



1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterulture, and the Shaping of a Generation

Charles Kaiser

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1968 in America is the tumultuous, comic, tragic, outrageous story of the year that changed a nation.

Nineteen sixty-eight has come to be recognized as the pivotal year in a period of nearly unprecedented change and upheaval—a year that witnessed the turning point of the Vietnam War and the Tet offensive; the shattering assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy; the near-breakdown of the Democratic National Convention—and, some thought, of the American political system itself. It was also the year in which the disparate strands of a growing youth culture burst forth upon the national consciousness, manifesting itself in a variety of ways—from ground-breaking records by the Beatles, Aretha Franklin, Simon and Garfunkel, and the Rolling Stones; to an explosion of student and radical unrest unlike anything this country had ever seen.

Much has been written about the sixties, but no one has yet captured the mixture of heady exuberance and sheer desperation that characterized these twelve months. Now Charles Kaiser, former journalist for Newsweek and The New York Times and himself a member of the generation that was irrevocably transformed by 1968, has written a work that at once flawlessly recreates, celebrates, and demythologizes this much-eulogized time. Here is the first book to speak with equal conviction, and equal authority, about such diverse figures and concerns as Martin Luther King and Timothy Leary; Janis Joplin and Richard Daley; the reasons behind Lyndon Johnson's refusal to run for reelection and those pushing Bob Dylan toward electric music; the impact on Vietnam of John Kennedy's death and the way sex, drugs, and rock and roll became a generation's bywords; the Columbia gymnasium as a catalyst for student revolt and the autodestruction of Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign.

Largely based on unpublished interviews and documents (including in-depth conversations with McCarthy and Dylan, among many others, and the late Theodore White's archives, to which the author had sole access), with the honesty and directness that were sixties hallmarks and the compulsive readability of classic social history, 1968 in America is the definitive study of a year when nothing could be taken for granted, and when America suddenly found its comfortable assumptions put on trial.

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