



# What Really Happened to the 1960s

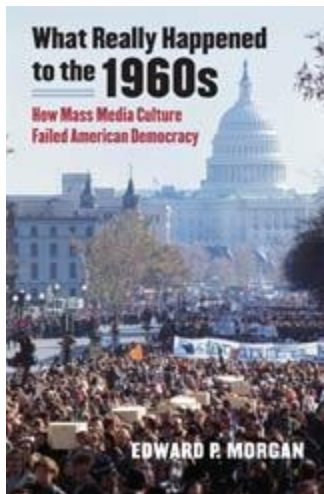
## How Mass Media Culture Failed American Democracy

Edward P. Morgan

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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.

"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*

"In this sophisticated and provocative analysis, 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. Such an approach, Morgan convincingly demonstrates, has helped to create a society in which the mass of the population feels ever more hopeless, alienated, and disconnected from one another, in which our fundamental problems can never even be addressed, much less solved."

**Robert Justin Goldstein**, author of *Political Repression in Modern America* and *Flag Burning and Free Speech*

"By detailing how our historical memory and images of the sixties differ in

major respects from what actually happened, Ted Morgan has produced a case study of the past that teaches us a great deal about contemporary political discourse. He shows how the mainstream mass media, in its norms and practices, simultaneously promotes—but also limits and contains—democratic engagement.”

**William A. Gamson**, author of *The Strategy of Social Protest*

“Political scripts left behind by the corrosive cultural convulsions of the 1960s and 1970s, endlessly depicted and recast by the mass media, are recoded as self-satire, corporate backlash, institutional failure, generational conflict, belligerent discourse, televised violence, and distrusted authority. Morgan’s analysis is a valuable exploration for anyone interested in how the workings of mass media and popular culture in America since the 1960s led us to where we are today.”

**Timothy W. Luke**, author of *Screens of Power: Ideology, Resistance, and Domination in Informational Society*

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

### **Table of Contents**

1. The Past as Prologue: Distorted History – Declining Democracy
2. Roots of the Sixties: Contradictions between Capitalism and Democracy in Postwar America
3. An Awakening Democratic Dialectic: From Action to Empowerment in the 1960s
4. Race, Class, and Gender: The Boundaries of Legitimate Media Discourse
5. Vietnam and the Spheres of Media Discourse
6. Visual Drama: The Power of the Image
7. System Response: Generational Hype and Political Backlash
8. Media, Militancy, and Violence: The Making of the “Bad Sixties”
9. Domesticating the Sixties: Capitalism’s Cultural Co-optation
10. Reconstructing the Past, Constructing the Future: Corporate Backlash and the Reagan Revolution
11. The “Sixties” Nostalgia Market and the Culture of Self-Satire
12. Cultural Politics and Warlike Discourse
13. Media Culture and the Future of Democracy