CHAPTER 28

Uncivil Wars: Liberal Crisis and Conservative Rebirth 1961–1972

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IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

What were liberalism's social and political achievements in the 1960s, and how did debates over liberal values contribute to conflict at home and reflect tension abroad?

The civil rights movement stirred American liberals and pushed them to initiate bold new government policies to advance racial equality. That progressive spirit inspired an even broader reform agenda that came to include women's rights, new social programs for the poor and the aged, job training, environmental laws, and other educational and social benefits for the middle class. All told, Congress passed more liberal legislation between 1964 and 1972 than in any period since the 1930s. The great bulk of it came during the 1965–1966 legislative session, one of the most active in American history. Liberalism was at high tide.

It did not stay there long. Liberals quickly came under assault from two directions. First, young activists became frustrated with slow progress on civil rights and rebelled against the Vietnam War. At the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, police teargassed and clubbed antiwar demonstrators, who chanted (as the TV cameras rolled), "The whole world is watching!" Some of them had been among the young idealists inspired by Kennedy's inaugural address and the civil rights movement. Now they rejected everything that Cold War liberalism stood for. Inside the convention hall, the proceedings were chaotic, the atmosphere poisonous, the delegates bitterly divided over Vietnam.

A second assault on liberalism came from conservatives, who found their footing after being marginalized during the 1950s. Conservatives opposed the dramatic expansion of the federal government under President Lyndon B. Johnson and disdained the "permissive society" they believed liberalism had unleashed. Advocating law and order, belittling welfare, and resisting key civil rights reforms, conservatives leaped back to political life in the late sixties. Their champion was Barry Goldwater, a Republican senator from Arizona, who warned that "a government big enough to give you everything you want is also big enough to take away everything you have."

The clashing of left, right, and center made the decade between the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and the 1972 landslide reelection of Richard Nixon one of the most contentious, complicated, and explosive eras in American history. There were thousands of marches and demonstrations; massive new federal programs aimed at achieving civil rights, ending poverty, and extending the welfare state; and new voices among women, African Americans, and Latinos demanding to be heard. With heated, vitriolic rhetoric on all sides, these developments overlapped with political assassinations and violence both overseas and at home. In this chapter, we undertake to explain how the rekindling of liberal reform under the twin auspices of the civil rights movement and the leadership of President Johnson gave way to a profound liberal crisis and the resurgence of conservatism.

"I Want Out" Protest movements of all kinds shook the foundations of American society and national politics in the 1960s. No issue was more controversial and divisive than the war in Vietnam. Private Collection/ Peter Newark American Pictures/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Liberalism at High Tide

In May 1964, Lyndon Johnson, president for barely six months, delivered the commencement address at the University of Michigan. Johnson offered his audience a grand and inspirational vision of a new liberal age. "We have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society," Johnson continued, "but upward to the **Great Society**." As the sun-baked graduates listened, Johnson spelled out what he meant: "The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice." Even this, Johnson declared, was just the beginning. He would push to renew American education, rebuild the cities, and restore the natural environment. Ambitious — even audacious — Johnson's vision was a New Deal for a new era. From that day forward, the president would harness his considerable political skills to make that vision a reality. A tragic irony, however, was that he held the presidency at all.

To see a longer excerpt of Johnson's commencement address, along with other primary sources from this period, see ***Sources for America's History.***

John F. Kennedy's Promise

In 1961, three years before Johnson's Great Society speech, John F. Kennedy declared at his inauguration: "Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans." He challenged his fellow citizens to "ask what you can do for your country," a call to service that inspired many Americans. The British journalist Henry Fairley called Kennedy's activism "the politics of expectation." Over time, the expectations Kennedy embodied, combined with his ability to inspire a younger generation, laid the groundwork for an era of liberal reform.

Kennedy's legislative record did not live up to his promising image. This was not entirely his fault; congressional partisanship and resistance stymied many presidents in the twentieth century. Kennedy's domestic advisors devised bold plans for health insurance for the aged, a new antipoverty program, and a tax cut. After enormous pressure from Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders — and pushed by the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 — they added a civil rights bill. None of these initiatives went anywhere in the Senate, where powerful conservative interests practiced an old legislative art: delay, delay, delay. All Kennedy's bills were at a virtual standstill when tragedy struck.

On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was in Dallas, Texas, on a political trip. As he and his wife, Jacqueline, rode in an open car past the Texas School Book Depository, he was shot through the head and neck by a sniper. He died within the hour. (The accused killer, twenty-four-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself killed while in custody a few days later by an assassin, a Dallas nightclub owner named Jack Ruby.) Before Air Force One left Dallas to take the president's body back to Washington, a grim-faced Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as Kennedy's successor.

Kennedy's youthful image, the trauma of his assassination, and the nation's sense of loss contributed to a powerful Kennedy mystique. His canonization after death capped what had been an extraordinarily stage-managed presidency. An admiring country saw in Jack and Jackie Kennedy an ideal American marriage (though JFK was, in fact, an obsessive womanizer); in Kennedy the epitome of robust good health (though he was actually afflicted by Addison's disease); and in the Kennedy White House a glamorous world of high fashion and celebrity. No other presidency ever matched the Kennedy aura, but every president after him embraced the idea that image mattered as much as reality in conducting a politically effective presidency.

Lyndon B. Johnson and the Great Society

In many ways, Lyndon Johnson was the opposite of Kennedy. A seasoned Texas politician and longtime Senate leader, Johnson was most at home in the back rooms of power. He was a rough-edged character who had scrambled his way up, with few scruples, to wealth and political eminence. But he never forgot his modest, hill-country origins or lost his sympathy for the downtrodden. Johnson lacked Kennedy's style, but he rose to the political challenge after Kennedy's assassination, applying his astonishing energy and negotiating skills to revive several of Kennedy's stalled programs, and many more of his own, in the ambitious Great Society.

On assuming the presidency, Johnson promptly pushed for civil rights legislation as a memorial to his slain predecessor (Chapter 27). His motives were complex. As a southerner who had previously opposed civil rights for African Americans, Johnson wished to prove that he was more than a regional figure — he would be the president of all the people. He also wanted to make a mark on history, telling Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders to lace up their sneakers

The Great Society

President Lyndon Johnson toured poverty-stricken regions of the country in 1964. Here he visits with Tom Fletcher, a father of eight children in Martin County, Kentucky. Johnson envisioned a dramatic expansion of liberal social programs, both to assist the needy and to strengthen the middle class, that he called the Great Society. © Bettmann/Corbis.

because he would move so fast on civil rights they would be running to catch up. Politically, the choice was risky. Johnson would please the Democratic Party's liberal wing, but because most northern African Americans already voted Democratic, the party would gain few additional votes. Moreover, southern white Democrats would likely revolt, dividing the party at a time when Johnson's legislative agenda most required unanimity. But Johnson pushed ahead, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act stands, in part, as a testament to the president's political risk-taking.

More than civil rights, what drove Johnson hardest was his determination to "end poverty in our time." The president called it a national disgrace that in the midst of plenty, one-fifth of all Americans—hidden from most people's sight in Appalachia, urban ghettos, migrant labor camps, and Indian reservations—lived in poverty. But, Johnson declared, "for the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty."

The **Economic Opportunity Act** of 1964, which created a series of programs to reach these Americans, was the president's answer—what he called the War on Poverty. This legislation included several different initiatives. Head Start provided free nursery schools to prepare disadvantaged preschoolers for kindergarten. The Job Corps and Upward Bound provided young people with training and employment. Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), modeled on the Peace Corps, offered technical assistance to the urban and rural poor. An array of regional development programs focused on spurring economic growth in impoverished areas. On balance, the 1964 legislation provided services to the poor rather than jobs, leading some critics to charge the War on Poverty with doing too little.

The 1964 Election With the Civil Rights Act passed and his War on Poverty initiatives off the ground, Johnson turned his attention to the upcoming presidential election. Not content to govern in Kennedy's shadow, he wanted a national mandate of his own. Privately, Johnson cast himself less like Kennedy than as the heir of Franklin Roosevelt and the expansive liberalism of the 1930s. Johnson had come to Congress for the first time in 1937 and had long admired FDR's political skills. He reminded his advisors never to forget "the meek and the humble and the lowly," because "President Roosevelt never did."

In the 1964 election, Johnson faced Republican Barry Goldwater of Arizona. An archconservative, Goldwater ran on an anticommunist, antigovernment platform, offering "a choice, not an echo"—meaning he represented a genuinely conservative alternative to liberalism rather than the echo of liberalism offered by the moderate wing of the Republican Party (Chapter 25). Goldwater campaigned against the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and promised a more vigorous Cold War foreign policy. Among those supporting him was former actor Ronald Reagan, whose speech on behalf of Goldwater at the Republican convention, called "A

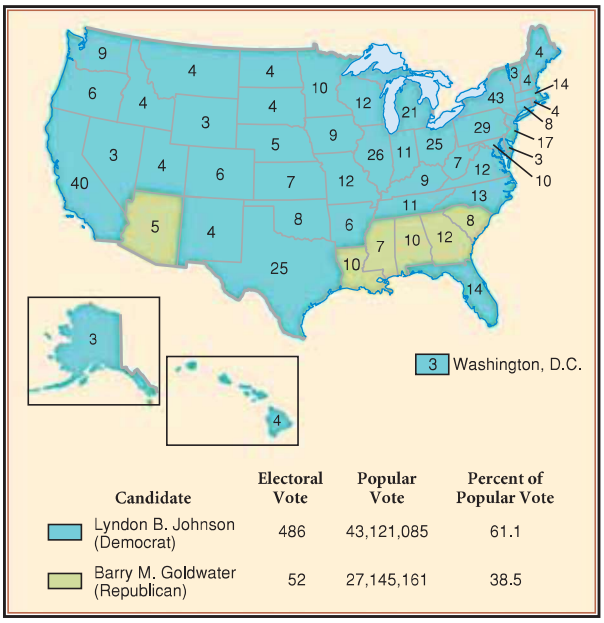
Time for Choosing," made him a rising star in the party.

But Goldwater's strident foreign policy alienated voters. "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," he told Republicans at the convention. Moreover, there remained strong national sentiment for Kennedy. Telling Americans that he was running to fulfill Kennedy's legacy, Johnson and his running mate, Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, won in a landslide (Map 28.1). In the long run, Goldwater's candidacy marked the beginning of a grassroots conservative revolt that would eventually transform the Republican Party. In the short run, however, Johnson's sweeping victory gave him a popular mandate and, equally important, congressional majorities that rivaled FDR's in 1935—just what he needed to push the Great Society forward (Table 28.1).

Great Society Initiatives One of Johnson's first successes was breaking a congressional deadlock on education and health care. Passed in April 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act authorized $1 billion in federal funds for teacher training and other educational programs. Standing in his old Texas schoolhouse, Johnson, a former teacher, said: "I believe no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America." Six months later, Johnson signed the Higher Education Act, providing federal scholarships for college students. Johnson also had the votes he needed to achieve some form of national health insurance. That year, he also won passage of two new programs: **Medicare**, a health plan for the elderly funded by a surcharge on Social Security payroll taxes, and **Medicaid**, a health plan for the poor paid for by general tax revenues and administered by the states.

The Great Society's agenda included environmental reform as well: an expanded national park system, improvement of the nation's air and water, protection for endangered species, stronger land-use planning, and highway beautification. Hardly pausing for breath, Johnson oversaw the creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); won funding for hundreds of thousands of units of public housing; made new investments in urban rapid transit such as the new Washington, D.C., Metro and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in San Francisco; ushered new child safety and consumer protection laws through Congress; and helped create the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities to support the work of artists, writers, and scholars.

It even became possible, at this moment of reform zeal, to tackle the nation's discriminatory immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1965 abandoned the quota system that favored northern Europeans, replacing it with numerical limits that did not discriminate among nations. To promote family reunification, the law also stipulated that close relatives of legal residents in the United States could be admitted outside the numerical limits, an exception that especially benefitted Asian and Latin American immigrants. Since 1965, as a result, immigrants from those regions have become increasingly visible in American society (Chapter 31).



MAP 28.1
The Presidential Election of 1964

This map reveals how one-sided was the victory of Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater in 1964. Except for Arizona, his home state, Goldwater won only five states in the Deep South—not of much immediate consolation to him, but a sure indicator that the South was cutting its historic ties to the Democratic Party. Moreover, although soundly rejected in 1964, Goldwater's far right critique of "big government" laid the foundation for a Republican resurgence in the 1980s.

Assessing the Great Society The Great Society enjoyed mixed results. The proportion of Americans living below the poverty line dropped from 20 percent to 13 percent between 1963 and 1968 (Figure 28.1). Medicare and Medicaid, the most enduring of the Great Society programs, helped millions of elderly and poor citizens afford necessary health care. Further, as millions of African Americans moved into the middle

TABLE 28.1

Major Great Society Legislation

	Civil Rights	
1964	Twenty-fourth Amendment	Outlawed poll tax in federal elections
	Civil Rights Act	Banned discrimination in employment and public accommodations on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin
1965	Voting Rights Act	Outlawed literacy tests for voting; provided federal supervision of registration in historically low-registration areas
	Social Welfare	
1964	Economic Opportunity Act	Created Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to administer War on Poverty programs such as Head Start, Job Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)
1965	Medical Care Act	Provided medical care for the poor (Medicaid) and the elderly (Medicare)
1966	Minimum Wage Act	Raised hourly minimum wage from $1.25 to $1.40 and expanded coverage to new groups
	Education	
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act	Granted federal aid for education of poor children
	National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities	Provided federal funding and support for artists and scholars
	Higher Education Act	Provided federal scholarships for postsecondary education
	Housing and Urban Development	
1964	Urban Mass Transportation Act	Provided federal aid to urban mass transit
	Omnibus Housing Act	Provided federal funds for public housing and rent subsidies for low-income families
1965	Housing and Urban Development Act	Created Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
1966	Metropolitan Area Redevelopment and Demonstration Cities Acts	Designated 150 "model cities" for combined programs of public housing, social services, and job training
	Environment	
1964	Wilderness Preservation Act	Designated 9.1 million acres of federal lands as "wilderness areas," barring future roads, buildings, or commercial use
1965	Air and Water Quality Acts	Set tougher air quality standards; required states to enforce water quality standards for interstate waters
	Miscellaneous	
1964	Tax Reduction Act	Reduced personal and corporate income tax rates
1965	Immigration Act	Abandoned national quotas of 1924 law, allowing more non-European immigration
	Appalachian Regional and Development Act	Provided federal funding for roads, health clinics, and other public works projects in economically depressed regions

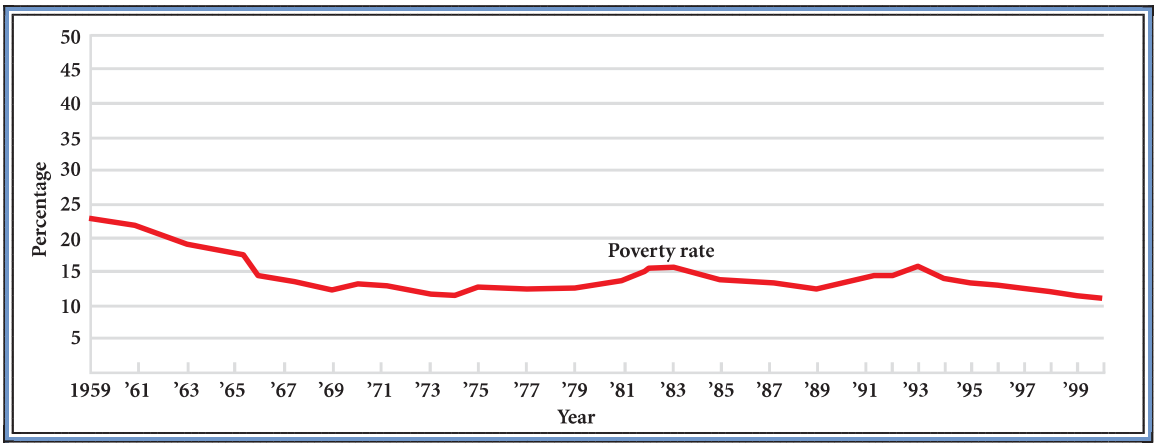


FIGURE 28.1
Americans in Poverty, 1959–2000

Between 1959 and 1973 the poverty rate among American families dropped by more than half—from 23 percent to 11 percent. There was, however, sharp disagreement about the reasons for that notable decline. Liberals credited the War on Poverty, while conservatives favored the high-performing economy, with the significant poverty dip of 1965–1966 caused by military spending, not Johnson's domestic programs.

PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT
What new roles did the federal government assume under Great Society initiatives, and how did they extend the New Deal tradition?

class, the black poverty rate fell by half. Liberals believed they were on the right track.

Conservatives, however, gave more credit for these changes to the decade's booming economy than to government programs. Indeed, conservative critics accused Johnson and other liberals of believing that every social problem could be solved with a government program. In the final analysis, the Great Society dramatically improved the financial situation of the elderly, reached millions of children, and increased the racial diversity of American society and workplaces. However, entrenched poverty remained, racial segregation in the largest cities worsened, and the national distribution of wealth remained highly skewed. In relative terms, the bottom 20 percent remained as far behind as ever. In these arenas, the Great Society made little progress.

Rebirth of the Women's Movement

The new era of liberal reform reawakened the American women's movement. Inspired by the civil rights movement and legislative advances under the Great Society, but frustrated by the lack of attention both gave to women, feminists entered the political fray and demanded not simply inclusion, but a rethinking of national priorities.

Labor Feminists The women's movement had not languished entirely in the postwar years. Feminist concerns were kept alive in the 1950s and early 1960s by working women, who campaigned for such things as maternity leave and equal pay for equal work. One historian has called these women "labor feminists," because they belonged to unions and fought for equality and dignity in the workplace. "It became apparent to me why so many employers could legally discriminate against women—because it was written right into the law," said one female labor activist. Trade union women were especially critical in pushing for, and winning, congressional passage of the 1963 **Equal Pay Act**, which established the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Labor feminists were responding to the times. More women—including married women (40 percent by 1970) and mothers with young children (30 percent by 1970)—were working outside the home than ever before. But they faced a labor market that undervalued their contributions. Moreover, most working women faced the "double day": they were expected to earn a paycheck and then return home to domestic labor. One woman put the problem succinctly: "The working mother has no 'wife' to care for her children."

Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women When Betty Friedan's indictment of suburban domesticity, ***The Feminine Mystique***, appeared in 1963, it targeted a different audience: college-educated,

middle-class women who found themselves not working for wages but rather stifled by their domestic routine. Tens of thousands of women read Friedan's book and thought, "She's talking about me." *The Feminine Mystique* became a runaway best-seller. Friedan persuaded middle-class women that they needed more than the convenience foods, improved diapers, and better laundry detergents that magazines and television urged them to buy. To live rich and fulfilling lives, they needed education and work outside the home.

Paradoxically, the domesticity described in *The Feminine Mystique* was already crumbling. After the postwar baby boom, women were again having fewer children, aided now by the birth control pill, first marketed in 1960. And as states liberalized divorce laws, more women were divorcing. Educational levels were also rising: by 1970, women made up 42 percent of the college population. All of these changes undermined traditional gender roles and enabled many women to embrace *The Feminine Mystique*'s liberating prescriptions.

Government action also made a difference. In 1961, Kennedy appointed the **Presidential Commission on the Status of Women**, which issued a 1963 report documenting job and educational discrimination. A bigger breakthrough came when Congress added the word *sex* to the categories protected against discrimination in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Women suddenly had a powerful legal tool for fighting sex discrimination.

IDENTIFY CAUSES
What factors accounted for the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s?

To force compliance with the new act, Friedan and others, including many labor feminists from around the country, founded the **National Organization for Women (NOW)** in 1966. Modeled on the NAACP, NOW intended to be a civil rights organization for women, with the aim of bringing "women into full participation in . . . American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men." Under Friedan's leadership, membership grew to fifteen thousand by 1971, and NOW became, like the NAACP, a powerful voice for equal rights.

One of the ironies of the 1960s was the enormous strain that all of this liberal activism placed on the New Deal coalition. Faced with often competing demands from the civil rights movement, feminists, the poor, labor unions, conservative southern Democrats, the suburban middle class, and urban political machines, the old Rooseveltian coalition had begun to fray. Johnson hoped that the New Deal coalition was strong enough to negotiate competing demands among its own constituents while simultaneously resisting conservative attacks. In 1965, that still seemed possible. It would not remain so for long.

National Organization for Women

Kathryn F. Clarenbach (left) and Betty Friedan (right) announced a "Bill of Rights for Women in 1968" to be presented to candidates in that election year. Clarenbach was the first chairwoman of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Friedan the organization's first president. NOW became a fixture of the women's movement and the leading liberal voice for women's legal and social equality. © Bettmann/Corbis.

The Vietnam War Begins

As the accelerating rights revolution placed strain on the Democratic coalition, the war in Vietnam divided the country. In a CBS interview before his death, Kennedy remarked that it was up to the South Vietnamese whether "their war" would be won or lost. But the young president had already placed the United States on a course that would make retreat difficult. Like other presidents, Kennedy believed that giving up in Vietnam would weaken America's "credibility." Withdrawal "would be a great mistake," he said.

It is impossible to know how JFK would have managed Vietnam had he lived. What is known is that in the fall of 1963, Kennedy had lost patience with Ngo Dinh Diem, the dictatorial head of South Vietnam whom the United States had supported since 1955. The president let it be known in Saigon that the United States would support a military coup. Kennedy's hope was that if Diem, reviled throughout the South because of his brutal repression of political opponents, could be replaced by a popular general or other military figure, a stable government would emerge — one strong enough to repel the South Vietnam National Liberation Front (NLF), or Vietcong. But when Diem was overthrown on November 1, the South Vietnamese generals went further than Kennedy's team had anticipated and assassinated both Diem and his brother. This made the coup look less like an organic uprising and more like an American plot.

South Vietnam fell into a period of chaos marked by several coups and defined by the increasing ungovernability of both the cities and countryside. Kennedy himself was assassinated in late November and would not live to see the grim results of Diem's murder: American engagement in a long and costly civil conflict in the name of fighting communism.

Escalation Under Johnson

Just as Kennedy had inherited Vietnam from Eisenhower, so Lyndon Johnson inherited Vietnam from Kennedy. Johnson's inheritance was more burdensome, however, for by now only massive American intervention could prevent the collapse of South Vietnam (Map 28.2). Johnson, like Kennedy, was a subscriber to the Cold War tenets of global containment.

MAP 28.2
The Vietnam War, 1968

The Vietnam War was a guerrilla war, fought in skirmishes rather than set-piece battles. Despite repeated airstrikes, the United States was never able to halt the flow of North Vietnamese troops and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which wound through Laos and Cambodia. In January 1968, Vietcong forces launched the Tet offensive, a surprise attack on cities and provincial centers across South Vietnam. Although the attackers were pushed back with heavy losses, the Tet offensive revealed the futility of American efforts to suppress the Vietcong guerrillas and marked a turning point in the war.

"I am not going to lose Vietnam," he vowed on taking office. "I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went" (Chapter 25).

Gulf of Tonkin It did not take long for Johnson to place his stamp on the war. During the summer of 1964, the president got reports that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin. In the first attack, on August 2, the damage inflicted was limited to a single bullet hole; a second attack, on August 4, later proved to be only misread radar sightings. To Johnson, it didn't matter if the attack was real or imagined; the president believed a wider war was inevitable and issued a call to arms, sending his national approval rating from 42 to 72 percent. In the entire Congress, only two senators voted against his request for authorization to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, as it became known, gave Johnson the freedom to conduct operations in Vietnam as he saw fit.

Despite his congressional mandate, Johnson was initially cautious about revealing his plans to the American people. "I had no choice but to keep my foreign policy in the wings . . . ," Johnson later said. "I knew that the day it exploded into a major debate on the war, that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society." So he ran in 1964 on the pledge that there would be no escalation—no American boys fighting Vietnam's fight. Privately, he doubted the pledge could be kept.

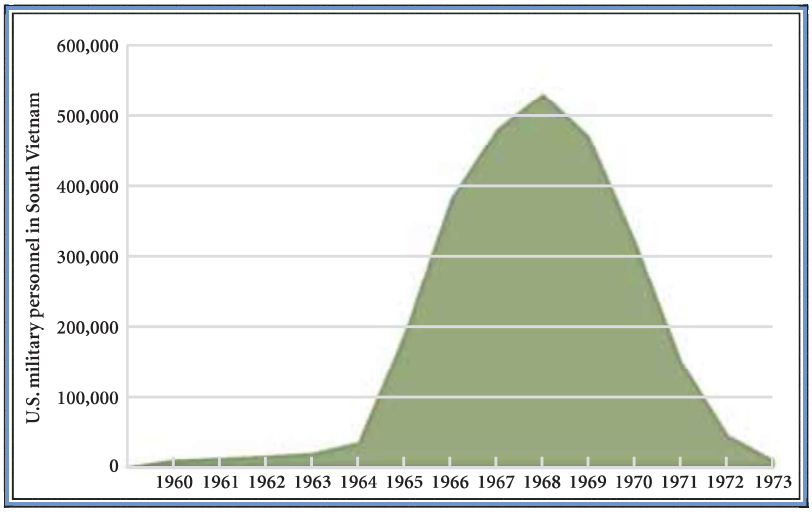
The New American Presence With the 1964 election safely behind him, Johnson began an American takeover of the war in Vietnam (American Voices, p. 912). The escalation, beginning in the early months of 1965, took two forms: deployment of American ground troops and the intensification of bombing against North Vietnam.

UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW
In what larger context did President Johnson view the Vietnam conflict, and why was he determined to support South Vietnam?

On March 8, 1965, the first marines waded ashore at Da Nang. By 1966, more than 380,000 American soldiers were stationed in Vietnam; by 1967, 485,000; and by 1968, 536,000 (Figure 28.2). The escalating demands of General William Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. forces, and Robert McNamara, the secretary of defense, pushed Johnson to Americanize the ground war in an attempt to stabilize South Vietnam. "I can't run and pull a Chamberlain at Munich," Johnson privately told a reporter in early March 1965, referring to the British prime minister who had appeased Hitler in 1938.

Meanwhile, Johnson authorized **Operation Rolling Thunder**, a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnam in 1965. Over the entire course of the war, the United States dropped twice as many tons of bombs on Vietnam as the Allies had dropped in both Europe and the Pacific during the whole of World War II. To McNamara's surprise, the bombing had little effect on the Vietcong's ability to wage war in the South. The North Vietnamese quickly rebuilt roads and bridges and moved munitions plants underground. Instead of destroying the morale of the North Vietnamese, Operation Rolling Thunder hardened their will to fight. The massive commitment of troops and air power devastated Vietnam's countryside, however. After one harsh but not unusual engagement, a commanding officer reported that "it became necessary to destroy

FIGURE 28.2
U.S. Troops in Vietnam, 1960–1973
This figure graphically tracks America's involvement in Vietnam. After Lyndon Johnson decided on escalation in 1964, troop levels jumped from 23,300 to a peak of 543,000 personnel in 1968. Under Richard Nixon's Vietnamization program, beginning in the summer of 1969, levels drastically declined; the last U.S. military forces left South Vietnam on March 29, 1973.



The Toll of War

The Vietnam War produced a rich and graphic literature: novels, journalists' reports, interviews, and personal letters. These brief selections suggest the war's profound impact on those Americans who experienced it firsthand.

Donald Whitfield

Donald L. Whitfield was a draftee from Alabama who was interviewed some years after the war.

I'm gonna be honest with you. I had heard some about Vietnam in 1968, but I was a poor fellow and I didn't keep up with it. I was working at a Standard Oil station making eight dollars a day. I pumped gas and tinkered a little with cars. I had a girl I saw every now and then, but I still spent most of my time with a car. When I got my letter from the draft lady, I appealed it on the reason it was just me and my sister at home. We were a poor family and they needed me at home, but it did no good.

My company did a lot of patrolling. We got the roughest damn deal. Shit, I thought I was going to get killed every night. I was terrified the whole time. We didn't have no trouble with the blacks. I saw movies that said we done the blacks wrong, but it wasn't like that where I was. Let's put it like this: they make pretty good soldiers, but they're not what we are. White Americans, can't nobody whip our ass. We're the baddest son of a bitches on the face of this earth. You can take a hundred Russians and twenty-five Americans, and we'll whip their ass. . . .

I fly the Rebel flag because this is the South, Bubba. The American flag represents the whole fifty states. That flag represents the southern part. I'm a Confederate, I'm a Southerner. . . .

I feel cheated about Vietnam, I sure do. Political restrictions — we won every goddamned battle we was in, but didn't win the whole goddamn little country. . . . Before I die, the Democratic-controlled Congress of this country — and I blame it on 'em — they gonna goddamn apologize to the Vietnam veterans.

Source: From "Donald L. Whitfield" in *Landing Zones: Southern Veterans Remember Vietnam*, by James R. Wilson, pp. 202–211. Copyright 1990, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder, www.dukepress.edu.

George Olsen

George Olsen served in Vietnam from August 1969 to March 1970, when he was killed in action. He wrote this letter to a close female friend.

31 Aug '69
Dear Red,
Last Monday I went on my first hunter-killer operation. . . . The frightening thing about it all is that it is so very easy to kill in war. There's no remorse, no theatrical "washing of the hands" to get rid of nonexistent blood, not even any regrets. When it happens, you are more afraid than you've ever been in your life — my hands shook so much I had trouble reloading. . . . You're scared, really scared, and there's no thinking about it. You kill because that little SOB is doing his best to kill you and you desperately want to live, to go home, to get drunk or walk down the street on a date again. And suddenly the grenades aren't going off any more, the weapons stop and, unbelievably fast it seems, it's all over. . . .

I have truly come to envy the honest pacifist who honestly believes that no killing is permissible and can, with a clear conscience, stay home and not take part in these conflicts. I wish I could do the same, but I can't see letting another take my place and my risks over here. . . . The only reason pacifists such as the Amish can even live in an orderly society is because someone — be they police or soldiers — is taking risks to keep the wolves away. . . . I guess that's why I'm over here, why I fought so hard to come here, and why, even though I'm scared most of the time, I'm content to be here.

Source: From *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, edited by Bernard Edelman for the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission, published by W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.

Arthur E. Woodley Jr.

Special Forces Ranger Arthur E. Woodley Jr. gave this interview a decade after his return.

You had to fight to survive where I grew up. Lower east Baltimore. . . . It was a mixed-up neighborhood of Puerto Ricans, Indians, Italians, and blacks. Being that I'm lightskinned, curly hair, I wasn't readily accepted in the black community. I was more accepted by Puerto Ricans and some rednecks. They didn't ask what my

race classification was. I went with them to white movies, white restaurants, and so forth. But after I got older, I came to the realization that I was what I am and came to deal with my black peers. . . .

I figured I was just what my country needed. A black patriot who could do any physical job they could come up with. Six feet, one hundred and ninety pounds, and healthy. . . .

I didn't ask no questions about the war. I thought communism was spreading, and as an American citizen, it was my part to do as much as I could to defeat the Communist from coming here. Whatever America states is correct was the tradition that I was brought up in. And I thought the only way I could possibly make it out of the ghetto was to be the best soldier I possibly could. . . .

Then came the second week of February of '69. . . . We recon this area, and we came across this fella, a white guy, who was staked to the ground. His arms and legs tied down to stakes. . . . He had numerous scars on his face where he might have been beaten and mutilated. And he had been peeled from his upper part of chest to down to his waist.

Skinned. Like they slit your skin with a knife. And they take a pair of pliers or a instrument similar, and they just peel the skin off your body and expose it to the elements. . . .

And he start to cryin', beggin' to die.

He said, "I can't go back like this. I can't live like this. I'm dying. You can't leave me here like this dying." . . .

It took me somewhere close to 20 minutes to get my mind together. Not because I was squeamish about killing someone, because I had at that time numerous body counts. Killing someone wasn't the issue. It was killing another American citizen, another GI. . . . We buried him. We buried him. Very deep. Then I cried. . . .

When we first started going into the fields, I would not wear a finger, ear, or mutilate another person's body. Until I had the misfortune to come upon those American soldiers who were castrated. Then it got to be a game between the Communists and ourselves to see how many fingers and ears that we could capture from each other. After a kill we would cut his finger or ear off as a trophy, stuff our unit patch in his mouth, and let him die.

With 89 days left in country, I came out of the field. What I now felt was emptiness. . . . I started seeing the atrocities that we caused each other as human beings. I came to the realization that I was committing crimes against humanity and myself. That I really didn't believe in these things I was doin'. I changed.

Source: Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 243–263.

Gayle Smith

Gayle Smith was a nurse in a surgical unit in Vietnam in 1970–1971 and gave this interview a few years later.

I objected to the war and I got the idea into my head of going there to bring people back. I started thinking about it in 1966 and knew that I would eventually go when I felt I was prepared enough. . . .

Boy, I remember how they came in all torn up. It was incredible. The first time a medevac came in, I got right into it. I didn't have a lot of feeling at that time. It was later on that I began to have a lot of feeling about it, after I'd seen it over and over and over again. . . . I turned that pain into anger and hatred and placed it onto the Vietnamese. . . . I did not consider the Vietnamese to be people. They were human, but they weren't people. They weren't like us, so it was okay to kill them. It was okay to hate them. . . .

I would have dreams about putting a .45 to someone's head and see it blow away over and over again. And for a long time I swore that if the Vietnamese ever came to this country I'd kill them.

It was in a Vietnam veterans group that I realized that all my hatred for the Vietnamese and my wanting to kill them was really a reflection of all the pain that I had felt for seeing all those young men die and hurt. . . . I would stand there and look at them and think to myself, "You've just lost your leg for no reason at all." Or "You're going to die and it's for nothing." For nothing. I would never, never say that to them, but they knew it.

Source: Albert Santoli, ed., *Everything We Had* (New York: Random House, 1981), 141–148.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Why did these four young people end up in Vietnam? How are their reasons for going to war similar and different?
2. How would you describe their experiences there?
3. What are their attitudes about the war, and how were they changed by it? What do their reflections suggest about Vietnam's impact on American society?

the town in order to save it"—a statement that came to symbolize the terrible logic of the war.

The Johnson administration gambled that American superiority in personnel and weaponry would ultimately triumph. This strategy was inextricably tied to political considerations. For domestic reasons, policymakers searched for an elusive middle ground between all-out invasion of North Vietnam, which included the possibility of war with China, and disengagement. "In effect, we are fighting a war of attrition," said General Westmoreland. "The only alternative is a war of annihilation."

Public Opinion and the War

Johnson gradually grew more confident that his Vietnam policy had the support of the American people. Both Democrats and Republicans approved Johnson's escalation in Vietnam, and so did public opinion polls in 1965 and 1966. But then opinion began to shift (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 916).

Every night, Americans saw the carnage of war on their television screens, including images of dead and wounded Americans. One such incident occurred in the first months of fighting in 1965. Television reporter Morley Safer witnessed a marine unit burning the village of Cam Ne to the ground. "Today's operation is the frustration of Vietnam in miniature," Safer explained. America can "win a military victory here, but to a Vietnamese peasant whose home is [destroyed] it will take more than presidential promises to convince him that we are on his side."

With such firsthand knowledge of the war, journalists began to write about a "credibility gap." The Johnson administration, they charged, was concealing bad news about the war's progress. In February 1966, television coverage of hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (chaired by J. William Fulbright, an outspoken critic of the war) raised further questions about the administration's policy. Johnson complained to his staff in 1966 that "our people can't stand firm in the face of heavy losses, and they can bring down the government." Economic problems put Johnson even more on the defensive. The Vietnam War cost taxpayers $27 billion in 1967, pushing the federal deficit from $9.8 billion to $23 billion. By then, military spending had set in motion the inflationary spiral that would plague the U.S. economy throughout the 1970s.

Out of these troubling developments, an antiwar movement began to crystallize. Its core, in addition to long-standing pacifist groups, comprised a new generation of peace activists such as SANE (the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), which in the 1950s had protested atmospheric nuclear testing. After the escalation in 1965, the activist groups were joined by students, clergy, civil rights advocates, and even Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose book on child care had helped raise many of the younger activists. Despite their diversity, these opponents of the war shared a skepticism about U.S. policy in Vietnam. They charged variously that intervention was antithetical to American ideals; that an independent, anticommunist South Vietnam was unattainable; and that no American objective justified the suffering that was being inflicted on the Vietnamese people.

Rise of the Student Movement

College students, many of them inspired by the civil rights movement, had begun to organize and agitate for social change. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, they founded **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** in 1960. Two years later, forty students from Big Ten and Ivy League universities held the first national SDS convention in Port Huron, Michigan. Tom Hayden penned a manifesto, the **Port Huron Statement**, expressing students' disillusionment with the nation's consumer culture and the gulf between rich and poor. "We are people of this generation," Hayden wrote, "bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." These students rejected Cold War foreign policy, including the war in Vietnam.

The New Left

The founders of SDS referred to their movement as the **New Left** to distinguish themselves from the Old Left—communists and socialists of the 1930s and 1940s. As New Left influence spread, it hit major university towns first—places such as Madison, Wisconsin, and Berkeley, California. One of the first major demonstrations erupted in the fall of 1964 at the University of California at Berkeley after administrators banned student political activity on university grounds. In protest, student organizations formed the Free Speech Movement and organized a sit-in at the administration building. Some students had just returned from Freedom Summer in Mississippi, radicalized by their experience. Mario Savio spoke for many when he compared the conflict in Berkeley to the civil rights struggle in the South: "The same rights are at stake in both places—the right to participate as citizens in a democratic society and to struggle against the same enemy." Emboldened by the Berkeley movement, students across the nation were soon protesting their

Free Speech at Berkeley, 1964

Students at the University of California's Berkeley campus protested the administration's decision to ban political activity in the school plaza. Free speech demonstrators, many of them active in the civil rights movement, relied on the tactics and arguments that they learned during that struggle. Dr. Jim Jumblatt, Free Speech Movement Archive.

universities' academic policies and then, more passionately, the Vietnam War.

One spur to student protest was the military's Selective Service System, which in 1967 abolished automatic student deferments. To avoid the draft, some young men enlisted in the National Guard or applied for conscientious objector status; others avoided the draft by leaving the country, most often for Canada or Sweden. In public demonstrations, opponents of the war burned their draft cards, picketed induction centers, and on a few occasions broke into Selective Service offices and destroyed records. Antiwar demonstrators numbered in the tens or, at most, hundreds of thousands — a small fraction of American youth — but they were vocal, visible, and determined.

Students were on the front lines as the campaign against the war escalated. The 1967 Mobilization to End the War brought 100,000 protesters into the streets of San Francisco, while more than a quarter million followed Martin Luther King Jr. from Central Park to the United Nations in New York. Another 100,000 marched on the Pentagon. President Johnson absorbed the blows and counterpunched — "The enemy's hope for victory . . . is in our division, our weariness, our uncertainty," he proclaimed — but it had become clear that Johnson's war, as many began calling it, was no longer uniting the country.

Young Americans for Freedom

The New Left was not the only political force on college campuses. Conservative students were less noisy but more numerous. For them, the 1960s was not about protesting the war, staging student strikes, and idolizing Black Power. Inspired by the group **Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)**, conservative students asserted their faith in "God-given free will" and their fear that the federal government "accumulates power which tends

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Contrast the political views of the SDS, the YAF, and the counterculture. How would you explain the differences?

THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN

Debating the War in Vietnam

The war in Vietnam divided Americans and ultimately divided world opinion. A product of the Cold War policy of containment, the war led many to question the application of that policy to Southeast Asia. Yet every American president from Truman to Nixon believed that opposing the unification of Vietnam under communist rule was essential. Historians continue to research, and debate, what led to the war and what effects the war had on both Vietnam and the United States. The following documents help us to consider different views of the war.

1. President Dwight Eisenhower's "Domino Theory" speech, April 7, 1954.

Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences. . . .

But when we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you're talking about millions and millions and millions of people.

2. Manifesto of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation (NLF), 1968.

Over the past hundred years the Vietnamese people repeatedly rose up to fight against foreign aggression for the independence and freedom of their fatherland. In 1945, the people throughout the country surged up in an armed uprising, overthrew the Japanese and French domination, and seized power. . . .

However, the American imperialists, who had in the past helped the French colonialists to massacre our people, have now replaced the French in enslaving the southern part of our country through a disguised colonial regime. They have been using their stooge — the Ngo Dinh Diem administration — in their downright repression and exploitation of our compatriots, in their maneuvers to permanently divide our country and to turn its southern part into a base in preparation for war in Southeast Asia.

3. President Lyndon Johnson, Johns Hopkins University speech, April 7, 1965.

Over this war — and all Asia — is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peiping [Peiking]. This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, which has attacked India, and has been condemned by the United Nations for aggression in Korea. It is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Viet-Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes.

4. James Fallows, "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?" *Washington Monthly*, October 1975. *The journalist Fallows highlighted the economic unfairness of the Vietnam-era draft.*

The children of the bright, good parents were spared the more immediate sort of suffering that our inferiors were undergoing. And because of that, when our parents were opposed to the war, they were opposed in a bloodless, theoretical fashion, as they might be opposed to political corruption or racism in South Africa. As long as the little gold stars [sent to parents whose son was killed in war] kept going to homes in Chelsea [a working-class part of Boston] and the backwoods of West Virginia, the mothers of Beverly Hills and Chevy Chase and Great Neck and Belmont [all affluent suburbs] were not on the telephone to their congressman screaming, "*You killed my boy*." . . . It is clear by now that if the men of Harvard had wanted to do the very most they could to help shorten the war, they should have been drafted or imprisoned en masse.

5. Students for a Democratic Society, Call for a March on Washington to End the War, 1965.

The current war in Vietnam is being waged on behalf of a succession of unpopular South Vietnamese dictatorships, not in behalf of freedom. No American-supported South Vietnamese regime in the past few years has gained the support of its people, for the simple reason that the people overwhelmingly want peace, self-determination, and the opportunity for development. American prosecution of the war has deprived them of all three.

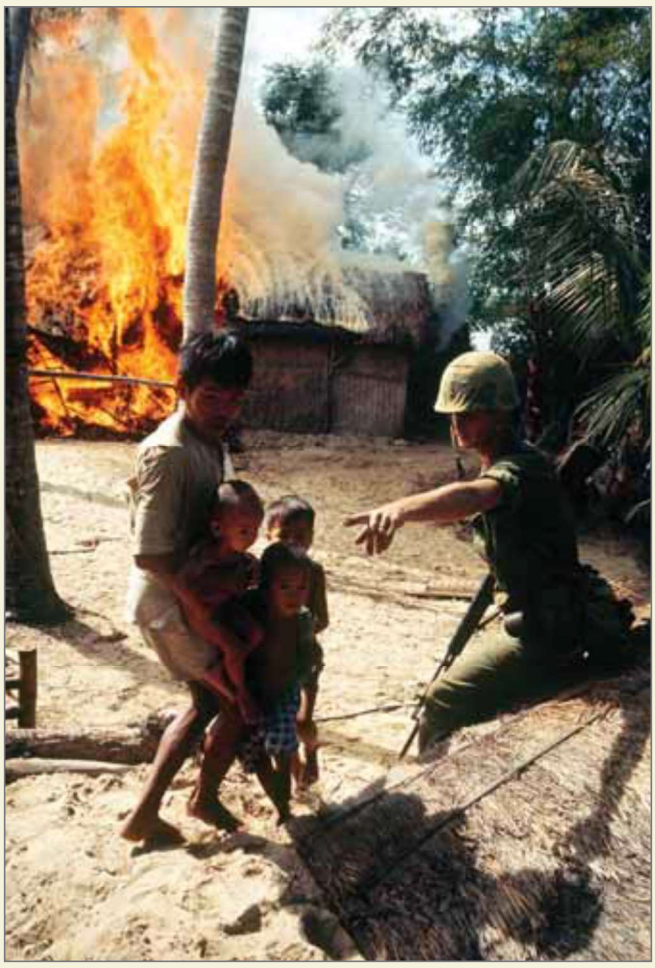
The war is fundamentally a *civil* war. . . .
It is a *losing* war. . . .
It is a *self-defeating* war. . . .
It is a *dangerous* war. . . .
It is a war never declared by Congress. . . .
It is a hideously *immoral* war.

6. Richard Nixon, address to the nation on the Vietnam War, November 3, 1969.

. . . President Eisenhower sent economic aid and military equipment to assist the people of South Vietnam in their efforts to prevent a Communist takeover. Seven years ago, President Kennedy sent 16,000 military personnel to Vietnam as combat advisors. Four years ago, President Johnson sent American combat forces to South Vietnam. . . .

For these reasons, I reject the recommendation that I should end the war by immediately withdrawing all our forces. I choose instead to change American policy on both the negotiating front and the battlefront. . . .

7. Evacuation of Vietnamese civilians in a burning village, c. 1965.



Source: Photo by Dominique BERETTY/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.

Sources: (1) George Katsiaficas, ed., *Vietnam Documents: American and Vietnamese Views of the War* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992), pp. 120–121. Used by permission of the author; (2) Katsiaficas, 43–44; (3) John Clark Pratt, *Vietnam Voices: Perspectives on the War Years, 1941–1982* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 201; (4) *The Washington Monthly*, October 1975, 5–19; (5) Katsiaficas, 120–121; (6) Katsiaficas, 147.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. Three of the sources (1, 3, and 6) feature remarks by U.S. presidents. What common feature do they share? Are there differences among the comments? Source 2 is also an attempt by a political figure to persuade. How should historians evaluate such documents?
2. In source 4, which Americans does the author believe have sacrificed the most in fighting the war in Vietnam?
3. Compare sources 2 and 5. What is the intended audience of each? What common features do they share?
4. Journalists and electronic media (photography and television) played an important role in the war. How would images, such as that in source 7, shape opinion about the war both in the United States and globally?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Using the knowledge you have gained from this chapter, analyze the documents above to construct an essay in which you explore the Vietnam War's causes and effects, both domestic and international. Choose at least one domestic and one international theme and use the documents to providence evidence for your conclusions.

to diminish order and liberty." The YAF, the largest student political organization in the country, defended free enterprise and supported the war in Vietnam. Its founding principles were outlined in "The **Sharon Statement**," drafted (in Sharon, Connecticut) two years before the Port Huron Statement, and inspired young conservatives, many of whom would play important roles in the Reagan administration in the 1980s.

The Counterculture While the New Left organized against the political and economic system and the YAF defended it, many other young Americans embarked on a general revolt against authority and middle-class respectability. The "hippie" — identified by ragged blue jeans or army fatigues, tie-dyed T-shirts, beads, and long unkempt hair — symbolized the new **counterculture**. With roots in the 1950s Beat culture of New York's Greenwich Village and San Francisco's North Beach, the 1960s counterculture initially turned to folk music for its inspiration. Pete Seeger set the tone for the era's idealism with songs such as the 1961 antiwar ballad "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" In 1963, the year of the civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham and President Kennedy's assassination, Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" reflected the impatience of people whose faith in America was wearing thin. Joan Baez emerged alongside Dylan and pioneered a folk sound that inspired a generation of female musicians.

By the mid-1960s, other winds of change in popular music came from the Beatles, four working-class Brits whose awe-inspiring music — by turns lyrical and driving — spawned a commercial and cultural phenomenon known as Beatlemania. American youths' embrace of the Beatles — as well as even more rebellious bands such as the Rolling Stones, the Who, and the Doors — deepened the generational divide between young people and their elders. So did the recreational

The Counterculture

The three-day outdoor Woodstock concert in August 1969 was a defining moment in the rise of the counterculture. The event attracted 400,000 young people, like those pictured here, to Bethel, New York, for a weekend of music, drugs, and sex. The counterculture was distinct from the New Left and was less a political movement than a shifting set of cultural styles, attitudes, and practices. It rejected conformity of all kinds and placed rebellion and contrariness among its highest values. Another concept held dear by the counterculture was, simply, "love." In an era of military violence abroad and police violence at home, many in the counterculture hoped that "peace and love" would prevail instead. Bill Eppridge/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

use of drugs—especially marijuana and the hallucinogen popularly known as LSD or acid—which was celebrated in popular music in the second half of the 1960s.

For a brief time, adherents of the counterculture believed that a new age was dawning. In 1967, the "world's first Human Be-In" drew 20,000 people to Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. That summer—called the Summer of Love—San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, New York's East Village, Chicago's Uptown neighborhoods, and the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles swelled with young dropouts, drifters, and teenage runaways whom the media dubbed "flower children." Although most young people had little interest in all-out revolt, media coverage made it seem as though all of American youth was rejecting the nation's social and cultural norms.

Days of Rage, 1968–1972

By 1968, a sense of crisis gripped the country. Riots in the cities, campus unrest, and a nose-thumbing counterculture escalated into a general youth rebellion that seemed on the verge of tearing America apart. Calling 1968 "the watershed year for a generation," SDS founder Tom Hayden wrote that it "started with legendary events, then raised hopes, only to end by immersing innocence in tragedy." It was perhaps the most shocking year in all the postwar decades. Violent clashes both in Vietnam and back home in the United States combined with political assassinations to produce a palpable sense of despair and hopelessness (America Compared, p. 920).

War Abroad, Tragedy at Home

President Johnson had gambled in 1965 on a quick victory in Vietnam, before the political cost of escalation came due. But there was no quick victory. North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces fought on, the South Vietnamese government repeatedly collapsed, and American casualties mounted. By early 1968, the death rate of U.S. troops had reached several hundred a week. Johnson and his generals kept insisting that there was "light at the end of the tunnel." Facts on the ground showed otherwise.

The Tet Offensive On January 30, 1968, the Vietcong unleashed a massive, well-coordinated assault in South Vietnam. Timed to coincide with Tet, the Vietnamese new year, the offensive struck thirty-six provincial capitals and five of the six major cities, including Saigon, where the Vietcong nearly overran the U.S. embassy. In strictly military terms, the Tet offensive was a failure, with very heavy Vietcong losses. But psychologically, the effect was devastating. Television brought into American homes shocking live images: the American embassy under siege and the Saigon police chief placing a pistol to the head of a Vietcong suspect and executing him.

TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME
What changed between 1965 and 1968, and how did these developments affect national political life?

The **Tet offensive** made a mockery of official pronouncements that the United States was winning the war. How could an enemy on the run manage such a large-scale, complex, and coordinated attack? Just before Tet, a Gallup poll found that 56 percent of Americans considered themselves "hawks" (supporters of the war), while only 28 percent identified with the "doves" (war opponents). Three months later, doves outnumbered hawks 42 to 41 percent. Without embracing the peace movement, many Americans simply concluded that the war was unwinnable.

The Tet offensive undermined Johnson and discredited his war policies. When the 1968 presidential primary season got under way in March, antiwar senators Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota and Robert Kennedy of New York, JFK's brother, challenged Johnson for the Democratic nomination. Discouraged, perhaps even physically exhausted, on March 31 Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that he would not seek reelection.

Political Assassinations Americans had barely adjusted to the news that a sitting president would not stand for reelection when, on April 4, James Earl Ray shot and killed Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. Riots erupted in more than a hundred cities. The worst of them, in Baltimore, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., left dozens dead and hundreds of millions of dollars in property damaged or destroyed. The violence on the streets of Saigon had found an eerie parallel on the streets of the United States.

One city that did not erupt was Indianapolis. There, Robert Kennedy, in town campaigning in the Indiana primary, gave a quiet, somber speech to the black community on the night of King's assassination. Americans could continue to move toward "greater polarization," Kennedy said, "black people amongst blacks, white amongst whites," or "we can replace that violence . . . with an effort to understand, compassion and love." Kennedy sympathized with African

The Global Protests of 1968

Nineteen sixty-eight was a year of youthful protest, political unrest, and violence across the globe. The year of massive antiwar protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago as well as the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy saw equal or greater turmoil around the world. Half of Italy's universities were occupied; a massive student strike in France turned into a violent confrontation with police; prodemocracy students in Mexico City led huge protests that drew police gunfire; and protests and street battles with police took place in Prague, Berlin, Tokyo, Rome, and London.

René Bourrigaud, French Student

My most vivid memory of May '68? The new-found ability for everyone to speak—to speak of anything with anyone. In that month of talking during May you learnt more than in the whole of your five years of studying.

Source: Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 9.

The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto, June 27, 1968, Prague, Czechoslovakia

Throughout the spring and summer of 1968, the government of Czechoslovakia, under new communist leadership, pursued reforms pushed by students and other protesters. In August, the Soviet Union invaded and put an end to the new openness.

This spring a great opportunity was given to us once again, as it was at the end of the war [World War II]. Again we have the chance to take into our own hands our common cause, which for working purposes we will call socialism, and give it a form more appropriate to our once-good reputation and to the fairly good opinion we used to have of ourselves.

Source: Jaromír Navrátil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 181.

Interview with Participants in 1968 Protests in Mexico City

During the summer of 1968, hundreds of thousands of students protested against Mexico's authoritarian national government and brutal police repression.

Sergio Aguayo: It was, in a symbolic way, the clash of a new Mexico and an old Mexico.
Antonio Azuela: You have a middle class with eyes closed and a group of students saying, this was not a democracy. And this is not working.
Marcela Fernandez de Violante: And so we were together hundred and hundreds and hundreds. We had these big, big meetings at the campus crowded, crowded. And people singing, Que Vivan los Estudiantes . . . ta-ri-ra-ra-ra-ra.
Marcela Fernandez de Violante: We were very young, very naive. But for the first time, you had this notion that this country was going to be changed by the power of our convictions.
Miguel Breseda: You would get in a bus and give a speech and inform the people. Because newspaper wouldn't publish anything. And people would give you money, they would congratulate you and they would say, "We are with you young people. . . ."

Source: Produced by Radio Diaries (radiodiaries.org) and originally broadcast on NPR's *All Things Considered*. To hear the entire documentary, visit radiodiaries.org. Used by permission of Radio Diaries.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Why did free speech figure so prominently in the protests of the 1960s?
2. What do all of these activists seem to be struggling for, or against? How do their struggles seem similar to—or different from—those occurring simultaneously in the United States?

Americans' outrage at whites, but he begged them not to strike back in retribution. Impromptu and heartfelt, Kennedy's speech was a plea to follow King's nonviolent example, even as the nation descended into greater violence.

But two months later, having emerged as the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination, Kennedy, too, would be gone. On June 5, as he was celebrating his victory in the California primary over Eugene McCarthy, Kennedy was shot dead by a young

Robert Kennedy
After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and with President Johnson out of the presidential race, Robert Kennedy emerged in 1968 as the leading liberal figure in the nation. A critic of the Vietnam War, a strong supporter of civil rights, and committed to fighting poverty, Kennedy (the brother of the late President John Kennedy) ran a progressive campaign for president. In this photograph he is shown shaking hands with supporters in Detroit in May 1968. However, less than three weeks after this picture was taken, Kennedy, too, was dead, the victim of yet another assassination. Andrew Sacks/Getty Images.

Palestinian named Sirhan Sirhan. Amid the national mourning for yet another political murder, one newspaper columnist declared that "the country does not work anymore." *Newsweek* asked, "Has violence become a way of life?" Kennedy's assassination was a calamity for the Democratic Party because only he had seemed able to surmount the party's fissures over Vietnam. In the space of eight weeks, American liberals had lost two of their most important national figures, King and Kennedy. A third, Johnson, was unpopular and politically damaged. Without these unifying leaders, the crisis of liberalism had become unmanageable.

The Antiwar Movement and the 1968 Election

Before their deaths, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy had spoken eloquently against the Vietnam War. To antiwar activists, however, bold speeches and marches had not produced the desired effect. "We are no longer interested in merely protesting the war," declared one. "We are out to stop it." They sought nothing short of an immediate American withdrawal. Their anger at Johnson and the Democratic Party—fueled by news of the Tet offensive, the murders of King and Kennedy, and the general youth rebellion—had radicalized the movement.

Democratic Convention In August, at the **1968 Democratic National Convention** in Chicago, the political divisions generated by the war consumed the party. Thousands of protesters descended on the city. The most visible group, led by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, a remarkable pair of troublemakers, claimed to represent the Youth International Party. To mock those inside the convention hall, these "Yippies" nominated a pig, Pigasus, for president. The Yippies' stunts were geared toward maximum media exposure. But a far larger and more serious group of activists had come to Chicago to demonstrate against the war as well—and they staged what many came to call the Siege of Chicago.

Democratic mayor Richard J. Daley ordered the police to break up the demonstrations. Several nights of skirmishes between protesters and police culminated on the evening of the nominations. In what an official report later described as a "police riot," police officers attacked protesters with tear gas and clubs. As the nominating speeches proceeded, television networks broadcast scenes of the riot, cementing a popular impression of the Democrats as the party of disorder. "They are going to be spending the next four years picking up the pieces," one Republican said gleefully. Inside the hall, the party dispiritedly nominated Hubert H. Humphrey, Johnson's vice president. The delegates approved a middle-of-the-road platform that endorsed

continued fighting in Vietnam while urging a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Richard Nixon On the Republican side, Richard Nixon had engineered a remarkable political comeback. After losing the presidential campaign in 1960 and the California gubernatorial race in 1962, he won the Republican presidential nomination in 1968. Sensing Democratic weakness, Nixon and his advisors believed there were two groups of voters ready to switch sides: northern working-class voters and southern whites.

Tired of the antiwar movement, the counterculture, and urban riots, northern blue-collar voters, especially Catholics, had drifted away from the Democratic Party. Growing up in the Great Depression, these families were admirers of FDR and perhaps even had his picture on their living-room wall. But times had changed over three decades. To show how much they had changed, the social scientists Ben J. Wattenberg and Richard Scammon profiled blue-collar workers in their study *The Real Majority* (1970). Wattenberg and Scammon asked their readers to consider people such as a forty-seven-year-old machinist's wife from Dayton, Ohio: "[She] is afraid to walk the streets alone at night. . . . She has a mixed view about blacks and civil rights." Moreover, they wrote, "she is deeply distressed that her son is going to a community junior college where LSD was found on campus." Such northern blue-collar families were once reliable Democratic voters, but their political loyalties were increasingly up for grabs—a fact Republicans knew well.

UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW
Why might a Democratic supporter of FDR in the 1940s have decided to vote for Republican Richard Nixon in 1968?

George Wallace Working-class anxieties over student protests and urban riots were first exploited by the controversial governor of Alabama, George C. Wallace. Running in 1968 as a third-party presidential candidate, Wallace traded on his fame as a segregationist governor. He had tried to stop the federal government from desegregating the University of Alabama in 1963, and he was equally obstructive during the Selma crisis of 1965. Appealing to whites in both the North and the South, Wallace called for "law and order" and claimed that mothers on public assistance were, thanks to Johnson's Great Society, "breeding children as a cash crop."

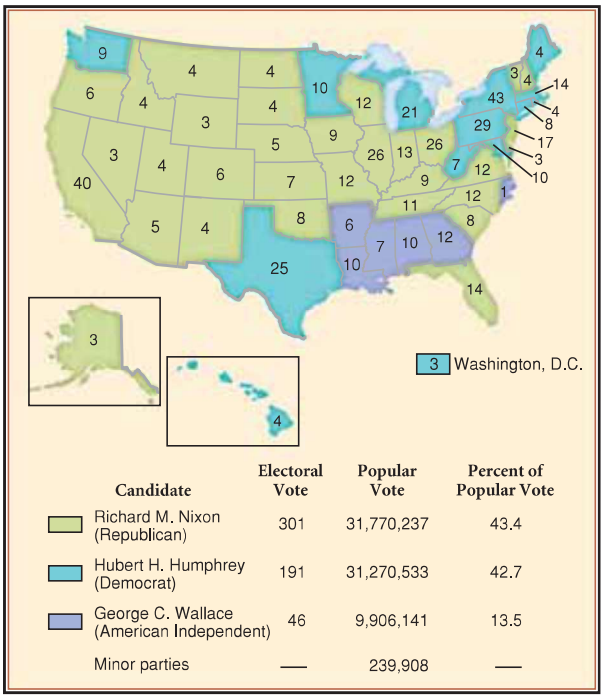
Wallace's hope was that by carrying the South, he could deny a major candidate an electoral majority and force the election into the House of Representatives. That strategy failed, as Wallace finished with just 13.5 percent of the popular vote. But he had defined hot-button issues—liberal elitism, welfare policies, and law and order—that became hallmarks for the next generation of mainstream conservatives.

Nixon's Strategy Nixon offered a subtler version of Wallace's populism in a two-pronged approach to the campaign. He adopted what his advisors called the "southern strategy," which aimed at attracting southern white voters still smarting over the civil rights gains by

George Wallace
George Wallace had become famous as the segregationist governor who stood "in the schoolhouse door" to prevent black students from enrolling at the University of Alabama in 1963 (though after being confronted by federal marshals, he stepped aside). In 1968, he campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination on a populist "law and order" platform that appealed to many blue-collar voters concerned about antiwar protests, urban riots, and the rise of the counterculture. In this 1968 photograph, Wallace greets supporters on the campaign trail. Lee Balterman/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

African Americans. Nixon won over the key southerner, Democrat-turned-Republican senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the 1948 Dixiecrat presidential nominee. Nixon informed Thurmond that while formally he had to support civil rights, his administration would go easy on enforcement. He also campaigned against the antiwar movement, urban riots, and protests, calling for a strict adherence to "law and order." He pledged to represent the "quiet voice" of the "great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators." Here Nixon was speaking not just to the South, but to the many millions of suburban voters across the country who worried that social disorder had gripped the nation.

These strategies—southern and suburban—worked. Nixon received 43.4 percent of the vote to Humphrey's 42.7 percent, defeating him by a scant 500,000 votes out of the 73 million that were cast (Map 28.3). But the numerical closeness of the race could not disguise the devastating blow to the Democrats. Humphrey received almost 12 million fewer votes than Johnson had in 1964. The white South largely abandoned the Democratic Party, an exodus that would accelerate in the 1970s. In the North, Nixon and Wallace made significant inroads among traditionally Democratic voters. New Deal Democrats lost the unity of purpose that had served them for thirty years. A nation exhausted by months of turmoil and violence had chosen a new direction. Nixon's victory in 1968 foreshadowed—and helped propel—a national electoral realignment in the coming decade.



Candidate	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Percent of Popular Vote
Richard M. Nixon (Republican)	301	31,770,237	43.4
Hubert H. Humphrey (Democrat)	191	31,270,533	42.7
George C. Wallace (American Independent)	46	9,906,141	13.5
Minor parties	—	239,908	—

MAP 28.3
The Presidential Election of 1968

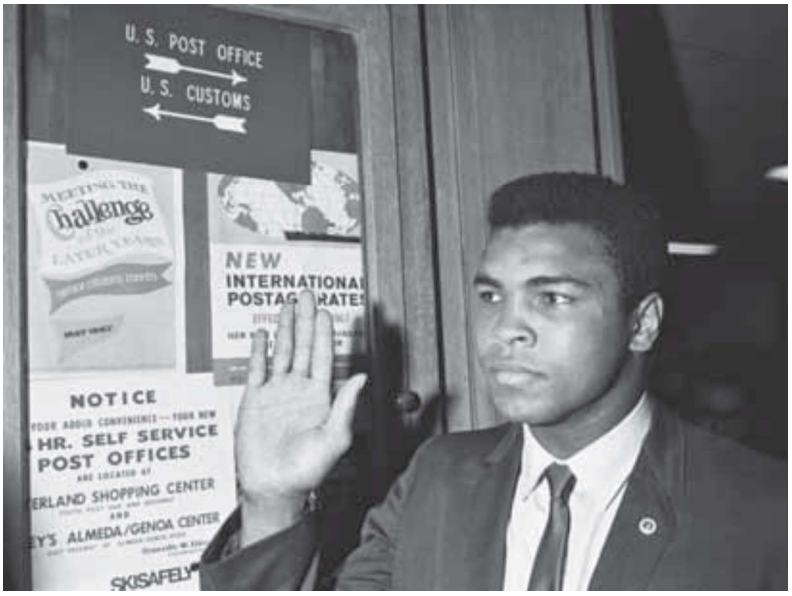
With Lyndon B. Johnson's surprise withdrawal and the assassination of the party's most charismatic contender, Robert Kennedy, the Democrats faced the election of 1968 in disarray. Governor George Wallace of Alabama, who left the Democrats to run as a third-party candidate, campaigned on the backlash against the civil rights movement. As late as mid-September Wallace held the support of 21 percent of the voters. But in November he received only 13.5 percent of the vote, winning five southern states. Republican Richard M. Nixon, who like Wallace emphasized "law and order" in his campaign, defeated Hubert H. Humphrey with only 43.4 percent of the popular vote, but it was now clear, given that Wallace's southern support would otherwise have gone to Nixon, that the South had shifted decisively to the Republican side.

The Nationalist Turn

Vietnam and the increasingly radical youth rebellion intersected with the turn toward racial and ethnic nationalism by young African American and Chicano activists. As we saw in Chapter 27, the Black Power and Chicano movements broke with the liberal "rights" politics of an older generation of leaders. These new activists expressed fury at the poverty and white racism that were beyond the reach of civil rights laws; they also saw Vietnam as an unjust war against other people of color.

In this spirit, the **Chicano Moratorium Committee** organized demonstrations against the war. Chanting "Viva la Raza, Afuera Vietnam" ("Long live the Chicano people, Get out of Vietnam"), 20,000 Mexican Americans marched in Los Angeles in August 1970. At another rally, Cesar Chavez said: "For the poor it is a terrible irony that they should rise out of their misery to do battle against other poor people." He and other Mexican American activists charged that the draft was biased against the poor—like most wars in history, Vietnam was, in the words of one retired army colonel, "a poor boy's fight."

Among African Americans, the Black Panther Party and the National Black Antiwar Antidraft League spoke out against the war. "Black Americans are considered to be the world's biggest fools," Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther Party wrote in his typically acerbic style, "to go to another country to fight for something they don't have for themselves." Muhammad Ali, the most famous boxer in the world, refused his army induction. Sentenced to prison, Ali was eventually acquitted on appeal. But his action cost him his heavyweight



Muhammad Ali Refuses Army Induction

On April 28, 1967, heavyweight champion boxer Muhammad Ali refused to be drafted into the U.S. Army, claiming that the war in Vietnam was immoral and that as a member of the Nation of Islam he was a conscientious objector. In this photograph, Ali stands outside the U.S. Army induction center in Houston, Texas. Ali's refusal, which was applauded by the anti-war movement, led to a five-year prison sentence. Though that conviction was overturned in 1971 after numerous appeals, Ali's stand against the war cost him his heavyweight boxing title. © Bettmann/Corbis.

title, and for years he was not allowed to box professionally in the United States.

Women's Liberation

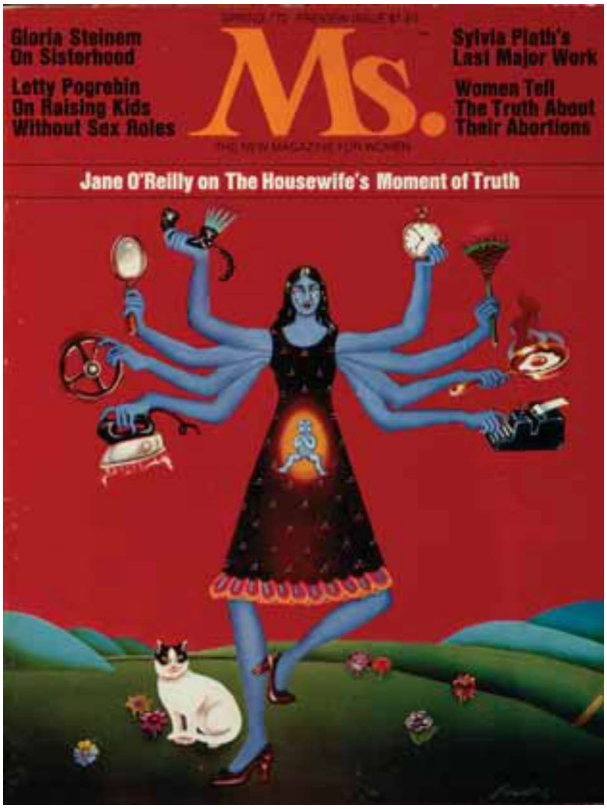
Among women, 1968 also marked a break with the past. The late 1960s spawned a new brand of feminism: **women's liberation**. These feminists were primarily younger, college-educated women fresh from the New Left, antiwar, and civil rights movements. Those movements' male leaders, they discovered, considered women little more than pretty helpers who typed memos and fetched coffee. Women who tried to raise feminist issues at civil rights and antiwar events were shouted off the platform with jeers such as "Move on, little girl, we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation."

COMPARE AND CONTRAST
How did women's liberation after 1968 differ from the women's movement of the early 1960s?

Fed up with second-class status, and well versed in the tactics of organization and protest, women radicals broke away and organized on their own. Unlike the National Organization for Women (NOW), the women's liberation movement was loosely structured, comprising an alliance of collectives in New York, San Francisco, Boston, and other big cities and college towns. "Women's lib," as it was dubbed by a skeptical media, went public in 1968 at the Miss America pageant. Demonstrators carried posters of women's bodies labeled as slabs of beef—implying that society treated them as meat. Mirroring the identity politics of Black Power activists and the self-dramatization of the counterculture, women's liberation sought an end to the denigration and exploitation of women. "Sisterhood is powerful!" read one women's liberationist manifesto. The national Women's Strike for Equality in August 1970 brought hundreds of thousands of women into the streets of the nation's cities for marches and demonstrations.

By that year, new terms such as *sexism* and *male chauvinism* had become part of the national vocabulary. As converts flooded in, the two branches of the women's movement began to converge. Radical women realized that key feminist goals—child care, equal pay, and reproduction rights—could best be achieved in the political arena. At the same time, more traditional activists, exemplified by Betty Friedan, developed a broader view of women's oppression. They came to understand that women required more than equal opportunity: the culture that regarded women as nothing more than sexual objects and helpmates to men had to change as well. Although still largely white and middle class, feminists began to think of themselves as part of a broad social crusade.

"Sisterhood" did not unite all women, however. Rather than joining white-led women's liberation organizations, African American and Latina women continued to work within the larger framework of the civil rights movement. New groups such as the Combahee River Collective and the National Black Feminist Organization arose to speak for the concerns of African American women. They criticized sexism but were reluctant to break completely with black men and the



***Ms.* Magazine**

Cofounded by the feminist Gloria Steinem, *Ms.* magazine made its initial appearance in 1972. Steinem and her cofounders believed that American women needed an explicitly feminist magazine distinct from the slew of available female-focused "lifestyle" magazines, such as *McCall's* and *Redbook*. *Ms.* would take on crucial, but neglected, issues relevant to women: reproductive rights, child care, employment and educational equality, sexual harassment, and marriage and relations between men and women. Inspired by women's liberation, *Ms.* has remained an important forum for feminist opinion and debate down to the present. Reprinted by permission of *Ms.* magazine, © 1972.

struggle for racial equality. Chicana feminists came from Catholic backgrounds in which motherhood and family were held in high regard. "We want to walk hand in hand with the Chicano brothers, with our children, our *viejitos* [elders], our Familia de la Raza," one Chicana feminist wrote. Black and Chicana feminists embraced the larger movement for women's rights but carried on their own struggles to address specific needs in their communities.

One of the most important contributions of women's liberation was to raise awareness about what feminist Kate Millett called sexual politics. Liberationists argued that unless women had control over their own bodies, they could not freely shape their destinies. They campaigned for reproductive rights, especially access to abortion, and railed against a culture that blamed women in cases of sexual assault and turned a blind eye to sexual harassment in the workplace.

Meanwhile, women's opportunities expanded dramatically in higher education. Dozens of formerly all-male bastions such as Yale, Princeton, and the U.S. military academies admitted women undergraduates for the first time. Colleges started women's studies programs, which eventually numbered in the hundreds, and the proportion of women attending graduate and professional schools rose markedly. With the adoption of **Title IX** in 1972, Congress broadened the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include educational institutions, prohibiting colleges and universities that received federal funds from discriminating on the basis of sex. By requiring comparable funding for sports programs, Title IX made women's athletics a real presence on college campuses.

Women also became increasingly visible in public life. Congresswomen Bella Abzug and Shirley Chisholm joined Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, the founder of *Ms.* magazine, to create the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. Abzug and Chisholm, both from New York, joined Congresswomen Patsy Mink from Hawaii and Martha Griffiths from Michigan to sponsor equal rights legislation. Congress authorized child-care tax deductions for working parents in 1972 and in 1974 passed the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, which enabled married women to get credit, including credit cards and mortgages, in their own names.

Antiwar activists, black and Chicano nationalists, and women's liberationists had each challenged the Cold War liberalism of the Democratic Party. In doing so, they helped build on the "rights liberalism" forged first by the African American–led civil rights movement. But they also created rifts among competing parts of the former liberal consensus. Many Catholics, for instance, opposed abortion rights and other freedoms sought by women's liberationists. Still other Democrats, many of them blue-collar trade unionists, believed that antiwar protesters were unpatriotic and that supporting one's government in time of war was a citizen's duty. The antiwar movement and the evolving rights liberalism of the sixties had made the old Democratic coalition increasingly unworkable.

Stonewall and Gay Liberation

The liberationist impulse transformed the gay rights movement as well. Homophile activists in the 1960s (Chapter 26) had pursued rights by protesting, but they adopted the respectable dress and behavior they knew

A Lesbian and Gay Rights Protest in Greenwich Village, New York City, 1970

Building on the momentum of the Black Power and women's liberation movements of the late 1960s, a gay liberation movement had emerged by the early 1970s. Its history was longer than most Americans recognized, dating to the homophile movement of the 1950s, but the struggle for gay and lesbian rights and freedoms gained new adherents after the Stonewall riots of 1969. Under the banner of "coming out," lesbian and gay Americans refused to accept second-class citizenship. Rue des Archives/The Granger Collection, NYC.

straight society demanded. Meanwhile, the vast majority of gay men and lesbians remained "in the closet." So many were closeted because homosexuality was considered immoral and was even illegal in the vast majority of states—sodomy statutes outlawed same-sex relations, and police used other morals laws to harass and arrest gay men and lesbians. In the late 1960s, however, inspired by the Black Power and women's movements, gay activists increasingly demanded immediate and unconditional recognition of their rights. A gay newspaper in New York bore the title *Come Out!*

EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES
How did the antiwar movement, women's liberation, and gay liberation break with an earlier liberal politics?

The new gay liberation found multiple expressions in major cities across the country, but a defining event occurred in New York's Greenwich Village. Police had raided gay bars for decades, making arrests, publicizing the names of patrons, and harassing customers simply for being gay. When a local gay bar called the **Stonewall Inn** was raided by police in the summer of 1969, however, its patrons rioted for two days, burning the bar and battling with police in the narrow streets of the Village. Decades of police repression had taken their toll. Few commentators excused the violence, and the Stonewall riots were not repeated, but activists celebrated them as a symbolic demand for full citizenship. The gay liberation movement grew quickly after Stonewall. Local gay and lesbian organizations proliferated, and activists began pushing for nondiscrimination ordinances and consensual sex laws at the state level. By 1975, the National Gay Task Force and other national organizations lobbied Congress, served as media watchdogs, and advanced suits in the courts. Despite all the activity, progress was slow; in most arenas of American life, gays and lesbians did not enjoy the same legal protections and rights as other Americans.

Richard Nixon and the Politics of the Silent Majority

Vietnam abroad and the antiwar movement and the counterculture at home tore at the fabric of the Democratic coalition and proved too difficult for Lyndon Johnson to navigate. Richard Nixon, in contrast, showed himself adept at taking advantage of the nation's unrest through carefully timed speeches and displays of moral outrage. A centrist by nature and temperament, Nixon was not part of the conservative Goldwater wing of the Republican Party. Though he was an ardent anticommunist like Goldwater, Nixon also shared some of Eisenhower's traits, including a basic acceptance of government's role in economic matters. Nixon is thus most profitably viewed as a transitional figure, a national politician who formed a bridge between the liberal postwar era and the much more conservative decades that followed the 1970s.

In late 1969, following a massive antiwar rally in Washington, President Nixon gave a televised speech in which he referred to his supporters as the **silent majority**. It was classic Nixonian rhetoric. In a single phrase, he summed up a generational and cultural

struggle, placing himself on the side of ordinary Americans against the rabble-rousers and troublemakers. It was an oversimplification, but the label *silent majority* stuck, and Nixon had defined a political phenomenon. For the remainder of his presidency, Nixon cultivated the impression that he was the defender of a reasonable middle ground under assault from the radical left.

Nixon in Vietnam

On the war in Vietnam, Nixon picked up where Johnson had left off. Cold War assumptions continued to dictate presidential policy. Abandoning Vietnam, Nixon insisted, would damage America's "credibility" and make the country seem "a pitiful, helpless giant." Nixon wanted peace, but only "peace with honor." The North Vietnamese were not about to oblige him. The only outcome acceptable to them was a unified Vietnam under their control.

Vietnamization and Cambodia

To neutralize criticism at home, Nixon began delegating the ground fighting to the South Vietnamese. Under this new policy of **Vietnamization**, American troop levels dropped from 543,000 in 1968 to 334,000 in 1971 to barely 24,000 by early 1973. American casualties dropped correspondingly. But the killing in Vietnam continued. As Ellsworth Bunker, the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, noted cynically, it was just a matter of changing "the color of the bodies."

Far from abating, however, the antiwar movement intensified. In November 1969, half a million demonstrators staged a huge protest in Washington called the Vietnam Moratorium. On April 30, 1970, as part of a secret bombing campaign against Vietcong supply lines, American troops destroyed enemy bases in neutral Cambodia. When news of the invasion of Cambodia came out, American campuses exploded in outrage—and, for the first time, students died. On May 4, 1970, at Kent State University in Ohio, panicky National Guardsmen fired into an antiwar rally, wounding eleven students

COMPARE AND CONTRAST
How was President Nixon's Vietnam policy different from President Johnson's?

Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon completed one of the more remarkable political rehabilitations in modern times. He had lost the 1960 presidential election and the 1962 California gubernatorial election. But he came back strong in 1968 to ride—and help direct—a growing wave of reaction among conservative Americans against Great Society liberalism, the antiwar movement, civil rights, and the counterculture. In this photograph, President Nixon greets supporters in June 1969, just a few months after his inauguration. © Wally McNamee/Corbis.

Prowar Rally

Under a sea of American flags, construction workers in New York City march in support of the Vietnam War. Wearing hard hats, tens of thousands of marchers jammed Broadway for four blocks opposite City Hall, and the overflow crammed the side streets. Working-class patriotism became a main source of support for Nixon's war. Paul Fusco/Magnum Photos, Inc.

and killing four. Less than two weeks later, at Jackson State College in Mississippi, Guardsmen stormed a dormitory, killing two black students. More than 450 colleges closed in protest. Across the country, the spring semester was essentially canceled.

My Lai Massacre Meanwhile, one of the worst atrocities of the war had become public. In 1968, U.S. Army troops had executed nearly five hundred people in the South Vietnamese village of **My Lai**, including a large number of women and children. The massacre was known only within the military until 1969, when journalist Seymour Hersh broke the story and photos of the massacre appeared in *Life* magazine, discrediting the United States around the world. Americans, *Time* observed, "must stand in the larger dock of guilt and human conscience." Although high-ranking officers participated in the My Lai massacre and its cover-up, only one soldier, a low-ranking second lieutenant named William Calley, was convicted.

Believing that Calley had been made a fall guy for official U.S. policies that inevitably brought death to innocent civilians, a group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War publicized other atrocities committed by U.S. troops. In a controversial protest in 1971, they returned their combat medals at demonstrations outside the U.S. Capitol, literally hurling them onto the Capitol steps. "Here's my merit badge for murder," one vet said. Supporters of the war called these veterans cowardly and un-American, but their heartfelt antiwar protest exposed the deep personal torment that Vietnam had caused many soldiers.

Détente As protests continued at home, Nixon pursued two strategies to achieve his declared "peace with honor," one diplomatic and the other brutal. First, he

sought **détente** (a lessening of tensions) with the Soviet Union and a new openness with China. In a series of meetings between 1970 and 1972, Nixon and Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev resolved tensions over Cuba and Berlin and signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), the latter a symbolic step toward ending the Cold War arms race. Heavily influenced by his national security advisor, the Harvard professor Henry Kissinger, Nixon believed that he could break the Cold War impasse that had kept the United States from productive dialogue with the Soviet Union.

Then, in 1972, Nixon visited China, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to do so. In a televised week-long trip, the president pledged better relations with China and declared that the two nations — one capitalist, the other communist — could peacefully coexist. This was the man who had risen to prominence in the 1950s by railing against the Democrats for "losing" China and by hounding communists and fellow travelers. Indeed, the president's impeccable anticommunist credentials gave him the political cover to travel to Beijing. He remarked genially to Mao: "Those on the right can do what those on the left only talk about." Praised for his efforts to lessen Cold War tensions, Nixon also had tactical objectives in mind. He hoped that by befriending both the Soviet Union and China, he could play one against the other and strike a better deal over Vietnam at the ongoing peace talks in Paris. His second strategy, however, would prove less praiseworthy and cost more lives.

Exit America In April 1972, in an attempt to strengthen his negotiating position, Nixon ordered B-52 bombing raids against North Vietnam. A month later, he approved the mining of North Vietnamese ports, something Johnson had never dared to do. The North Vietnamese were not isolated, however: supplies from China and the Soviet Union continued, and the Vietcong fought on.

With the 1972 presidential election approaching, Nixon sent Kissinger back to the Paris peace talks, which had been initiated under Johnson. In a key concession, Kissinger accepted the presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. North Vietnam then agreed to an interim arrangement whereby the South Vietnamese government in Saigon would stay in power while a special commission arranged a final settlement. With Kissinger's announcement that "peace is at hand," Nixon got the election lift he wanted, but the agreement was then sabotaged by General Nguyen Van Thieu, the South Vietnamese president. So Nixon, in one final spasm of bloodletting, unleashed the two-week "Christmas bombing," the most intense of the entire war. On January 27, 1973, the two sides signed the Paris Peace Accords.

Nixon hoped that with massive U.S. aid, the Thieu regime might survive. But Congress was in revolt. It refused appropriations for bombing Cambodia after August 15, 1973, and gradually cut back aid to South Vietnam. In March 1975, North Vietnamese forces launched a final offensive, and on April 30, Vietnam was reunited. Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City, after the founding father of the communist regime.

The collapse of South Vietnam in 1975 produced a powerful, and tragic, historical irony: an outcome little different from what would likely have resulted from the unification vote in 1954 (Chapter 25). In other words, America's most disastrous military adventure of the twentieth century barely altered the geopolitical realities in Southeast Asia. The Hanoi regime called itself communist but never intended to be a satellite of any country, least of all China, Vietnam's ancient enemy.

Many paid a steep price for the Vietnam War. America's Vietnamese friends lost jobs and property, spent years in "reeducation" camps, or had to flee the country. Millions of Vietnamese had died in a decade of war, which included some of the most intensive aerial bombing of the twentieth century. In bordering Cambodia, the maniacal Khmer Rouge, followers of Cambodia's ruling Communist Party, took power and murdered 1.7 million people in bloody purges. And in the United States, more than 58,000 Americans had sacrificed their lives, and 300,000 had been wounded. On top of the war's $150 billion price tag, slow-to-heal internal wounds divided the country, and Americans increasingly lost confidence in their political leaders.

The Silent Majority Speaks Out

Nixon placed himself on the side of what he called "the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators." But moderate and conservative Americans increasingly spoke out. They were not in the mood to simply remain silent. During Nixon's first presidential term, those opposed to the direction liberalism had taken since the early 1960s focused their discontent on what they believed were the excesses of the "rights revolution" — the enormous changes in American law and society initiated by the civil rights movement and advanced by feminists and others thereafter.

The Fall of Saigon

After the 1973 U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, the South Vietnamese government lasted another two years. In March 1975, the North Vietnamese forces launched a final offensive; by April, they had surrounded the capital, Saigon. As seen here, many Vietnamese, some of them associated with the fallen South Vietnamese regime, sought sanctuary at the U.S. embassy compound. Thousands of Vietnamese and Americans were evacuated before the last helicopter left the embassy on April 30. Nik Wheeler/Sipa/AP/Wide World Photos.

Law and Order and the Supreme Court The rights revolution found an ally in an unexpected place: the U.S. Supreme Court. The decision that stood as a landmark in the civil rights movement, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), triggered a larger judicial revolution. Following *Brown*, the Court increasingly agreed to hear human rights and civil liberties cases—as opposed to its previous focus on property-related suits. Surprisingly, this shift was led by the man whom President Dwight Eisenhower had appointed chief justice in 1953: Earl Warren. A popular Republican governor of California, Warren surprised many, including Eisenhower himself, with his robust advocacy of civil rights and civil liberties. The **Warren Court** lasted from 1954 until 1969 and established some of the most far-reaching liberal jurisprudence in U.S. history.

Right-wing activists fiercely opposed the Warren Court, which they accused of "legislating from the bench" and contributing to social breakdown. They pointed, for instance, to the Court's rulings that people who are arrested have a constitutional right to counsel (1963, 1964) and, in *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), that arrestees have to be informed by police of their right to remain silent. Compounding conservatives' frustration was a series of decisions that liberalized restrictions on pornography. Trying to walk the fine line between censorship and obscenity, the Court ruled in *Roth v. United States* (1957) that obscene material had to be "utterly without redeeming social importance" to be banned. The "social importance" test, however, proved nearly impossible to define and left wide latitude for pornography to flourish.

That measure was finally abandoned in 1972, when the Court ruled in *Miller v. California* that "contemporary community standards" were the rightful measure of obscenity. But *Miller*, too, had little effect on the pornographic magazines, films, and peep shows proliferating in the 1970s. Conservatives found these decisions especially distasteful, since the Court had also ruled that religious ritual of any kind in public schools—including prayers and Bible reading—violated the constitutional separation of church and state. To many

religious Americans, the Court had taken the side of immorality over Christian values.

Supreme Court critics blamed rising crime rates and social breakdown on the Warren Court's liberal judicial record. Every category of crime was up in the 1970s, but especially disconcerting was the doubling of the murder rate since the 1950s and the 76 percent increase in burglary and theft between 1967 and 1976. Sensational crimes had always grabbed headlines, but now "crime" itself preoccupied politicians, the media, and the public. However, no one could establish a direct causal link between increases in crime and Supreme Court decisions, given a myriad of other social factors, including drugs, income inequality, enhanced statistical record-keeping, and the proliferation of guns. But when many Americans looked at their cities in the 1970s, they saw pornographic theaters, X-rated bookstores, and rising crime rates. Where, they wondered, was law and order?

Busing Another major civil rights objective—desegregating schools—produced even more controversy and fireworks. For fifteen years, southern states, by a variety of stratagems, had fended off court directives that they desegregate "with all deliberate speed." In 1968, only about one-third of all black children in the South attended schools with whites. At that point, the federal courts got serious and, in a series of stiff decisions, ordered an end to "dual school systems."

Where schools remained highly segregated, the courts increasingly endorsed the strategy of busing students to achieve integration. Plans differed across the country. In some states, black children rode buses from their neighborhoods to attend previously all-white schools. In others, white children were bused to black or Latino neighborhoods. In an important 1971 decision, the Supreme Court upheld a countywide busing plan for Charlotte-Mecklenburg, a North Carolina school district. Despite local opposition, desegregation proceeded, and many cities in the South followed suit. By the mid-1970s, 86 percent of southern black children were attending school with whites. (In recent years, this trend has reversed.)

In the North, where segregated schooling was also a fact of life—arising from suburban residential patterns—busing orders proved less effective. Detroit dramatized the problem. To integrate Detroit schools would have required merging city and suburban school districts. A lower court ordered just such a merger in 1971, but in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), the Supreme Court reversed the ruling, requiring busing plans to remain within the boundaries of a single school district. Without including the largely white suburbs in busing efforts, however, achieving racial balance in Detroit, and other major northern cities, was all but impossible. Postwar suburbanization had produced in the North what law had mandated in the South: entrenched racial segregation of schools.

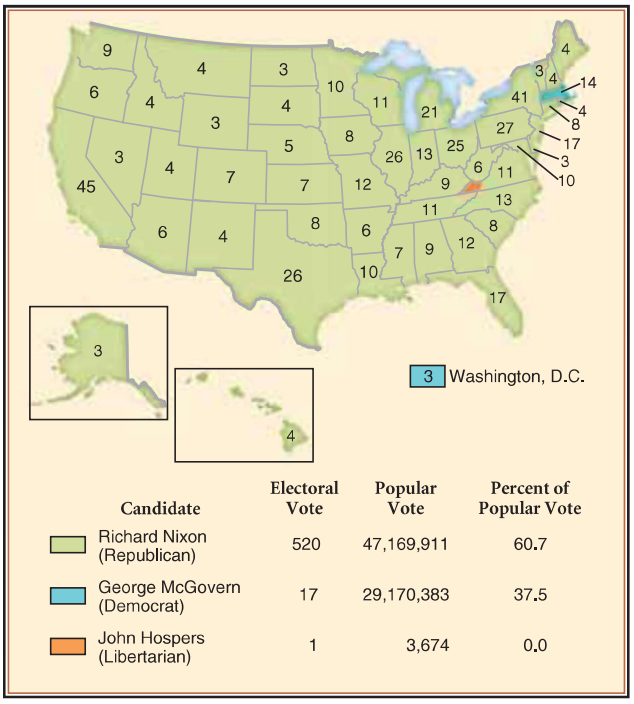
As the 1972 election approached, President Nixon took advantage of rising discontent over "law and order" and busing. He was the political beneficiary of a growing reaction against liberalism that had begun to take hold between 1968 and the early 1970s.

The 1972 Election

Political realignments have been infrequent in American history. One occurred between 1932 and 1936, when many Republicans, despairing over the Great Depression, had switched sides and voted for FDR. The

An Antibusing Confrontation in Boston

Where busing was implemented, it often faced stiff resistance. Many white communities resented judges dictating which children would attend which neighborhood school. In working-class Irish South Boston, mobs attacked African American students bused in from Roxbury in 1974. A police presence was required to keep South Boston High School open. When lawyer and civil rights activist Ted Landsmark tried to enter Boston's city hall during a 1976 antibusing demonstration, he was assaulted. Stanley Forman's Pulitzer Prize–winning photo for the Boston *Herald-American*—titled *The Soiling of Old Glory*—shows Joseph Rakes lunging at Landsmark with an American flag. Busing also had the perverse effect of speeding up "white flight" to city suburbs. Pulitzer Prize, 1977, www.stanleyformanphotos.com.



Candidate	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Percent of Popular Vote
Richard Nixon (Republican)	520	47,169,911	60.7
George McGovern (Democrat)	17	29,170,383	37.5
John Hospers (Libertarian)	1	3,674	0.0

MAP 28.4

The Presidential Election of 1972

In one of the most lopsided presidential elections of the twentieth century, Republican Richard Nixon defeated Democrat George McGovern in a landslide in 1972. It was a reversal of the 1964 election, just eight years before, in which Republican Barry Goldwater had been defeated by a similar margin. Nixon hoped that his victory signaled what Kevin Phillips called "the emerging Republican majority," but the president's missteps and criminal actions in the Watergate scandal would soon bring an end to his tenure in office.

years between 1968 and 1972 were another such pivotal moment. This time, Democrats were the ones who abandoned their party.

After the 1968 elections, the Democrats fell into disarray. Bent on sweeping away the party's old guard, reformers took over, adopting new rules that granted women, African Americans, and young people delegate seats "in reasonable relation to their presence in the population." In the past, an alliance of urban machines, labor unions, and white ethnic groups — the heart of the New Deal coalition — dominated the nominating process. But at the 1972 convention, few of the party faithful qualified as delegates under the changed rules. The crowning insult came when the convention rejected the credentials of Chicago mayor Richard Daley and his delegation, seating instead an Illinois delegation led by Jesse Jackson, a firebrand young black minister and former aide to Martin Luther King Jr.

Capturing the party was one thing; beating the Republicans was quite another. These party reforms opened the door for George McGovern, a liberal South Dakota senator and favorite of the antiwar and women's movements, to capture the nomination. But McGovern took a number of missteps, including failing to mollify key party backers such as the AFL-CIO, which, for the first time in memory, refused to endorse the Democratic ticket. A weak campaigner, McGovern was also no match for Nixon, who pulled out all the stops. Using the advantages of incumbency, Nixon gave the economy a well-timed lift and proclaimed (prematurely) a cease-fire in Vietnam. Nixon's appeal to the "silent majority" — people who "care about a strong United States, about patriotism, about moral and spiritual values" — was by now well honed.

Nixon won in a landslide, receiving nearly 61 percent of the popular vote and carrying every state except Massachusetts and the District of Columbia (Map 28.4). The returns revealed how fractured traditional Democratic voting blocs had become. McGovern received only 38 percent of the big-city Catholic vote and lost 42 percent of self-identified Democrats overall. The 1972 election marked a pivotal moment in the country's shift to the right. Yet observers legitimately wondered whether the 1972 election results proved the popularity of conservatism or merely showed that the country had grown weary of liberalism and the changes it had wrought in national life.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we saw that the combined pressures of the Vietnam War and racial and cultural conflict fractured and split the New Deal coalition. Following John Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Lyndon Johnson

advanced the most ambitious liberal reform program since the New Deal, securing not only civil rights legislation but also many programs in education, medical care, transportation, environmental protection, and, above all, his War on Poverty. But the Great Society fell short of its promise as Johnson escalated American involvement in Vietnam.

The war bitterly divided Americans. Galvanized by the carnage of war and the draft, the antiwar movement spread rapidly among young people, and the spirit of rebellion spilled beyond the war. The New Left took the lead among college students, while the more apolitical counterculture preached liberation through sex, drugs, music, and personal transformation. Women's liberationists broke from the New Left and raised new concerns about society's sexism. Conservative students rallied in support of the war and on behalf of conservative principles, but they were often drowned out by the more vocal and demonstrative liberals and radicals.

In 1968, the nation was rocked by the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, as well as by a wave of urban riots, fueling a growing popular desire for law and order. Adding to the national disquiet was the Democratic National Convention that summer, divided by the Vietnam War and besieged by street riots outside. The stage was set for a new wave of conservatism to take hold of the country, and a resurgence of the Republican Party under Richard Nixon between 1968 and 1972. President Nixon ended the war in Vietnam, but only after five more years and many more casualties.

CHAPTER REVIEW

MAKE IT STICK Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you've read.

TERMS TO KNOW

Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

Key Concepts and Events

Great Society (p. 904)
Economic Opportunity Act (p. 905)
Medicare (p. 906)
Medicaid (p. 906)
Equal Pay Act (p. 908)
The Feminine Mystique (p. 908)
Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (p. 909)
National Organization for Women (NOW) (p. 909)
Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (p. 911)
Operation Rolling Thunder (p. 911)
Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (p. 914)
Port Huron Statement (p. 914)
New Left (p. 914)
Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) (p. 915)
Sharon Statement (p. 918)
counterculture (p. 918)
Tet offensive (p. 919)
1968 Democratic National Convention (p. 921)
Chicano Moratorium Committee (p. 923)
women's liberation (p. 924)
Title IX (p. 925)
Stonewall Inn (p. 926)
silent majority (p. 926)
Vietnamization (p. 927)
My Lai (p. 928)
détente (p. 929)
Warren Court (p. 930)

Key People

Lyndon B. Johnson (p. 904)
Barry Goldwater (p. 905)
Betty Friedan (p. 908)
Ngo Dinh Diem (p. 910)
Robert Kennedy (p. 919)
Richard M. Nixon (p. 922)
George C. Wallace (p. 922)
Henry Kissinger (p. 929)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter's main ideas.

1. How do you explain the liberal resurgence in the first half of the 1960s?
2. What were the main elements of Johnson's Great Society?
3. How did the debates over civil liberties, particularly with respect to Supreme Court decisions under Chief Justice Earl Warren, influence political life in the 1960s and 1970s?
4. In what ways was the Vietnam War part of the Cold War? How did the antiwar movement represent a break with Cold War assumptions?
5. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Look at the events listed under "America in the World" on the thematic timeline on page 803. American global leadership is a major theme of Part 8. How did the global role of the United States shift in the 1960s?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

1. **ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** In what ways was the Great Society an extension of the New Deal? In what ways was it different? What factors made the period between 1932 and 1972 a "liberal" era in American politics? What events and developments would you use to explain your answer?
2. **VISUAL EVIDENCE** Compare the photographs of the prowar rally (p. 928) and the counterculture (p. 918). Why did clothing and appearance become so important to many social movements in the 1960s—the women's movement, the Black Power movement, the antiwar movement, and others? How are these visual images historical evidence?

MORE TO EXPLORE

Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (1998). An engaging biography of Johnson and an account of his era.

Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (1999). A vivid account of dissent in the 1960s.

G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (2008). A thoughtful account of the Great Society.

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open* (2000). An accessible exploration of the women's movement and feminism.

Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (2001). A thoughtful explanation of Nixon and political realignment.

Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (1991). An excellent history of the decades-long conflict in Vietnam.

TIMELINE

Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

1963	• John F. Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon B. Johnson assumes presidency
1964	• Civil Rights Act • Economic Opportunity Act inaugurates War on Poverty • Free Speech Movement at Berkeley • Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
1965	• Immigration Act abolishes national quota system • Medicare and Medicaid programs established • Operation Rolling Thunder escalates bombing campaign (March) • First U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam
1967	• Hippie counterculture's "Summer of Love" • 100,000 march in antiwar protest in Washington, D.C. (October)
1968	• Tet offensive begins (January) • Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated • Women's liberation protest at Miss America pageant • Riot at Democratic National Convention in Chicago (August) • Richard Nixon elected president
1969	• Stonewall riots (June)
1970	• National Women's Strike for Equality
1971	• *Swan v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* approves countywide busing
1972	• Nixon visits China (February) • Nixon wins a second term (November 7)
1973	• Paris Peace Accords end Vietnam War
1974	• *Milliken v. Bradley* limits busing to school district boundaries
1975	• Vietnam reunified under Communist rule

KEY TURNING POINTS: Which specific developments from this timeline made the years 1964, 1965, and 1968 turning points in politics, foreign policy, and culture and why?