

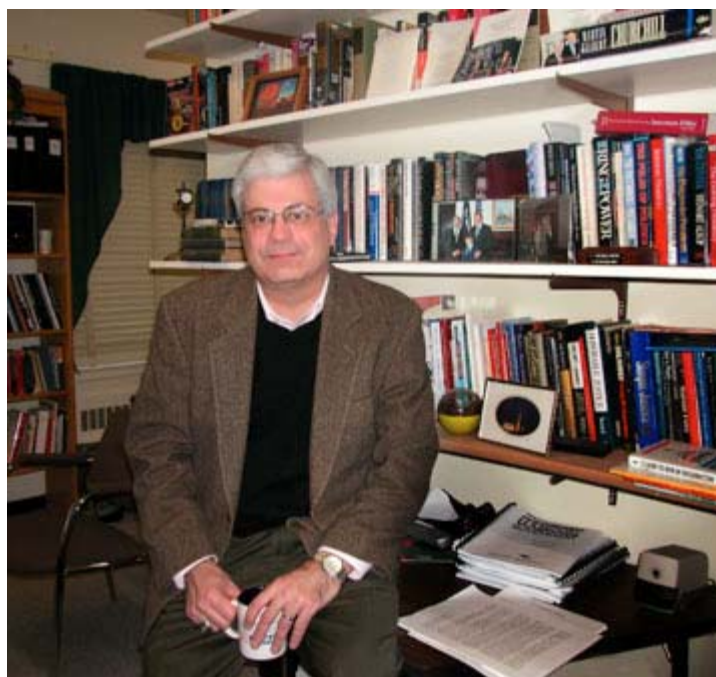
20th Century Journey

Written by Molly English-Bowers

Political assassinations, the civil rights movement, the Beatles and Rolling Stones, the moon shot, Woodstock—all popular culture watersheds that occurred in one exhilarating, exhausting and enduring decade, the 1960s. Almost a half-century old, the 1960s continue to entice sociologists, musicologists and historians in a way that no other decade of the last millennium has.

John Robert Greene: The self-described teacher-who-writes, not writer-who-teaches, will impart groovy lessons at a signing for his latest book, *America in the Sixties*, Tuesday at the Onondaga Historical Association.

As part of his series on “America in the Twentieth Century,” John Robert Greene, Paul J. Schupf professor of history and humanities at Cazenovia College, is beginning to tout *America in the Sixties* (Syracuse University Press; 200 pages; \$19.95/softcover) right here in the Salt City. Greene presides over a book signing and reading on Tuesday, Nov. 9, at 5 p.m. at the



Onondaga Historical Association, 321 Montgomery St. It's *the* national launch of the fifth in his 10-book series. And considering the subject matter, it's sure to resonate with many *New Times* readers.

“Of all the decades of the last century, people’s opinions are the most set on the 1960s,” said Greene, 55. “Everyone who is our age finds something in the ’60s that doesn’t just resonate, but it’s all important. It’s our social building block. This was when we became thinking adults, and our memories of that moment may be different from everybody else’s.”

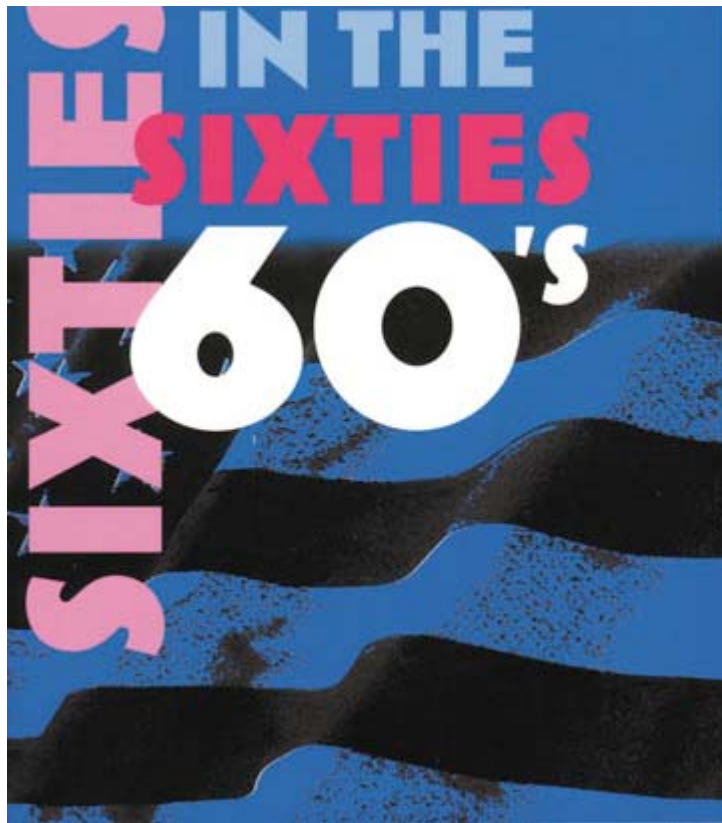
Greene has found that when he gives these book-by-decade talks, they are made more effective when he lists potential topics for discussion on a board, and lets the audience decide what they want him to talk about. It’s a natural format for curious, historically minded audiences like those who frequent the OHA.

“People who attend OHA events are really savvy consumers of local literature and of natural history,” Greene noted. “I’ll be talking to a great audience. And the fact that it is the national launch of the book—I wanted to have that here in Central New York—it’s my home, I was born and raised here.”

Instead of a comprehensive look at any of the decades Greene has already written about—the 1920s, 1950s and 1970s, with the 1940s and 1910s on their way, produced in the order they were contracted—he and SU Press decided to organize the chapters in each book thematically. “It is one of my fervent, firmly held beliefs that most textbooks stink,” he noted. “I’ve written a couple; they stink. I wanted to create a series that would engage readers in the history of the 20th century in a manner that was actually interesting in some way. Thematically is the best way to deal with a decade, and it’s also a good structure for teaching.”



So instead of writing about the years leading up to the Vietnam War, Greene instead wrote about the war itself in a chapter called “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy.” Rather than examining each year touched by the civil rights movement, he penned the third chapter, “We Shall Overcome” as an overview. Further, Greene noted



recommended readings at the end of each chapter, extremely helpful to readers who may want to delve a little deeper into a subject matter.

Above all, however, Greene hopes readers find these books as engaging to read as they are for him to write. "I want people to enjoy my books in the bathtub and still have them be a serious piece of history," he said. "Let's face it, how many toads do you have to kiss before you finally find your prince? How many books do you have to read to find a really engaging book?"

Next on Greene's docket come the 1930s, clearly not as fun to write about as the 1960s, but certainly important to the 20th century. "It's not going to be an FDR book—we have plenty of those," he said, referencing Franklin Roosevelt. "It'll look at culture, both high and popular culture, what the Depression did to everything. That's my working premise right now."

Until that book gets finished, Greene is happy to promote the book about the decade we can't seem to

escape. "This makes a great Thanksgiving and Christmas gift," he touted with a grin. "I encourage everyone to buy 10 copies and I'll sign anything anybody wants. You want me to sign it 'Bart Simpson,' that's fine by me."

Tuesday's OHA event will feature book signings from 5 to 5:30 p.m., and again from 6 to 7 p.m. In between, Greene will give remarks and selected readings. For more information, call the OHA at 428-1864. Further book signings and readings will take place in the next few months. Check the Literati section of Times Table for details.

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