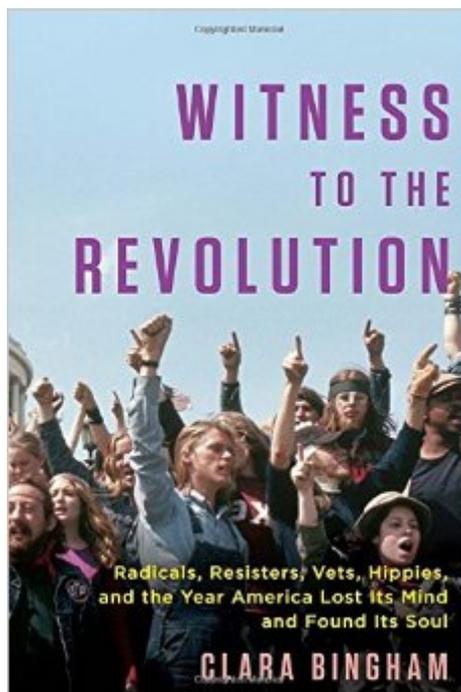


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Witness To The Revolution: Radicals, Resisters, Vets, Hippies, And The Year America Lost Its Mind And Found Its Soul



Synopsis

The electrifying story of the turbulent year when the sixties ended and America teetered on the edge of revolution. As the 1960s drew to a close, the United States was coming apart at the seams. From August 1969 to August 1970, the nation witnessed nine thousand protests and eighty-four acts of arson or bombings at schools across the country. It was the year of the My Lai massacre investigation, the Cambodia invasion, Woodstock, and the Moratorium to End the War. The American death toll in Vietnam was approaching fifty thousand, and the ascendant counterculture was challenging nearly every aspect of American society. *Witness to the Revolution*, Clara Bingham's unique oral history of that tumultuous time, unveils anew that moment when America careened to the brink of a civil war at home, as it fought a long, futile war abroad. Woven together from one hundred original interviews, *Witness to the Revolution* provides a firsthand narrative of that period of upheaval in the words of those closest to the action—the activists, organizers, radicals, and resisters who manned the barricades of what Students for a Democratic Society leader Tom Hayden called “the Great Refusal.” We meet Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn of the Weather Underground; Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department employee who released the Pentagon Papers; feminist theorist Robin Morgan; actor and activist Jane Fonda; and many others whose powerful personal stories capture the essence of an era. We witness how the killing of four students at Kent State turned a straitlaced social worker into a hippie, how the civil rights movement gave birth to the women's movement, and how opposition to the war in Vietnam turned college students into prisoners, veterans into peace marchers, and intellectuals into bombers. With lessons that can be applied to our time, *Witness to the Revolution* is more than just a record of the death throes of the Age of Aquarius. Today, when America is once again enmeshed in racial turmoil, extended wars overseas, and distrust of the government, the insights contained in this book are more relevant than ever. Praise for *Witness to the Revolution*—“Especially for younger generations who didn't live through it, *Witness to the Revolution* is a valuable and entertaining primer on a moment in American history the likes of which we may never see again.”—Bryan Burrough, *The Wall Street Journal*—“A gripping oral history of the centrifugal social forces tearing America apart at the end of the '60s . . . This is rousing reportage from the front lines of US history.”—O: The Oprah Magazine—“The familiar voices and the unfamiliar ones are woven together with documents to make this a surprisingly powerful and moving book.”—*New York Times Book Review*—“An] Enthralling and brilliant chronology of the period between August 1969 and September 1970.”—*Buffalo News*—“[Bingham] captures the essence of these fourteen months through the words of movement organizers, vets, students, draft resisters, journalists, musicians, government

agents, writers, and others. . . . This oral history will enable readers to see that era in a new light and with fresh sympathy for the motivations of those involved. While Bingham's is one of many retrospective looks at that period, it is one of the most immediate and personal.âBooklist

Book Information

Hardcover: 656 pages

Publisher: Random House (May 31, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812993187

ISBN-13: 978-0812993189

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsâ See all reviewsâ (58 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #18,130 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Books > History > Military > United States > Vietnam War #114 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General #127 in Books > History > Asia

Customer Reviews

Understanding the significance of the sixties requires grasping just how pernicious the endless (1954-1975) Vietnam War was. How it created much of the fractiousness and political controversy that is still so visible today. The war fostered a volatile climate that led to increasingly violent demands for equality on multiple social, racial and sexual fronts. And a vast baby-boom generational transition caused an upheaval in social norms which functioned like gasoline tossed onto a fire. Towards the end of the revolutionary 1960s events became darker, increasingly violent and rebellious, despite rare peaceful anomalies like Woodstock, whose dried mud still clings to my old 1940s era bomber jacket (I just can't bring myself to clean it). During a college peace rally in September 1972, I seized an opportunity to ask Jane Fonda why she jeopardized her film career by engaging in what many Americans considered a treasonable response to the war (she had recently gone to Hanoi). Her reply reflected the same kind of insularity one might witness today in a combative response towards our current conflicts: incomprehension about the question's premise and a dismissal of the opinions of the opposing side. It is hardly a stretch to say that the sixties created the modern world. Witness to the Revolution is an indispensable overview of that era, the book focusing on the final year of the sixties (1969-1970) when each day seemed to contain more rage and even greater uncertainty. Clara Bingham, a former Newsweek White House correspondent,

has created a first-person narrative arranged into a series of paragraphs, each one labeled with the name of a famous sixties rebel. The first-person recollections and observations exert a visceral immediacy.

It's a strange feeling when your formative years are suddenly treated as part of History with a capital H. But it makes sense for Clara Bingham to collect oral histories of the tumultuous 1969/1970 when so much happened, including Woodstock, Daniel Ellsberg leaking the Pentagon Papers, the shootings at Kent State University, the fatal bombing of a campus building at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the My Lai massacre.. Reading this brought so many memories flooding back. In the Vietnam war era, people watched the nightly news, usually with either Walter Cronkite on CBS or Huntley and Brinkley on NBC. Everyone was getting the same news, and the lead story just about every single night was the war. And although the civil rights movement was a source of plenty of political action, it was the Vietnam war, and the draft, that galvanized political rebellion across the country. The antiwar rebellion was related to many other movements, like feminism, earth consciousness, marijuana/LSD promotion, rock music. Since these are recollections (with succinct commentaries and historical notes by Bingham), you will read different perspectives of the same events. A story from a demonstrator at the 1968 Democratic party convention in Chicago is followed by one from an FBI agent. Stories of activists who went underground are accompanied by recollections of those whose job it was to try to track them down. Recollections of the New York trial of the Black Panther 21 come from one of the defense lawyers and from the presiding judge's son, who was just nine years old during the trial, but vividly remembers the firebombing of his family's home and the rigid security measures his family lived under for the remaining months of the trial.

Journalist Clara Bingham, born into the Louisville Courier Journal family, reflects her elite bias that was typified by the "radical chic" of 1970. Born too late (1963) to experience the late 1960s she writes as a "wannabe" member of the Weather Underground. Her book is series of oral histories to describe the period between Woodstock (Summer 1969) to the end of 1970 as the anti-Vietnam War movement reached its apogee. The interviewees are a mixture of new left political types, veterans, G.I.s, pop culture figures, feminists, Black Panthers, LSD/marijuana entrepreneurs, high Nixon administration officials, occasional police officers and F.B.I. agents. She is at her best with histories of the Army math center bombing at the University of Wisconsin and National Guard killings at Kent State. Although she has a host of interviewees her sample is biased towards her

focus on the Weather Underground and in particular, Bernadine Dorhn and Bill Ayers. Recall that the Weather Underground glorified violence by initiating the "Days of Rage" in Chicago in 1969 and three of their members died in a bomb making factory in a very toney section of Greenwich Village. The victims of the bomb were to be G.I.s at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Ayers and Dorhn, both children of privilege, are unrepentant to this day. Not true of Michael Kazin and Mark Rudd who dropped out of the organization and moved on. Kazin is now a distinguished historian at Georgetown and Rudd taught for years at a community college in New Mexico. Rudd noted, and this is important, that it is results, not intentions that matter. Bingham's failure is to look more to intentions than results. I was more than a casual participant in the milieu of the late 1960s.

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