



FOR MILLIONS OF BABY BOOMERS, the period called “the Sixties” (the decade running roughly from the height of the Civil Rights Movement in 1963 to the mid 1970s and the end of the Vietnam War) was the defining period in their lives, the time when their identities were forged. Did they march against the war? Burn their draft cards? Did they join SDS or SNCC or the Black Panthers, start a woman’s consciousness-raising group, dance naked at Woodstock?

This very political time engendered great societal upheaval. Everything was challenged: race relations, sexual relations, and, above all, the morality of the government. The era spawned major movements that involved millions: the Civil Rights Movement, the Feminist Movement, and anti-Vietnam war protests. The period also saw the assassinations of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy, police firing on students at Kent State, student strikes and sit-ins, protest marches, and the spread of a counterculture that espoused sexual freedom, anti-authority attitudes, and drug experimentation, accompanied by an explosion of rock music, as exemplified by the Woodstock Folk Festival.

In an essay in The New York Times Sunday magazine (July 1, 2001) (“The Way We Live Now; You Had to be There, Man”), David Oshinsky writes that those involved in the struggles of the '60s found their

identities marked for the rest of their lives by the stands they took on poverty, war, free speech, and human rights, as well as the lifestyle choices they made. "The greatest sin," he wrote, "was to have passed through the decade with an empty slate.... It is not surprising that so many of us, even the spectators, look back longingly to these years. To stay connected to the '60s is to bear witness...to an era of turbulent action and unfulfilled dreams."

Subsequently, the United States entered a quiescent political period. In recent years, however, in response to globalization, environmental degradation, the Iraq war, and the election of Barack Obama, there's been an increase in activism among the young and a resurgence of interest in the movements of the '60s. The Oscar-nominated documentary *The Weather Underground* and the movies *Across the Universe* and *Woodstock* are examples. According to Robert Greenwald, antiglobalization protestors have been screening *Steal This Movie*, his recent movie on Yippie Abbie Hoffman's life, at campuses across the country.

My hope is that the themes of *Layla* will resonate not only with the idealists of the '60s and '70s but also with those who are discovering their own forms of activism in light of that legacy.