

## Reader's Guide

**M**any Americans realized by the middle of the 1960s that their nation was going through a period of intense change and disruption. The decade had begun in relative peace, with the election of a vibrant, young president, John F. Kennedy, a Democrat. Yet Kennedy faced several key issues that would come to define the decade. First, he clashed with the Soviet Union over the spread of communist influence in Europe and in Cuba. Then, he also faced domestic tensions as the civil rights movement in the South grew increasingly intense and even violent. When Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963, the nation was shocked and saddened, for they had invested great hopes in Kennedy.

Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, struggled with the existing tensions and new pressures as well. He had an ambitious agenda for domestic policies that he called the Great Society, which included passing civil rights legislation, using federal funds to wage a "war on poverty," and creating programs to support public education, housing, and jobs. He succeeded in passing many of his programs. But Johnson's political career was undone by American involvement in the expanding war in Viet-

nam, which American combat troops entered in 1965. A powerful grassroots movement rose up against the war, and its dramatic demonstrations helped turn public sentiment against the war. Johnson did not seek reelection in 1968. Republican Richard M. Nixon won a hard-fought election by promising to return law and order to what he depicted as an unruly nation.

Domestic and international politics were not the only source of high drama in the 1960s. The colorful hippie subculture emerged as a growing youth movement, bringing changes in music, education, fashion, art, and other areas of culture. Thanks to television, American sports became more commercial and more dramatic, and American sports figures like Muhammad Ali, Vince Lombardi, and Joe Namath became important cultural figures. Riots in major cities and the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy caused many Americans to worry about rising violence in their society. An increase in sexual content in books and movies, as well as a new openness about homosexuality at the end of the decade, raised worries about declining morality. There was, of course, much, much more, as changes in one area of American society encouraged or clashed with other movements and trends.

The dramatic, stirring, and sometimes violent events of the 1960s make it an important decade for students to study in their quest to understand American society as it exists today. Many aspects of American culture in the 2000s can be traced back to that era. In some ways, the 1960s are still close at hand. Classic rock radio stations continue to play music from the decade. In fact, The Beatles remain one of the top-selling bands, just as they were in the 1960s. Fashion trends introduced in the 1960s—bell-bottoms and paisley fabric, for example—make periodic comebacks. Politicians continue to refer to the legacy of President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to inspire audiences. Political leaders and activists also point to the lessons of the Vietnam War to help Americans understand foreign policy. Many Americans who experienced the 1960s firsthand are in positions of power in American society in the 2000s, and their experiences of that decade inform their actions.

In some ways, however, the 1960s can seem quite distant. For example, during that era, television was still a rela-

tively new phenomenon. Nightly coverage of war on television was something new to Americans. In addition, the Cold War (1945–91) between the United States and the Soviet Union—and the threat of nuclear war—informed every decision about foreign policy. And, sexuality, especially homosexuality, was never discussed in polite company, much less on television. One of the features that make this decade so fascinating is the fact that the 1960s are so close, yet so far away.

*The Sixties in America: Biographies* contains twenty-six biographies of men and women who played crucial roles in the social, cultural, and political developments of the 1960s. Readers will find coverage of the most notable figures of the decade, including John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Essays are also provided on a number of lesser-known though no less interesting figures, including labor activist Dolores Huerta, atheist activist Madalyn Murray O’Hair, scientist Frances Oldham Kelsey, feminist author and activist Betty Friedan, and Native-American activist Richard Oakes, who led a takeover of Alcatraz Island.

## Features

The entries in *The Sixties in America: Biographies* contain sidebar boxes that highlight topics of special interest related to the profiled individual. Each entry also offers a list of additional sources that students can go to for more information. More than fifty black-and-white photographs help illustrate the material. The volume begins with a timeline of important events in the history of the 1960s and a “Words to Know” section that introduces students to difficult or unfamiliar terms. The volume concludes with a general bibliography and a subject index so students can easily find the people, places, and events discussed throughout *The Sixties in America: Biographies*.

## Sixties in America Reference Library

*The Sixties in America: Biographies* is only one component of the three-part U•X•L Sixties in America Reference Library. The other two titles in this set are:

- *The Sixties in America: Almanac* (one volume) presents, in fifteen chapters, a comprehensive overview of events

that occurred within the United States during the 1960s. The introduction asks readers to consider the themes that make the decade worthy of study. This includes: the unfolding dramas of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and anti-war movement; the expansion of the federal government under Democratic presidents; the birth of a counterculture and its impact on American entertainment; and a variety of other cultural developments. These issues and others are considered closely in the thematic chapters that follow. Finally, the conclusion asks readers to consider the extent to which the experiences and events of the 1960s shaped American society in the years that followed. The volume contains more than seventy black-and-white photographs as well as a list of further readings related to the topic.

- ***The Sixties in America: Primary Sources*** (one volume) tells the story of the 1960s in the words of the people who lived and shaped the decade. The volume gives readers firsthand contact with some of the key documents of the era, including material pertaining to the civil rights movement, the formation of U.S. policy in Vietnam, the growth of the anti-war movement, the rise of feminism and the women's movement, and the emergence of television as a cultural force in the United States. Also included are expressions of political radicalism from such diverse groups and individuals as the Students for a Democratic Society, Young Americans for Freedom, Barry Goldwater, and the Yippies. Some of these primary sources use specialized or complex language, so efforts have been made to place these documents in context as well as define terms that may be otherwise inaccessible to young readers. The volume contains more than sixty black-and-white photographs as well as a list of further readings related to the topic.
- A cumulative index of all three titles in the U•X•L Sixties in America Reference Library is also available.

### **Special Thanks**

The authors wish to thank the following talented and dedicated individuals for aiding in the creation of *The Sixties in America* Reference Library. At U•X•L, Allison McNeill has

been the ideal editor for this set, pointing out pitfalls to avoid while ably steering us toward creating books that would best serve an audience of young readers. Special thanks also go to the skilled writers who contributed to the *Biographies* volume: Rob Edelman, Tina Gianoulis, Audrey Kupferberg, Mary Le Rouge, and Chris Routledge.

The authors note that work on this book was both enriched and complicated by the growing and diverse body of historical knowledge that exists on the 1960s. The 1960s may be considered a part of the distant past to many of the readers of this book, but many of those who have written about the period lived through it or, in the case of the authors of this book, had parents who lived through it. It was such a dramatic, eventful decade that those with direct experience have not always seen it clearly. As such, the authors have tried to develop an approach to the decade that is without undue bias, though it may take another generation before the decade is seen clearly.

### **Comments and Suggestions**

We welcome your comments on *The Sixties in America: Biographies* and suggestions for other topics to consider. Please write: Editors, *The Sixties in America: Biographies*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Rd. Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535; call toll free: 1-800-877-4253; fax to (248) 699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.com>.

# Words to Know

## A

**activist:** A person who campaigns vigorously for or against a political, social, or economic issue.

**authentic:** True to one's spirit or character. In the 1960s, the idea of being authentic was important to many young people because they considered the behavior of their parents to be inauthentic or something that compromised their own values.

## B

**black nationalism:** An ideology held among militant groups of American blacks that called for the formation of self-governing black communities that were separate from those of whites.

**Black Power:** A movement among American blacks to gain economic and political rights and improve their social condition.

