

# The 60s

Wow, that was really heavy, a real bumner. No, that vernacular of the day is just too peaceful for responding to Herbert London's venomous assault on the 60s (July 16, The 60s: portrait of a counterfeit era). So, I guess I'd have to go with: the worst form of pseudo socio-analytical drivel I've read since the 60s. The frustrated whining of a wannabe, whose Young Republican meetings conflicted with all those weekly love-ins? As if he would have been invited.

First, let me make one thing perfectly clear: having been there, I do not wane nostalgic for the 60s. That was then and this is, well, something else. The 60s were both significant and silly. (Left: Karen and Danny Pietrodangelo back then.)



But to characterize – no vilify – an entire decade as one big, meaningless drug-stupefied orgy is about as moronic as saying the 50s were just about sockhops in Pleasantville and the 70s no more than coke-frenzied disco.

Too frequently – and too easily – those who partook of the 60s and early 70s are homogenized, by those who didn't, into one big glassy-eyed, bushy-haired, tie-dyed, bell-bottomed, shirtless, debaucherous flower child. Yes, some of those were there. Or, if that character doesn't raise enough ire, the antiwar building-bombing, red book-waving, Uncle Ho-loving, soldier-spitting, mega horn shouting radical is equally popular. Yes, some of those too. (Rarely, if ever, one and the same person.)

No Professor London, you clearly missed the decade and the point if “All You Need Is Love” is the best you can do for a thematic synopsis of the decade that brought us Martin Luther King and the Kennedys; Birmingham, Watts and Chicago; My Lai and the Hanoi Hilton; Richard Speck and Richard Nixon. How about “The Whole World Is Watching?”

Analysts like London give the decade far too much – and too little – credit. Sex, drugs and rock and roll weren't invented in the 60s. They were just a response.

Call it a cliché, but mostly for the better, and occasionally for the worse, the decade had far-reaching effects on once-sacred norms. As a result, what were then disquieting ideas and attitudes, furthered and fostered by 60s activism – on human equality, social responsibility and self-expression – are considered no more than blandly, routine now.

Women, minorities and the disenfranchised were, and have since been, beneficiaries of the perspectives, policies and social consciousness that evolved in the 60s. I have four sisters, two older, two younger, who grew up on both sides of the decade. The opportunities and attitudes each set of sisters experienced were very, very different.

And, I never saw nor heard of anyone spitting on a soldier. Rather, the worse I saw was disquieting avoidance between those who served and those, who by chance or chicanery, didn't. Perhaps antiwar protests did not directly end the war in Southeast Asia. But the echoes of Vietnam have no doubt tempered US military involvement since, in Central America, Bosnia, Somalia, the Caribbean, and most recently in South American.

The student activists, soldiers, hippies, intellectuals, Krishnas and, yes, Young Republicans have moved on – some still true believers – to be middle-aged community activists, environmentalists, corporate raiders, NYU professors and unindicted co-conspirators. Oh, and let's not forget, president.

Did we change the world? Of course. What generation hasn't?