

Reader's Guide

Many 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 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 many Americans 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: Primary Sources tells the story of the 1960s in the words of the people who lived and shaped the decade. Approximately twenty-five excerpted and full-text documents provide a wide range of perspectives on this period of history. Included are excerpts from political speeches and proclamations; manifestos from civil rights groups and antiwar protesters; influential books of the era; magazine articles; and reflections by individuals who lived through the tumultuous times.

Format

The excerpts in *The Sixties in America: Primary Sources* are divided into six chapters. Each of the chapters focuses on a specific theme: The Struggle for Civil Rights, Feminist Perspectives, The War in Vietnam, The Antiwar Movement, “The Times They Are a Changin’”: Radicals on the Left and Right, and Debating the Power of Television. Every chapter opens with a historical overview, followed by reprinted documents.

Each excerpt (or section of excerpts) includes the following additional features:

- **Introductory material** places the document and its author in a historical context.
- **Things to remember while reading** offers important background information about the featured text.
- **Excerpt** presents the document in its original spelling and format.
- **What happened next...** discusses the impact of the document and/or relevant historical events following the date of the document.
- **Did you know...** provides interesting facts about the document and its author.

- **Consider the following...** poses questions about the material for the reader to consider.
- **For More Information** offers resources for further study of the document and its author as well as sources used by the authors in writing the material.

Other features of *The Sixties in America: Primary Sources* include sidebar boxes highlighting interesting, related information. More than sixty black-and-white photos illustrate the text. In addition, each excerpt is accompanied by a glossary running in the margin alongside the reprinted document that defines terms, people, and ideas. The volume begins with a timeline of events and a “Words to Know” section, and concludes with a general bibliography and subject index of people, places, and events discussed throughout *The Sixties in America: Primary Sources*.

The Sixties in America Reference Library

The Sixties in America: Primary Sources 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 antiwar 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 Sixties in America: Biographies* (one volume) presents the life stories of twenty-six 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.

- 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 U•X•L's Allison McNeill for being 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.

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: Primary Sources* and suggestions for other topics to consider. Please write: Editors, *The Sixties in America: Primary Sources*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Rd., Farmington Hills, Michigan 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.

