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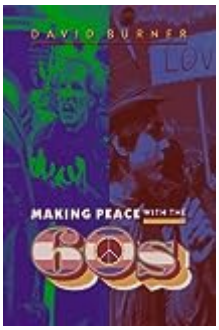

David Burner. *Making Peace With The 60s.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 295 pp. $28.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-691-05953-2; $42.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-02660-2.

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Born in 1937, David Burner is both an observer and scholar of the subject of his new book, *Making Peace With The 60s*. Coming of age during the triumph of New Deal liberalism, Burner enters his sixties by wondering aloud what the 1960s did to destroy the promise of the liberalism of his youth. Thus, Burner's monograph is a "selective" essay on the "temper of liberalism and the character of radicalism" during the decade of the sixties.

Making Peace With The 60s is not a general history of the period but a series of extensive essays that examines the challenge which confronted the liberal coalition established by Franklin Roosevelt three decades earlier. Burner defines this New Deal liberalism as a concern for civil liberties and "at least" a mild interest in civil rights. To accomplish their goals, the liberal coalition of the 1930s trusted the investigative methods of the academy and the administrative capacities of government while relying upon the good will of the people to act as the final arbitrator of policy. Created during the Depression, the New Deal liberal coalition was a series of "ideas in action."

If nothing else, the 1960s were a time of action. The action, however, was not from the top down, as the New Deal programs of the depression were, but from the bottom up. Community based actions like the Civil Rights movement, the Anti-War movement, and the Counter-Culture movement were outside the control of administrative elites in the nation's capital or the nation's colleges. What action should be taken, how, and for what reason became a debate between the old-line liberals and their younger, more radically-inclined children. In particular, Burner argues, the fundamental disagreement was over the "character of moral action."

The catalyst for this debate was, of course, the Civil Rights movement. At first, liberals endorsed the goal of the movement and approved of the strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience. But when groups like S.N.C.C. and C.O.R.E. implemented nonviolent direct action, and passion replaced the traditional liberal virtues of cool restraint and sobriety, the liberal coalition withdrew its support as evidenced by its handling of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic convention of 1964. Within four years, the Baptist preacher Martin Luther King, Jr. was replaced by the paramilitary firebrand Huey Newton on America's television screens. By the early 1970s, white middle-class Americans, confused by court-ordered busing and affirmative action programs which occurred as a sudden economic downturn began, retreated to their personal concerns and avoided the political issues of the movement. Burner's discussion of this retreat, "Killers of the Dream," is perhaps the best short analysis currently available about the relationship

between white liberals and black activists in the post-civil rights era.

Among the personal concerns white middle class Americans focused upon by the early 1970s was the fact that their sons might go to Vietnam and, worse yet, die there. Cold War liberals increasingly found themselves on the defensive as, year after year, the boys did not come home for Christmas. Burner sums up the liberal confusion over Vietnam nicely by pointing out that the problem was "the ingrained liberal habit of combining action and restraint that allowed neither retreat nor decisive engagement." Thus, the war went on with no particular policy in place to either win or withdraw from the conflict. The war exposed the problem of a policy of containment: you play to a draw. Americans like to win, and far too many young Americans had died for a tie. The Anti-War movement increased in number and passion as the number of casualties increased. Once again as with the Civil Rights movement, the war was measured in moral terms, not the realities of diplomatic give and take. Ironically, of course, two decades after American troops withdrew from Vietnam, the Soviet Union withdrew from the playing fields of the Cold War. The victory for Cold War liberals was a hollow one, however, as by then their liberal coalition had collapsed, and the Reagan Republicans proclaimed themselves both political and diplomatic victors.

The Republican ascendancy was, in large measure the result of their challenging the actions of the sixties activists, especially the Counter-Culture movement. The rejection of mainstream middle-class values by those under the age of thirty receives less attention from Burner than warranted by the movement. In a chapter entitled "The Rucksack Revolution," Burner discusses the origins of the Beats and their influence on the activists of the early 1960s. But his discussion is uneven, and he fails to place it within the context of his ongoing conversation about the demise of liberalism. In addition, Burner makes the same error as other scholars, by emphasizing the works of the likes of Gary Snyder and books like *Naked Lunch*. Although Snyder and *Naked Lunch* were much discussed, they were little read, especially by the kids. Instead, the more influential and more widely-read books of J.D. Salinger and Kurt Vonnegut should receive attention. Their literary merits may be questioned by some, but they were the books that the "hippies" felt had something serious to say. For a better introduction to the influences which shaped the Counter-Culture, the reader may wish to consult Terry Anderson's *The Movement and the Sixties*.

Burner's discussion about campus unrest is also problematic. The chapter focuses on two events: the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the student strike at Columbia. Unfortunately, four years separate these events from one another, and during that time, America itself had changed dramatically. Far too little is mentioned about the events between 1964 and 1968 to make his discussion relevant to the reader. And although both campuses received considerable media attention, similar events took place at mid-level state universities, suggesting that student unrest was not an elitist affectation.

The same qualifications must be mentioned regarding his chapter on poverty. Although Burner's analysis is thought provoking, twenty-one pages hardly provides the space needed to discuss adequately the complexities of the intentions and results of the Great Society programs of Lyndon Johnson. Irwin Unger's *The Best of Intentions: The Triumph and Failure of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon* is the best starting point for those interested in America's discovery of poverty and the country's attempts to eliminate it.

Burner closes the book with a thoughtful epilogue that might better have served the reader as an introduction. His suggestion that the New Deal liberals' vision of America as a "commonwealth at work" and that one's identity "comes of self-discovery and self-making" would have established a better context for the reader if placed at the beginning–not the end–of the book. Finally, Burner's conclusion that now "your identity is assigned from the beginning, its treasury of merits and its entitlements assured to you if your sex, race or ethnic group has been historically oppressed," although perhaps accurate, was expressed better by Arthur Schlesinger in his essay "The Disuniting of America" and is too weak a final statement for the book's original ambitions.

Making Peace With The 60s, however, would serve as an excellent catalyst for a graduate seminar on the period. Burner's chapter on the demise of the Civil Rights movement and the liberals' war in Vietnam, combined with David Steigerwald's *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* would create an interesting discussion on the legacy of the sixties for America. Finally, Burner's seventy-one page bibliographic essay should be mandatory for graduate students needing an introduction to the literature of the period.