



The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond (Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution)

By Timothy Miller

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The greatest wave of communal living in American history crested in the tumultuous 1960s era including the early 1970s. To the fascination and amusement of more decorous citizens, hundreds of thousands of mostly young dreamers set out to build a new culture apart from the established society. Widely believed by the larger public to be sinks of drug-ridden sexual immorality, the communes both intrigued and repelled the American people. The intentional communities of the 1960s era were far more diverse than the stereotype of the hippie commune would suggest. A great many of them were religious in basis, stressing spiritual seeking and disciplined lifestyles. Others were founded on secular visions of a better society. Hundreds of them became so stable that they survive today. This book surveys the broad sweep of this great social yearning from the first portents of a new type of communitarianism in the early 1960s through the waning of the movement in the mid-1970s. Based on more than five hundred interviews conducted for the 60s Communes Project, among other sources, it preserves a colorful and vigorous episode in American history. The book includes an extensive directory of active and non-active communes, complete with dates of origin and dissolution.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

As a historian of both the counterculture and non-mainline spirituality, Miller (religious studies, Univ. of Kansas; *The Hippies and American Values*) has a properly broad perspective from which to view U.S. communalism. In this sequel to *The Quest for Utopia in 20th-Century America* (Syracuse Univ., 1998), he examines the communes' brief zenith. But while Miller's surveying skills are, indeed, considerable--his appendixes identify 1600-plus communes extant in 1960-75--the body of his text occasionally reads like an annotated list of historic sites. He mentions each site at least once but reveals little that is new. Communes were places where sexual openness and drug use were rampant but not all-pervading, he (unsurprisingly) finds. What is surprising is that he mentions neither the Quakers of Pendle Hill nor Scott and Helen Nearing, the most prominent of the back-to-nature advocates. And he gives communal dwellers excessive credit for spreading an environmental ethos and appetite for whole foods--phenomena that are surely the legacy, more generally, of a wide range of events of the 1960s. The book's most interesting sections deal with the Jesus Freak phenomenon and young Christians' experiments with intentional community. On balance, however, Miller has done a great service: there are precious few scholarly treatments of the movement--nearly all the existing material on 1960s communalism was published before 1975. An important acquisition; recommended for academic and theological libraries.

-*Scott H. Silverman, Bryn Mawr Coll. Lib., PA*

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About the Author

Timothy Miller is a professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas. He has published two earlier books on intentional communities, including *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America* (also published by Syracuse University Press) to which this new volume is a successor. He co-directed the 60s Communes Project, an extensive documentation effort that preserved memories and artifacts from the 1960s-era communes.

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