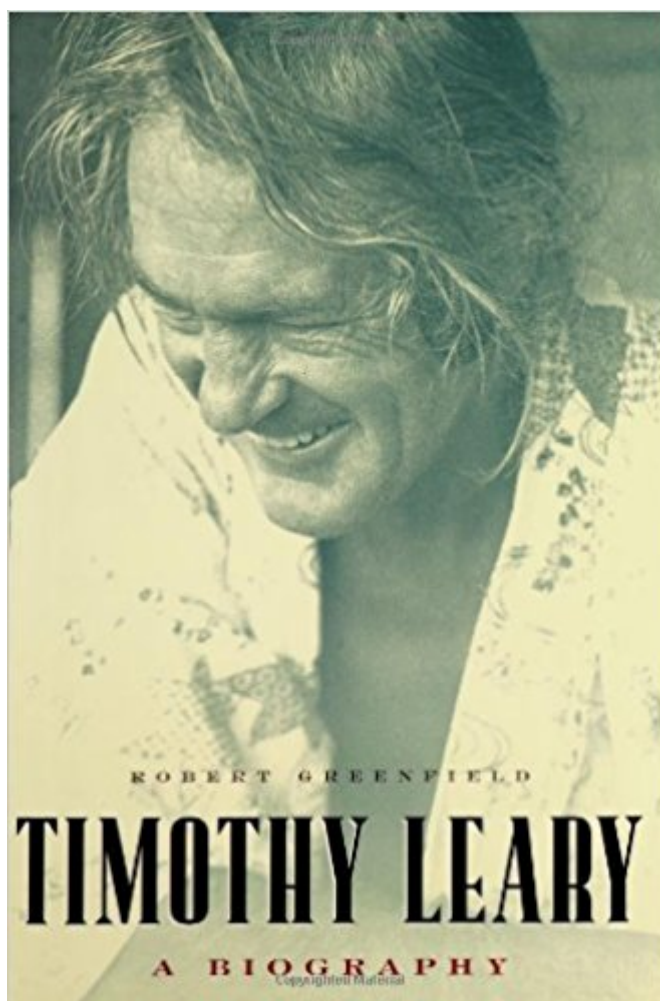


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# Timothy Leary: A Biography



## Synopsis

To a generation in full revolt against any form of authority, "Tune in, turn on, drop out" became a mantra, and its popularizer, Dr. Timothy Leary, a guru. A charismatic and brilliant psychologist, Leary became first intrigued and then obsessed by the effects of psychedelic drugs in the 1960s while teaching at Harvard, where he not only encouraged but instituted their experimental use among students and faculty. What began as research into human consciousness turned into a mission to alter consciousness itself. Leary transformed himself from serious social scientist into counterculture shaman, embodying the idealism and the hedonism of an age of revolutionary change. Timothy Leary is the first major biography of one of the most controversial figures in postwar America.

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## Customer Reviews

Greenfield, award-winning biographer of Jerry Garcia and Bill Graham, paints another '60s portrait in this scathing account of counterculture hero and LSD guru Timothy Leary (1920-1996). Largely based on interviews with Leary's friends and acquaintances, this book offers a highly detailed and decidedly ugly portrayal of a pathologically selfish, narcissistic yet complex man who lacked basic qualities such as empathy and compassion. Worse, Leary, the cynosure of the psychedelic movement, who preached the power of LSD and other drugs to expand human consciousness and foster change, fails to exhibit the capacity for inner growth. Greenfield's gaze alights as much on the quotidian (who cooked what for dinner when) as on the sensational (drugs,

sex, Black Panthers, parades of famous figures like Allen Ginsberg and Abbie Hoffman). Despite the visceral dislike for Leary that readers are likely to develop, many will be intrigued by the unlikely course of his life, which took him from a prestigious position as a Harvard lecturer to the California penal system, and later to work as a government informer in an Algerian compound with Eldridge Cleaver. Leary ends up a dissipated, broken man, who remains self-promoting enough to suggest, in 1996, that he would kill himself while logged on to yet another new phenomenon, the Internet. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** After launching his pioneering and brazen inquiry into the effects of psychedelic drugs at Harvard, Leary (1920-96) became the reigning psychedelic guru, declaring, "You must turn on, tune in, and drop out." In the first comprehensive biography of this notorious and puzzling figure, Greenfield trenchantly analyzes Leary's pseudospirituality, egoism, thrill seeking, strange brew of naivete and wiliness, and mind-boggling ability to ingest astronomical amounts of LSD, all the while meticulously and incredulously chronicling Leary's epic misadventures, including masterminding communal chaos at an estate in Millbrook, New York; a daring prison break; and exile in Algiers under the baleful eye of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. Charismatic and cunning, lacking in compassion and common sense, Leary--the emperor of acid, the jet-setting court jester of the counterculture, and an Elmer Gantry-like evangelist in the church of self-indulgence--lived at least nine lives. Greenfield masterfully shapes an unwieldy amount of astounding, often troubling material so that both the absurdity and tragedy of Leary's life come clear. A veritable who's who of the age of Aquarius and a real page-turner, Greenfield's cornerstone portrait of the acidhead who would be king brilliantly illuminates the paradoxes of the psychedelic age. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I'm glad I only paid \$0.01 for this book-- that says it all. Greenfield is simply cashing in on the fame or, notoriety if you like, of someone he clearly dislikes and doesn't understand. I give two stars for the interviews in the book, which are a must for anyone interested in Leary, and the fact that Leary's is a fascinating story. The book is plodding and pedestrian. The origins of quoted comments are fairly hard to ascertain in many cases (simply interview with, date). He keeps describing photos in detail (quaintly Greenfield seems to think Leary was very handsome) and interviews are not edited very well. The book spans six hundred 600 pages, which implies that some judicious editing might have helped. Greenfield thinks that Leary was 'not cool, man' (his words) but his own comments

often lack interest. Everything Leary did is given a negative slant. If someone made a negative comment about Leary, generally that's what he quotes (you might think that Robert Anton Wilson was one of Leary's greatest critics!). Worst of all, Leary's endearing sense of humor, which comes out in every book and appearance and book, is absent from this book and Leary as writer and intellectual (his main appeal to many) is largely ignored, as if Greenfield could not manage to rise above day to day details. Greenfield is to Leary what John Symonds was to Aleister Crowley-- both men making money by writing hatchet jobs on controversial figures. John Hitchen's *I Have America Surrounded: A Biography of Timothy Leary* is a much better introduction to Leary.

## GOOD PRODUCT AND PROMPT SERVICE

Fascinating book. Leary's life connected with almost everyone of consequence in the sixties, both in and out of the counter culture. Greenfield is an interesting writer and his book reads like a novel you can't put down!

This new biography of Leary presents him as a complex character full of flaws and tragic heroism. In particular, Leary's tragic personal life stands in stark contrast here to his larger-than-life counterculture heroics. Whether you love him or hate him, you will have to admit that his life makes for an amazing story. Greenfield tells that story in fluid prose, weaving together disparate first-hand accounts into a detailed chronological portrait. If the book has a flaw, it is that Greenfield perhaps loses his own voice at times, relying too much on quotes from others to tell the story. But, the flip side of that is that he does not let his own agenda interfere with telling the story. Another minor criticism is that he could have helped the reader out at places by providing more date references to keep the chronology clear -- there were times I had to go back several pages to remind myself what year was being discussed. But, at the end of this remarkable book, those flaws are minor indeed. If you have any interest at all in Leary or the '60s counterculture, this book comes highly recommended. Since reading it, I have found myself constantly thinking about Leary and processing the meaning of his life and times. That is what good books are all about.

I usually read quite a few books simultaneously but I read this one every time I got a chance and finished it rather quickly. I found it very interesting. Timothy had quite an eventful life. Timothy's books influenced me a great deal. He inspired me to attend college. I now have a graduate degree. Nobody from my family had ever been to college until I did it. Timothy's mantra to increase one's

intelligence was very inspiring to me. Tim showed us that the world is not what Madison Ave. or the governments are leading us to believe it is. It's interesting to see the 2 divergent paths Richard Alpert/Ram Dass and Timothy took after their shared LSD/Harvard years. Richard went East while Tim stayed western to a large degree, primarily, although he did acknowledge much eastern philosophy. Ram Dass studied and meditated in traditions that see the ego or human individual as profoundly transitory and that who we are is consciousness or one with the god head or ultimately we are God beyond all the thoughts of individuality. See Ram Dass's books, *Be Here Now*, *The Only Dance There Is* and *Grist for the Mill* as well as his commentary on Ramana Maharshi's video: "Abide as the Self". Tim in his psychedelic writings would go in and out of acknowledging universal consciousness but part of him seemed to cling to the ego or the individual as if somehow he could make it last forever. His interest in cryogenics and the freezing of his brain to be later implanted in a new body in the future, (an idea he finally abandoned, choosing instead to have his ashes shot into space) was evidence of this. I felt Timothy was a great individual and wonderful person who inspired many to evolve their consciousness which is Phase I. Phase II would be the dropping of the ego i.e. the Eastern way. Rajneesh/Osho talked about this. He said the east is egoless because it is part of their culture but it is almost useless because in order to drop your ego you need an ego to drop and the easterners don't have sufficiently developed egos to drop or a vehicle that is strong enough to allow God consciousness to express except in a few cases like Ramana Maharshi who realized at age 16. Ramana stated that perhaps his early realization is due to the fact that he did a lot of work in previous lives. Conversely, the west is all about ego, i.e. Maslows' Hierarchy of Needs, Descartes' "I think therefore I am". Eastern philosophy, on the other hand states that thoughts are not who we are at all. The author of this book tries to show that when Tim was in jail he became a turncoat or snitch and sold out the very people who helped him escape and betrayed even his friends. But I say this. Timothy Leary is not the villain here. It is the American government with their draconian drug laws. These laws have destroyed more lives and citizens of this country than the drugs have. They have turned family members against each other and have destroyed families. Prohibition drives these activities underground where they cannot be regulated for safety or taxed for much needed government revenue. Citizens convicted under such stupid laws cannot get good employment anymore and are forced to be criminals to survive. Could you imagine how much revenue our country would have available to solve really important problems like universal health care or old age health care if there were fewer prisons and the police were actually loved again rather than perceived as jackbooted Nazi-like thugs cracking people's skulls for taking a little weed? The laws and the cost of enforcement financially, psychologically and from a societal point of view are far more

damaging than an open culture where drugs are an individual choice. Perhaps the stronger drugs like LSD should be dispersed only under guidance or one must get a license to drive this drug. There are damaging drugs, primarily the opiates, heroin, primarily because of the potential for dependence, and meth. See "Ain't Nobody's Business if You Do" by Terry McWilliams for some excellent discussion on these drugs and their use. Perhaps a drug council could get together to legalize and tax LSD, psilocybin and other manufactured drugs which in turn would be regulated for safety and purity by the FDA. Mushrooms and pot could be homegrown like any plant or professionally grown and taxed. Just the reduction in enforcement costs alone, fewer prisons, The social costs of ruined lives because of going to prison and the destruction of families due to ridiculous prison sentences would be eliminated. Just making drugs legal will not make everybody start using them. I did my share of drinking in my life but have gone years and years without drinking or having any desire to or in anyway feeling pressure to even though it is legal and readily accessible. There are just other things to do in life besides drinking and drugging. But I would like the option to take a little or drink a little if I ever got the desire to do so. DUIs still have to be enforced and perhaps public intoxication laws but we as citizens should have the ability to imbibe these chemicals. Humans have done this for ages. Pleasure is not inherently wrong. It's just a possibility...not an end in itself but just an ordinary thing like sex is ordinary...that's another tangent, prostitution should be legal, regulated for safety and taxed for those who choose such a lifestyle. It's nobody's business but our own. We need courageous politicians to change the laws. A college professor told us that if you want to change the laws you utilize congress not the courts. We need to support the Libertarian Party and the ACLU so we can get these laws changed. As far as I know we still have free speech, and can assemble and use the system to get our views across. The Founding Fathers had Great Fear of the "Police State". They did everything they could to insure that their civil liberties would be protected. Drug laws, sting operations on prostitutes and johns, BTW the only reason why more men are not prostitutes for women is that men cannot be passive in the act while women can, and increased surveillance over private citizens in the name of protecting us from terrorism really compromises our freedom. All the civil liberties our country fought for in the revolution are gradually being eroded in the name of security. Apparently we want security, not freedom. "I don't want to think for myself. I want somebody to think for me. I want somebody to tell me what to do and when to do it". The government and the police are going to protect us? Who will protect us from the government and the police? We are being led like sheep to slaughter and we are giving up willingly because we haven't got the guts to think for ourselves. A few people will die from misadventure from drugs like people die from driving cars so shall we prohibit cars? Drugs out in the

open means more education about the topic and no secrets. Remember this: Power corrupts. The more power we give to the government and to the police the more insane they will become, they will seek to instill more fear in to us so they can sell us their medicine, of course, for our own good. Who are they that they know so much? Are they perfect beings? There is much room for police corruption because of the victim less crime laws, i.e. laws against drugs and prostitution. Spying on people engaged in sexual activity is a form of voyeurism. Delighting in cracking skulls of pot smokers is a form of sanctioned violence. If you give up freedom for so called security you sacrifice a great deal. You give up your very soul. Authorities killed Socrates, authorities told Galileo to recant his contention that the earth revolved around the sun and not the other way around. Authorities of more recent times stated that "Separate but Equal" facilities in the south that segregated blacks from whites was OK. Like Timothy said, "Think for yourself and question authority".

can not get enough of Tim

Although second hand, the book appeared to be brand new. Timothy Leary was my neighbor in Berkeley so of course, I'm fascinated with his life story. It is very well-written.

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