . . a wonderful account of an odd and unlikely place where for a brief time a small number of people pursued a romantic vision of what a life dedicated to art should be like . . . a superb story."—William O'Neill, author of *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960*

The beatnik was born in Venice, California, in the 1950s. An imaginary figure in many respects—the invention of both the media and the people who played the beatnik role—the character quickly assumed nearly mythic proportions for the American public. Coffeehouses, beards, poetry, drugs, and free-wheeling sexuality were all associated with the beatnik, the quintessential rebel who, by rejecting material values, represented both a threat and an alluring alternative to the dominant middle-class culture.

In this fascinating book, John Arthur Maynard tells the story of the poets and promoters who invented the Beat Generation and who, in many cases, destroyed themselves in the process. In this look at the least remembered (but in its time, most publicized) beat enclave, Maynard focuses on two of Venice's most newsworthy residents—Lawrence Lipton and Stuart Z. Perkoff. Lipton began as a writer of popular detective stories and screenplays, but was determined to be recognized as a poet and social critic. He eventually published *The Holy Barbarians*, which helped to create the enduring public image of the beatnik. Stuart Perkoff was a more gifted poet; with fascination and horror, we follow his failed attempts to support his family, his heroin addiction, his first wife's courage and mental fragility, his sexual entanglements, his imprisonment, and the development of his own writing. Other characters who move in and out of the story are Kenneth Rexroth, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, as well as lesser-known poets, artists, hangers-on, and the many women who were rarely treated as full members of the community.

For most of the 1950s, the Venice beatniks were able to live and work in isolation. Once the media decided that beats made good copy, however, their peace was shattered. Reporters, drug dealers, violent criminals, and would-be beatniks invaded Venice in such force that many "square" residents began an unrelenting campaign to purge their community of bohemianism. This campaign persisted long after the beats, who tended to ignore politics, had yielded the stage to a new generation of political activists. In this collective biography, based largely on unpublished sources, Maynard tells us how these events affected public perceptions and the beats' own perceptions of themselves.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

In the late 1950s, Venice was southern California's answer to Greenwich Village and North Beach. Maynard interweaves the bohemian colony's history with the lives of its two most prominent literary denizens: Stuart Perkoff and Lawrence Lipton. Perkoff, the quintessential beat poet, lived simply, took drugs, and was dedicated to his muse. Lipton, despite his rabid rejection of materialism, seemed doomed to become its victim. His book, *The Holy Barbarians*, brought a wave of publicity that all but drowned the real concerns of the beat movement, shifting the focus of attention from beats to beatniks. Maynard's book, begun as a dissertation, is meticulously researched and a pleasure to read. A major work on bohemianism, this is highly recommended.

- William Gargan, *Brooklyn Coll. Lib., CUNY*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Ponderously serious book about a California cult upheaval that prefigured the better-known rage of hippie bohemianism. Applying the full academic treatment, self-described historian Maynard, a Californian, delivers a defeating book that seems always to be promising a breakthrough for its beatnik subjects--and yet releases them only in death. There are some fast pages midway where the beatniks of Venice West attain a single season in the sun, but the public appetite for fads moves on, and the town goes into a long, lingering death rattle that cannot lift Maynard's literary sociology into brilliance and great humor. Venice was founded in 1905 ``as a genteel retreat for esthetically-minded Los Angeles businessmen" and quickly became ``the Coney Island of the West." The ocean-front town was built in imitation of Venice, Italy, with a Grand Canal, Bridge of Sighs, miles of canals, and imported Venetian gondolas. It was much in decay by the late 1950's (Orson Welles used it as the vile bordertown in 1958's *Touch of Evil*), when Lawrence Lipton was readying his research on his fellow Venice bohemians, to be called *The Holy Barbarians*. Lipton--who seems to have been an oddly repulsive fellow--surrounded himself with callow, unformed poets, wanted to make a big statement of his opinions, and chose to ride his friends as a hobbyhorse for his breast-beating and tub-thumping. Alas for Lipton, the Kerouac/Ginsberg axis stole much of his thunder, and Venice West never achieved quite the recognition of Haight Ashbury. Despite some early ink in *Life* magazine and time on TV, which suddenly threw a hot spotlight on Venice, the town soon closed up as a beat enclave and its greatest literary lights (dim bulbs all) could not survive drugs, cancer, madness, or old age. What should have been a lively, eccentric book wilts under a pall of dreary sociology. -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

About the Author

John Arthur Maynard is a historian who lives in Simi Valley in southern California.

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Jeffrey Sandoval:**

Often the book Venice West will bring one to the new experience of reading any book. The author style to clarify the idea is very unique. In case you try to find new book to see, this book very suited to you. The book Venice West is much recommended to you to study. You can also get the e-book in the official web

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**Tom Johnson:**

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**Sharon Clayton:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent that they free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity here is look different you can read the book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a book. The book Venice West it is quite good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book provides high quality.

**Ricky Bodkin:**

People live in this new day of lifestyle always aim to and must have the spare time or they will get great deal of stress from both daily life and work. So , when we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely sure. People is human not really a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to you actually of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading guides. It can be your alternative inside spending your spare time, typically the book you have read is Venice West.

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