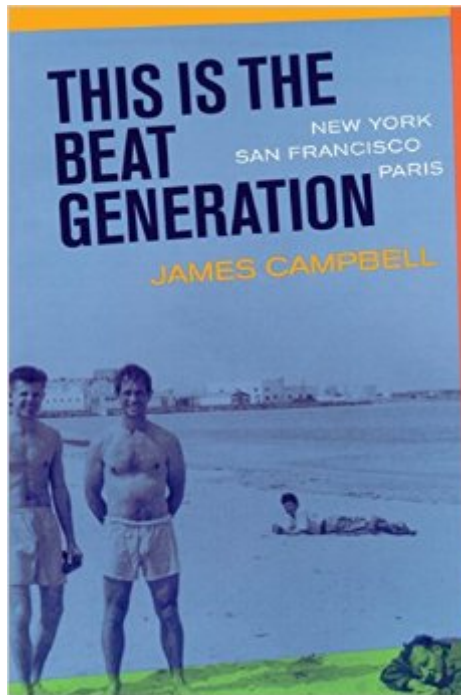


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This Is The Beat Generation: New York-San Francisco-Paris



Synopsis

Beginning in New York in 1944, James Campbell finds the leading members of what was to become the Beat Generation in the shadows of madness and criminality. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs had each seen the insides of a mental hospital and a prison by the age of thirty. A few months after they met, another member of their circle committed a murder that involved Kerouac and Burroughs as material witnesses. This book charts the transformation of these experiences into literature, and a literary movement that spread across the globe. From "The First Cut-Up"--the murder in New York in 1944--we end up in Paris in 1960 with William Burroughs at the Beat Hotel, experimenting with the technique that made him notorious, what Campbell calls "The Final Cut-Up." In between, we move to San Francisco, where Ginsberg gave the first public reading of Howl. We discover Burroughs in Mexico City and Tangiers; the French background to the Beats; the Buddhist influence on Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and others; the "Muses" Herbert Huncke and Neal Cassady; the tortuous history of *On the Road*; and the black ancestry of the white hipster.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I started reading this book with little prior knowledge of the beat movement and authors. I also didn't expect much from the book, thinking that it would probably be a rather academic piece of writing. And what a pleasant surprise it turned out to be! The book was so gripping that I finished it in a few days, reading long passages at a time. It covers the rise to prominence of the dramatis personae of the beat movement (focusing on Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs), giving enough information on

their backgrounds to facilitate an understanding of how this influenced them and their writing, but does not dwell on unnecessary minutiae in the process. All the information is presented in a concise and remarkably readable manner. The author points out the foibles of the beats, but is not too judgemental, leaving it to the reader to come to his own conclusions. But the best thing about this book is the way the author links events and people in a witty, intelligent way without falling into the very beat trap of being pretentious. It can serve as an example to all authors wishing to write an intelligent, accessible work of non-fiction.

[...]. But then I also suggest getting a subscription to the National Enquirer, for the same rhetoric to be found in that rag is to be found in this book's overtly slanted viewpoint. Every luminary in this significant literary and cultural movement is depicted as psychotic, criminal, racist, and sexually confused. Nothing positive about the Beat Generation is mentioned. Granted, the Beats had their personal faults, but who doesn't? Campbell does a great disservice to his readers by not presenting a balanced perspective of the Beats and the influence they have had around the world. If you're looking for fair, introspective commentary on the Beat Generation...look elsewhere.

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