

Dead Serious and Lighthearted: The Memorable Words of Modern America - Volume I (1957-1976)

Mack W. Borgen

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Moving through the civil rights movement, the shock waves of JFK's assassination, and the drama of Watergate, these "memorable words" hold incredible significance.

From Eisenhower's "Peace may be the only climate possible for human life itself" to Carter's "I've committed adultery in my heart many times," Mack W. Borgen's *Dead Serious and Lighthearted* collects some of the most significant phrases, books, and events that shaped modern American social and political life. Ambitious in scope and dutifully researched, this expansive book carefully presents the "memorable words" that define America's identity.

This first volume of *Dead Serious and Lighthearted* covers the time period from 1957 to 1976 and contains a section explaining the purpose of the book and the process of Borgen's selection. This hundred-page first part is "common to all three volumes" and could successfully stand on its own as an indictment of Americans' lack of interest in history. Neither dry nor loaded down with jargon, Borgen's argument deftly defends his reasons for creating this exhaustive work and passionately explains the importance of studying American history beyond what is taught in the classroom. This section would make an inspiring introduction to a university-level history course.

The bulk of the book is composed of the "memorable words" themselves. Sorted chronologically, years are divided into thematic categories—beginning with the Pulitzer Prize-winning books for the year, moving through quotes from movies and advertising campaigns, and detailing the context of speeches given by significant political and social figures. The section for 1961, for instance, contextualizes the publication of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, offers "The thrill of victory ... and the agony of defeat" line from ABC's *Wide World of Sports* as an influential phrase in American culture, and provides compelling excerpts from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address.

While it is efficiently organized and effective, the layout means that the book may become repetitive if it is read continually. For history buffs, social justice activists, and students, it will be most enjoyable and useful if it is read in sections, or approached by picking pertinent years.

The book strives for balance and avoids taking sides, except in its assertion that grassroots groups succeeded in making America a more progressive and peaceful nation. It includes pivotal information for liberals, conservatives, and centrists alike. Moving through the civil rights movement, the shock waves of JFK's assassination, and the drama of Watergate, these "memorable words" hold incredible significance.

Dead Serious and Lighthearted is an eye-opening collection that works to establish and perpetuate an educated, self-aware American readership.

AIMEE JODOIN (July 20, 2018)

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