



# America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s

By Maurice Isserman, Michael Kazin

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*America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, Fifth Edition, is the definitive interpretive survey of the political, social, and cultural history of 1960s America. Written by two top experts on the era--Maurice Isserman, a historian of American radicalism, and Michael Kazin, a specialist in social movements--this book provides a compelling tale of this tumultuous era filled with fresh and persuasive insights.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Historians (and former 1960s radicals) Isserman (If I Had a Hammer) and Kazin (The Populist Persuasion) mount an intermittently convincing reinterpretation of the 1960s. They start off strong with the Civil War Centennial Commission's remarkable decision to avoid any mention of slavery or emancipation in its five-year-long celebrationA vividly illustrating America's forced "normalcy" as the decade began. But they go on to present an erratic vision of the decade. For instance, they inexplicably relegate the huge 1963 March on Washington to a brief mention. And the popular song "Louie Louie" merits a longer discussion than such critical texts and events as SDS's Port Huron statement and the Supreme Court's Griswold decision. Further, they artificially separate their discussion of politics, culture and spiritualityA three strands that were intimately linked in the era. The authors' revisionist take does offer some useful correctives, for instance, to the false notions that the War on Poverty was a massive giveaway program and that in the '60s liberalism held sway ("Of the three main branches of the federal government, liberals held the commanding heights... in only one branch, the judiciary... liberalism was neither sufficiently coherent as a political philosophy nor sufficiently well organized as a political movement, to realize many ambitions"). But the dearth of historical analysis of the "why" of this situation will leave many readers unsatisfied. In short, this is a sometimes useful if tepid and occasionally odd corrective to more lopsided views of the '60s. Photos. (Nov.)

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### **From Library Journal**

Isserman (If I Had a Hammer) and Kazin (The Populist Persuasion) are two of the keenest practitioners of the history of American people's politics. Both came of age in the 1960s, and each has a genetic link, respectively, to the Old Left and the grand liberal tradition of the 1930s. No better-suited collaborators could join to offer a history of the American Sixties. But while the book they offer is commendably balanced, the authors have not written a definitive text. Oddly, they cover most penetratingly terrain already well trod by more staid scholars: conventional electoral politics, Vietnam, the four presidencies, the assassinations. Their most important contribution comes in demonstrating the rise not only of a New Left but a new and persistent Right. By contrast, their writing on the advent of the counterculture, movement politics, and especially urban black nationalism is familiar and too brief. The authors seem to be aiming this book at the undergraduate survey-course marketA each reference to Jim Crow is accompanied by a parenthetical definitionA and apparently decided to economize on the very subjects still most unsettled by conventional wisdom.

Nevertheless, this is recommended for academic, secondary school, and public libraries. A Scott H.

Silverman, Bryn Mawr Coll. Lib., PA

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### **From Booklist**

Your shelves may already have a book or two by Kazin (of Georgetown University) and Isserman (from Hamilton College); both have authored several thoughtful historical studies. Here, they address the "civil war" they participated in: the 1960s. Their volume is a solid survey, with chapters devoted to obvious subjects (the civil rights movement, the Great Society, Vietnam and the antiwar movement, the New Left, youth culture, other liberation movements), but also several chapters on particular years (1963, 1965, 1968) that dramatize the *multiple* events Americans had to deal with almost simultaneously. One major focus of Isserman and Kazin's book is demonstrating that the era's notable political developments included activism among young people on both the right and the left; another is an exploration of the search many Americans undertook for a more authentic spirituality: a search that led seekers to every form of religion, from

fundamental Christianity to liberation theology to Eastern religions and New Age belief. *America Divided* thus resists easy generalizations, elucidating a confusing time in all its complexity. *Mary Carroll*

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