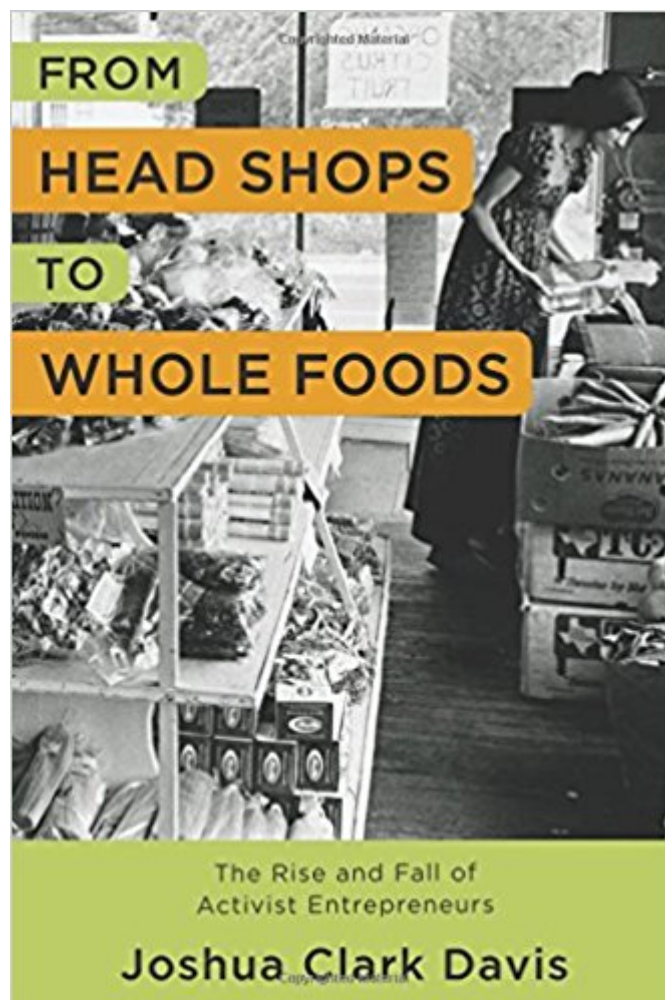


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# From Head Shops To Whole Foods: The Rise And Fall Of Activist Entrepreneurs (Columbia Studies In The History Of U.S. Capitalism)



## Synopsis

In the 1960s and 1970s, a diverse range of storefronts—including head shops, African American bookstores, feminist businesses, and organic grocers—brought the work of the New Left, Black Power, feminism, environmentalism, and other movements into the marketplace. Through shared ownership, limited growth, and democratic workplaces, these activist entrepreneurs offered alternatives to conventional profit-driven corporate business models. By the middle of the 1970s, thousands of these enterprises operated across the United States—but only a handful survive today. Some, such as Whole Foods Market, have abandoned their quest for collective political change in favor of maximizing profits. Vividly portraying the struggles, successes, and sacrifices of these unlikely entrepreneurs, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods* writes a new history of social movements and capitalism by showing how activists embraced small businesses in a way few historians have considered. The book challenges the widespread but mistaken idea that activism and political dissent are inherently antithetical to participation in the marketplace. Joshua Clark Davis uncovers the historical roots of contemporary interest in ethical consumption, social enterprise, buying local, and mission-driven business, while also showing how today's companies have adopted the language—but not often the mission—of liberation and social change.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rigorously researched and carefully written, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods* uncovers one of the

most unrecognized groups of the American activists in the 1960s and 1970s—activist entrepreneurs. They were widely influential then and remain so today. This book is critical for understanding contemporary companies that celebrate ethical practices and social change. (Ibram X. Kendi, American University, author of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, winner of the 2016 National Book Award, Nonfiction)

*From Head Shops to Whole Foods* offers an important look at the afterlife of the direct action campaigns of the 1960s, recasting the history of small business as a desegregated history of American politics. With a critical eye and swift prose, Davis's book recognizes the centrality of entrepreneurial politics as an expression of—and in the making of—American political culture, writ long and writ large. Truly exceptional. (N. D. B. Connolly, Johns Hopkins University and cohost of the podcast *BackStory*)

Davis has rewritten the sixties. His compelling account reveals how sixties radicals and rebels fought to co-opt capitalism to create a more just, diverse, and free marketplace. They lost more battles than they won, but their victories continue to shape our world. (David Farber, University of Kansas, author of *The Age of Great Dreams*)

Joshua Clark Davis's new book is a brilliant tour through a history yet untold, illuminating the fascinating past of a contemporary marketplace that eagerly brands itself as countercultural but which has largely abandoned—even as it has been irreversibly shaped by—the activist politics that inspired it. (Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *The New School For Social Research*)

In this beautifully written, elegantly conceived, and deeply researched book, Davis traces the histories of 1960s-era small enterprises aimed at alternative forms of capitalism. His clear prose and sharp analysis illuminates the U.S. economy's appetite for reform under capitalism. An essential work. (Charles McGovern, *William and Mary*)

*From Head Shops to Whole Foods* avoids the stilted language of the academy to produce deft descriptions of African-American bookstores, the head shops of the drug counterculture, the businesses of second-wave feminism, and the arrival of health-food stores and their corporate apotheosis. Using solid, representative examples, Davis traces each vein of activist entrepreneurialism to show how activists' original intentions were frustrated, altered, or abandoned. (Publishers Weekly)

Scholarly in tone and approach but accessible and of interest to students of business history as well as to budding entrepreneurs. (Kirkus Reviews)

*From Head Shops to Whole Foods* makes a valuable contribution to the study of American capitalism and consumerism. It reveals some well-worn paths in American history but in new ways, while also establishing some of the ironic origins of today's corporate citizens. (The Metropole: The Official Blog of the Urban History Association)

Joshua Clark Davis is assistant professor of history at the University of Baltimore.

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