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Slouching Towards Bethlehem



Synopsis

Audie Award Nominee, Short Stories/Collections, 2013 Universally acclaimed from the time it was first published in 1968, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* has been admired for decades as a stylistic masterpiece. Academy Award-winning actress Diane Keaton (*Annie Hall*, *The Family Stone*) performs these classic essays, including the title piece, which will transport the listener back to a unique time and place: the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco during the neighborhood's heyday as a countercultural center. This is Joan Didion's first work of nonfiction, offering an incisive look at the mood of 1960s America and providing an essential portrait of the Californian counterculture. She explores the influences of John Wayne and Howard Hughes, and offers ruminations on the nature of good and evil in a Death Valley motel room. Taking its title from W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming", the essays in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* all reflect, in one way or another, that "the center cannot hold."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book of essays is a delight to read for anyone interested in invoking the 1960's in America. The writing is complex but flawless; Didion is a master observer. The words are carefully measured and impressively assembled. The choice and arrangement of the essays is not clear, but this is a book you can tuck into your travel bag or Kindle and read occasionally. Don't wait until the end of the book to read the Yeats poem that provides the title if you are unfamiliar with it.

A series of essays connected by location in California. Well written in a matter of fact way. First are interesting and then they become a bit tiresome and predictable. Not heavy going through and a fairly quick read. A worthwhile effort.

I would recommend this book to anyone who has a difficult time finding a modern or recently written novel to read or enjoys the Classics. Didion writes clearly while making one feel she or he is beside the author living and reliving experiences. As a native Californian my childhood memories returned of visiting Los Angeles as a child, sitting in the back of the Lincoln-Mercury station wagon while my mother drove for hours day and night on Highway 101 during the 1960's, and at night looking for the Firestone fire torches burning in front of the castle like factory. Didion's memories and writing stimulated my memories of California that once was and will never be again.

The book is a collection of articles/essays Didion published in various magazines. I read this book after reading an opinion that it is a classic of prose. I can't argue that. The writing is memorable and a number of passages are haunting or insightful (or both). However, a reader does have to make a real commitment and I can understand if the book is not for everyone. Didion has an emotionally remote style that I found tiring by the end of the book. In addition, there is a tone I find an uneasy mixed of melancholy/cynicism/depression. Still, the style seemed to work, in at least some cases, when she moves to an evaluation of the subjects in that particular article. Especially noteworthy are the chapters on a Bay Area communist, John Wayne, and the people who populated the Haight-Ashbury in the 1960s. It's definitely not a 'pleasant' read, but is a worthwhile one. Maybe this was the author's intent. If so, she succeeded.

I was drawn to this because I am old enough to remember the Summer of Love and was curious to see how her experience compared with my memories. In general, it rang true. I am slowly reading my way through the remaining essays. Her work gives me much to ponder. Highly recommended if you can pause and reflect.

Joan Didion is one of my favorite writers. I haven't read much of her works of fiction but love her essays and memoirs. Her book "Where I Was From" is one of my all-time favorites but this book of essays was my first introduction to her writing. I'm probably at the end of my love affair with living in San Francisco so reading "Goodbye To All That" (an essay in this collection) resonates with me in a whole new way. These essays can seem a time capsule of the "at times" turbulent late 1960's, but

to me it's a time capsule of a sensitive, young person just starting out in the world, chronicling her experiences with wisdom and editorial precision beyond her years.

This is my favorite collection of essays. Didion is a brilliant mind with a sharp eye for hypocrisy and irony in all scenarios, and every walk of life. "On Self Respect" is a must read for anyone-- but especially young women. There is no lesson more important in this life than learning how to own your actions and take responsibility for them. Didion sums up this lesson plainly within a few beautifully written pages, and reading it genuinely changed the way I live my life on a day to day basis.

This is the kind of essay that Truman Capote and E. B. White do better. It is roughly equal to Tom Wolfe's shorter work. Didion's mind is sea-level interesting, but her work doesn't hold you.

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