



# What Really Happened to the 1960s: How Mass Media Culture Failed American Democracy

*By Edward P. Morgan*

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## What Really Happened to the 1960s: How Mass Media Culture Failed American Democracy By Edward P. Morgan

Wherever we turn these days, we encounter reminders of the sixties. They're invoked in presidential campaigns, American military actions, and outbursts of mass protest. We're bombarded with media-saturated anniversaries of iconic events, from JFK's inauguration (and assassination) to urban riots and Woodstock. But as Edward Morgan suggests, these references offer little more than an endless stream of distracting imagery that has more to do with today's politics and economics than with the reality of yesterday's social movements.

In his provocative look at mass media's connection with those turbulent years, Morgan simultaneously seeks to explain what happened in the 1960s and what happened to how we remember it. His comprehensive overview and critical analysis reveal how the mass media have shaped the popular image of a raucous decade in ways that have curtailed its promise of democracy.

Morgan's in-depth study of sixties social movements and their depictions in corporate America's print media, film, and television helps to explain why the past still provokes deep emotions—even antagonism—half a century later. He blends history, sociology, political science, media and cultural studies, and critical theory to explain why the 1960s have been so virulently targeted, particularly by critics on the right who blame today's self-indulgent culture on baby boomers and "sixties permissiveness" instead of the real culprits: consumer-driven capitalism and neoliberal politics.

Emphasizing the tensions between capitalism and democracy, Morgan investigates the fate of democracy in our media-driven culture, first by examining the ways that the 1960s were represented in the media at the time, then by exploring how popular versions of the sixties have glossed over their more radically democratic qualities in favor of sensationalism and ideological constructions. He reminds us of what really happened—then shows us how the media trivialized and satirized those events, co-opting and commercializing the decade's legacy and, in doing so, robbing it of its more radical, democratic potential.

By revisiting this chapter of the past, Morgan shows that it has much to tell us about where we are today and how we got here. Whether you lived through the sixties or only read about them—or only saw Hollywood's version of them in *Forrest Gump*—this book will put their lessons in clearer perspective.

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#### Review

"Morgan demonstrates that while the mainstream media has been obsessed with the 1960s, its portrayal has consistently stressed the sensational and violent aspects of that decade while downplaying two of its most important components: a sense of hope that society could be changed and the sense that the basic social, economic, and political structures of American society, in particular the power of corporate capitalism, were at the heart of our problems. . . . Sophisticated, provocative, and convincing."—**Robert Justin Goldstein**, author of *Political Repression in Modern American* "This important book provides an illuminating historical overview, critical analysis, and appraisal of the 1960s. Drawing upon historical and media studies, theories of capitalism and democracy, and in-depth study of the era's social movements, Morgan provides an extremely comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the events and aftermath of the 1960s. Based on highly impressive research, his study should appeal to a large audience interested in how that decade's more radical spirit continues to live on in our society."—**Douglas Kellner**, author of *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy and Media Culture*

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#### About the Author

Edward P. Morgan is University Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Lehigh University and author of *The Sixties Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America*.

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