

Do you really remember the sixties?

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New research suggests that the sixties was not really the decade of peace, love and understanding that people generally remember.

Instead, Professor Gerard DeGroot claims that the decade was as much marked by 'mindless mayhem, shallow commercialism and unbridled cruelty' as it was by wearing flowers in your hair and loving your fellow man.

In a new book, the University of St Andrews' researcher attempts to rewrite the history books and capture 'the real spirit of the sixties' that is generally lost in the mists of nostalgia. Out this week, *The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade*, suggests an alternative view of the decade best known as a time for free love. The new research restores to the hippy era the `prevalent disorder and inconvenient truths that longing, wistfulness, and distance have obscured from memory'.

The historian claims that nostalgia can create a distorted view of history as it 'strives to impose order on memory and value on mayhem'.

He said, "We remember the Sixties for sex, drugs and rock and roll. The 1960s is a decade often seen through a rose-tinted lens: an era when the young would not only rule the world but change it, too, for the better. Books and films about the decade tend invariably to reinforce that image. But is such fond nostalgia really merited?"

"How many of us, reflecting on those times, think about Sharpeville, the

Six Day War, starvation in Biafra, mass murder in Jakarta or the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which was undoubtedly one of the worst atrocities of the 20th Century? Forty years after the summer of love, it is possible to focus more clearly on what actually took place."

Far from being a decade of opening doors, Professor DeGroot claims that it was, rather, a time when real opportunities for liberal progress were destroyed by a generation of protesters in 'thrall to violence and in love with their television image'.

"The survival of the Sixties myth says something about the resilience of our spirit, if not about the reality of our world", he continued. "The decade brought flowers, music, love and good times. It also brought hatred, murder, greed, dangerous drugs, needless deaths, ethnic cleansing, neo-colonialist exploitation, soundbite politics, sensationalism, a warped sense of equality, a bizarre notion of freedom, the decline of liberalism and the end of innocence. Bearing all that in mind, the decade should seem neither unfamiliar nor all that wonderful."

The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade by Professor Gerard DeGroot is published by Macmillan.

Source: University of St Andrews

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