

(Mobile pdf) The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America

The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America

James T. Patterson

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"An illuminating look at a remarkably significant year by a master historian."—*Wall Street Journal*



JAMES T. PATTERSON
WINNER OF THE BANCROFT PRIZE

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James T. Patterson : The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America:

49 of 52 people found the following review helpful. The Hinge that Turned the SixtiesBy The Ginger ManLyndon Johnson was elected in a landslide in 1964 and was selected by Time as "Man of the Year." GDP growth was an astounding 25% as unemployment dropped to 4% and inflation hovered at 1%. During the National Christmas Tree

lighting ceremony on 12/18, the President reflected the expansive mood in the US when he said, "These are the most hopeful times in all the years since Christ was born in Bethlehem." The country was united, prosperous and at peace. Yet by September, American troops were fighting an offensive, undeclared war in Vietnam. LBJ had launched Operation Rolling Thunder on March 2 which would ultimately drop more explosive tonnage on Vietnam than had been unleashed on all of Europe in World War II. The largest peace demonstration in US history had been held in April. South American countries were protesting American military intervention in the Dominican Republic. The press was angered at the administration's evasiveness. Blacks felt that civil rights legislation was moving too slowly while conservatives were angered by Great Society initiatives. In September, singer Barry Maguire released "Eve of Destruction" which reached the number one spot on 9/25 and stayed in the top 20 for 8 weeks. The song struck a raw nerve as Maguire asked, "Can't you feel the fear that I'm feelin' today?" Time Magazine observed that youth's rallying cry had changed from "I want to hold your hand" to "I want to change the world." Todd Gitlin suggested that the song "seemed to certify that a mass movement of American young was upon us." Author James Patterson has written a convincing description of a year that seemed to transform America from an Age of Camelot to Days of Rage. He argues that while the iconic events of the sixties occurred at the end of the decade, their basis was established in 1965. He quotes journalist Nicholas Lemann who observed in 1991 that "the 1960s turned as if on a hinge" in the summer of 65. Patterson traces the impact of the war in Vietnam, Great Society legislation, the civil rights movement and changes in popular culture in charting this remarkable transition from an era of good feelings to the eve of destruction. He remains focused on the giant and ultimately tragic figure of Lyndon Baines Johnson. *Eve of Destruction* is a concise, compelling read. The book moves quickly between facts, avoiding value-laden arguments while demonstrating how quickly the mood in the country shifted as LBJ's political capital eroded. Patterson meets the challenge of distinguishing between what was known at the time and what we have come to believe in retrospect, as with the development of youth as a specific generation with a shared consciousness. The author is aware that the events he describes have implications for today's political scene but wisely leaves most of these conclusions for the reader to draw. The resulting history manages to elucidate without trying to influence unduly. I enjoyed this book and recommend it to both history buffs and to persons with interest in current affairs. 13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A year of disappointment, discord and discontent. By Paul Tognetti As the year 1965 dawned the American people were feeling pretty good about themselves and the nation at large. They had begun to put the horrific events of November 22, 1963 behind them and looked forward to a peaceful and prosperous year ahead. On the surface at least all appeared to be copacetic. Lyndon Johnson was at the peak of his popularity and declared that the nation that he led had "no irreconcilable differences". It was his intention to continue to advocate for the progressive agenda he so firmly believed in. But in the first few weeks of 1965 a series of unforeseen events would begin to spiral out of control that would eventually cut into Johnson's popularity and ultimately cost him his Presidency. The noted historian and author James T. Patterson believes that 1965 was a watershed year in American history and has documented all of the major events of that tumultuous year in his sterling new book "The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America". For those of us who lived through it "The Eve of Destruction" serves as a stark reminder of just how transformative 1965 turned out to be. No one can argue that Lyndon Johnson was a savvy politician who knew how to get things done. His legislative agenda for 1965 was ambitious to say the least. Over the course of the year the largely Democratic Congress would pass a host of important bills including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Voting Rights Act, immigration reform, Medicare and Medicaid, the Higher Education Act while also creating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. But despite all of his successes racial divisions were beginning to rear their ugly heads. On March 7 a protest by civil rights activists in Selma, Alabama turned violent when police attacked the demonstrators. What would become known as "Bloody Sunday" would unleash bottled-up racial tensions and resentment in cities all across America. Black Americans were becoming impatient and with very good reason. Later on in the year race riots would break out in the Watts section of Los Angeles. And then there was the escalating conflict in Vietnam. Patterson recalls the events that would ultimately cause the President to decide to commit more and more troops to the conflict in Southeast Asia. Ever concerned with his legacy Johnson did not want to be brandished as "the President who lost Vietnam". He reluctantly and very quietly escalated this nation's involvement in the conflict and did so with a minimum of consultation. By April an estimated 15000-25000 people would come to Washington to protest the war. It was at the time the largest peace demonstration in American history. Clearly, it was LBJ's lack of candor with the American people that spawned the anti-war movement in the spring of 1965. Patterson introduces us to all of the major players who were advising the President in 1965 including Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of State Robert McNamara and General William Westmoreland and the influence that each of them had on the decisions that were made. Meanwhile, major changes were beginning to take place in the culture as well. According to Patterson "The spread of social programs in the Johnson years, stimulating ever grander popular expectations had the unintended consequence of intensifying the demands of rights-conscious interest groups in America". Yes, the genie was finally out of the bottle and many might argue that these developments would serve to divide the country in innumerable ways in the decades that followed. 1965 was also the year that American popular music began to evolve as evidenced by Barry McGuire's

#1 hit "Eve of Destruction" and The Byrds "Turn, Turn, Turn". By the end of the year it was becoming abundantly clear to most observers that the mood of the country had darkened considerably and that there was no turning back. For better or worse America would never be the same again. In retrospect, until you stop and focus on a year like 1965 you simply cannot comprehend the monumental impact the events that such a watershed year can have on a society. I found "The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America" to be a compelling and fast-moving read that attempts to tie all of these disparate events together and to make sense of it all. Frankly, in some cases you can while in others it is simply not possible. In any event, I will never think of that year in quite the same way again. As it all turned out what transpired during 1965 not only had implications for LBJ's liberal agenda. Indeed, after the tremendous shellacking that Barry Goldwater took in the 1964 Presidential election many would argue that the events of 1965 would help to spawn a conservative renaissance in America. "The Eve of Destruction" would be a great choice for history buffs and general readers alike. There is an awful lot to chew on here. James T. Patterson has certainly succeeded in making history come alive for his readers. Highly recommended! 28 of 31 people found the following review helpful. The Peak of the Great Society By Karen Sullivan Patterson's look back at 1965 primarily focuses on three issues: Vietnam, LBJ's "Great Society" and civil rights. He brings these issues together into his main thesis which is that 1965 was both the peak of the Great Society -- and of our belief in government -- and the year that set the stage for what we think of as the turbulent 60's. 1965 began with about 23,000 "military advisors" in Vietnam and ended with 185,000 combat troops on the ground. Even though President Johnson privately acknowledged that a military victory was unlikely, he escalated the war and did so while being untruthful with the American people. 1965 sowed the seeds for the "credibility gap" that helped disenchant many people with government. In part, LBJ tried to keep his actions in Vietnam quiet because he was afraid the truth would upset his ambitious and expensive legislative agenda. Viewing Congress today, it's hard to believe the incredible quantity of significant legislation that was passed in 1965: Medicare/Medicaid, education reform (ESEA), immigration reform, the "War on Poverty" and, of course, the Voting Rights Act -- just to name a few! As a political pro, Johnson knew he had limited time to get his bills passed before he would become "Lame Duck Lyndon", but this led to hasty action. Legislation was passed quickly, but some of the new initiatives were flawed and the flood of bills created administrative overload and confusion. Johnson over promised and then under delivered, building disappointment and frustration among people who were becoming more and more rights-conscious. It was in the area of civil rights that Johnson achieved greatness. Patterson traces events from March's "Bloody Sunday" at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma to signing of the Voting Rights Act in August. He shows that despite progress, the civil rights movement was starting to fragment as the continued value of non-violence was being questioned and civil rights leaders began to address the impact of both poverty and the war in Vietnam. Specifically, events such as the Watts Riots (just 5 days after the Voting Rights Act was signed) made it clear that economic opportunity was as important as the right to vote. The only weak points in the book are where Patterson looks at pop culture in an effort to illustrate the changes taking place in society. Despite naming his book after "Eve of Destruction", the great song performed by Barry McGuire, Patterson's comments about pop culture feel a bit forced. He is on much firmer ground when discussing the political military arenas. Overall I enjoyed this very informative, well written and thoughtful book.

At the beginning of 1965, the U.S. seemed on the cusp of a golden age. Although Americans had been shocked by the assassination in 1963 of President Kennedy, they exuded a sense of consensus and optimism that showed no signs of abating. Indeed, political liberalism and interracial civil rights activism made it appear as if 1965 would find America more progressive and unified than it had ever been before. In January 1965, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed that the country had "no irreconcilable conflicts." Johnson, who was an extraordinarily skillful manager of Congress, succeeded in securing an avalanche of Great Society legislation in 1965, including Medicare, immigration reform, and a powerful Voting Rights Act. But as esteemed historian James T. Patterson reveals in *The Eve of Destruction*, that sense of harmony dissipated over the course of the year. As Patterson shows, 1965 marked the birth of the tumultuous era we now know as "The Sixties," when American society and culture underwent a major transformation. Turmoil erupted in the American South early in the year, when police attacked civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama. Many black leaders, outraged, began to lose faith in nonviolent and interracial strategies of protest. Meanwhile, the U.S. rushed into a deadly war in Vietnam, inciting rebelliousness at home. On August 11th, five days after Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, racial violence exploded in the Watts area of Los Angeles. The six days of looting and arson that followed shocked many Americans and cooled their enthusiasm for the president's remaining initiatives. As the national mood darkened, the country became deeply divided. By the end of 1965, a conservative resurgence was beginning to redefine the political scene even as developments in popular music were enlivening the Left. In *The Eve of Destruction*, Patterson traces the events of this transformative year, showing how they dramatically reshaped the nation and reset the course of American life.