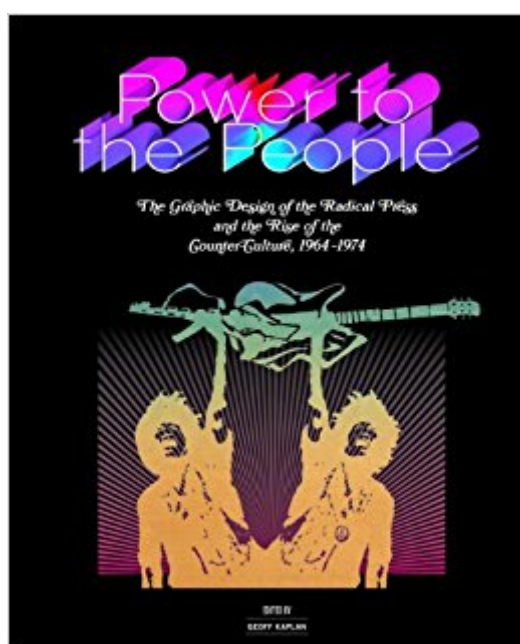


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# Power To The People: The Graphic Design Of The Radical Press And The Rise Of The Counter-Culture, 1964-1974



## Synopsis

Though we think of the 1960s and the early 1970s as a time of radical social, cultural, and political upheaval, we tend to picture the action as happening on campuses and in the streets. Yet the rise of the underground newspaper was equally daring and original. Thanks to advances in cheap offset printing, groups involved in antiwar, civil rights, and other social liberation issues began to spread their messages through provocatively designed newspapers and broadsheets. This vibrant new media was essential to the counterculture revolution as a whole—helping to motivate the masses and proliferate ideas. *Power to the People* presents more than 700 full-color images and excerpts from these astonishing publications, many of which have not been seen since they were first published almost fifty years ago. From the psychedelic pages of the Oracle, Haight-Ashbury's paper of choice, to the fiery editorials of the Black Panther Party Paper, these papers were remarkable for their editors' fervent belief in freedom of expression and their DIY philosophy. They were also extraordinary for their graphic innovations. Experimental typography and wildly inventive layouts reflect an alternative media culture as much informed by the space age, television, and socialism as it was by the great trinity of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll. Assembled by renowned graphic designer Geoff Kaplan, *Power to the People* pays homage in its layout to the radical press. Beyond its unparalleled images, *Power to the People* includes essays by Gwen Allen, Bob Ostertag, and Fred Turner, as well as a series of recollections edited by Pamela M. Lee, all of which comment on the critical impact of the alternative press in the social and popular movements of those turbulent years. *Power to the People* treats the design practices of that moment as activism in its own right that offers a vehement challenge to the dominance of official media and a critical form of self-representation. No other book surveys in such variety the highly innovative graphic design of the underground press, and certainly no other book captures the era with such an unmatched eye toward its aesthetic and look. *Power to the People* is not just a major compendium of art from the 1960s and 1970s—it showcases how the radical media graphically fashioned the image of a countercultural revolution that still resounds to this day.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 264 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; First Edition (US) First Printing edition (May 15, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226424359

ISBN-13: 978-0226424354

Product Dimensions: 10 x 1.1 x 12 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,251,680 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Publishing & Books > Bibliographies & Indexes > Politics](#) #2110 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Writing > Journalism & Nonfiction](#) #2477 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > Art](#)

## Customer Reviews

With its low cost of entry—only a typewriter, artwork, a mimeograph, and a point of view were required—underground newspapers flourished during the '60s and early '70s, covering a plethora of topics (sex, corruption, alternative lifestyles, etc.) mainstream media couldn't or wouldn't touch. Here, California College of Art instructor Kaplan examines the depth and breadth of these publications in a graphic-rich study. Instead of focusing on landmark articles, Kaplan's short bursts of narrative are broken up by lengthy reproductions of newspaper and magazine covers, articles, and inserts. Guest authors explore various concepts ("Design as a Social Movement") with varying degrees of success—though failure isn't always their fault; Kaplan frequently breaks up the narrative with lengthy spreads of images, forcing readers to flip back and forth in order to keep the story going. His typographical play doesn't help either, as he employs various period-inspired fonts, type sizes, and colors throughout the book that add little to the experience. Still, Kaplan deserves commendation for assembling a collection that manages to include viewpoints from all reaches of the underground; those who were there and students of the form will appreciate his efforts. (June)

"Power to the People reproduces stunning covers of radical late '60s and early '70s papers . . . including The Black Panther, Paul Krassner's The Realist and the long-running Off Our Backs. This is a remarkable collection curating artifacts from the diverse worlds of feminists, leftists, technology visionaries, gays and other factions all liberated by cheap printing. . . . The powerful images Geoff Kaplan has expertly assembled are each worth an eloquent thousand words." (Chicago Tribune) "Before there was the Internet and desktop publishing, there was the underground press—a rich, irreverent source of information, opinion, and outrageousness that is all too difficult to access today. With Power to the People Geoff Kaplan has brought together a rowdy and stimulating collection of design from the 1960s and '70s that will be an inspiration and

an indispensable resource to anyone who wants to speak out in the 21st century. (David Joselit, Yale University) "A handsome, comprehensive look at the drawings, collages and mash-ups that winked, blasted and shrieked from the pages of the underground press of the 1960s and 1970s. The result is a visual chronicle of the successes and excesses of the time. Smart essays place the papers and the surges that launched them in political / cultural / artistic context. It's especially good on the technological innovations that allowed creators with little money and even less experience to provide counter-news and blow the doors off cultural stodginess. (Abe Peck, author, *Uncovering the Sixties: Life & Times of the Underground Press*) "When we started the International Times in London in 1966 there were only half a dozen underground papers in the US and none in Europe; a year later there were several hundred. Looking at this superb collection of pages from the underground press I am struck by how innovative and imaginative they were, particularly considering that the majority of them were designed by amateurs. This overview includes many papers that are new to me and is surely destined to become the standard work on the subject. (Barry Miles, co-founder International Times, London) "Power to the People serves as a significant slice of countercultural history. It graphically captures the experimentation, anger, compassion, humor, and soul of that idealistic era. This anthology will provide you with images that may well bring back memories you never had. (Paul Krassner, author of *Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut*) "The production methods of the Vietnam era underground press seem crude compared to today's digital technology, but they freed non-corporate journalists, artists, designers, and political activists to publish stunning layout and radical writing cheaply, easily, and in huge quantities, enough to create a worldwide revolution whose effects are still being felt today. In *Power to the People*, Geoff Kaplan has created a select kaleidoscopic gallery of cover and inside page designs from the vast portfolio of papers that the Vietnam era antiwar countercultural community gifted to the world through their personal struggles, celebrations, and discoveries. Valuable accompanying essays describe how it was done, and also draw the connection to today's social media radicals, whose roots—whether they know it or not (and too often they don't)—are with the underground press and who owe it to themselves to read everything they can about these papers. (Ken Wachsberger, editor of *Voices from the Underground* series) "Railing against a senseless war, pollution, and police violence while celebrating the many social and cultural advances of the time, this passionate artwork, like Renaissance painting, crystallizes a spirit that is obviously dated, but also timeless." (*Village Voice*) "Documenting the power and significance

of the counterculture publications of the sixties (understood, culturally, as the years between the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the end of the Vietnam War), this volume is a superb contribution to several disciplines. Historians and students of cultural history, graphic design, political history, and American Studies will discover a beautifully designed book that thoroughly explores the graphics of the period and their impact. . . . Highly recommended. (Choice)

I take the omissions in this book personally. One review above claims that it focuses too much attention on *The East Village Other*, one of the first underground newspapers and the one throughout the period with the highest circulation and the largest number of non-advertising pages. Not only does *Power to the People* not focus attention on *The East Village Other*, but *EVO* is mentioned a bare three times, only once in any way one could consider directly. There are no graphics from *EVO*, which arguably had the best graphics staff (and consistently had the best covers, which accounted for that high circulation). It isn't even listed in the Index. The book ignores other papers whole and downplays others, and it gives far too much weight to extraordinarily minor papers like John Wilcock's *Other Scenes* which had a circulation of something in the neighborhood of 3. John was a friend and competitor (due to ego-driven macho over love lost) to *EVO*'s Jaakov Kohn and *Other Scenes* was nothing more than an attempt to make John look more suave and continental. No one in the New York Underground was more suave and Continental than Jaakov (unfortunately, so few are around these days to back that up). *Other Scenes* failed on all counts and only made John look foolish, as usual, because he virtually copied everything right out of *EVO* (also a little bit from here, and a little bit from there...). Prof. Kaplan wasted some great opportunities here to get the record straight. Perhaps he relied too much on his contributors to do the work for him and they let him down. Paul Krasner was there. Indeed, he was among the original publishers of *EVO* (along with Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, Tuli Kupferberg and other notables of the day). But Krasner was pushed out after a while and, over time, wasn't even given a friendly hello when he poked his little head inside the Second Avenue office door. So it isn't surprising that among his contributions were not a single word about *EVO*. The most came from a "temp" cartoonist and paste-up helper by the name of Steven Heller who I don't remember (but there were plenty of people coming and going at times). He made a strange remark about paste-up night being "part makeup and part make-out session." In all my years there I only remember one real make-out session, and that was when the inimitable Dean Latimer blew through town with some girls from the University of Alabama and some Owsley acid. We did have a great make-out couch behind the paste-up area, but we used it to nap in shifts, not make-out. Heller was probably trying to come up

with a neat rhetorical trick. Cartoonists. The graphics in *Power to the People* are abundant and, for the most part, impressive. But a third of them could have been dropped so that the omissions could have been included. And there is no excuse for their exclusion. They are readily available on any university computer (at least that's the case for the EVO back files, and has been for decades). I won't tout my own work (although some of it was pretty good and one or two pieces were actually historic from a technical perspective--a subject that Kaplan claims to cover in his book but doesn't to any genuine extent) but we had regular artists during the heyday like the late Spain Rodriguez, Peter Mikliunas and Kim Deitch who produced graphics and cartoons that no one else in the underground press could compete with. And, of course, everyone else copied, or tried to. And not just the underground press, but the mainstream press as well, after a time. *Esquire*, *The New York Times*, *Playboy*, *Time*, *Newsweek*. I read through the other short essays and, for the most part, they seemed to be 21st century commentaries on what the sixties were. That's okay for what it's worth, but for the most part it has little to do with what was going on then. Sure, all of these things were a part of what was taking place; but these issues were not the central issues back then. They are the central issues now. Back then the central issues were the war, civil rights, and the idea of being free from people telling you what to do with your life. That last part has become the issues in specification today--women's rights, LGBTQ rights, anti-corporatism, etc--and that's mostly what the essays are about, I think. But, that may be my interpretation. But we didn't have the same perspective in the late 1960s and early 1970s as we have today, obviously, so the work we did then speaks to these issues--when they speak to them at all--in a very different manner. That has to be understood clearly by anyone under the age of 60 before the work is seen. For example, the gay press is, frankly, over-represented in *Power to the People*. In today's world it makes sense to give that kind of representation to that work. But that work didn't have the, for lack of a better word, market-share in the day. The gay press didn't have space on public newsstands (neither did some "straight" underground papers) until very late in the period, and in some parts of the country not until recently. So most of these papers were "distributed" from one hand to another. When your market is so small you end up virtually talking to yourself, communicating to your family and friends, not even your larger community. It's much like having a popular college literature magazine in a small town. It may not limit what you are doing, but it limits the range of feedback and thus your growth. And it just wasn't seen nearly as much as the representation here would give the impression, at least not outside the very private and insular--at the time--gay community. Most of us didn't know it was happening until well into the 1970s, even after Stonewall. The longer opening essays by "Laurel" that speak to the technical issues cover a lot of things that were relevant but simply were not true in

most cases as she explains them, or at least as she gives the impression. Most papers were using equipment from the stone age when they started in the early 1960s. Our photostat machine I think may have been used during the Grant administration. I learned everything I knew about the art of photo-copying on that machine and in that darkroom, and my experience was being repeated in Boston and Ann Arbor and Berkeley and Miami and many other places (I know this because a few years later, thanks to Bob bless-me-I-can't-remember-his-last-name I was the second employee of the Underground Press Syndicate and talked to people in these places and found out their histories). For paste-up we used rubber cement and little rubber erasers when we used too much to clean off the gunk. We drudged humped over makeshift light boxes, sawed and hammered together by our go-fer, Fred, a short, not so handsome Italian guy who was also a little short under the hair. We made fun of him incessantly--it was New York in the sixties, after all, and we hadn't yet learned to be nice to people--mostly because he was always making passes at the women in our office who tried to be nice to him but always ended up having to yell at him to take a long walk off a short pier. It wasn't until the technology went completely cold press in the early 1970s, and we could slap together a 32-page paper with columns and photos overnight with two people--and I did that several times before I ran out of steam and quit--that situations changed. Especially in New York and the other major cities, the mob(s) took over the straight and gay underground porn papers and then the distribution for most of the larger underground papers and the industry started to change in parts and die in parts. For example, some people stayed on at EVO, trying to tough it out, while others went West to the Soho Weekly News (and tried to tough it out there in a completely different manner). Others just quit outright.

This coffee-table book is long on graphics and short on textual explication. It omits several important but minor elements of the radical press, most especially the brilliant artistry, patently offensive scatology and pungent lampoons of Thomas and Robert Dunker's subversive publication (the full name of which will not be permitted by censors). In 1968, Horses\*\*\* was responsible (along with Zap, Snatch, the SCUM Manifesto and legions of others contributing to a much lessor extent) for the arrest of a Berkeley bookseller on charges of selling pornography: that was an accomplishment of some note, given the city and the time period. It overlooks Vancouver, B.C.'s "Georgia Straight" and many other regional broadsheets, concentrating instead on seminal papers such as the "Berkeley Barb" and the "East Village Other". Some of the reproductions were rather poor quality, even allowing for their original disposable format. Not much attempt was made at historical context or follow-up on either the publishers, editors, writers or (for that matter) the illustrators. Underground

comics (a topic in-and-of-itself, of course) should merit attention as they were part-and-parcel of the radical press. The music scene and its poster art cannot be separated from the counter-culture but they appear only as an aside (if at all). Naturally and to be fair, an encyclopaedic approach was not intended and that's what would be required to present a comprehensive history. Nonetheless, there's not much available on the topic and this book, despite its deficiencies, is a reasonable first attempt compilation.

I'm an academic librarian and I used this this book to help teach students in a journalism course about the impact the graphic design of the underground press had on 1960s counterculture. I've read just about every book on the underground press of the 1960s and early 1970s and this is the best one I've come across which specifically covers the radical design and psychedelic art of underground newspapers. A wonderful section, from *Quarterly*, a Lesbian underground newspaper, gives step-by-step instructions for "how to make a magazine" with photos of offset printing equipment, cutting and pasting, and so forth. It's also fun to just peruse through the book which is filled with eye-popping graphics and underground newspaper covers. The essays on graphic design were very informative. I know nothing about graphic design, but learned about elements artists used in the underground press such as *d'fÂ©*tournement, deskilling, and montage. I'm very familiar with the artwork of the underground press, but I didn't know what these techniques were called and the just how powerful the they were in packing social, cultural, and political messages. I especially loved the example of an article published in San Francisco's psychedelic *Oracle*, which showed the border completely overtaking the text. The effect of psychedelic graphics was to force the reader to experience the article as though their "doors of perception" had been opened-- a kind of graphical trip. Another aspect brought out, and very much on display in this book, is how counterculture artists gave censorship the middle finger, and often sought out to "shock" their readers into action or thought. One of the interesting things I noticed is how prude college students in this generation are when compared with college students of the late sixties and early seventies. I literally could not show students in the classes certain images from the book (even though there should be no topic that can't be discussed maturely in academia), because of fear that they would have an absolute meltdown.

Great book but was clearly dropped before shipping and has crushed corners on two sides.

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