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AMERICA DURING ITS LONGEST WAR, 1963–1974

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- The Great Society • Escalation in Vietnam • The War at Home
- 1968 • Continued Polarization, 1969–1974 • Foreign Policy in a Time of Turmoil, 1969–1974 • A Crisis of Governance, 1972–1974

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON (LBJ) promised to finish what John F. Kennedy (JFK) had begun. Ultimately, though, popular memories of LBJ's presidency would bear little resemblance to those of Kennedy's. At home, Johnson had already charted his course: He hoped to mobilize the power of government to promote liberty and advance equality. In Southeast Asia, however, Johnson saw no obvious route to follow. Should the United States pull back from earlier commitments to South Vietnam, roll out its vast military power, or follow some other course? Johnson's decisions about Vietnam generated political discord at home, and controversy also overtook his initially popular domestic moves. As America's longest war dragged on, public opinion turned against Johnson and his policies. By 1968, polarization over priorities at home and overseas embittered national politics.

The polarization so much in evidence during 1968 grew worse during the war years that followed. By the end of America's longest war and the Watergate crisis that brought President Richard Nixon's resignation, the nation's political culture and social fabric looked very different from how they had appeared in 1963.

THE GREAT SOCIETY

Lyndon Baines Johnson lacked Kennedy's charisma, but he possessed other political assets. As a member of the House of Representatives during the late 1930s and early 1940s and as majority leader of the U.S. Senate during the 1950s, Johnson mastered the art of interest group horse-trading. Few issues, it appeared, defied an LBJ-forged solution. Johnson flattered, cajoled, or threatened people until they lent him their support. During Johnson's time in Congress, his already wealthy Texas

CHRONOLOGY

1964	Civil Rights Act of 1964 passes ♦ Congress approves Gulf of Tonkin Resolution ♦ Johnson defeats Barry Goldwater
1965	Congress passes Voting Rights Act ♦ Violence hits Watts ♦ U.S. role in Vietnam dramatically expands
1966	Supreme Court decides <i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> ♦ U.S. begins massive air strikes in North Vietnam
1967	Large antiwar demonstrations begin
1968	Tet offensive begins ♦ Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy assassinated ♦ Civil Rights Act passed ♦ Richard Nixon wins presidency
1969	Nixon announces “Vietnamization” policy ♦ My Lai massacre becomes public
1970	U.S. troops enter Cambodia ♦ Congress creates Environmental Protection Agency
1971	Stagflation upsets U.S. economy ♦ U.S. dollar begins to “float” on currency markets
1972	Watergate burglars caught inside Democratic headquarters ♦ Nixon crushes George McGovern in presidential election
1973	OPEC oil embargo begins ♦ Paris peace accords signed ♦ Supreme Court decides <i>Roe v. Wade</i> ♦ Special Senate committee begins hearings into “Watergate”
1974	House votes impeachment and Nixon resigns ♦ Gerald Ford assumes presidency
1975	Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces

benefactors gained valuable oil and gas concessions and lucrative construction contracts. Johnson’s skill in gaining congressional funding for building projects boosted Texas cities such as Dallas and Houston, along with much of the Southwest. LBJ himself acquired a personal fortune.

Kennedy’s death gave Johnson the opportunity to deploy his political skills on the presidential stage. No previous president had ever taken office after having served so long in Congress. Although eager to enact a bold social-economic program, Johnson began cautiously. He asked Congress to honor JFK’s memory by addressing three legislative issues proposed by Kennedy’s administration: tax cutting, economic inequality, and civil rights.

Closing the New Frontier

Working behind the scenes, Johnson easily secured passage of the Kennedy tax cut, the measure that JFK had promised would stimulate economic growth. Although analysts still differ on the precise design of this legislation and its contribution to the economic boom of the mid-1960s, the tax measure appeared to work. GNP rose 7 percent in 1964 and 8 percent the following year, unemployment dropped, and inflation remained low.

In his January 1964 State of the Union address, Johnson upped the ante on Kennedy's cautious effort to address economic inequality by calling for "an unconditional war on poverty in America." Relentlessly prodded by the White House, Congress soon passed The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. It created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to coordinate a multipart program. First headed by R. Sargent Shriver, a brother-in-law of John Kennedy, the OEO was charged with eliminating "the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty." In addition to establishing the OEO, the act mandated loans for rural and small-business development; established a work-training program called the Jobs Corps; created Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a domestic version of the Peace Corps; provided low-wage, public service jobs for young people; began a "work-study program" to assist college students; and authorized the creation of federally funded social programs to be planned in concert with local community groups.

Johnson also helped push an expanded version of Kennedy's civil rights proposal through Congress. Although championing the measure as a memorial to JFK, LBJ knew that Southerners in their own Democratic Party would try to block it. Consequently, he successfully sought Republican support to curtail a southern-led filibuster. Johnson also helped hammer out compromises on several key provisions and reconcile the differing bills enacted by the House and Senate.

In July, Congress passed a landmark measure. The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** strengthened federal remedies, monitored by a new Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), against racially inspired job discrimination. The act also prohibited racial discrimination in all public accommodations connected to interstate commerce, such as motels and restaurants. Moreover, Title VII, a provision added during congressional debate, barred discrimination based on sex and became important to the reviving women's movement. Although opponents of the 1964 act argued that its extension of federal power violated the Constitution, the Supreme Court, effectively a political ally of Lyndon Johnson during his presidency, curtly rejected such claims.

That same summer, a coalition of civil rights groups recruited nearly a thousand young volunteers for **Freedom Summer**. Sponsored by a coalition of activist groups and led by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), this project targeted Mississippi with an effort to register African American voters and to begin other civil rights projects. During that tension-filled summer, at least six civil rights workers met violent deaths. In the most notorious incident, a conspiracy among KKK leaders and law-enforcement officers from Neshoba County, Mississippi, brutally murdered three volunteers—James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. This incident would roil Mississippi's legal and political life for years. Finally, in 2005, a Mississippi jury convicted a former KKK leader, by then in his eighties, of manslaughter for participating in the triple killing of 1964.

Meanwhile, supporters of Freedom Summer pressed forward, only to see the national Democratic Party reject their grassroots political work. Pressured by LBJ, the 1964 Democratic convention voted to seat Mississippi's "regular" all-white delegates rather than members of a new, racially diverse Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The regulars had made clear their intention to support the GOP's presidential candidate, but Johnson declined to support the MFDP in hopes of keeping some other southern states in the Democratic camp in the fall election. LBJ's rebuff of the MFDP prompted its leaders, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, to question the president's



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The Presence of Lyndon B. Johnson. *As both senator and president, Lyndon Johnson employed body language—the “Johnson treatment”—as one means of gaining support for his policies.*

commitment to their cause. What would Johnson—and Hubert Humphrey, his hand-picked vice presidential running mate—do for civil rights after the 1964 election?

The Election of 1964

After a bruising battle within GOP ranks, the Republicans nominated Senator **Barry Goldwater** of Arizona, hero of the new conservatism, to challenge Johnson. Goldwater’s strategists claimed that a stoutly conservative GOP campaign would attract the vast number of voters who supposedly rejected both Democratic policies and Dwight Eisenhower’s “modern Republican” ones. Goldwater denounced Johnson’s foreign policy for tolerating communist expansion and attacked his domestic agenda, including civil rights, for destroying individual liberties. One of only eight Republican senators who had opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Goldwater condemned the measure as an unconstitutional extension of national power on behalf of the laudable goal of combating discrimination. Issues of civil rights, Goldwater insisted, were matters for state and local governments.

The Goldwater campaign quickly fizzled. The Democratic campaign savaged the candidate’s policies, his grasp of issues, and even his mental stability. A tendency to make ill-considered remarks already haunted Goldwater. He had suggested that people who feared nuclear war were “silly and sissified.” He had wondered out loud if participation in the Social Security program should become voluntary. And during his acceptance speech at the 1964 Republican convention Goldwater proclaimed that “extremism in the pursuit of liberty is no vice” and “moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” The phrase fed Democratic claims that “extremist” forces on the “radical right” would dominate a Goldwater presidency.

Many moderate Republicans deserted Goldwater, who led the GOP to a spectacular defeat in November. Johnson carried 44 states and won more than 60 percent of the popular vote; Democrats also gained 38 seats in Congress. In the short run, the 1964 election seemed a triumph for Lyndon Johnson's vision of government power.

The 1964 election, however, foreshadowed deep-rooted political changes that would undermine Johnson's agenda and, in time, the Democratic Party. Indeed, during the Democratic primaries of 1964, Alabama's segregationist governor, George Wallace, had run strongly against the president in several states. Already well positioned as an opponent of civil rights movements, Wallace denounced any "meddling" by Washington in local affairs. The 1964 election proved the last, until that of 2008, in which the Democratic Party would capture the White House by proposing an expansion in the power of the national government.

Goldwater's defeat invigorated rather than discouraged supporters of the new conservatism. His staff pioneered innovative campaign tactics, such as direct-mail fundraising. By refining these techniques during future campaigns, conservative strategists helped make 1964 the beginning, not the end, of their plan to push the Republican Party, and the country, to the right. Goldwater's continued criticism of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped him carry five Southern states. These victories—along with Wallace's earlier appeal to "white backlash" voters—suggested that opposition to additional civil rights measures could woo Southern whites away from the Democratic Party.

An important electoral issue in California also gave conservatives hope. The Democratic national ticket easily carried the state, but real-estate interests joined with suburban conservatives to sponsor a referendum measure that repealed the recently enacted "Rumford Act." This 1962 law had prohibited racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing in California. Opponents of this open-housing measure adopted a political strategy that conservatives would increasingly embrace: downplay racial issues and, instead, denounce governmental regulations such as the Rumford Act for violating the principles of equal rights and individual liberties.

Finally, the Goldwater campaign introduced a new corps of conservative activists, many of them from the Sunbelt, to national politics. Ronald Reagan championed the new conservatism so effectively that Goldwater Republicans in California began grooming the former movie and TV actor for a political career. Younger conservatives, such as William Rehnquist and Newt Gingrich, entered the national arena as supporters of Goldwater's vision. Goldwater also enlisted Milton Friedman, the staunchly conservative economist and a critic of Keynesian policies, as an advisor. Historians now credit the Goldwater effort of 1964, for spearheading the overhaul of American conservatism—and the Republican Party.

Lyndon Johnson's Great Society

Lyndon Johnson rushed to capitalize on his electoral victory. Enjoying broad support in Congress, Johnson unveiled plans for a **Great Society**, an array of federal programs designed to "enrich and elevate our national life." Some of the programs fulfilled the dreams of his Democratic predecessors. Nationally funded medical coverage for the elderly (Medicare) and for low-income citizens (Medicaid) grew out of healthcare proposals from the New- and Fair-Deal eras. Similarly, a new cabinet office, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), built on earlier plans for coordinating urban revitalization programs.

The **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, which created mechanisms for national oversight of state and local elections in the South, capped the long-term effort to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination, especially sham “literacy tests,” from political life. The measure gave the Justice Department broadly defined authority to monitor electoral procedures in jurisdictions with a history of discriminating against African American voters. Modified and extended over the years, most recently in 2008, the Voting Rights Act also came to require ballots printed in languages other than English.

Meanwhile, Congress enacted another milestone measure that addressed matters long discussed—and long avoided. The **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965** finally abolished the discriminatory “national origins” quota system established in 1924 (see Chapter 24). Henceforth, roughly the same set of rules would apply to people wishing to immigrate to the United States from any part of the world. This change, in practice, would allow the entry of far more people from Asia and Africa than had previously been allowed.

Many of the Great Society’s new proposals rested on the mid-century “affluence” that the Johnson administration expected to continue for years to come. Even a costly war in Southeast Asia could not dampen its optimism. Ongoing economic growth could provide the tax dollars to underwrite a bold expansion of national power without any overhaul of fundamental political and economic arrangements.

The array of Great Society initiatives that rolled through Congress during the mid-1960s heartened LBJ’s supporters and appalled his critics. The Model Cities Program (1966) offered smaller-scale alternatives to urban renewal efforts. Rent supplements and an expanded food stamp program went to help low-income families. The Head Start Program (1965) provided help for children considered educationally unprepared for kindergarten. Other new federal educational programs aimed to upgrade classroom instruction, especially in low-income neighborhoods, and a legal services initiative provided lawyers to clients who could not afford to hire an attorney. These measures aimed at providing low-income people with the kind of professional expertise, routinely available to the more affluent, that could help them fight their way out of social and economic distress. The Great Society’s service-based approach, Johnson insisted, would give people a “hand up” rather than a “handout.”

The Community Action Program (CAP) promised a different tack. It authorized grassroots activists, working through neighborhood organizations, to design community-based projects that could gain funding from Washington. By promoting “maximum feasible participation” by ordinary citizens rather than relying on planning experts, the architects of CAP proposed to nurture a grassroots democracy that could revitalize American politics from the bottom up.

Evaluating the Great Society

How did the Great Society become so controversial? Most obviously, the extension of Washington’s reach rekindled old debates about the use, as both an issue of political principle and pragmatic policymaking, of the power of the national government. In addition, Johnson’s rhetorical extravagance, such as promising an “unconditional” victory over poverty, announced long-term objectives that failed to survive the short-term rhythms of partisan politics. Republicans rebounded from the Democratic landslide of 1964 and picked up 47 seats in Congress in the midterm elections of 1966. The Great Society ideal would never again enjoy the overwhelming congressional support that had accompanied Johnson’s initial proposals.

Finally, the expectation that continued economic growth would generate tax revenues sufficient to finance new social programs faded during the early 1970s. Worsening economic conditions, exacerbated by the escalating cost of the war in Vietnam, made social welfare measures more politically vulnerable than during the prosperous mid-1960s. Facing financial worries of their own, people who had been initially supportive of the Great Society became receptive to the claim, first championed by George Wallace and the Goldwater campaign in 1964, that bureaucrats in Washington would waste their hard-earned tax dollars on flawed social experiments.

Historians disagree about the impact of Johnson's programs. Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* (1984) charged the Great Society with encouraging antisocial behavior. This book argued that too many people, lured by welfare payments, abandoned the goals of marrying, settling down, and seeking jobs. Money spent on Johnson's programs, moreover, created government deficits that slowed economic growth. Had ill-advised social spending not undermined personal initiative and disrupted the nation's economy, its continued growth would have ultimately provided most Americans with a comfortable lifestyle, according to *Losing Ground*. A central text of the new conservatism, Murray's book saw Johnson's Great Society as a cause of, not a solution for, economic distress.

Other analysts more sympathetic to the Great Society rejected this view. First, where was the evidence for the claim that most people preferred welfare to meaningful work? Second, funds actually spent on Great Society programs neither matched Johnson's promises nor reached the lavish levels claimed by the new conservatism. Moreover, the charge that government expenditures choked off growth ignored the systemic economic problems that emerged in the early 1970s. In addition, Great Society advocates pointed to the significant decline in poverty rates, which fell from 19 percent in 1962 to 10 percent in 1969.

Antipoverty activists developed another critique that faulted the architects of the Great Society for not doing enough. They charged that the Johnson administration failed to challenge the prevailing distribution of political and economic power and favored large-scale bureaucratic solutions forged by people beholden to power-brokers in Washington. They noted that the administration jettisoned the CAP model of grassroots empowerment almost as soon as local politicians began complaining about having to compete for federal funding. In this view, the assumption that economic growth would fund the Great Society had precluded any serious attempt, such as a revised tax code, to redistribute income and wealth. The Johnson administration always lacked a viable plan to confront inequality, according to this critique.

Despite disagreements over how to interpret the Great Society, historians nevertheless concur over its impact on the federal budget. Washington's financial outlay for domestic programs increased more than 10 percent during every year of LBJ's presidency. In 1960, federal spending on social welfare constituted 28 percent of total governmental outlays; by 1970, this figure had risen to more than 40 percent. Moreover, Great Society programs such as Medicaid, legal assistance, and job training gave low-income families access to social services and slightly narrowed the disparity between rich and poor.

From the perspective of political viability, though, the Great Society proved a failure. Opposition to the assumptions and goals of Johnson's Great Society gave new energy to the conservative surge. As support for domestic spending programs waned, even some Democrats hesitated to defend Lyndon Johnson's vision. LBJ's domestic policies, based on extending national power, inflamed partisan passions; and calls for limiting the reach of Washington increasingly dominated political discussion and

reshaped American political culture. For many years, the Democratic Party rarely recalled Lyndon Johnson's memory. Finally, in 2007, a Republican president signed a bill renaming the Department of Education Office Building in Johnson's honor.

ESCALATION IN VIETNAM

Lyndon Johnson's divisive crusade to build a Great Society at home found its counterpart abroad. His pledge to protect South Vietnam from communism demanded ever more of the nation's human and material resources. Johnson's foreign policy diminished the nation's international standing, further polarized its domestic politics, and strained its economy.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

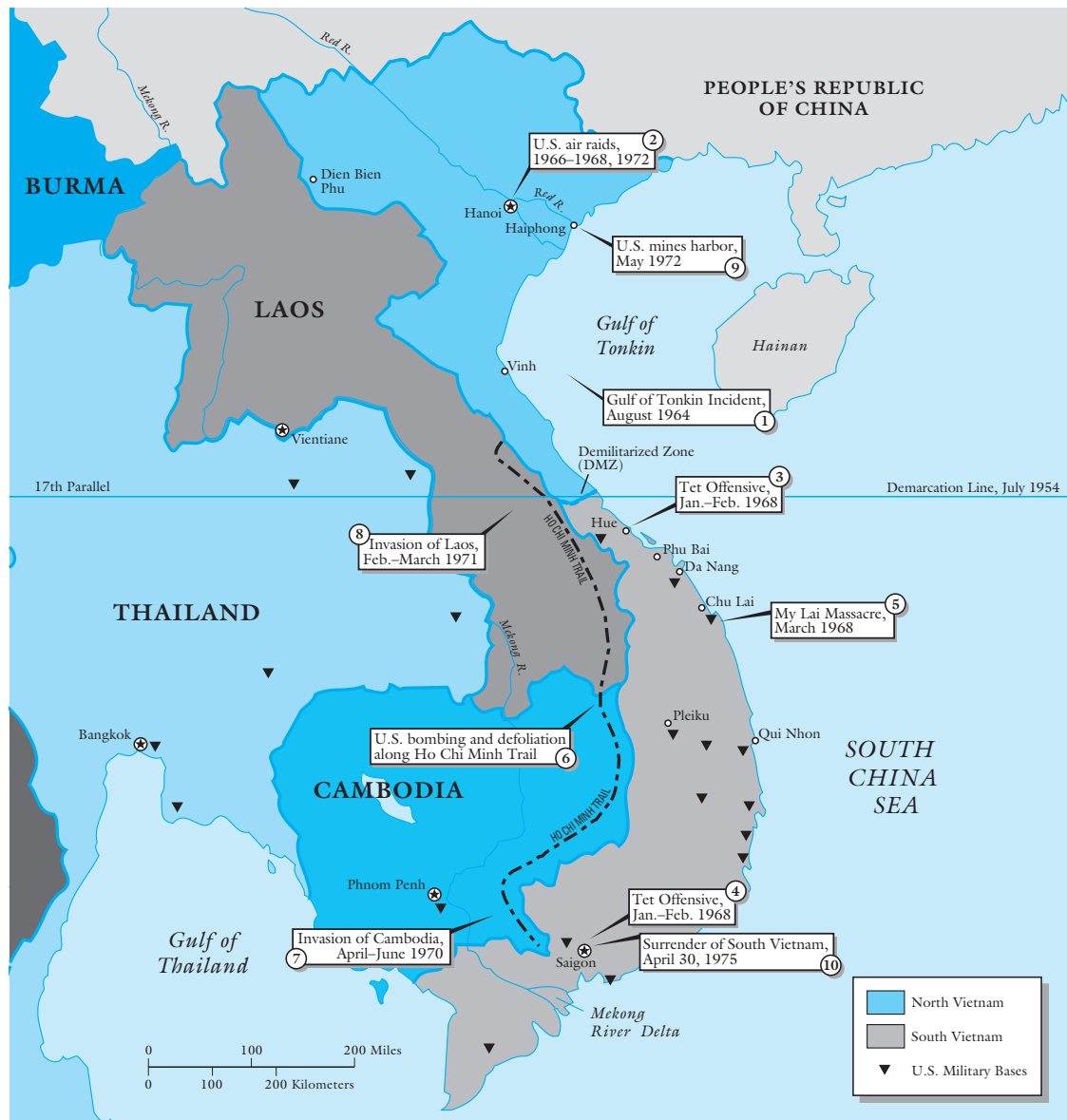
Immediately after John Kennedy's assassination, Johnson resisted additional support for South Vietnam. His fears of appearing soft on communism, however, soon led him to side with those advisers who saw air strikes against North Vietnam as the necessary first step toward preserving an anticommunist government in South Vietnam. Johnson prepared a congressional resolution authorizing this escalation of hostilities.

Events in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam, provided the rationale for taking the resolution to Capitol Hill. On August 1, 1964, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox*, while on an intelligence-gathering mission, exchanged gunfire with North Vietnamese ships. Three days later, the *Maddox* returned with the *Turner Joy* and, during severe weather, reported what seemed to be signs of a failed torpedo attack. Although the *Maddox*'s commander advised that the episode needed further analysis, Johnson immediately denounced "unprovoked aggression" by North Vietnam against the United States. (A later study concluded that there had never been a North Vietnamese attack.) With only two dissenting votes in the Senate, Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, which authorized Johnson to take "all necessary measures to repel armed attack."

This resolution seemed to give Johnson what he needed. His strong stand against apparent aggression was politically popular, and the resolution gave the president numerous military options in Southeast Asia. He immediately began bombing strikes against North Vietnam and used the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution as tantamount to a congressional declaration of war.

The congressional resolution also helped Johnson position himself as a cautious moderate during the presidential campaign of 1964. When Barry Goldwater demanded stronger measures against North Vietnam and even hinted at possible use of tactical nuclear weapons, Johnson's campaign managers portrayed Goldwater as a threat to the survival of civilization. Johnson seemingly promised not to commit U.S. troops to any land war in Southeast Asia during the 1964 campaign.

Soon after the November election, however, Johnson faced a complicated decision. More than a year after the 1963 coup against Diem (see Chapter 28), South Vietnam still faced political disarray. The failure of successive military governments in Saigon was fueling popular discontent, and South Vietnamese troops were deserting at an alarming rate. North Vietnam continued expanding its military aid to the National Liberation Front (NLF) and then began sending a sizable number of its own troops into South Vietnam. By the beginning of 1965, the NLF controlled much of the countryside. Only in Saigon and other urban areas was national authority still relevant. In January, another Saigon regime collapsed, and factionalism stalled the emergence of any viable alternative.



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MAP 29.1 Vietnam War

The war in Vietnam spread into neighboring countries as the United States sought to prevent North Vietnam from bringing supplies and troops southward along a network called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Unlike the Korean War the guerrilla-style war in Indochina had few conventional battle “fronts.”

Lacking an effective ally in Saigon, Johnson pondered conflicting advice. National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy predicted Saigon’s defeat unless the United States greatly increased its military role. Another key aide, Walt W. Rostow, assured Johnson that North Vietnam would give up its aggressive plans if the United States clearly showed its determination to oppose them. Undersecretary of State George Ball, by contrast, warned that U.S. troops could never prop up South Vietnam. He wrote, “no one has demonstrated that a white ground force of whatever size can win a guerrilla war—which is at the same time a civil war between Asians—in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation to the white forces.” Senate Majority Leader Mike

Mansfield, an expert in Asian history, urged finding some way of reuniting Vietnam as a neutral country. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, afflicted by inter-service rivalries, provided differing military assessments and, thus, no clear guidance.

Johnson was left wondering and worrying. He still privately doubted the chances for a successful U.S. intervention but seemed incapable of translating these doubts into a decision to alter the U.S. commitment to containing communism in Vietnam. Johnson became obsessed about the adverse political and diplomatic consequences of a U.S. pull-out or compromise. He feared that domestic criticism of anything looking like a communist victory in Vietnam would endanger his Great Society programs and embolden the new conservatives.

Moreover, Johnson accepted the familiar domino theory. This theory held that a U.S. withdrawal could lead to further communist aggression in Asia, encourage communist-leaning insurgencies in Latin America, increase Soviet pressure on West Berlin, and damage U.S. credibility around the world. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy had staked U.S. prestige on a noncommunist South Vietnam. Johnson either had to revise that commitment or chart an uncertain course by ordering the direct infusion of U.S. combat troops.

Ultimately, Johnson greatly expanded U.S. military involvement. A deadly attack on the U.S. military outpost at Pleiku in early 1965 prompted retaliatory bombing against North Vietnam. Within a month, the United States inaugurated a sustained campaign of bombing, code-named Rolling Thunder. Washington also began deploying U.S. ground forces to regain lost territory in the South, expanding covert operations, and boosting economic aid to the beleaguered South Vietnamese government. Only six months after the 1964 election, with his advisers still divided, Johnson had decisively committed the United States to a wider war.

The War Continues to Widen

Combat operations in Vietnam grew steadily more intense. Hoping to break the enemy's spirit, U.S. military commanders sought to inflict more casualties. The Johnson administration authorized the use of napalm, an incendiary and toxic chemical that charred both foliage and people, and allowed the Air Force to bomb new targets. Additional U.S. combat troops arrived, but every escalation seemed to require a further one. After North Vietnam rejected a Johnson peace plan that Hanoi viewed as tantamount to its surrender, the United States again escalated its effort. North Vietnam's leadership, pursuing a long-term strategy of attrition in South Vietnam, became convinced that Johnson would eventually lose public and congressional support for continuing the costly intervention.

In April 1965 Johnson applied his Cold War, anticommunist principles closer to home. Responding to exaggerated reports about a communist threat in the Dominican Republic, Johnson sent U.S. troops to unseat a left-leaning, elected president and to install a government supportive of U.S. interests. This incursion violated a longstanding "good neighbor" pledge not to intervene militarily in the Western Hemisphere. Although the action angered critics throughout Latin America, the overthrow of a leftist government in the Dominican Republic seemed to steel Johnson's determination to hold the line against communism in Vietnam.

Later that spring, as another South Vietnamese government was forming in Saigon, U.S. strategists were still seeking a politically stable anticommunist ally. **General William Westmoreland**, who directed the U.S. effort, recommended using

“search and destroy” missions against communist forces. By relying on helicopters to deploy U.S. forces quickly, Westmoreland envisioned that U.S. troops would engage enemy units, inflict as many casualties as possible, and withdraw without trying to secure the battleground. “Body count”—the number of enemy forces killed or disabled—became the key measure of success for these missions. This strategy aimed at incapacitating NLF and North Vietnamese forces and at allowing a viable Saigon government the time to take shape.

In July 1965, Johnson publicly agreed to send 50,000 additional military personnel to Vietnam. Privately, he pledged to send another 50,000 and left open the possibility of deploying even more. LBJ also approved saturation bombing in the South Vietnamese countryside and intensified bombardment of the North.

Some advisers urged Johnson to inform the public candidly about the expanded U.S. military effort. They recommended seeking an outright declaration of war from Congress or at least legislation allowing the president to wield the economic and informational controls that previous administrations had used during wartime. But Johnson worried about provoking antiwar members of Congress and expanding a still-small antiwar movement. Rather than risk ramping up dissent, Johnson decided to stress the administration’s willingness to negotiate and to act as if the war he was expanding was not really a war. The Johnson administration talked of seeing “light at the end of the tunnel” and apparently hoped that most people in the United States would remain largely in the dark about events in Vietnam.

Over the next three years, U.S. involvement steadily increased. The number of U.S. troops in Vietnam grew to 535,000. Operation Ranch Hand scorched South Vietnam’s croplands and defoliated half its forests in an effort to eliminate the natural cover for enemy troop movements. Operation Rolling Thunder, despite several brief pauses, continued until the Pentagon finally declared it a strategic failure in late 1968. Overall, U.S. planes dropped approximately 1.5 million tons of bombs—more than all the tonnage dropped during the Second World War—that pounded North Vietnamese cities and pummeled the villages and hamlets of the South.

Despite this level of violence, Vietnam remained a “limited” war. The United States avoided bombing close to the Chinese border. China had stationed more than 300,000 troops in North Vietnam, and Johnson feared provoking their entry, or possibly even that of forces from the Soviet Union, into the conflict. The strategy remained one of containing the NLF and North Vietnam by steadily escalating the cost they would pay in lost lives and bombed-out infrastructure.

Body count continued to be the primary measure for gauging progress toward the goal of saving Saigon. Estimates that a kill ratio of 10 to 1 would force North Vietnam and the NLF to pull back encouraged the U.S. military command to unleash more firepower and further inflate enemy casualty figures. This same calculation provided an automatic justification for seeking additional U.S. troops. Whenever the number of enemy forces seemed to increase, the Pentagon required more U.S. troops to maintain the desired kill ratio.

Johnson, whose notorious temper flared at the first hint of bad news, used body count numbers to justify claims of victory being “just around the corner.” Privately, though, a different picture began to emerge. Enjoying material assistance from the Soviet Union and China, North Vietnam could match every U.S. escalation. The North Vietnamese funneled troops and supplies into the South through the shifting network of roads and paths, primarily through Laos, called the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

By the end of 1967, several of Johnson's key aides, most notably Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, decided that the United States could not sustain its commitment to South Vietnam. The price for containing North Vietnam, McNamara now concluded, had become far too steep. He left office, he later recalled, in a daze. He had trouble remembering whether he had resigned or had been fired. The majority of Johnson's advisors, however, refused to accept McNamara's assessment.

Meanwhile, the destruction wreaked by U.S. forces was giving the NLF, North Vietnamese, Chinese, and Soviet leaders a decided propaganda advantage in what had become an international war of imagery. Pictures from Southeast Asia allowed critics from around the world to condemn the U.S. bombardments and its search-and-destroy strategy. In Western Europe, demonstrations against the United States became prominent features of political life. Antiwar protesters at home constantly hounded the president and members of his administration, and Johnson eventually complained of being a prisoner in his own White House.

He also continued to lack an effective ally in Saigon. The devastation of the countryside from the U.S. military strategy, the economic destabilization from the flood of U.S. dollars, and the political corruption of Saigon officials took their toll. The "pacification" and "strategic hamlet" programs, which gathered Vietnamese farmers into tightly guarded villages, sounded viable in Washington but created greater instability by uprooting many South Vietnamese from their villages and ancestral lands. Buddhist priests persistently demonstrated against foreign influence. In 1967, Generals Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky, having sustained a military regime in Saigon longer than any of their predecessors, tried to legitimate their rule by holding a new election. The effort failed. A voting process shot through with corruption only highlighted the precarious political position of Thieu and Ky and their dependence on aid from Washington.

The Media and the War

Johnson lectured the American public about upholding the nation's honor and diplomatic commitments, but dissent continually mounted. In previous wars, Washington had restricted media coverage. Hoping to avoid the controversy that overt censorship would surely cause, the Johnson administration employed informal ways of managing information. With television making Vietnam a "living room war"—one that people could watch in their own homes—Johnson kept three TV sets playing in his office in order to monitor what viewers were seeing. Most of what he saw, early on, he liked.

Antiwar activists initially assailed what they considered the media's uncritical reporting. American journalists, they claimed, generally accepted story frames constructed by the White House. Few reporters wrote stories that dissected either the limits of the U.S. military effort or the travails of its South Vietnamese ally. TV camera crews, trailing behind U.S. combat forces and reliant on them for protection, invariably framed their stories from perspectives supportive of "our guys." *Time* magazine initially praised General Westmoreland's leadership and named him its "Man of the Year" for 1965.

In time, however, media coverage changed. Images of unrelenting destruction coming across TV screens undercut the optimistic words coming from the White House and U.S. officials in Saigon. After gazing at his TV sets, LBJ started telephoning network executives, castigating them for broadcasts to which he objected. More and more journalists and reporters, finally following the lead of David Halberstam,

began challenging the reassuring reports. Gloria Emerson's grim stories portrayed the war as one in which poor and disproportionately nonwhite troops fought and died so that wealthy families, with draft-exempt "fortunate sons," might reap war-related profits. Harrison Salisbury sent dispatches from North Vietnam that detailed the destructive impact of U.S. bombing missions. Younger journalists who traveled alongside U.S. troops, such as Michael Herr, came to represent the American mission as a drug-drenched trip into the surreal.

As the conflict dragged on, the media began to talk about a "war at home." Initially, commentators generally adopted a stark, bipolar story frame. It pitted the "hawks," people who wanted to fight in Vietnam until the United States "won," against those who desired to end U.S. involvement as quickly as possible, the "doves." Decrying media coverage, Johnson claimed to be following the time-tested policy of containment. Secretary of State Dean Rusk warned of the dangers of "appeasement." But influential U.S. politicians—led by J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—complained of misplaced priorities in Vietnam and of an "arrogance of power" by the Johnson administration.

In time, stories about a war at home expanded beyond those about hawks and doves. It came to seem as if the fundamental structures of domestic politics, society, and culture were up for grabs.

THE WAR AT HOME

Even as Lyndon Johnson's policy in Southeast Asia was coming under attack from antiwar activists, a broader culture of dissent emerged. Growing tensions produced a political landscape marked by bitterness, confrontation, polarization, and violence on a scale not seen in the United States for many years.

The Movement of Movements

The 1960s came to feature a variety of movements on the political and cultural left. These movements not only opposed the war in Vietnam but also demanded dramatic domestic changes that went beyond those envisioned in Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. A "New Left" sought to re-orient politics. Cultural activists urged people to expand their minds, often with a little help from drugs and rock music, and to seek alternative ways of living their lives. Iconic images from the 1960s provide a kaleidoscopic panorama of what can be called a "movement of movements."

This movement of movements rejected a dominant ideal of the 1950s and early 1960s: the faith that political pluralism would almost always unite the nation (see Chapter 28). As the war in Vietnam dragged on and conflict emerged at home, activists from different movements increasingly doubted that the existing political system could actually solve problems. At the same time, disparate movements based on deeply held values—involving issues such as war and peace, race relations, gender politics, the environment, and sexuality—appeared to head in different directions or to collide. Taken together, this complex movement of movements soon became central to the historical era already being called "the Sixties."

Although media imagery alone could not create any particular movement, most activists sought the media spotlight to help demonstrate their disdain for policies they opposed and to attract support for their visions of change. Often beginning

with posters and pamphlets, movement activists produced increasingly sophisticated imagery and eye-catching public demonstrations.

No single group can lay exclusive claim to the Sixties, the period from roughly 1963 to 1974 that coincided with America's longest war. Numerous movements sought to redirect national life down different paths, often with no clear maps. Still, those on the political and culture left, gaining recruits from the huge baby boom generation, initially dominated media accounts and the earliest histories of the Sixties. Four of the most prominent of the movements involved a New Left, a counterculture, a Black Power movement, and an antiwar coalition.

A New Left

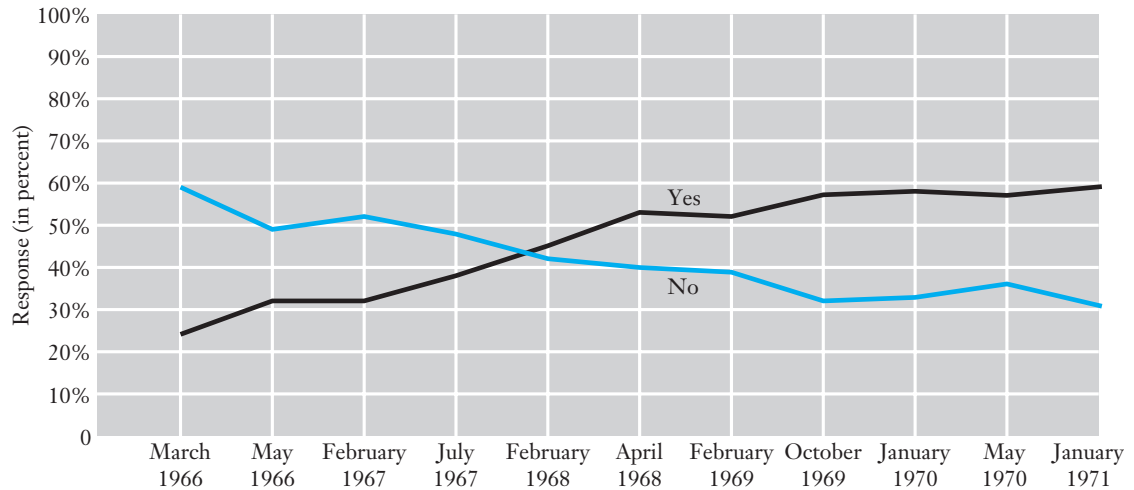
While relatively few college students actually became active in left-leaning political movements, the activities of a **New Left** dominated politics on many campuses, attracted significant media attention, and in time generated popular controversy.

In 1962, two years after the new conservatism had given birth to Young Americans for Freedom (see Chapter 28), the left-leaning Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) emerged. Although SDS endorsed familiar causes, especially civil rights, it also attracted attention for the personalized style of its politics. SDS's *Port Huron Statement* (1962) pledged to fight the “loneliness, estrangement, isolation” that supposedly afflicted many people. Charging that the dominant political culture valued bureaucratic expertise over citizen engagement and economic growth over meaningful work, SDS spoke for alternative visions. In politics, it called for “participatory democracy”—grassroots activism and institutions responsive to local needs. Historians once framed SDS as *the* epicenter of the New Left, but recent accounts see it as only one of the left-leaning movements seeking a new politics.

Indeed, grassroots political efforts such as Freedom Summer in Mississippi provided tangible examples of participatory democracy. Organizing efforts in the Deep South attracted idealistic volunteers from the North. Risking racist violence, they joined local activists in registering African American voters and organizing for political action. Some volunteers remained in the South, working for civil rights; others returned to the North and joined neighborhood-based political projects. Small-scale movements of various kinds promised young people and their older allies the chance to reenergize political life and reorient its moral compass.

New Left activists constantly expanded their view of what counted as “politics.” Although voter registration drives remained important in the South, for example, local movements came to place greater emphasis on alternative political forms, such as sit-ins and demonstrations. Young people claimed that their generation's numbers and educational attainments made them ideally suited to confront a political system dominated by powerful and entrenched interests.

On campus, discontent simmered. Even students generally indifferent to larger issues chafed at classes that seemed irrelevant to the issues of the day and at college bureaucracies that imposed restrictions on their living arrangements and lifestyle choices. Many students, for example, challenged whether deans of students should be able to establish dress codes and restrict visiting hours in dorms for students that, off campus, qualified as adults. Far worse, according to New Left activists, giant universities compromised their independence and integrity by welcoming funding from the military-industrial complex. Too many faculty members seemed oblivious to the social and moral implications of their war-related research.



American Attitudes Toward the Vietnam War

Responses to the question: "Do you think that the United States made a mistake in sending troops to fight there?"

The "Berkeley Revolt" of 1964 and 1965 saw dissident students and sympathetic faculty expand their activism. They first protested how the University of California restricted political activity on campus and then began speaking out against its complicity in the Vietnam War and in racial discrimination. The long-running drama of protest at Berkeley, which disrupted classes and polarized one of the world's most prestigious universities, came to symbolize the turmoil that the media began calling "the war on campus."

The Counterculture

Berkeley also hosted some of the earliest encounters between the political movements of the New Left and the vertiginous energies of a youth-dominated **counterculture**.

The counterculture of the mid-1960s remains a difficult "movement" to identify. One of its own slogans, after all, proclaimed "Do Your Own Thing." The counterculture elected no officers, held no formal meetings, and maintained no central office to issue manifestos. It first burst into view in low-income neighborhoods, such as San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury area, and along the streets bordering college campuses, such as Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue. Its self-appointed spokespeople embraced values, lifestyles, and institutions hailed as alternatives to those of the dominant culture.

Countercultural ventures drew on earlier models, especially those of the "Beat movement" of the 1950s. A loosely connected group of writers and poets, the Beats had denied that either the material abundance or conventional spiritual ideals of the 1950s provided fulfillment. Rejecting the benefits of "affluence" (see Chapter 28), the Beats claimed that an excess of consumer goods and oppressive technologies condemned most people to wander through alienated lives feeling oppressed, emotionally crippled, or just plain bored. Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac, author of *On the Road* (1957), praised the rebels and nonconformists for challenging settled routines and seeking more instinctual, sensual, and authentic ways of living. The Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, in works such as *Howl* (1956), decried soulless materialism and puritanical moral codes. He celebrated the kind of personal freedom that he found in

drugs, Eastern mysticism, and same-sex love affairs. Ginsberg and other celebrities from the Beat era soon became iconic figures in the counterculture of the 1960s.

Countercultural energies eventually left their imprint on a wide range of social and cultural movements, including the cooperative movement, radical feminism, environmentalism, and the fight against legal restrictions on lifestyle choices. The counterculture also affected mainstream consumer culture. The mass media, for example, invariably highlighted the flamboyant clothing, hairstyles, and uninhibited sexuality among younger devotees of the counterculture. They liked to portray countercultural “hippies” as being on the cutting edge of a massive, fun-filled “youth rebellion” and focused on use of drugs, such as marijuana and LSD, communal living arrangements, and new forms of music, such as the folk-rock of the Byrds and the acid rock of the Grateful Dead.

As the counterculture developed its own soundtrack, it created its own media as well. Music-oriented publications such as *Rolling Stone* magazine (founded in 1967) celebrated singer-songwriters, such as Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, as the counterculture’s prophet-laureates. Many radio stations featured folk-rock and other sounds associated with the counterculture. In a pre-Internet age, they also provided community billboards for promoting musical and political events. Some stations joined print publications, such as the *Berkeley Barb*, in dispatching youthful journalists to report on—and participate in—the countercultural scene.

Images and products from the counterculture soon found a ready market among otherwise conventional consumers. The ad agency for Chrysler Motors urged car buyers to break from older patterns, purchase a youthful-looking 1965 model, and thereby join the “Dodge Rebellion.” Recognizing the appeal of bands such as San Francisco’s Jefferson Airplane, the music industry, too, saw profits to be made. An early countercultural happening, the “Human Be-In,” organized by community activists from San Francisco in early 1967, provided a model for subsequent, commercially dominated music festivals such as “Monterrey Pop” (later in 1967) and “Woodstock” (in 1969).

Back on college campuses, some of the students and faculty attracted to New Left political movements seemed initially baffled by the counterculture. The novelist Ken Kesey shocked a 1965 political demonstration at Berkeley with a style of politics indebted to the theatrics of the counterculture. Accompanied by veterans from the Beat movement and youthful members of his communal group, “the Merry Pranksters,” Kesey alternated between singing choruses of “Home on the Range” and urging students to ignore politics and to refashion, especially through drugs such as LSD, how they lived their own lives.

Civil Rights and Black Power

The movement of movements of the mid-1960s also reshaped efforts to achieve liberty and equality for African Americans. Again, the media played an important and controversial role.

Civil rights leaders, of course, had long recognized the value of media coverage. TV images of the violence in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 had helped Dr. King’s SCLC galvanize support for federal voting-rights legislation. At one point, ABC television interrupted a special showing of the anti-Nazi film *Judgment at Nuremberg* to show white Alabama state troopers beating peaceful, mostly African American, voting-rights marchers. Lyndon Johnson used television to promise, “we shall overcome” the nation’s “crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.”



© Bettmann/CORBIS

Violence in Detroit, 1967. *Outbreaks of violence swept through many U.S. cities between 1965 and 1969. The 1967 upheaval in Detroit, which federal troops had to quell, left many African American neighborhoods in ruin.*

The turmoil associated with the civil rights campaigns prompted different views. Conservatives insisted that favorable media coverage of activism encouraged conflict and violence and that only a renewed commitment to law and order would ease social tensions. Movement activists who looked to Dr. King replied that racism, lack of opportunity, and inadequate government remedies produced the frustration that spawned violence. Other more militant voices within the broad movement of movements argued that governments could not be relied upon to address race-related issues effectively and that aggrieved groups needed to mobilize themselves.

In 1965, this debate intensified in the wake of racial conflict in Los Angeles. An altercation between a white highway patrol officer and a black motorist escalated into six days of violence, centered in the largely African American community of Watts in the South-Central area of Los Angeles. Thirty-four people died; hundreds of businesses and homes were burned; heavily armed National Guard troops patrolled the streets; and television camera crews carried images of the destruction across the nation and around the world.

What provoked this conflagration? Had TV cameras and radio reports helped to fan the flames? What should be the response to the violence in Watts? Stunned by what his trio of TV sets was showing, Lyndon Johnson responded according to his style of politics and ordered up new social welfare resources for Watts. “Let’s move in—money, marbles, and chalk,” LBJ reportedly ordered. The mayor and police chief of Los Angeles, conversely, blamed civil rights “agitators” and sought new resources for law enforcement. Local cultural leaders mobilized and created new organizations, such

HISTORY THROUGH FILM

Malcolm X (1992)

Directed by Spike Lee. Starring Denzel Washington (Malcolm X), Angela Bassett (Betty Shabazz), Al Freeman, Jr. (Elijah Muhammad).

For more than 25 years, Hollywood tried to make a movie portraying the foremost advocate of Black Power, Malcolm X, whose *Autobiography* (1965) is a literary classic. Delays in obtaining financing, crafting a script, and finding a director always stymied production plans. Spike Lee, America's best-known African American film director, insisted that only he could do justice to the story of Malcolm X, who was assassinated by rivals at a speaking engagement in Harlem in 1965 at the age of 40. Finally, in 1992, with a budget of \$34 million, Lee's independent production company (named Forty Acres and a Mule, after the land-distribution program for former slaves advocated after the Civil War) released a movie that argues for Malcolm X's continuing relevance.

The montage sequences that begin and end the movie underscore the film director's outlook. Against the backdrop of the Warner Brothers logo, the soundtrack

introduces the actual voice of Malcolm X decrying the nature of racial politics over the course of U.S. history. Malcolm X's accusations continue as a giant American flag appears on screen and is cut into pieces by jagged images from an amateur video of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King, a notorious instance of police misconduct that took place in 1991. Next, the flag begins to burn until, revealed behind it, a giant "X," adorned with remnants of the flag, fills the frame. Some three hours later, the ending of the movie presents archival footage of Malcolm X, along with images of South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, while the voice of Ozzie Davis, the celebrated African American actor, gives a eulogy.

When first released, the film opened to packed movie houses. Despite a multimedia publicity blitz, box-office revenues steadily declined. Viewers reported that the lengthy, episodic movie taxed their patience and attention span.

Watching *Malcolm X* on video or DVD today, however, allows today's viewers to concentrate on its best sequences, speeding

as the Watts Writers Workshop. When Dr. King rushed to the scene, preaching the politics of nonviolence, local activists generally ignored or even ridiculed him. They endorsed more militant action to gain political power. The previous year, they noted, white Californians from suburbia had voted overwhelmingly to junk the Rumford Act, the state's hard-won open housing law. Only a strategy of empowerment could produce access to more equitable policing practices, higher paying jobs, and better housing.

The basic structure of the post-Watts debate would change relatively little as violence continued to rock, usually during the summer, other urban neighborhoods. Commentators from different political camps applied their own value-soaked labels, including "riot," "rebellion," and "insurrection." The major outbreaks produced investigative commissions that debated these labels, parsed increasingly familiar arguments about causes, and pondered equally common recommendations for responding to the violence. According to one estimate, there were more than 300 cases of serious urban violence between 1965 and 1969. Property damage reached

**Denzel Washington
stars as Malcolm X.**



Everett Collection

by ones that seem to drag, and returning to those that initially might seem muddled. *Malcolm X* offers a complex account of

the early Black Power movement and the social ferment that gripped the nation during the 1960s.

into the billions, and hundreds of people lost their lives. Significant portions of major cities—but almost never the more affluent areas or nearby suburbs—became battlegrounds that would bear the scars of the Sixties for years to come.

How do these “long hot summers” fit into a history of the 1960s? The earliest narrative saw escalating violence producing movements that helped to splinter the earlier, more united, civil rights cause. The competing story about a “movement of movements,” however, suggests that there was never one single civil rights *movement* that splintered. Long before Watts, a variety of black activist movements were advocating different ways to gain greater power for black communities.

Many efforts during the late 1950s and early 1960s looked to **Malcolm X**, who had initially gained attention as a minister in the Nation of Islam, a North American-based group popularly known as the “Black Muslims.” In 1954, the same year as the *Brown* decisions (see Chapter 28), Malcolm X assumed leadership of the Nation of Islam’s temple in Harlem. Using it as his base of operations, he

forged ties with activist groups in other cities, particularly Detroit and Los Angeles. He oftentimes criticized Dr. King's gradual, nonviolent approach as largely irrelevant to the everyday problems of most African Americans and questioned the desirability or feasibility of racial integration. Malcolm X never advocated initiating confrontation, but he did endorse self-defense "by any means necessary."

Portrayed as a dangerous subversive by the FBI and most mainstream media, Malcolm X offered more than angry rhetoric. He also established a formidable presence among people and groups that would soon embrace what came to be called **Black Power**. Malcolm urged African Americans to "recapture our heritage and identity" and "launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people." Seeking a broad movement, Malcolm X eventually broke from the Black Muslims and established his own Organization of Afro-American Unity. Murdered in 1965 by enemies from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X remained, especially after the posthumous publication of his *Autobiography* (1965), a powerful symbol for black-centered political and cultural visions of the future.

These visions increasingly diverged from those of LBJ's administration. Officially committed to additional civil rights legislation, the president privately struggled to understand movements with goals that differed from his. In fall 1965, the president hosted a "racial summit" at the White House. Among the several hundred black leaders who attended were two veteran activists: A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. They used this occasion to highlight their "Freedom Budget," an implicit criticism of their host's spending priorities. They called for spending \$100 billion on infrastructure projects in low-income neighborhoods. Johnson privately denounced the sponsors of the Freedom Budget for "raising un-shirted hell and saying it's got to be a 100 billion" at *his* summit.

Meanwhile, events in the South highlighted other variations among the movements. SNCC and Dr. King's SCLC pressed forward, increasingly along separate paths. Both groups faced the constant threat of racist violence. State and local legal systems seemed unable to restrain or punish the segregationist vigilantes who attacked, or even killed, civil rights workers. White Southern legal officials appeared no better at overseeing electoral contests. Charging an SNCC-sponsored slate had been robbed of victory in a 1965 election in Lowndes County, Alabama, a young black activist named Stokely Carmichael organized a third-party movement. SNCC commissioned a special logo for it: a coiled black panther.

Carmichael himself achieved celebrity status the following summer. In June 1966, a KKK gunman shot James Meredith, who had integrated the University of Mississippi several years earlier and was conducting a one-person March against Fear from Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi. Carmichael joined other activists in hastily organizing an enlarged March against Fear that would complete Meredith's walk. This was the first large-scale movement project—in contrast to the 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 voting-rights campaign in Alabama—that did not seek new civil rights legislation. It sought, instead, to demonstrate that movements for liberty and equality could focus on everyday struggles for safety, dignity, pride, and empowerment. The march also tried to capitalize on the national media coverage that Meredith's shooting had already attracted.

As Stokely Carmichael played to the omnipresent TV cameras, Dr. King, an old hand at this movement art form, admirably acknowledged the younger activist's grasp of media routines. Shortly after having been jailed on a trumped-up charge,

Carmichael delivered an emotional speech that secured his celebrity status. He questioned an unwavering commitment, no matter what the circumstances, to non-violence. The speech also explicitly urged that the civil rights struggle not remain just one for “Freedom,” the byword of the SCLC, but for “Black Power.” Black Power, Carmichael insisted, best described the objectives that direct-action movements must seek. As he later explained, Black Power was “a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community.” They should “define their own goals” and “lead their own organizations.”

Black Power thus provided a sometimes inflammatory label for an often pragmatic set of claims that local civil rights groups had been making for some time. They sought greater on-the-ground power both in and for their own communities. Operating from this perspective, in 1966, several college students from Oakland announced a new Black Power organization that borrowed its name and logo from Carmichael’s earlier movement in Lowndes County. The Black Panther Party’s platform employed militant rhetoric on behalf of 10 objectives, including greater opportunities for housing, education, and employment; legal protections, especially against police misconduct; and improved health and nutrition initiatives in low-income black neighborhoods.

The Panther leadership quickly joined Carmichael as media-certified celebrities. A trio of its media-savvy young members—Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver—adapted symbolism and rhetoric from Third World revolutionary movements. A 1967 rally in Sacramento, California, on behalf of the Second Amendment right to use firearms for self-defense attracted the notice of J. Edgar Hoover. He made destroying the Black Panther Party a key goal of his FBI.

Less flamboyant groups and movements were also invoking the Black Power approach. Fully embracing the word *black* and a political-cultural agenda based on racial identity, they sought the power to pursue separate, African American-directed routes not just toward liberty and equality but also toward “liberation” from the prevailing political culture. “Black Is Beautiful” became a watchword. James Brown, the “Godfather of Soul,” captured this new spirit with his song, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968).

Within this context, Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1968**. One provision of this omnibus measure, popularly known as the “Fair Housing Act,” followed in the wake of earlier state-level measures. It aimed at eliminating racial discrimination in the national real estate market but contained exemptions that enfeebled its own enforcement. Moreover, another section in the law declared it a crime to cross state lines in order to incite a “riot.” Supporters hailed this provision as a law-and-order measure, while critics countered that it targeted political activists, especially those in the Black Power movement. Whenever tested in federal courts, though, this section passed constitutional scrutiny.

The Antiwar Movement

Meanwhile, another of these multifaceted movements was coming to overshadow all others: the one to end the war in Vietnam.

The antiwar movement, like its counterparts, never fell into neat categories. Some of the strongest “antiwar” sentiment, for example, blamed LBJ for not prosecuting the war *aggressively enough*. At the other end of the spectrum, several small movements called for a North Vietnam-NLF victory. The chant, “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh/NLF is Gonna Win” enraged Johnson and distressed most others in the antiwar coalition.

The antiwar effort faced the same questions as the other movements of the Sixties. What kind of politics best expressed its ethical and spiritual values? How might it reach out to people not already in the movement? How could it mobilize enough support to change public policy?

The antiwar movement inexorably expanded the scope of its activism. On college campuses, for example, supporters and opponents of the war initially debated at “teach-ins.” These academic-style events soon gave way to demonstrations and sit-ins. A draft-resistance effort emerged, often symbolized by the burning of draft cards, which urged young men to help alter Lyndon Johnson’s policies by refusing to serve in the military. This movement gained its most celebrated member when the heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali refused induction into the military. Campus protests passed into a new phase when a pitched, bloody battle broke out between antiwar demonstrators and police at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1967.

That same year, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. crossed an important threshold in his personal politics. Antiwar clergy had been pressing him to proclaim publicly his opposition to the war, connect it to the civil rights cause, and elaborate his vision of the moral-spiritual issues at stake. Speaking at New York’s Riverside Church in April 1967, Dr. King highlighted a black-and-white truth. African American troops, mostly from low-income communities, served and died in numbers far greater than their proportion of the U.S. population “for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.” The immoral “madness” in Vietnam “must cease,” Dr. King concluded.

This speech provided a gauge of both the growing antiwar movement and the expanding polarization over the war. Many voices from the political-media mainstream, which had been supportive of Dr. King’s civil rights activities, condemned his antiwar address. Although the *New York Times* did not follow some other newspapers in calling King a “traitor,” it read his antiwar pronouncement through the narrow frame of interest-group politics. Dr. King risked damaging the civil rights cause by addressing a matter about which, according to the *Times*, he lacked any authority to speak. As Dr. King continued to broaden his political agenda, criticism from one-time supporters commonly followed.

Dr. King’s speech at Riverside Church raised the same issues—the nature of politics and the role of the media—that surrounded popular discussion of a massive 1967 antiwar demonstration in Washington. This event underscored how the politics of the New Left and the spirit of the counterculture could march together, at least when opposing LBJ’s policies in Vietnam. Noting the visual media’s voracious appetite for pictures of colorful dissenters, a small group of activists had invented a kind of “non-movement movement” that bypassed mobilization and organization in favor of making the media its primary constituency. Two members of this group, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, proclaimed themselves leaders of a (nonexistent) Youth International Party (or YIPPIE!) and waited for media coverage to surround their activities, as they knew it would.

Hoffman and Rubin raised the curtain on a new style of countercultural-political performance. In one incident, they mocked the symbolic value of stocks on the New York Exchange by tossing real dollar bills onto the trading floor. Invoking the sit-in movement, they joked about staging department store

“loot-ins.” Their contribution to the 1967 antiwar march in Washington would be to lead a separate trek to the Pentagon, where marchers would chant mystical incantations and try to levitate the building.

Although the Pentagon remained firmly planted, the march against it generated eye-catching media imagery. The event also gained the novelist and antiwar activist Norman Mailer a National Book Award for *Armies of the Night* (1968). Mailer’s book, which wove together personal impressions and journalistic observation, helped to reinvent political reporting. Cultural observers identified accounts such as Mailer’s as a “new journalism” and saw this form of reportage paralleling how political activists were creating a “new politics” that expanded ideas about what counted as political involvement.

But the relationship between this new politics and the media seemed uncertain. Might not images of colorful quipsters such as Hoffman and Rubin help fuel cultural polarization rather than political action? Was the media’s taste for spectacular demonstrations trivializing underlying issues? Such questions became even more pressing during the tumultuous 12 months of 1968.

1968

This single year remains an important signpost in virtually every history of the period known as the Sixties. As world leaders rang in the New Year, many expressed hope that 1968 would bring better days. But the year ended on a very different note. Too many problems seemed to have grown worse; too many hopes appeared dashed.

Turmoil in Vietnam, 1968

At the end of January 1968, during a supposed truce in observance of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar New Year celebration, NLF and North Vietnamese forces suddenly went on the attack throughout South Vietnam. U.S. military leaders had expected some kind of enemy offensive but badly underestimated its potential breadth and ferocity. A small NLF force even temporarily seized the grounds of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. Very quickly, General Westmoreland’s troops recovered and regained the areas that the other side had overrun, but the **Tet Offensive** nonetheless became a turning point.

Militarily, this offensive gained the NLF and the North relatively little territory at a very high cost. The NLF lost three-quarters of its military forces and much of its civilian support structure. Americans who backed the war blamed the antiwar movement and media imagery for exaggerating the early attacks, ignoring NLF and North Vietnamese losses, and thereby portraying a U.S. “victory” as a “defeat.” Other observers, however, countered that the offensive discredited General Westmoreland’s pre-Tet forecasts about seeing “light at the end of the tunnel.” Even after rolling back the communist onslaught, the U.S. military command appeared ill prepared to pursue the badly mauled enemy forces.

Most importantly, the mere fact of a Tet Offensive undercut the optimistic story that the Johnson administration had been spinning. After CBS-TV anchor Walter Cronkite returned from a post-Tet trip to Vietnam, he told a national audience that the United States would never prevail militarily. Lyndon Johnson reportedly lamented that if he had lost “the most trusted person in America,” as Cronkite was then known, he had lost the rest of the country on the issue of the Vietnam War.

Johnson received more bad news after summoning his most trusted advisers and a select group of senior outsiders, such as Dean Acheson, for advice on General Westmoreland's call for an additional 206,000 U.S. troops. Most criticized Westmoreland's request and insisted that South Vietnamese troops shoulder more of the military burden. The views of the senior members, the so-called "Wise Men," proved especially sobering since they had formulated America's anticommunist containment policy following the Second World War (see Chapter 27). Dean Acheson now advised the president that the United States "could no longer do the job we set out to do" in Vietnam "in the time we have left, and we must begin to take steps to disengage."

Other factors weighed on Johnson as well. As before, any plan for using U.S. military power to crush North Vietnam carried an unthinkable risk: a larger conflict with China and/or the Soviet Union. Now, public-opinion polls showed rapidly declining confidence in Johnson's more limited containment policy. And Westmoreland's call for another large increase in U.S. troops, even if forces could be spared from other duties, would further fan antiwar opposition. Pressured by his new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, another early architect of Cold War containment, Johnson changed his guiding assumption about Vietnam. The cost of continuing the U.S. intervention vastly outweighed whatever benefit might accrue from continuing the effort against North Vietnam. He turned toward negotiations but found little success.

Turmoil at Home

The Tet offensive also destroyed Lyndon Johnson's political plans. The antiwar wing of the Democratic Party was trying to do what seasoned political pundits had declared impossible: deny Johnson renomination. The dissidents backed **Senator Eugene McCarthy** of Minnesota, the only prominent Democrat willing to challenge LBJ. An unorthodox candidate who avoided bombastic rhetoric in favor of calm warnings about how Johnson's course in Vietnam was dividing the nation, Gene McCarthy fronted an unusual campaign. The McCarthy movement's version of new politics relied on the wisdom of a few seasoned political strategists and the energy of thousands of college students. Young people packed away grubby campus attire, donned fresh clothing to "come clean for Gene," and stumped New Hampshire in the initial primary of 1968. Because Johnson refused to campaign personally, this "Dump Johnson" effort enjoyed unexpected media coverage. Johnson's forces actually won the New Hampshire's primary, but McCarthy came close enough to claim a symbolic victory. Polls predicted he would easily beat Johnson, head-to-head, in the upcoming Wisconsin primary.

McCarthy's "children's crusade" thus rocked the Democratic Party—and U.S. policy in Vietnam. Even before McCarthy could claim the Wisconsin contest, Senator Robert Kennedy of New York, brother of the slain president, jumped into the race. He had refused earlier entreaties to challenge Johnson but now declared that the nation's "perilous course" impelled him to seek the presidency. Facing two Democratic challengers, President Johnson surprised all but his closest confidants when, during a live TV address in late March about Vietnam, he suddenly announced that he would not seek reelection. He also limited U.S. bombing of North Vietnam and signaled a readiness to begin peace negotiations in Paris.

Johnson's withdrawal created a three-way race for the Democratic nomination. McCarthy now faced Robert Kennedy and Johnson's ever-loyal vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey, who had entered the fray after LBJ's surprise announcement. Humphrey, however, steered clear of the remaining primaries, leaving the two senators to fight a

series of brass-knuckled contests that pitted McCarthy's new politics against Kennedy's blend of the new and the old. Kennedy once quipped that the "A" students may have already flocked to McCarthy but that he was locking up those receiving 'Bs.'" The Democratic Party's A-level celebrities generally divided their support between the two, while Humphrey courted the Democratic powerbrokers who had been allied with LBJ.

Martin Luther King, Jr. welcomed LBJ's withdrawal and hoped that an antiwar candidate, ideally Kennedy, would head the Democratic ticket in November. On April 4, 1968, however, Dr. King took a break from planning an upcoming "Poor Peoples' March" on Washington and visited Memphis, Tennessee, in support of a strike by African American sanitation workers. There, he was assassinated while standing on the balcony of his motel. Law enforcement officials identified James Earl Ray, a career criminal, as the lone killer. Ray was eventually captured and charged with Kennedy's murder. He waived a jury trial, pleaded guilty, and received a 99-year prison sentence. Subsequently, Ray recanted and claimed to have been a pawn in a conspiracy directed by white supremacists. He died in prison still insisting on his innocence, but few people credit his claims.

News of Dr. King's murder immediately prompted another wave of violence. It swept through more than 100 cities and towns; 39 people died; 75,000 regular and National Guard troops were called to duty. When President Johnson proclaimed Sunday, April 7, as a day of national mourning for the slain civil rights leader, parts of the nation's capital city remained ablaze.

Following Dr. King's memorial service, Gene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy returned to campaigning. Their primary contests took on an increasingly surreal quality since the party insiders who controlled the selection of a majority of delegates to the Democratic national convention had unofficially anointed Hubert Humphrey as the party's presidential nominee. Campaigning at a breakneck pace, with only a minimal security detail, Robert Kennedy sought to demonstrate that popular opinion endorsed his candidacy. He also hoped to convince the insiders now backing Humphrey that only a Democrat without ties to Lyndon Johnson, especially another Kennedy, could capture the White House in November.

On June 5, an ebullient Robert Kennedy defeated Gene McCarthy in California's Democratic Primary. He relished his dream of wresting the presidential nomination from Humphrey for only a few minutes, however. While preparing to leave the hotel that had hosted his victory celebration, Kennedy was slain by yet another political assassin. Bystanders grabbed Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian immigrant, who was later convicted of the killing. Television coverage of Kennedy's body being returned by train to Washington and his state funeral were reminders of Dr. King's recent murder and of the 1963 assassination of RFK's own brother. Bowing to the reality of Humphrey's delegate total, McCarthy effectively closed down his campaign.

Questions abounded. Was some "sickness" plaguing American political culture? Did "government by gunplay," rather than political pluralism, best describe the current system? Could the presidential election of 1968 possibly produce a legitimate victor?

The violence of 1968 continued. During the Republican national convention in Miami, as its presidential nominee **Richard Milhous Nixon** was promising to restore law and order, racial conflict produced considerable property damage and took the lives of four people. Later that summer, thousands of antiwar demonstrators converged on Chicago, site of the Democratic Party's convention, to protest the nomination of Hubert Humphrey, still supporting Johnson's policy in Vietnam. Responding

to provocative acts by some demonstrators, including Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin of the Yippies, police officers attacked antiwar protestors and some nearby journalists. Tensions from this “Siege of Chicago” filtered into the convention hall, and antiwar delegates squared off, verbally, with supporters of the vice president. Humphrey easily captured the Democratic presidential nod, but disagreements over Johnson’s Vietnam policy and the conduct of Chicago’s police force left his party bitterly divided. Opinion polls showed that most people supported the use of force against the demonstrators, a judgment subsequently challenged by a special commission, whose report assessed the violence in Chicago as a “police riot.”

The Election of 1968

Both Humphrey and Nixon worried about Alabama’s George Wallace, who was running for president as a third-party candidate on the American Independent ticket. With his opposition to civil rights well established, Wallace concentrated his fire on the counterculture and the antiwar movement. If any “hippie” protestor ever blocked his motorcade, he once announced, it would “be the last car he’ll ever lay down in front of.” Although Wallace had generally supported the Democratic Party’s domestic spending programs, he now courted voters who saw themselves the captives to “tax-and-spend” bureaucracies in Washington.

Wallace never expected to gain the presidency. If a candidate from the two major parties failed to win a majority of the electoral votes, however, the Constitution required that the president be selected by the House of Representatives. The Wallace strategy called for holding his core southern constituency, enticing conservatives elsewhere away from Nixon, and tipping several swing states into the Humphrey camp. If everything fell into place, Wallace hoped to play the power-broker role when the House of Representatives selected the nation’s next president.

As Wallace figured his odds and the new journalists wrote about a new politics, Humphrey and Nixon recalled the days of old. Humphrey promised fellow Democrats, still a majority of those likely to vote, the continuation of New Deal-Great Society programs. He struggled, though, with antiwar Democrats over his inability, until late in the campaign, to break from the Vietnam policies of Lyndon Johnson, his political patron. Conservative Republicans who favored Ronald Reagan as the GOP’s 1968 nominee still suspected Richard Nixon to be an Eisenhower moderate. They also recognized, however, that the former vice president clearly stood to Humphrey’s political right and that he appeared a safer guardian of conservative values than the mercurial Wallace. Nixon promised to restore order at home and hinted at a secret plan for ending U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Nixon narrowly prevailed in November. Although he won 56 percent of the electoral vote, Nixon outpolled Humphrey in the popular vote by less than 1 percent. George Wallace’s plan collapsed when he picked up only 46 electoral votes, all from the Deep South, and just 13.5 percent of the popular vote nationwide. Nixon won five crucial Southern states and attracted, all across the country, votes from people he called “the forgotten Americans, the non-shouters, the non-demonstrators.”

The results in several states, however, were so close that relatively small shifts could have produced a victory for Humphrey or the scenario that Wallace had envisioned playing out in the House of Representatives. Humphrey’s campaign suddenly gained momentum when normally Democratic voters decided they could not support Nixon or “waste a vote” on Wallace. Humphrey also benefited when

Lyndon Johnson temporarily halted all bombing of North Vietnam and sought to accelerate the peace talks in Paris. Nixon's forces responded with back-channel overtures to South Vietnamese leaders about getting a better deal if they stalled peace negotiations until a Nixon presidency. Although illegal wiretaps informed Johnson of this maneuver, he never intervened on Humphrey's behalf.

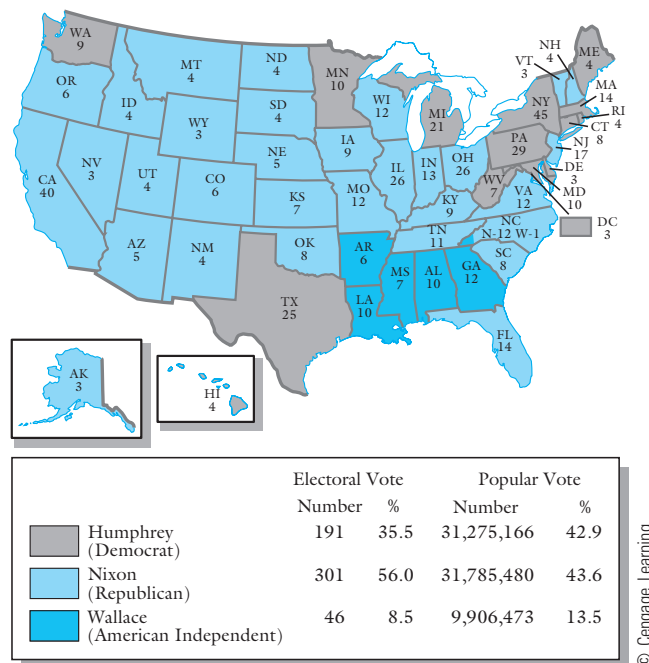
CONTINUED POLARIZATION, 1969–1974

Raised as Quaker, Richard Nixon had campaigned as someone able to restore the kind of tranquility he had known when growing up in Yorba Linda, California. His presidency, however, failed to calm the troubled waters.

Lawbreaking, Violence, and a New President

A handful of people on the leftist fringe embraced violence, generally through bomb attacks. There were nearly 200 actual and attempted bombings on college campuses during the 1969–70 academic year; an explosion at the University of Wisconsin claimed the life of a graduate student. Non-lethal attacks rocked other targets, including several large banks and the U.S. Capitol building. In 1970, three members of a small faction that had broken with SDS, “the Weather Underground,” blew themselves apart when their bomb factory in New York City exploded.

At the same time, government officials stepped up their use of violent force. Fred Hampton of the Black Panthers and prison activist George Jackson died under circumstances their supporters called political assassination and public officials considered normal law enforcement. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI harassed activists, planted



MAP 29.2 Presidential Election, 1968

George Wallace sought to throw the 1968 presidential election into the House of Representatives with his independent, third-party candidacy. What does this map suggest about the political changes already sweeping through the once solidly Democratic South?

damaging rumors, and even dispatched *agent provocateurs* who incited protestors to undertake actions that officials could later prosecute as crimes.

State and local officials redoubled their efforts to bring order. During the fall of 1971, New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller broke off negotiations with inmates at Attica State Prison, who had seized several cell-blocks and taken guards hostage in a protest over living conditions. He then ordered heavily armed state troopers and National Guard forces into the complex. When this "Attica Uprising" finally ended, 29 prisoners and 11 guards lay dead. On college campuses, too, local officials and administrators were increasingly ready to employ force against demonstrators.

Richard Nixon insisted that his vast public experience made him the ideal leader for such turbulent times. After graduating from Whittier College in California, Nixon studied law at Duke University and served in the Navy during the Second World War. He then began a political career that took him from a small-town law practice to the House of Representatives in 1946, the Senate in 1950, and the vice presidency in 1952.

Nixon claimed to thrive on confronting personal and political challenges. He entitled an early memoir *Six Crises*. After his narrow loss to Kennedy in 1960 and his failure, in 1962, to win the California governorship, Nixon denounced the media and announced his retirement from politics. He campaigned, however, loyally for Barry Goldwater in 1964 and tirelessly on behalf of Republican candidates in 1966. The GOP's comeback in that year's balloting boosted Nixon's stature within his party and even won him plaudits from media pundits. As he geared up for 1968, supporters talked about a "New Nixon" while detractors complained of "the same Old Nixon, now just a little older." Nixon narrowly captured the 1968 Republican nomination for president and emerged from his equally slim victory over Humphrey and Wallace with a new confidence.

Social Policy

Although Richard Nixon considered foreign policy to be his specialty, he initially crafted an ambitious domestic agenda. At the urging of Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a special presidential adviser on domestic issues, Nixon decided he could push through bolder programs than any Democratic president. Moynihan encouraged Nixon to think of himself as a conservative who could bring about progressive change. In 1969, Nixon thus proposed his **Family Assistance Plan (FAP)**, a dramatic overhaul of welfare policy. FAP proposed replacing most existing welfare measures, including the controversial Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). AFDC provided government payments to cover the basic costs of care for low-income children who had lost the support of a bread-winning parent.

Under the FAP proposal, *every* low-income family would be guaranteed an annual income of \$1,600. Moynihan and Nixon touted FAP as advancing equality since it replaced existing arrangements that assisted only those with special circumstances, such as low-income mothers with small children. Nixon liked the measure because it promised to cut out the layers of bureaucracy needed to administer the requirements of a complicated program such as AFDC.

Nixon's FAP proposal debuted to tepid reviews. Conservatives claimed that income supplements for families with regularly employed, albeit low-paid, wage earners would be too costly. Proponents of more generous governmental assistance programs argued that FAP's income guarantee was too miserly. The House of

Representatives approved a modified version of FAP in 1970, but a curious alliance of senators who opposed Nixon's proposal for very different reasons blocked its passage. Nixon eventually abandoned FAP, and the nation's welfare system would not be overhauled until the 1990s.

Although FAP failed to pass, other significant innovations in domestic policy were enacted. In an important move, Congress passed Nixon's revenue-sharing plan, part of his "new federalism," which returned a portion of federal tax dollars to state and local governments in the form of block grants. Instead of Washington specifying how these funds could be used, the block-grant concept allowed state and local officials, within general guidelines, to spend the funds as they saw fit.

A Democratic-controlled Congress and a Republican White House also cooperated to continue and even increase funding for many Great Society initiatives: Medicare, Medicaid, rent subsidies for low-income people, and Supplementary Security Insurance (SSI) payments to those who were elderly, blind, or disabled. In 1972, Social Security benefits were "indexed," which meant they would increase along with the inflation rate.

Nixon had adopted a complicated approach to civil rights during his campaign. He commonly criticized existing policies, such as the busing of children to advance school integration, but carefully distinguished his stance from that of George Wallace. The new Nixon administration, moreover, included Republicans anxious to aid civil rights causes. It thus allowed, and sometimes urged, federal bureaucracies to extend the reach civil rights measures when interpreting antidiscrimination legislation passed during the Great Society. In line with candidate Nixon's call for supporting "black capitalism" through small business loans, the new president helped extend the plan to other minority entrepreneurs, particularly Hispanics. His administration also helped implement the bilingual education programs that had been authorized in 1968 legislation. Indeed, the reach of many federal social welfare programs expanded during Nixon's first term, and the percentage of people living below the poverty line declined.

Environ- mentalism

Nixon also worked with the new environmental movement that became a significant political force during his presidency.

Landmark legislation of the 1960s—such as the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, and the National Trails Act of 1968—had already protected large areas of the country from commercial development. In the 1970s, a broader environmental movement focused on people's health and on ecological balances. Accounts such as *The Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson raised concerns that the pesticides used in agriculture, especially DDT, threatened bird populations. Air pollution (smog) in cities such as Los Angeles had become so toxic that simply breathing became equivalent to smoking several packs of cigarettes per day. Industrial processes, atomic weapons testing, and nuclear power plants prompted fear of cancer-causing materials. The Environmental Defense Fund, a private organization formed in 1967, went to court to try to limit DDT and other dangerous toxins. Earth Day, a festival first held in 1970, aimed to raise awareness about the many newly publicized hazards of environmental degradation.

The Nixon administration, although not a sponsor of Earth Day, took environmental issues seriously. The president supported creation of the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA) and signed major pieces of congressional legislation: the Resources Recovery Act of 1970 (dealing with waste management), the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, the Pesticides Control Act of 1972, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. National parks and wilderness areas were expanded, and a new law required that “environmental impact statements” be prepared in advance of any major government project.

The new environmental standards brought both unanticipated problems and significant improvements. The Clean Air Act’s requirement for taller factory smokestacks, for example, moved pollutants higher into the atmosphere, where they produced a dangerous byproduct, “acid rain.” Still, the act’s restrictions on auto and smokestack emissions cleared smog out of city skies and helped people with respiratory ailments. The law reduced six major airborne pollutants by one third in a single decade. Lead emissions into the atmosphere declined by 95 percent.

Controversies over Rights

Activism on social and environmental concerns accompanied fierce debate over the federal government’s responsibility to protect the rights and liberties of citizens. The struggle to locate and define these rights soon embroiled the nation’s constitutional culture in controversy.

A majority of the justices on the Supreme Court of the Sixties had supported the Great Society’s political vision and sought to bring an expanding list of rights under constitutional protection. As this group charted the Court’s path, two Eisenhower appointees, Chief Justice Earl Warren and Associate Justice William Brennan, often led the way. Although many of the Warren Court’s decisions involving rights issues drew critical fire, the case that raised the most public controversy involved handling criminal suspects. *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) held that the Constitution required police officers to advise persons suspected of having committed a felony offense of their constitutional right to remain silent and to consult an attorney, which would be provided to indigents by the government. Defenders of this decision, which established the famous “Miranda Warning,” saw it as the logical extension of settled precedents. The Court’s critics, in contrast, accused its majority of “inventing” liberties not found in the Constitution. Amid rising public concern over crime, political conservatives made *Miranda* a symbol of the judicial “coddling” of criminals and the Warren Court’s supposed disregard for constitutional law.

Richard Nixon had campaigned for president as an opponent of the Warren Court and promised to appoint federal judges who would “apply” rather than “make” the law on matters such as criminal rights and court-ordered school busing. As candidate Nixon continued to assail the Warren Court, the chief justice announced his retirement, and Lyndon Johnson’s plan to anoint his close confidante, Associate Justice Abe Fortas as Warren’s successor, stalled in congress. Consequently, the victorious Nixon appointed a Republican loyalist, Warren Burger, as chief justice. Subsequent vacancies allowed Nixon to appoint three other Republicans to the High Court.

This new “Burger Court” immediately faced controversial rights-related cases of its own. Lawyers sympathetic to the Great Society vision of social welfare advanced the argument that access to adequate economic assistance from the federal government was a constitutionally protected right. The Burger Court, however, narrowly rejected this claim when deciding *Dandridge v. Williams* (1970). With the new chief justice casting the deciding vote, it held that a state could limit the amount it paid to

welfare recipients. Payment schedules that varied from state to state did not violate the constitutional requirement of equal protection of the law.

Rights-related claims involving health-and-safety legislation generally fared better. A vigorous consumer movement, which had initially drawn inspiration from Ralph Nader's exposé about auto safety (*Unsafe at Any Speed*, 1965), joined with environmentalists to bolster rights claims in the context of workplace safety, consumer protection, and nontoxic environments. Their efforts, overcoming opposition from many business groups, found expression in such legislation as the Occupational Safety Act of 1973 and stronger consumer and environmental protection laws. The Burger Court invariably supported the constitutionality of these measures.

At the same time, the newly energized women's rights movement pressed another set of issues. The **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**, initially proposed during the 1920s, promised to explicitly guarantee women the same legal rights as men. Easily passed by Congress in 1972 and quickly ratified by more than half the states, the ERA suddenly stalled. Conservative women's groups, such as Phyllis Schlafly's "Stop ERA," charged that this constitutional amendment would undermine traditional "family values" and expose women to new dangers such as military service. The ERA failed to attain approval from the three quarters of states needed for ratification. Ultimately, women's groups abandoned the ERA effort in favor of using the courts to adjudicate equal rights claims on a case-by-case, issue-by-issue basis.

One of these issues, whether a woman possessed a constitutional right to terminate a pregnancy, became far more controversial than the ERA. The abortion issue, in contrast to controversies over busing and criminal procedure, had never played a prominent role in Nixon's 1968 campaign, and his administration thus paid little attention to this rights-related question when nominating federal judges. In **Roe v. Wade** (1973), the Burger Supreme Court ruled, in a 7–2 decision, that a state law making abortion a criminal offense violated a woman's "right to privacy." Two of the three justices appointed by Nixon voted with the majority. The *Roe* decision outraged antiabortion groups, who rallied under the "Right-to-Life" banner on behalf of the unborn fetus, providing new support for the already expanding conservative wing of the Republican Party. On the other side, feminist groups made the issue of individual choice in reproductive decisions a central rallying point.

Meanwhile, with little controversy, President Nixon supported other rights-related issues. He signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and in 1972 approved another civil rights measure popularly known as "Title IX." It banned sexual discrimination in higher education and became the legal basis for requiring colleges and universities to adopt "gender equity" in all areas, including intercollegiate athletics. The Nixon administration also refined the "affirmative action" concept, which had surfaced during Lyndon Johnson's presidency, and required that all hiring and contracting that depended on federal funding take "affirmative" steps to enroll greater numbers of African Americans as union apprentices.

The Economy

Richard Nixon eventually confronted economic problems that had been unthinkable only a decade earlier. No single cause can account for them, but most analyses begin with the war in Vietnam. This expensive military commitment, along with increased domestic spending and a

volatile international economy, began to curtail economic growth. Lyndon Johnson had been determined to contain communism in Indochina without cutting Great Society programs or raising taxes, and thus he had concealed the true costs of the war. Nixon inherited a deteriorating (although still favorable) balance of trade and rising rate of inflation. Between 1960 and 1965, consumer prices grew only about 1 percent per year; in 1968, this figure exceeded 4 percent.

By 1971, the unemployment rate topped 6 percent. According to conventional wisdom, expressed in an economic concept called “the Phillips curve,” when unemployment rises, prices should remain constant or even decline. Yet *both* unemployment and inflation numbers were going up simultaneously. Economists coined the term **stagflation** to describe this puzzling convergence of economic stagnation and price inflation. Along with stagflation, U.S. exports were becoming less competitive in international markets and in 1971, for the first time in the 20th century, the United States ran a trade deficit, importing more products than it exported.

Nixon never expected to grapple with a faltering economy. One of his economic advisers conceded that the president had “an almost pathological block about economics.” Although long critical of economic regulations, Nixon now needed a quick cure for the nation’s economic ills. His narrow victory in 1968 and setbacks in the midterm election of 1970 left him fearful of the political fallout from stagflation and trade imbalances. In January 1971 he suddenly, and surprisingly, announced, “I am now a Keynesian in economics” and began proclaiming his faith in governmental remedies. In August, he unveiled a “New Economic Policy” that included a 90-day freeze on any increases in wages and prices, to be followed by government monitoring to detect “excessive” increases in either arena.

Nixon simultaneously took an even more daring step. Dating from the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement (see Chapter 26), the value of the U.S. dollar had been tied to the value of gold—at \$35 for every ounce. This meant that the United States would exchange its dollars for gold at that rate whenever any other nation’s central bank requested it to do so. Other countries had fixed their own currency exchange rate in relation to the values of the U.S. dollar. But U.S. trade deficits were undermining the dollar and allowing foreign banks to exchange U.S. dollars for gold at rates far more favorable than \$35 per ounce. In response, the Nixon administration abandoned the fixed gold-to-dollar ratio. Henceforth, the U.S. dollar would “float” in value against the prevailing market price for gold and against all other currencies in the world. This change would devalue the dollar and hopefully make American exports more competitive in the global marketplace. The strategy fundamentally altered the international economic order by allowing the value of all currencies to float and fluctuate.

In October 1973, oil-producing nations in the Middle East further changed international economic arrangements. Citing the declining U.S. dollar and falling oil revenues as justifications, petroleum producers began curtailing exports as a means of raising prices. About a week later, in response to U.S. military aid for Israel, then engaged in the Yom Kipper War with Egypt and Syria, Arab nations temporarily embargoed oil shipments to the United States. Nixon and Congress responded with a series of measures that included rationing, lowered speed limits, and the naming of a new “energy czar.” As U.S. oil reserves declined, the days of “cheap oil” were coming to an end.

FOREIGN POLICY IN A TIME OF TURMOIL, 1969–1974

Even as it wrestled with divisive domestic concerns, the Nixon administration was far more interested in international affairs. Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser and then secretary of state, laid out a grand strategy: **détente** with the Soviet Union, normalization of relations with China, and disengagement from direct military involvement in South Vietnam.

Détente

Although Nixon had built his early political career on hard-line anticommunism, he and Kissinger worked to ease tensions with the two major communist nations: the Soviet Union and China. The Nixon–Kissinger team expected that improved relations might lead these nations to reduce their support for North Vietnam, increasing chances for a successful U.S. pull-back of U.S. combat troops.

Arms control talks took top priority in U.S.–Soviet relations. In 1969, the two superpowers opened the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT); after several years of high-level diplomacy, they signed an agreement (SALT I) that limited further development of both antiballistic missiles (ABMs) and offensive intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). SALT I's impact on the arms race was limited because it said nothing about the number of nuclear warheads that a single missile might carry. Still, the ability to conclude any arms-control pact signaled improving relations.

Nixon's overtures toward the People's Republic of China eventually brought an even more dramatic break with the Cold War past. Secret negotiations, often conducted personally by Kissinger, led to a slight easing of U.S. trade restrictions and then to an invitation from China for Americans to compete in a table tennis match. This celebrated "ping-pong diplomacy" presaged more significant diplomatic exchanges. Most spectacularly, Nixon visited China in 1972, posing for photos with Mao Zedong and strolling along the Great Wall. A few months later, the UN admitted the People's Republic as the sole representative of China, and in 1973 the United States and China exchanged informal diplomatic missions.

Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine

In Vietnam, the Nixon administration decided to speed withdrawal of U.S. ground forces by embracing a policy called "Vietnamization," which had already informally begun during Lyndon Johnson's administration. Put simply, it meant that South Vietnamese, rather than U.S. troops, should bear the burden of ground combat operations. In July 1969, the **Nixon Doctrine** announced a broader version of this approach. It pledged that the United States would extend military assistance to anticommunist governments in Asia but would require them to supply their own combat forces. From the outset, the Nixon Doctrine for Vietnam envisioned the eventual removal of U.S. ground troops without accepting compromise or defeat. While officially adhering to Johnson's 1968 bombing halt over the North, Nixon and Kissinger accelerated both the ground and air wars by launching new offensives and by approving a military "incursion" into Cambodia, an ostensibly neutral country. The 1970 operation into Cambodia, which targeted a command center from which North Vietnam conducted the war in the South, aimed at shortening U.S. military engagement in Southeast Asia by temporarily expanding it.

The invasion of Cambodia set off a new wave of protests in the United States and around the world. U.S. campuses exploded in angry demonstrations against this apparent widening of the war, and a number of institutions began the summer vacation early. White police officers fatally shot two students at the all-black Jackson State College in Mississippi, and National Guard troops at Kent State University in Ohio fired on unarmed protestors, killing four students. As antiwar demonstrators descended on Washington, D.C., Nixon seemed personally unnerved by the furor, especially during an unscheduled, late-night meeting with protesting students.

A continuing controversy over the **My Lai Incident** further polarized sentiment over the war. Shortly after the 1968 Tet offensive, U.S. troops had entered the small South Vietnamese hamlet of My Lai and murdered more than 200 civilians, most of them women and children. This massacre only became public in 1969 and quickly refocused debate over U.S. policy. Military courts convicted only one officer, Lieutenant William Calley, of any offense. Critics charged that the military was using Calley as a scapegoat for a failed strategy that emphasized body counts and lax rules of engagement. Injecting the White House into this controversy, Nixon ordered that the young lieutenant be confined to his officer's quarters pending the results of his appeal. Ultimately, Calley was ordered released based on procedural irregularities. The controversies over this case inflamed tensions between those Americans who backed and those who protested the war.

Meanwhile, the Nixon administration widened military operations to include Laos as well as Cambodia. Although it denied waging any such campaign, large areas of those agricultural countries were ravaged. As the number of refugees inside Cambodia swelled and food supplies dwindled, the communist guerrilla force there—the Khmer Rouge—became a well-disciplined army. The Khmer Rouge eventually came to power and in a murderous attempt to eliminate dissent turned Cambodia into a “killing field.” It slaughtered more than 1 million Cambodians. While Nixon continued to plan U.S. troop withdrawals and conduct peace negotiations with North Vietnam in Paris, the Vietnam War broadened into a conflict that destabilized all of Indochina.

Even greater violence was yet to come. U.S. aid beefed up South Vietnam's army, but it never became a reliable fighting force. During the spring of 1972, North Vietnam's “Easter Offensive” approached within 30 miles of Saigon before falling back. The surge showed the limits of Vietnamization and swelled South Vietnam's refugee population. Nixon responded with an escalation as great as that by Lyndon Johnson in 1965. He ordered the systematic bombing of North Vietnam, the mining of its harbors, and the institution of a naval blockade. Just weeks before the November 1972 elections in the United States, Henry Kissinger declared that “peace is at hand” and announced a cease-fire. After Nixon's reelection, however, the impending peace deal fell apart in Paris, and the United States unleashed even greater firepower over North Vietnam. During the “Christmas bombing” of December 1972, the heaviest bombardment in history, B-52 planes pounded military and civilian targets in North Vietnam around the clock. North Vietnam, which was also feeling diplomatic pressure from the Soviet Union and China, decided to conclude peace negotiations with Washington and Saigon.

Jackson State. *The era of America's longest war was a time of violence overseas and at home. In May 1970, police gunfire killed two students and wounded 15 others at Jackson State University in Mississippi. This picture was taken through a bullet-riddled window in a women's dorm.*



© Bettmann/CORBIS

The United States Leaves Vietnam

Much of the U.S. media, Congress, and public were also calling for an end to the war. Many were tired of the violence in Asia and of the administration's effort to stem dissent at home. In addition, sagging morale among U.S. troops hindered the missions that the U.S. command was still conducting. Soldiers questioned the purpose of their sacrifices; some refused to engage the enemy; and a few openly defied their superiors. At home, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), a new organization, joined the antiwar coalition. Running out of non-bombing options, Nixon proceeded with full-scale Vietnamization.

In January 1973, the warring parties signed peace accords in Paris that provided for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The actual terms closely resembled those in the pre-election deal that Kissinger had celebrated but which had later fallen apart. By allowing North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South, the Paris accords left Nguyen Van Thieu's government in an unenviable position, and Nixon may have anticipated preserving it by future bombing campaigns. As U.S. ground forces departed, the South Vietnamese army continued to fight, increasingly demoralized and ineffectual. In spring 1975, nearly two years after the Paris accords,

South Vietnam's army and Thieu's government collapsed as North Vietnamese armies entered the capital of Saigon (see Chapter 30). America's longest war ended with its objective of maintaining a noncommunist South Vietnam unfulfilled.

Between 1960 and 1973, approximately 3.5 million American men and women served in Vietnam: 58,000 died, 150,000 were wounded, and 2,000 were classified as missing. In the aftermath of this costly, divisive war, Americans struggled to understand why their country failed to defeat a small, barely industrialized nation. Those still supporting the war argued that it had been lost on the home front. They blamed an irresponsible media, a disloyal antiwar movement, and a Congress afflicted by a "failure of will." The war, they insisted, had been for a laudable cause. Politicians, setting unrealistic limits on the Pentagon, had prevented strategists from attaining victory. By contrast, those who had come to oppose the war stressed the overextension of U.S. power, the misguided belief in national omnipotence, the dangers of touching off a wider war with China, and the strategic miscalculations of decision makers. For them, the United States had waged a war in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. The human costs in both the United States and Indochina outweighed any possible gain.

Regardless of their position on the war, most Americans seemed to agree on a single proposition: There should be "no more Vietnams." The United States should not undertake another military operation unless it involved clear and compelling political objectives, sustained public support, and realistic means to accomplish its goals. Eventually, people who wanted to reassert U.S. power in the world came to worry that such caution, which they dismissed as "the Vietnam syndrome," might shape a timid foreign policy. The legacy of Vietnam era divisions would continue far beyond the era of America's longest war.

Expanding the Nixon Doctrine

Although the Nixon Doctrine initially applied to the Vietnamization of the war in Indochina, Nixon and Kissinger extended its premise to the entire world. The White House made clear that the United States would not dispatch its troops to quash insurgencies but would generously aid anticommunist regimes or factions willing to fight their own battles.

During the early 1970s, U.S. Cold War strategy came to rely on supporting staunchly anticommunist regional powers. These included nations such as Iran under Shah Reza Pahlavi, South Africa with its apartheid regime, and Brazil with its military dictatorship. All of these countries built large, U.S. trained military establishments. U.S. military assistance, together with covert CIA operations, also incubated and protected anticommunist dictatorships in South Korea, the Philippines, and much of Latin America. U.S. arms sales to the rest of the world skyrocketed. In one of its most controversial foreign policies, the Nixon administration employed covert action against the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile in 1970. After Allende took office, Kissinger pressed for the destabilization of his government. On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military overthrew Allende, immediately suspended democratic rule, and announced that Allende had committed suicide.

Critics charged that the United States, in the name of anticommunism, too often linked its diplomatic fortunes to questionable covert actions and unpopular military governments. In 1973, Democratic Senator Frank Church conducted Senate hearings into abuses of power by the executive branch, especially the CIA's actions in Chile.

Supporters of Nixon and Kissinger, however, gave the pair high marks for a pragmatic foreign policy that combined détente toward the communist giants with containment directed against the spread of revolutionary regimes.

A CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE, 1972–1974

Nixon's presidency came under constitutional scrutiny as a result of decisions made in the Oval Office. A political loner who ruminated about taking revenge against his enemies, Nixon often seemed his own greatest foe. He ordered the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to harass prominent Democrats with expensive audits; placed antiwar and Black Power activists under surveillance; and conducted risky covert activities on the domestic front that even rattled the constitutional sensibilities of an old ally, J. Edgar Hoover. Isolated with a close-knit group of advisers, Nixon eventually created his own secret intelligence unit, "the Plumbers," which set up shop in the White House.

During the summer of 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, an antiwar activist who had once worked in the national security bureaucracy, leaked to the press a top-secret, highly critical history of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, subsequently known as the "Pentagon Papers." Nixon responded by seeking, unsuccessfully, a court injunction to stop publication and, more ominously, by unleashing his Plumbers unit to stop leaks to the media. Seeking something that might discredit Ellsberg, the Plumbers burglarized his psychiatrist's office. Thus began a series of secretive political "dirty tricks" and clear-cut crimes, sometimes financed by funds solicited for Nixon's 1972 reelection campaign.

The Election of 1972

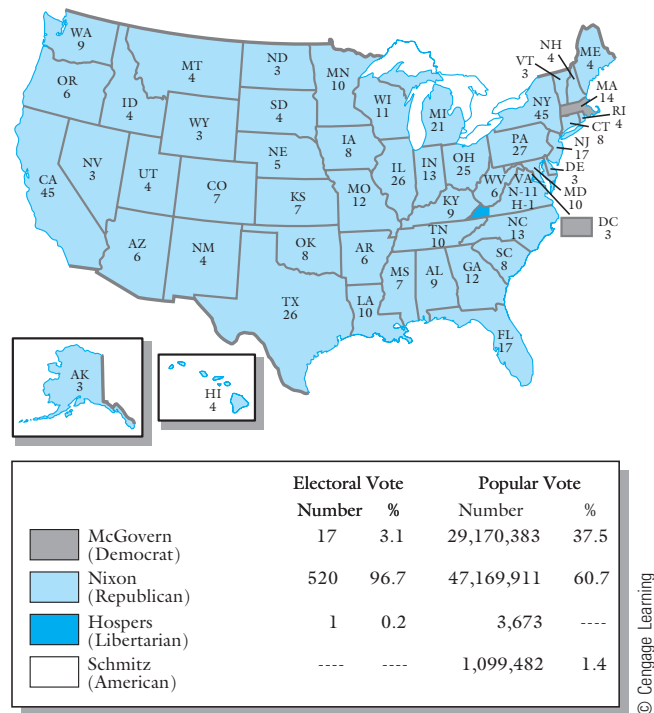
Nixon's political strategists worried that domestic troubles and the war in Vietnam might deny the president another term.

Creating a campaign organization separate from that of the Republican Party, with the ironic acronym of **CREEP (Committee to Re-elect the President)**, they secretly raised millions of dollars, much of it from illegal contributions.

As the 1972 campaign took shape, Nixon's chances for reelection dramatically improved. An assassin's bullet crippled George Wallace and kept him from playing the spoiler's role in November. Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, initially Nixon's leading Democratic challenger, made a series of blunders (some of them, perhaps, precipitated by Republican "dirty tricksters") that derailed his campaign. Eventually, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War but a lackluster campaigner, won the Democratic nomination.

McGovern never seriously challenged Nixon. The Democratic candidate called for higher taxes on the wealthy, a guaranteed minimum income for all Americans, amnesty for Vietnam War draft resisters, and the decriminalization of marijuana. In foreign policy, he urged deep cuts in defense spending and peace in Vietnam—proposals that Nixon successfully portrayed as signs that McGovern would "weaken" national security. Nixon won an easy victory in November, receiving the Electoral College votes of all but one state and the District of Columbia. **Although the 26th Amendment, ratified one year before the election, had lowered the voting age to 18, relatively few of the newly enfranchised voters cast ballots.**

While helping achieve this victory, however, the president's supporters left a trail of crime and corruption that eventually led to a crisis of governance. The election of 1972 initially seemed a simple triumph for Richard Nixon, but the other



MAP 29.3 Presidential Election, 1972

In contrast to the closely contested election of 1968, the 1972 election produced a landslide victory for Richard Nixon. What helps explain the stark difference between these two elections? What events would force Richard Nixon, in 1974, to leave an office to which he had been overwhelmingly returned?

branches of government soon began scrutinizing its legitimacy. In June 1972, a surveillance team with links to both CREEP and the White House had been arrested while fine-tuning eavesdropping equipment in the Democratic Party’s headquarters in Washington’s Watergate office complex. In public, Nixon’s spokespeople dismissed the Watergate break-in as a “third-rate burglary”; privately, the president and his inner circle launched a cover-up. They paid hush money to the Watergate burglars and ordered CIA officials to misinform the FBI that any investigation into the episode would jeopardize national security. Nixon succeeded in containing the political damage through the 1972 election, but events associated with **Watergate** soon overtook him.

The Watergate Investigations

While reporters from the *Washington Post* pursued the taint of scandal coming from the election, Congress, the federal courts, and government prosecutors also sought evidence of illegal activities during the 1972 campaign. Federal District Judge John Sirica, a Republican appointee presiding over the trial of the Watergate burglars, suspected a cover-up and continually pressed the defendants before his court for additional information. In May 1973, U.S. Senate leaders convened a special, bipartisan Watergate Committee, headed by North Carolina’s conservative Democratic Senator Sam Ervin, to investigate. Federal prosecutors uncovered evidence that seemed to

link key administration figures, including John Mitchell, Nixon's former attorney general and later the head of CREEP, to illegal activities.

The Ervin hearings, carried live on TV, eventually attracted the most public attention. A succession of witnesses testified about illegal activities committed by CREEP and the White House. The Watergate Committee called Nixon's closest aides before the committee, and its sessions became a daily political drama that much of the country watched. Testimony from John Dean, who had been the president's chief legal counsel, linked Nixon himself to attempts to cover up Watergate and to other illegal activities. The president steadfastly denied Dean's charges.

Along the way, though, Senate investigators discovered that a voice-activated taping system had recorded every conversation in Nixon's Oval Office. These tapes made it possible to determine whether the president or Dean, Nixon's primary accuser, was lying. While contending he was not "a crook," Nixon also claimed an "executive privilege" to keep the tapes from being released, but Judge Sirica, Archibald Cox (a special, independent prosecutor in the Watergate case), and Congress all demanded access to them.

If Nixon's Watergate-related problems were not enough, his vice president Spiro Agnew suddenly resigned in October 1973 after pleading no contest to income-tax evasion. Agnew agreed to a plea-bargain arrangement to avoid prosecution for having accepted illegal kickbacks while in Maryland politics. Acting under the 25th Amendment (ratified in 1967), Nixon appointed—and both houses of Congress confirmed—Representative Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, a Republican Party stalwart, as the new vice president.

Nixon's Resignation

Nixon's clumsy efforts to protect himself backfired. During the fall of 1973, Nixon had abruptly fired Archibald Cox, hoping to prevent him from gaining access to the tapes. When this firing prompted an outcry, the president appointed an equally tenacious replacement, Leon Jaworski. Nixon's own release of edited transcripts of some Watergate-related conversations, including one key transcript reflecting an 18-minute gap in the tape, merely strengthened demand for the original recordings. Finally, by proclaiming that he would obey only a "definitive" Supreme Court decision, Nixon all but invited the justices to deliver a unanimous ruling on the question of the tapes. On July 24, 1974, the Burger Court did just that in the case of *U.S. v. Nixon*. No claim of executive privilege could justify the refusal to release evidence in a criminal investigation. With Nixon refusing to consider resignation, the House of Representatives began to consider his impeachment.

After televised deliberations, a bipartisan majority of the House Judiciary Committee voted three formal articles of impeachment against the president for obstruction of justice, violation of constitutional liberties, and refusal to produce evidence. Nixon promised to rebut these accusations before the Senate, the body authorized by the Constitution (Article I, Section 3) to render a verdict of guilty or not guilty after impeachment by the House.

Nixon's aides, however, were already orchestrating his departure. One of his own attorneys had discovered that a tape Nixon had been withholding contained the long-sought "smoking gun," clear evidence of a criminal offense. It confirmed that during a 1972 conversation, Nixon had helped hatch a plan by which the CIA would advance a fraudulent claim of national security in order to stop the FBI from investigating the

Watergate break-in. At this point, Nixon's own secretary of defense ordered military commanders to ignore any order from the president, the constitutional commander-in-chief, unless the secretary had countersigned it. Abandoned by almost every prominent Republican and confronted by a Senate prepared to vote him guilty on the impeachment charges, Nixon went on television on August 8, 1974, to announce his resignation. On August 9, Gerald Ford became the nation's 38th chief executive. He assumed the post never having been elected president or vice president.

In 1974, most people told pollsters that the string of abuses collectively known as "Watergate" was one of the gravest crises in the history of the republic and that the Nixon administration had posed a serious threat to constitutional governance. As time passed, though, the details of Watergate-related events faded from memories. Opinion polls conducted on the 20th anniversary of Nixon's resignation suggested that Americans now only dimly recalled the crisis of governance that had once gripped the nation.

What might account for this change? First, although nearly a dozen members of Nixon's administration—including its chief law enforcement officer, John Mitchell—were convicted of criminal activities, the president avoided prosecution. Gerald Ford granted him an unconditional pardon. The nation was spared the spectacle of a former president undergoing trial, but it was also denied an authoritative accounting, in a court of law, of Nixon's misdeeds.

Another reason for fading memories may be the media's habit of attaching the Watergate label to nearly every political scandal of the post-Nixon era. The suffix *-gate* became affixed to grave constitutional episodes and to obviously trivial political events. Over time, then, "Watergate" became almost a synonym for "politics as usual." Finally, images of what the historian Stanley Kutler calls the "Wars of Watergate" have tended to blend into the broader picture of political, social, economic, and cultural turmoil that accompanied U.S. involvement in the nation's longest war.

CONCLUSION

The power of the national government expanded between 1963 and 1974. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society provided a blueprint for policymaking at home even as his administration dramatically escalated the war in Vietnam. This growth of government power prompted divisive debates that polarized the country. During Johnson's presidency, both the war effort and the economy faltered, top leaders became discredited, and Johnson abandoned the office he had so long sought. The use of presidential power by Johnson's Republican successor, Richard Nixon, prompted a crisis of governance that ultimately forced Nixon from office. The hopes of the early 1960s—that an active national government could promote liberty and equality both at home and throughout the rest of the world—ended in frustration.

The era of America's longest war was a time of political passion, cultural and racial conflict, and differing definitions of patriotism. It saw the slow convergence of an antiwar movement, along with the emergence of youthful dissent, Black Power, women's activism, and contests over what constituted Americans' basic rights. Different groups have invoked divergent explanations for the fates of both the Great Society and the war effort, and the divisions from this era shaped politics and culture for years to come. Many Americans became skeptical, many even cynical, about expanding the power of the federal government in the name of expanding liberty and equality.