

# 25 | The Sixties



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 25-1 Describe the experiences John F. Kennedy had while president that led some to label him the “ultimate cold warrior.”
- 25-2 Discuss attempts made both by African Americans and by the legal system to provide voting and other rights to black citizens.
- 25-3 Discuss Lyndon Johnson’s desire to build a “Great Society” and evaluate the relative success of his programs.
- 25-4 Explain the Cold War origins of the Vietnam War, and evaluate the decisions Johnson made that pushed the war into the forefront of Americans’ minds.
- 25-5 Discuss the growth of the “counterculture” in U.S. society during the 1960s, the coming together of protesters against American culture and protesters challenging the war, and describe the various movements that began to gather strength as Americans sought to have their voices heard.

AFTER FINISHING  
THIS CHAPTER  
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FOR STUDY TOOLS

From today's perspective, the years 1960, 1961, and 1962 look a lot more like the fifties than what we have come to think of as "the sixties." The economy remained strong, those advocating for dramatic social change remained largely on the margins, and the child-focused world of the postwar years retained its grip in the ever-expanding suburbs.

The transition to the excitement and disenchantments that we today associate with "the sixties" took place slowly, beginning about 1963 or 1964. It culminated in 1968, as **liberalism** seemed under attack from all sides. Liberalism was America's dominant political system at the time, which stressed democracy, corporate capitalism, a generous system of social entitlements, and an ordered social system premised on obedience to the prevailing culture. Some felt postwar liberalism was too generous, creating a class of entitled loafers unwilling to do their fair share. Others felt postwar liberalism wasn't generous enough, sacrificing equality for the sake of freedom, and placing a priority on appearances and consumerism rather than authenticity and generosity. By the end of the decade, nonviolent political stances—against racial discrimination and the Vietnam War—so infuriated those who opposed them that the opposition sometimes turned to violence, which was sometimes met in return by further violence. By the late 1960s, this violence included even the assassinations of leaders like John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Furthermore, sexual and social mores seemed to be changing too, as a widespread drug culture emerged and as women pushed against society's long-held restrictions against them. African Americans and other repressed minorities also began to demand greater access to power. In the end, "freedom" won the 1960s, but it surprised almost everyone that freedom could mean free speech and free love, and also free markets. It was almost as if the containment policy of the early Cold War somehow extended beyond foreign policy and into the realm of American society, and in the 1960s everyone wanted to bust free from being contained.

## 25-1 KENNEDY AND THE COLD WAR

The 1960s started conventionally enough. After eight years in the White House, Eisenhower was still beloved by much of America. But the Twenty-second

Amendment, ratified in 1951 in reaction to FDR's four terms as president, did not permit Eisenhower, or anyone else, to run for more than two terms in office. Eisenhower tepidly endorsed his vice president, Richard Nixon, who had risen to fame through the anticommunist witch hunts of the 1950s Red Scare.

For their part, the Democrats nominated a young (forty-three-year-old) Massachusetts senator named John F. Kennedy. The scion of a prosperous Boston Irish family, Kennedy was a World War II hero with an easy demeanor and a good sense of humor. He had been a middle-of-the-road congressman and senator, removing himself from debates about the tactics of the McCarthy supporters, although both he and Nixon promised to execute the Cold War more aggressively than had Eisenhower. Kennedy was also Catholic, and at a time when Catholics and Jews were just beginning to feel part of the national mainstream, many Americans still believed he would be unable to lead the country without consulting the pope.

In a masterful performance in front of a group of Protestant ministers in Houston, Kennedy claimed that he felt it was inappropriate for any church to demand specific actions from a government leader. He hoped that both Catholics and Protestants would not vote for a candidate based on the candidate's religion alone. His Catholicism may have helped develop his character, but it did not dictate his moral life. Masterfully given, the speech helped transform the political landscape for religious minorities. In one stroke he made the anti-Catholic diatribes of his detractors irrelevant. More importantly, Kennedy rightly viewed his election as a generational transition and surrounded himself with young advisors, few of whom were older than fifty. In the first-ever televised presidential debate, Kennedy came off as cool and demure, while Nixon appeared clammy and untrustworthy. In the end, Kennedy won an extremely narrow victory over Nixon, and though his Catholicism may have cost him some votes, he

**liberalism** A political philosophy founded on the ideas of liberty and equality but which, in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, came to signify the federal government's role in providing a counter-balance to free-market capitalism

◀◀◀ Of all the divisive events of the 1960s, perhaps none was more divisive than the Vietnam War. The first war to be fought with integrated troops, the war provoked questions about the nation's racial and class divides, as well as the proper place of the American empire. And it was just one of many transformative events of the decade. This photograph shows an integrated squadron marching through the forests of Vietnam, with a helicopter flying away in the background.



Bettmann/Getty Images

>> The first-ever televised presidential debate took place in 1960 between Richard M. Nixon (left) and John F. Kennedy. Kennedy used the new medium to showcase his youthful vigor, while Nixon's shifting eyes and moving hands made viewers uncertain he was ready to be president. Many radio listeners, though, thought Nixon won the debate.

prevailed to become the first Catholic president in American history (see Map 25.1).

### 25-1a President Kennedy

During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy often spoke of a “new frontier,” although once he was in office, his agenda rarely diverged from that of standard-issue Democrats like Truman. Like Truman, he lacked a congressional majority to enact major new programs. As a result, Kennedy's calls for increased federal aid for education,

medical care, mass transit, the unemployed, and a cabinet-level urban affairs department generally went nowhere.

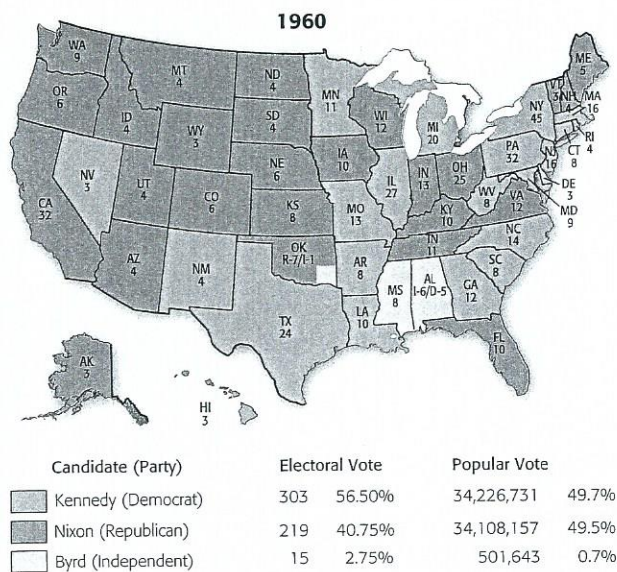
### 25-1b Kennedy the Cold Warrior

But Kennedy did become an avid Cold Warrior. During the election, he vowed to take a more aggressive approach to the Cold War than Eisenhower had, by challenging communism all over the world.

#### NATION BUILDING

To do this, Kennedy sought the support of developing nations around the world, which he intended to win by facilitating their economic and political maturation—a process known as **nation building**. Kennedy believed

**nation building** Facilitating the economic and political maturation of developing nations; political strategy employed by President Kennedy in order to prevent developing nations from adopting communism



**Map 25.1 The Election of 1960**

wholeheartedly in the doctrine of containment and announced his willingness to wage preemptive strikes to prevent the march of communism. The Kennedy administration pursued this policy all over the globe, specifically with his Alliance of Progress program, which provided \$25 billion in aid to countries in Latin America.

One response to the United States' promoting wealth for its allies was the construction, in 1961, of the **Berlin Wall**, built by the communist government to separate impoverished, Soviet-controlled East Berlin from the more prosperous West Berlin.

### KENNEDY AND CUBA

After the election, however, Cuba and Vietnam rapidly developed as the president's two biggest areas of concern, and nowhere did Kennedy's hard-line approach to the Cold War manifest itself more dramatically than in dealing with Cuba. Located 90 miles off the coast of Florida, Cuba had been a main concern of U.S. foreign policy since the Spanish-American War for two reasons: (1) the United States feared any political turmoil so close to its border, and (2) many Americans had invested in the country. These long-standing concerns were compounded when Fidel Castro took power in 1959 and established a communist regime. This new regime distressed Kennedy not only because it meant one more communist country in the world, but also because the Soviet Union now had an ally just 90 miles from U.S. shores. Kennedy soon dedicated himself to removing Castro and the communists from power.

### BAY OF PIGS INVASION

Under Eisenhower, the CIA had designed a plan to overthrow Castro. Kennedy implemented the plan in April 1961, when the CIA sent American-trained Cuban exiles back to their homeland to spark a rebellion. This seemingly simple scheme quickly went awry. Inadequate air cover, treacherous reefs, and swampy terrain meant that the 1,400 commandos had a tough landing. In addition, the plan was hardly a secret to Castro; there had been a lot of talk about the invasion in the Cuban immigrant community in the United States, and the news got back to him. When the commandos arrived on Cuban shores, Castro's forces were waiting to capture them as they landed.

Kennedy, wanting to conceal U.S. aims to overthrow or even assassinate another nation's leader, waffled as to how to salvage the operation. His options were to do nothing and allow the operation to fail, or send U.S. military forces into Cuba, escalating the conflict. He chose to do nothing, meaning that more than 1,200 exiles were captured and went on trial; some were executed, and most were sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment. Those imprisoned were released in twenty months, in exchange for \$53 million in food and medicine. It was Kennedy's greatest humiliation as president.

### CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

After the Bay of Pigs incident, the president launched a multifaceted assault on the Castro regime, including radio broadcasts, assassination plots, and sabotage raids. Castro knew that another invasion of Cuba was imminent. Determined to protect his communist revolution, in April 1962 Castro agreed to allow the Soviet Union to base a few of its nuclear missiles in Cuba. These missiles would be easily capable of reaching U.S. targets and therefore of triggering a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, also knew the United States had missiles close to the Soviet Union, in American ally Turkey, and he wanted to have at least some semblance of balance in the arms race. A nuclear conflict was on the horizon.

In October 1962, a U.S. reconnaissance plane photographed the storage site of the missiles. This shocking discovery set off a thirteen-day confrontation

**Berlin Wall** Barrier built in 1961 by the communist government to separate impoverished, Soviet-controlled East Berlin from the more prosperous West Berlin

## KENNEDY AND VIETNAM

While Kennedy was dealing with Cuba, he was also supporting an anticommunist government in South Vietnam. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the southeast Asian country of Vietnam had been a French colony, and after World War II, it sought its independence from France. The Vietnamese independence movement was led by communist leader Ho Chi Minh, who sought assistance from China and the Soviet Union. In an effort to prevent another domino from falling in the Cold War, the United States began funding the French fighters, a situation that lasted until 1954, when the Vietnamese effectively defeated the French in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Minh sought to unify the north of the country, which he controlled, with the south, which had been the French stronghold. But before he could do so, the United

States intervened. It propped up another leader, a non-communist named Ngo Dinh Diem, to rule in the south, and, under the terms of the Geneva Convention which ended the French-Vietnam War, proposed that elections be held in 1956 so that the Vietnamese people could choose its leader. When it became apparent that the communist Minh was going to win the election, the U.S. engineered the election's cancellation. Then it devoted resources to propping up the South Vietnamese government. By 1961, the U.S. was spending more than \$40 million on improving the South Vietnamese police system and on establishing a number of programs to help the South Vietnamese battle communist-backed guerrilla forces in the south, called the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong often fought with the assistance of the North Vietnamese military but were an independent unit. To prevent the Viet Cong from becoming too powerful in the south, Kennedy increased the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam from 5,000 to 16,700. The United States was slowly drawing itself in, all in an attempt to prevent another domino from falling.

But when an internal battle in South Vietnam between Catholic leaders like Ngo Dinh Diem and the Buddhist majority led to protests (several Buddhists publicly burned themselves to death to protest the repression of the Buddhist majority), the United States felt it was necessary to intervene in order to maintain stability. Diem, who was a ruthless leader in his own right, was not doing an effective job ruling South Vietnam and was making the region susceptible to a communist takeover. In August 1963 the U.S. ambassador



Ralph Crane/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

>> The fear and dread provoked by the Cuban Missile Crisis made Americans confront the possibility of nuclear annihilation. Here, Americans in an appliance store watch a broadcast of President Kennedy during the Crisis.

known as the **Cuban Missile Crisis**. Kennedy hastily convened a committee of top advisors to discuss how to handle the situation. Options ranged from invading Cuba to negotiating with the Soviets, although most of Kennedy's advisors favored some form of direct standoff. Kennedy ultimately decided to establish a naval "quarantine," or blockade, of Cuba to prevent Soviet weapons from reaching port. The tension heightened on October 27 when a U.S. pilot flying over Cuba was shot down and killed. The frightening standoff subsided only when the Soviets agreed to remove their missiles from Cuba in exchange for a promise that the United States would not invade Cuba. The Kennedy administration also privately pledged to dismantle U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey. Successful negotiations meant that both sides had averted nuclear war, and the secrecy of the agreement about removing missiles in Turkey made it appear that Kennedy had won the standoff. The two sides also took steps to avoid getting that close to a nuclear standoff again, including putting a direct telephone line between the White House and the Kremlin. For thirteen days, the world had gotten perilously close to nuclear war.

**Cuban Missile Crisis** Thirteen-day confrontation between the Kennedy administration and the Cuban communist regime in October 1962; Castro had agreed to allow the Soviet Union to base a few of its nuclear missiles in Cuba, thus potentially triggering a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union



Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

>> In one of the most horrific images of the decade, a Buddhist monk in Saigon makes the ultimate protest against the repression of the Buddhist majority by setting himself on fire.

to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, gave U.S. support (and \$40,000) to a group of South Vietnamese generals who launched a coup against Diem. Within a few days, the U.S.-backed officers executed the old leaders and took charge. Nevertheless, political instability persisted, only increasing the apparent need for U.S. intervention. By 1963, Vietnam was a small but volatile front in the Cold War.

25-2

## THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

As Kennedy navigated the difficult terrain of a multifaceted worldwide Cold War, a movement at home was emerging just as dramatically. After the civil rights victories of the 1950s, African Americans stepped up their activism in the early 1960s, using Cold War rhetoric to demonstrate that America itself was not living up to its claim of being a beacon of freedom.

### 25-2a Expanded Nonviolence

Civil rights protests had been ongoing since the Second World War, but they increased in intensity and number in the early 1960s, beginning with the actions of a collection of university students.

### THE SIT-INS AND SNCC

In one of the most influential protests in American history, on February 1, 1960, four black college freshmen from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College began a sit-in at a local Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro. The young men would not leave until they were served a cup of coffee, a practice regularly refused in a segregated society. The students sat quietly until the store closed. The next day, twenty-seven students sat in. Within a few days there were more students than seats at Woolworth's, which prompted the students to spread their protest to other white-only restaurants in the city. Within three days, there were more than three hundred students participating in the sit-in.

By the end of February, students in other southern cities began similar protests, and by late spring, almost seventy thousand students had participated in sit-ins all over the country. The students staged the sit-ins almost entirely in the Upper South, while the hardened system of Jim Crow intimidation prevented civil rights protests in the Deep South states of Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia. And even in the Upper South, the students confronted humiliations and violence: food was thrown at them, cigarettes were put out on their arms, and many were forcibly removed from their seats. But the students

"Some way through, an old white lady, who must have been seventy-five or eighty-five, came over and put her hands on my shoulders and said, 'Boys I am so proud of you. You should have done this ten years ago.'"

—FRANKLIN MCCAIN, ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FOUR SIT-IN PROTESTERS AT GREENSBORO

stayed true to nonviolent principles and refused to retaliate. In many cities (including Greensboro), southern business owners agreed to desegregate because sales had dipped so low.

In May 1960, students organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”) and selected Marion Barry, a student activist from Fisk University in Nashville, as chairman. SNCC had the youngest and most energetic membership of the major civil rights organizations, spreading the student-led sit-in movement throughout the Upper South. A group mostly made up of college students, they practiced nonviolence and put forward a vision of a racially integrated America, which they called “the Beloved Community.” Young people were particularly active in the growing civil rights movement because they didn’t face the same kind of economic retaliation adults faced, like losing their job or having loans called in.

## FREEDOM RIDES

Rejuvenated by the sit-ins, civil rights organizations grew increasingly active. In 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which had been founded during the Second World War, renewed its efforts to test segregation in interstate transportation facilities by organizing Freedom Rides into the South. After notifying President Kennedy, the FBI, and the Justice Department, CORE volunteers of many races began their journey through the South.

On May 14, 1961, a Greyhound bus carrying Freedom Riders arrived in Anniston, Alabama. It was met by white supremacists who attacked the bus, slashed its tires, and threw a bomb on board. The terrified passengers exited the bus through flames and smoke. Once outside the bus they were beaten with bats, iron bars, iron chains, and bricks. The local hospital refused to help the wounded. Alabama governor John Patterson and Birmingham public safety commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor did not prosecute the perpetrators.

CORE was forced to abandon its efforts. A week later, however, SNCC continued the Freedom Rides, and a bus left from Birmingham to Montgomery on a two-hour ride. At the bus station in

Montgomery, the passengers were savagely attacked by hundreds of racist southerners.

## RESULTS

The Freedom Rides generated national and international publicity. Predictably, communist propaganda eagerly reported stories of American repression, and newly independent African and Asian countries paid close attention to white supremacy struggles in the United States. On September 22, 1962, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a new policy that required all interstate carriers and terminals to display signs indicating that seating “is without regard to race, color, creed or national origin.” The efforts of the Freedom Rides were a legal success. They demonstrated the power of interracial activism, the philosophy of nonviolence, and the skillful use of the media, all of which would become standards in the civil rights movement that was then bubbling into the national consciousness.

## 25-2b National Successes

While SNCC and CORE were orchestrating the Freedom Rides, other groups were attempting to dismantle social aspects of segregation.



>> The leaders of the civil rights movement made sure the media was present when southern racism was on full display, as in this 1963 demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama. President Kennedy said images like this one of a young black being mauled by a police dog while a white police officer holds the man in place, made Kennedy “sick.”

## JAMES MEREDITH, PROJECT C, AND THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

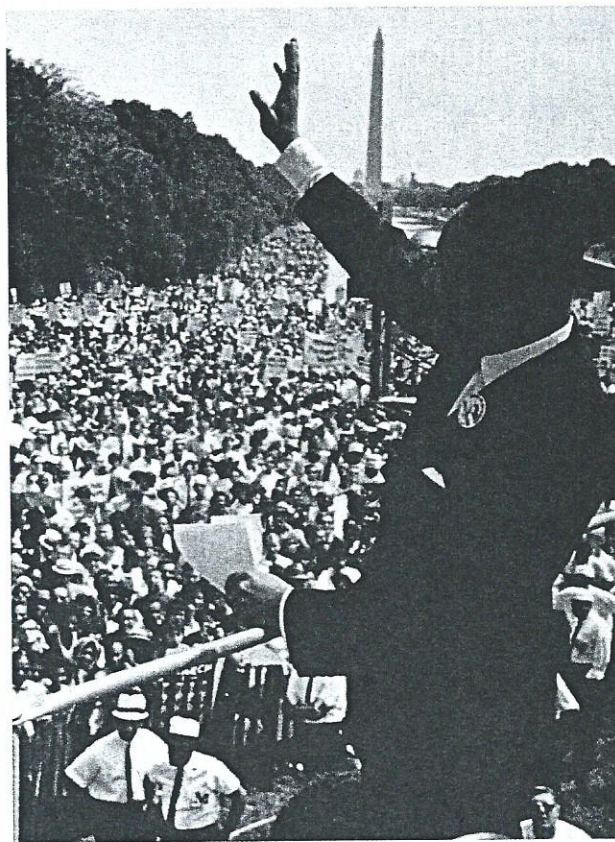
In 1962, James Meredith sought to enroll as the first African American student in the history of the University of Mississippi. His attempt was met with strong resistance, prompting Kennedy to go on live television arguing against the inhumanity of persistent segregation. Kennedy also sent in federal troops to quell riots and ensure that Meredith be allowed to attend the university.

Building on the successes of nonviolent protest, in 1963 the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) under Martin Luther King, Jr., launched a campaign in what was called "the most segregated city in America," Birmingham, Alabama. They called their campaign Project C, which stood for "confrontation." King and others organized marches—often bringing along children dressed in their Sunday best—protesting segregation even after Birmingham's mayor outlawed such protests. More than 20,000 black people were arrested, including thousands of children. The notoriously brutal Bull Connor directed his men to attack the protesters with police dogs, electric cattle prods, and high-powered water hoses. National media captured the action, sending images across the globe of children being arrested and women being beaten.

The campaign ended in bitter victory for the civil rights protesters, but only after white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham during a church service, injuring several people and killing four African American girls. Millions of Americans were outraged by the violence and demanded federal action. As pressure mounted, the Kennedy administration implored local white leaders to end the violence. Birmingham's white leaders agreed to meet with black leadership and adopted a desegregation plan. As a result, not only were parks and various public spaces desegregated, but black people also had access to city jobs previously denied them. But it had come at a momentous cost.

## MARCH ON WASHINGTON

In 1963, in an effort to push for federal civil rights laws, SCLC cosponsored the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. At the August 28 gathering, leaders from every major civil rights organization spoke. No other orator was as powerful as Martin Luther King, Jr., who delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. King's ability to tap into both Christian and American symbolism was tremendously effective. He extolled the belief "that my



AP Images/Anonymous

>> Martin Luther King, Jr., waves to supporters from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The event still stands as the high point of the civil rights movement.

four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The simple, forceful demand that America live up to its national creed was difficult to reject or dismiss.

## A RIFT APPEARS

SNCC workers also helped organize the March. John Lewis, the new chairman of SNCC, had written a militant speech that demanded an immediate end to civil rights violations. Organizers, however, edited his speech, deleting Lewis's desire to march through the South "the way [Civil War General] Sherman did." They found it too militant. SNCC activists became increasingly disaffected with what they considered the more cautious politics of other organizations. They found the continual requests for new laws to be infuriatingly slow and unlikely to change the country, and sought instead a more

"I remember the very first time that my dad, when they went to the courthouse, and they stood in the line so long, and, you know, they said the white people just looked at them, and asked them, 'Well, niggers, what are you doing here? You know you have no business here.' And they didn't even allow them to even register that very first day."

—ESTELL HARVEY, RECALLING HER FATHER'S ATTEMPT  
TO REGISTER TO VOTE IN THE SUMMER OF 1964

aggressive civil rights movement. This disaffection and frustration would lead to dissent later on.

### FREEDOM SUMMER

After these early, hard-won successes, civil rights organizers led an effort to dismantle the discriminatory southern voting system, which denied most black people the right to vote. The work was tough: as volunteers went into the rural South and tried to convince black people to register to vote, they were under constant watch by white southerners and nearly always under threat. The most concerted effort emerged in the summer of 1964, when thousands of black and white volunteers headed south to establish "Freedom Schools" and register southern black people to vote in the upcoming election. The Freedom Summer was not without its share of violence. In Mississippi, Ku Klux Klan members, who were being supplied information by the state government, killed three young CORE members who were trying to register southern black voters. Of the three, two were white middle-class Jewish men from New York, whose deaths created images of an interracial struggle against southern barbarity.

**Civil Rights Act of 1964** Legislation outlawing all discrimination in public facilities based on color, religion, sex, and national origin, and establishing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate violations of the law in employment

## 25-2c Laws and Rifts

In the atmosphere of the popular March on Washington, activists pushed for new civil rights laws (indeed, support of these kinds of laws was one purpose of the march). Kennedy agreed, announcing his intention in the summer of 1963 to put forward a bill. The anticipation ended when the president was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, in one of the iconic moments of the twentieth century (discussed further in Section 25-3 The Great Society).

### THE TWENTY-FOURTH AMENDMENT AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Within days of being sworn in, Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a tall Texan with a southern drawl, surprised everyone when he insisted he would fight on behalf of Kennedy's legislative plan for civil rights. Johnson worked with several civil rights organizations and appealed to the public in press conferences. With his shepherding, in January 1964 the states ratified the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which outlawed the use of the poll tax in federal elections (it was extended to cover state elections in 1966).

Then, a major civil rights bill passed the House on February 10, 1964. After a failed filibuster by South Carolina senator Strom Thurmond, it won Senate approval late in June. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed into law the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. The act outlawed all discrimination in public facilities based on color, religion, sex, and national origin and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate violations of the law in employment—something that had never been done before. Discrimination remained permissible in some aspects of the private sphere, but the Civil Rights Act was of paramount importance in outlawing discrimination within the mechanisms of the state.

### VIOLENCE CONTINUES

Despite the victories, or perhaps because of them, violence against civil rights activists continued, especially for the Freedom Summer workers who were in the South to get southern black people registered to vote. Even after dozens of their homes and churches had been bombed, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover refused to extend protection to civil rights activists. Fearing for their lives, some activists began carrying guns, and by the end of 1964, some organizations acknowledged their members' right to arm themselves, moving away from the nonviolent creed of Dr. King. Frustration was simmering. Successes were

coming, but actually changing the nature of American life was a slow-moving process. It appeared as though there were two civil rights movements: one to end legal segregation in the South, another to generate true economic, political, and social equality for African Americans. Civil rights activists were successful in addressing the first, but less successful when it came to the second.

### MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY (MFDP)

To address the persistent racism in the South's major institutions, in 1964 Fannie Lou Hamer and a collection of civil rights workers founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The MFDP was open to all citizens, regardless of race, unlike the Democratic Party for the state of Mississippi, which was restricted to white people. MFDP members traveled to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in an attempt to be seated as the genuine Mississippi representatives of the national party. White southern delegates threatened to splinter the Democratic Party if the MFDP was seated. In order to avoid a complete collapse of the party, on the one hand, or appearing as a bigot on the other, President Johnson (the party's nominee for the 1964 election) convinced the delegates to allow the MFDP to be seated at the convention "at large," while still allowing the all-white Mississippi delegation to be seated. Some civil rights leaders felt betrayed. Some became disaffected with traditional, incremental civil rights activism. And southern segregationists were growing increasingly aware that their time at the helm of the Democratic Party might be nearing its end.

By 1964 and 1965, many SNCC workers were eagerly listening to the fiery Black Nationalist rhetoric of Malcolm X, who advocated armed self-defense, a celebration and perpetuation of African American life, and a rejection of white assistance in the civil



>> Fannie Lou Hamer, demanding an integrated Democratic Party.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-DIG-ppmsc-01267]

rights movement. The rift in the movement was growing.

### VOTING RIGHTS ACT

But legal victories were continuing. Although the Twenty-fourth Amendment had outlawed the use of the poll tax, other laws prohibiting black people from voting remained in place. But, through boycotts, marches, and sit-ins, SCLC and SNCC had galvanized many poor southern black people to participate in the movement. Through these organizations, a tremendous groundswell of activism had emerged. From January through March 1965, SCLC and SNCC led large marches in Selma, Alabama, to advocate dismantling laws that prevented black suffrage. State troopers met the Selma march with a bloody attack. On March 25, 1965, Klansmen murdered Viola Liuzzo, a white mother of five from Detroit who had volunteered for the voting registration effort.

On March 15, 1965, in a televised speech, the president introduced a comprehensive voting rights bill to Congress. "Their cause must be our cause, too," Johnson said. The president ended his speech with the words of the movement's anthem: "And we *shall* overcome." Over the objections of southern senators like Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond, Congress overwhelmingly passed the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**. The new law outlawed attempts to deny suffrage to African Americans through literacy tests, poll taxes, or any other attempt to disfranchise citizens. From 1964 to 1968, the number of registered black people in Alabama jumped from 22 to 57 percent. In Mississippi the percentage of black registered voters leapt from a mere 7 percent to 59 percent.

**Voting Rights Act of 1965** Legislation outlawing attempts to deny suffrage to African Americans through literacy tests, poll taxes, or any other attempt to disfranchise citizens

## SUCCESS AND RIFTS

By the mid-1960s, the civil rights movement had achieved substantial success. The Twenty-fourth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act, as well as the local protests against segregation, were major milestones. Perhaps more important, the progress these activists made produced a major shift in the national consciousness regarding race, equality, and the meaning of democracy. The challenge to the idea that there was a hierarchy of races, a challenge that began in earnest during the Second World War, had come to predominate American thinking in the 1960s.

But there was much discontent within the movement over tactics and goals, and many black Americans thought civil rights workers had ignored the poverty of America's black people, north and south. Furthermore, as Vietnam began to escalate, many young black men were being recruited into the armed forces and away from the civil rights movement. In the late 1960s, these issues—and the rift they created—would grow more apparent, and more violent.

## 25-3 THE GREAT SOCIETY

While John Kennedy came into office promising a “new frontier” of liberal policies, his day-to-day agenda was made up largely of issues related to the Cold War and the civil rights movement. Tragedy struck before he could move beyond those objectives.

### 25-3a The Kennedy Assassination

On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was gunned down while riding in an open limousine in Dallas. The assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, left few reasons for his murder, and Oswald himself was gunned down two days later while being transported from police headquarters to jail, an event aired on live television. For four days, the nation collectively mourned its fallen leader. In death, the image of the brash Cold Warrior and the tepid civil rights supporter underwent a transformation to that of a liberal legend, the king of Camelot.

### 25-3b Lyndon Johnson

Kennedy's replacement was Lyndon Johnson, who did not have Kennedy's charisma but did possess ample political skill, and it was through him that the nation made its most significant attempt to expand the American welfare state.

Having grown up in poverty in Texas, and having cut his political teeth as a fervent New Dealer, President Johnson viewed poverty as more divisive than race, and he thus sought to transform American liberalism through a series of programs intended to end poverty and expand education. In 1964, Johnson called for America to become a “Great Society,” where “no child will go unfed and no youngster will go unschooled; where every child has a good teacher and every teacher has good pay, and both have good classrooms; where every human being has dignity and every worker has a job.” Running on this platform, Johnson won a mandate for change in a resounding landslide election victory over Barry Goldwater in November 1964.

### 25-3c Johnson's Great Society

With a much stronger base in Congress, Johnson laid out a series of ambitious goals during his second term. In addition to the war on poverty, Johnson sought new funding and programs for (1) education, (2) health care, (3) social welfare programs, (4) immigration reform, and (5) civil rights bills.

#### DECLARING WAR ON POVERTY

In his State of the Union address of January 1964, Johnson called for the nation to undertake a comprehensive “war on poverty.” Interest in the issue had been growing since the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962), a sweeping survey of the 40 to 50 million Americans who remained mired in poverty despite the fact that America in the 1960s continued to enjoy the post-World War II economic boom. Harrington argued that a poor “underclass,” trapped in central cities and rural areas, was hidden from the consciences of affluent Americans. A report of the Council of Economic Advisers in January 1964 estimated that 22 percent of the nation's population lived in poverty, lacking adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Johnson wanted to defeat this scourge in the wealthiest nation in the world.

In August 1964, Johnson persuaded Congress to pass the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), designed to attack poverty. The EOA comprised a number of agencies and programs, including (1) Head Start (a child-development program for disadvantaged preschoolers), (2) Volunteers in Service to America (or VISTA, to recruit volunteers for antipoverty programs), (3) work-training programs, (4) Job Corps (for inner-city youth), and more. Congress provided \$3 billion for these programs in 1965 and 1966.



George James/Krt/Newscom

>> Lyndon Johnson, the big Texan who assumed the presidency after Kennedy's assassination, was a master of political persuasion, often literally throwing his weight around in order to win votes. The technique was called "the Johnson Treatment."

## EDUCATION

The first "Great Society" measure, passed into law in April 1965, was the Elementary and Secondary School Act, which granted \$1.3 billion to be divided between individual school districts according to their number of students who lived in poverty; the money went to educational equipment, textbooks, and learning programs, and the goal was to uplift and provide for the nation's neediest. In October 1965, Congress enacted the Higher Education Act, creating new funding for college education and enhancing existing programs. The Educational Opportunity Act of 1968

granted young people from impoverished backgrounds new access to higher education, particularly through the Upward Bound program and various scholarships.

## HEALTH CARE

In the early 1960s, millions of elderly and poor Americans lacked adequate health care. Johnson insisted that the government remedy this situation. Congress responded by creating Medicare (1965), which provided medical insurance for the elderly, and Medicaid (1965), which helped finance medical treatment for the poor. To combat other deficiencies of the nation's health care system, Congress signed into law the Child Health and Improvement Act (1968), which provided prenatal and postnatal care for pregnant women and new mothers.

## SOCIAL WELFARE AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Johnson also undertook measures to address social welfare issues. He increased funding to programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (popularly called **welfare**), while also increasing public eligibility for such programs. Congress continued to raise the minimum wage and to extend it to workers in sectors such as retail, restaurants, hotels, and agriculture. Another \$1.1 billion went to economic programs in remote rural regions, in the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1966. A large

housing bill passed in 1965 to fund low- and middle-income housing. To direct federal housing policy, Congress approved the creation of a new cabinet position, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in 1966. Robert Weaver, the former president of the NAACP, was appointed the first head of HUD. Weaver was also the first African American member of any presidential cabinet.

**welfare** Umbrella term referring to many government assistance programs, especially Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Other Great Society acts similarly expanded the purview of the federal government in the areas of health, safety, and culture, including the Water and Air Quality Acts, the National Foundation of the Arts and Humanities, the Public Broadcasting Corporation (PBS), and several consumer safety standards.

## RACE AND IMMIGRATION

Johnson also bolstered his liberal credentials by appointing civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall to be solicitor general in 1965 and then, in 1967, to serve as the first African American Supreme Court justice. Johnson's commitment to civil rights also prompted him to call for a liberalization of immigration laws; in 1965 he signed the **Hart-Cellar Act**, curtailing the quota system of the 1920s and permitting larger numbers of non-Europeans to settle in the United States. The unintended consequence was a dramatic rise in the number of Asian and Latin American immigrants. Of all the laws passed in the 1960s, the Hart-Cellar Act was one of the most influential in changing the nature, and appearance, of American society.

## CONCLUSION

The Great Society undeniably expanded the power and reach of the federal government during the 1960s. It helped reduce poverty levels and created a vast social welfare system that has, more or less, lasted ever since. It was not without its failures, however. Public housing and racial segregation remained persistent problems, and many argue that the solutions proposed by Johnson's Great Society have made these problems worse, not better.

The pendulum, however, was about to swing the other way. Portended by Barry Goldwater's conservative 1964 candidacy for the presidency, and fueled in part by the perception that the federal government had grown too large, a conservative backlash was on the horizon. One issue that would spur this reaction along was the Vietnam War.

25-4

## JOHNSON'S VIETNAM

Johnson inherited the same Cold War problems that Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had faced. But over time, Vietnam was the Cold War flashpoint

**Hart-Cellar Act** Legislation passed in 1965 curtailing the quota system of the 1920s and permitting larger numbers of non-Europeans to settle in the United States

that flared most persistently. By 1964, U.S. troops stationed in South Vietnam had become mired in a complex civil war that would keep them there for nearly a decade. And how Johnson handled or mishandled the war would shadow the remainder of his presidency.

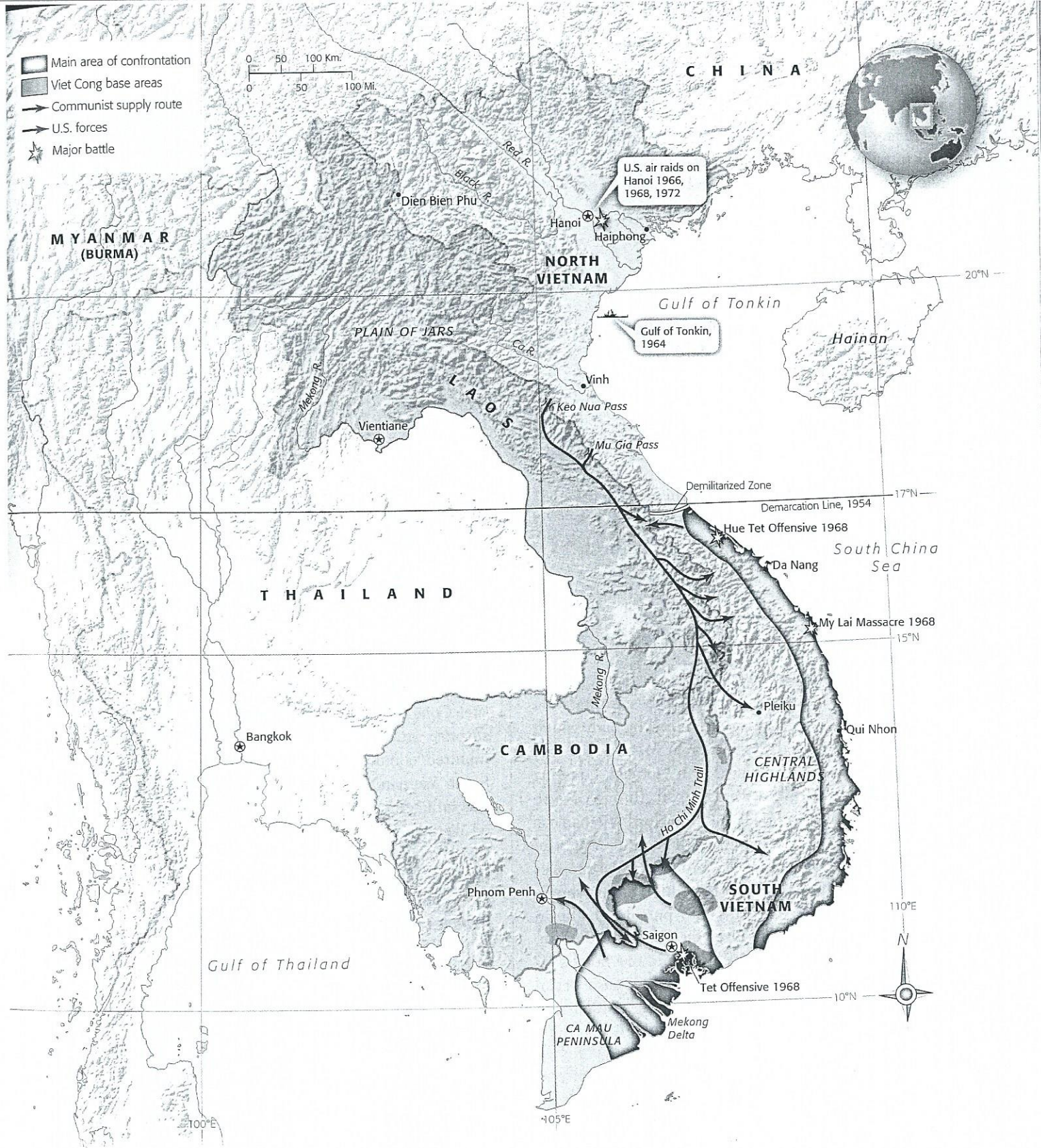
## 25-4a Initial Decisions

When Johnson took office in November 1963, he agonized over whether the United States should make a significant commitment to prevent South Vietnam from becoming a communist nation. He knew the United States might become embroiled in a lengthy war that would drain resources from his envisioned Great Society. But he also knew the United States had to retain credibility as a fighter of communism. Johnson's policy advisors were equally conflicted, offering a variety of recommendations about what to do, ranging from air strikes against the communist Viet Cong to complete withdrawal because victory seemed so unlikely. (Most, however, favored escalating the amount of American involvement in order to ensure communist defeat.) In the end, Johnson decided that fighting communism outweighed the risks involved. He sent more troops.

## TONKIN GULF INCIDENT

On August 2, 1964, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox*, a spy ship, was cruising in Vietnam's Tonkin Gulf to support South Vietnamese coastal raids on the north. The weather was poor, and in the fog, North Vietnamese patrol boats fired torpedoes at the *Maddox*. The *Maddox* destroyed the torpedoes and suffered no damage. The spy ship returned two days later to continue collecting intelligence. That night, sonar readings aboard the *Maddox* and a second U.S. ship, the *Turner Joy*, again indicated that North Vietnamese torpedoes were being launched at them. The U.S. warships opened fire and called for air support. This second "attack" proved unfounded—neither of the ships had been attacked. The indications that they were under fire were either the actions of an overeager sonar man or the deliberate misreading of information by those higher up the chain of command (see Map 25.2).

Despite the sketchy evidence of a second attack, President Johnson argued that this encounter was a blatant act of aggression by the North Vietnamese. By a vote of 416 to 0 in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate,



### Map 25.2 Vietnam

>> This map of Southeast Asia shows the contested terrain of North and South Vietnam, including some of the major battles and the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos and Cambodia, a central supply line for the North Vietnamese.

Congress passed the **Tonkin Gulf Resolution**, which allowed the president to “take all necessary measures to repel armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” This legislation supplied Johnson with what was called a “blank check” to increase U.S. support for South Vietnam.

### EXPANDING U.S. COMMITMENT

The blank check provided by Congress allowed Johnson to expand the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam and to attack the Viet Cong full force without technically declaring war. By March 1965, Johnson had authorized heavy bombing and a U.S. troop commitment of 80,000.

The U.S. military pursued a variety of war strategies, all of which were designed to crush the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces but cause minimum aggravation to China, which shared a border with Vietnam, and to the Soviet Union, which provided North Vietnam with military support. As in Korea and Cuba, Vietnam began as an attempt by the Cold War powers to attack each other through proxies—an attempt to stop a domino from falling.

### 25-4b Battle

The war was instead mostly a war of attrition, trying to inflict as much pain to the opposing forces as they were willing to take. Progress was determined by body count, not by territory gained. Beginning in March 1965, the United States began bombing North Vietnam, targeting the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, a winding path through North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that the North Vietnamese used to supply the Viet Cong in the south. American bombers never completely blocked the path; supplies kept coming. And indeed targeting these supply lines forced the United States into pursuing battle in countries beyond Vietnam. Over the course of the war, the United States would actually drop more bombs on Laos than on Vietnam. The United States also began **search-and-destroy operations**, during which the

**Tonkin Gulf Resolution** Legislation allowing the president to “take all necessary measures to repel armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression,” which was used to justify U.S. involvement in Vietnam

**Ho Chi Minh Trail** Winding path through North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia that the North Vietnamese used to supply the Viet Cong

**search-and-destroy operations** Strategy used during wartime in which the U.S. Army would locate enemy forces, retreat, and call in airpower

U.S. Army would locate enemy forces, retreat, and call in airpower. Because Johnson did not want to provoke the Soviet Union or China, he never called for a full-scale ground war. Critics complained that this “war from afar” was simply pointless meandering through the jungle.

### THE SOLDIERS

From the ground soldier’s perspective, it was a difficult war to fight. Vietnam lacked any discernible front line, so one might just as easily die from a Viet Cong explosive left in a city bar as on patrol in the jungle. U.S. soldiers seldom met their enemy face to face, experiencing battle instead through unexpected snipers, land mines, and booby traps. Because the Viet Cong recruited from all ages and sexes, any man, woman, or child could be the enemy. Army morale and discipline eroded over time, and, given the increased availability of illicit drugs in Vietnam, drug use among U.S. servicemen skyrocketed.

### THE TET OFFENSIVE

Despite these difficulties, by late 1967 many U.S. authorities repeatedly told Johnson that the Viet Cong were on the verge of defeat: South Vietnam would be safe from communism. But on January 30, 1968, during the celebration of the Lunar New Year of Tet, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army launched a surprise attack southward, occupying more than one hundred communities and military targets throughout South Vietnam. In the ensuing battle, terrible damage was inflicted on South Vietnamese cities, and hundreds of Vietnamese were killed. During the offensive, Viet Cong soldiers temporarily bombarded and even entered the U.S. embassy in Saigon, the ultimate symbol of U.S. power in the region. However, after six hours of fighting, all the insurgents were dead.

Although stunned by the boldness of the Tet Offensive, U.S. forces eventually drove the Viet Cong out of South Vietnamese cities, after which the U.S. declared victory. The Viet Cong would never fully recoup from the loss. But from a political perspective, the Tet Offensive constituted a major setback for Johnson, because the belief only deepened back home that the United States could never win the war, no matter how long it fought. Every time victory seemed near, the Viet Cong would stage a vigorous counterattack. The Tet Offensive demonstrated not only that the war in Vietnam was not nearly won, but also that the U.S. government was either unclear about American prospects for victory or deliberately deceiving the American public. Neither prospect was reassuring.



AFP/Getty Images

>> As the Vietnam War went on, criticism came from both domestic leaders and soldiers on the front. Here, American soldiers carry a wounded warrior through Vietnamese swamps in 1969.

## 25-4c Domestic Criticism

The Tet Offensive, dispiriting reports from the front, and reports from questioning journalists all prompted many Americans to criticize the war. The media initially had been generally supportive of the war effort, but as the army got bogged down, as the sunny reports from the administration were countered by gloomier reports from the front, the media became some of the war's harshest critics. Television coverage grew increasingly negative, and most reporters said the war could not be won on terms acceptable to the United States.

With domestic criticism of the war increasing and the U.S. government spending enormous amounts of money to manage the conflict, President Johnson reached his breaking point. On March 31, 1968, the president addressed the nation with a call for peace negotiations—which began in Paris later that year—and a dramatic reduction in bombing runs over North Vietnam. Johnson also astonishingly withdrew from the presidential campaign to punctuate his desire to conclude the war. He would not succeed, and American involvement in Vietnam would last until 1975. But Johnson's decision not to seek a second term as

president demonstrated the war's divisiveness in American life and Johnson's inability to repair that divide. By 1968, it was unclear if anyone could.

## 25-5 LIBERALISM ADRIFT

By the middle of the 1960s, significant changes had taken place in American life. The civil rights movement had questioned America's commitment to equality and brought the issue of social justice more forthrightly into public consideration. The Great Society had expanded the welfare state and redefined the role of government in American life. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War had provoked large-scale protests about what critics saw as a meaningless war. These protests swirled together, sometimes in concert, sometimes in conflict. The result was to make

the late 1960s and early 1970s a contentious time, one in which most forms of authority were brought under scrutiny.

### 25-5a Protests on Campus

Besides the civil rights movement, the first large-scale protests emerged from the college-aged youth of the 1950s.

#### THE NEW LEFT

Inspired by the civil rights movement, student activism began to spread across America's college campuses in the early 1960s. The seminal group on the left was **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)**, founded in 1959. SDS garnered public notice for declaring that young people were tired of older political movements, even older radical ones. The members of SDS formed the core of a self-conscious "New Left" movement, which

**Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** Organization founded in 1959 declaring that young people were tired of older political movements, even older radical ones; formed the core of a self-conscious "New Left" movement, which rejected the Old Left's ideologies of economic justice in favor of an ideology of social justice

rejected the Old Left's ideologies of economic justice in favor of an ideology of social justice.

The SDS manifesto was the "Port Huron Statement" of 1962. It argued that the American idealism bred by the Cold War had been contradicted by the reality of segregation and the threat of nuclear war. The statement advocated "participatory democracy," which meant reconnecting average Americans with their communities and with society at large. While vague as a plan of action, the Port Huron Statement's language signaled that tempers were flaring and that protests were coming from the youth on the left.

### FREE SPEECH MOVEMENT

SDS fostered an atmosphere of restlessness on college campuses, as students nationwide challenged the limits of expression. In fall 1964, the University of California at Berkeley enforced a ban on public protests and on the distribution of political reading materials in an effort to rein in student political activity. When a member of CORE, Jack Weinberg, was arrested for passing out political literature, graduate student Mario Savio led a spontaneous demonstration to protest. The demonstrators surrounded a police car and prevented the police from taking Weinberg to jail. The standoff between students and the police lasted thirty-two hours; police eventually arrested the protesters. Savio and others argued that colleges should be domains of free political discussion and not arenas where discussion was curtailed, even if it threatened to overturn the current social order.

News of the Berkeley event was reported nationally, and the Free Speech Movement, as it became known, spread to campuses such as Columbia, the University of Michigan, and Yale. Student activists across the country ultimately demanded further changes to academia, including student representation in university decisions and the modification of college curricula to include Black Studies, Chicano or Puerto Rican Studies, and Women's Studies programs. The university protests smoothly transformed into political rallies in support of the civil rights movement and in opposition to the Vietnam War, the two movements that sparked the most protest and outrage in the 1960s. But because of the questioning nature of many college students, the radicalism of their protests often was difficult to gauge or limit, especially when they confronted the Vietnam War and the

escalation of the draft, which enrolled college-aged men with increasing intensity in the latter 1960s. In practice, going to college was an allowed deferment from the draft, and thus it was typically working-class and minorities—those with disproportionate numbers enrolled in higher education—who often went to war. Nevertheless, college students' awareness of their precarious situation amplified their rebelliousness.

### 25-5b Black Power, Chicano Power

At about the same time—the middle years of the 1960s—a new militancy was brewing in the African American community.

### MALCOLM X AND THE NATION OF ISLAM

As the civil rights movement fought its major battles in the South during the early 1960s, a new Black Nationalist movement was rising in the North. The **Nation of Islam** and its charismatic spokesman, Malcolm X, attained prominence for criticizing the timidity of mainstream civil rights protesters. The Nation of Islam's leaders rejected the integrationist perspective of these leaders, calling instead for an independent black nation-state. They demanded that black Americans patronize only black-owned stores. They declared that nonviolence was fruitless. As some white people ratcheted up their rejection of the civil rights movement, the Nation of Islam seemed for many black people to be a more realistic solution than nonviolent resistance.

### URBAN RIOTS, SNCC, AND BLACK POWER

Despite the political gains of the 1960s for African Americans, Black Nationalist militancy continued to gather strength, mainly because social and economic discrimination persisted. Beginning in the summer of 1965, following riots in the Watts section of Los Angeles, urban unrest became endemic to many northern black communities. The Watts riot exploded when a seemingly routine traffic stop erupted into violence. The riot lasted six days and left thirty-four dead and more than one thousand injured. Persistent racism was certainly one cause of the riots, but so was the civil rights movement's strategic decision not to address urban poverty outside the South.

SNCC hoped to tap into the urban rage by establishing chapters in the North and developing programs to channel energy into constructive activities. Yet the increasing anger soon changed SNCC itself. In 1966, after being attacked by police during a peaceful march in Mississippi, SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael rallied a crowd by calling for "black power," and the crowd began chanting the phrase. White people were

**Nation of Islam** Black Nationalist organization whose leaders rejected the integrationist perspective of mainstream civil rights protesters, calling instead for an independent black nation-state

soon purged from SNCC and instructed to go fight racism in white communities. This development alarmed many of both races: Roy Wilkins, the head of the NAACP, called it “a reverse Ku Klux Klan.”

By the late 1960s, **Black Power** emerged as a movement bridging the gap between Black Nationalism and the civil rights struggle. Leaders in the Black Power movement argued that black people should have control over the social, educational, and religious institutions in their communities. Black Power advocated black pride at a time when blackness was stigmatized.

### BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Perhaps no Black Power organization captured the attention of America more than the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California. The Black Panthers believed that providing goods and services to the most downtrodden people of the black community would be essential to a black revolution, and they developed free clothing and medical programs, as well as a free breakfast program that fed thousands of poor children each week. They also began patrolling the streets in armed groups in an attempt to end police brutality.

### WHITE REACTION

The racial violence of these years, as well as the angry separatism of Black Power leaders, prompted many white Americans to fear and condemn the Black Power movement, and the civil rights movement in general. Referred to as the “white backlash,” this sentiment gave a wider audience to conservative political leaders, such as Richard Nixon, who emphasized the restoration of “law and order” in the nation’s cities. Angry white Americans began efforts to reclaim their past “outsider” ethnicities, prompting an ethnic revival that lasted into the 1970s. They also asserted that, with the civil rights laws, the country had already done all that it needed to do to dismantle the legal apparatus of segregation.

Perhaps the most significant white reaction to the successes of the civil rights movement and its

**Black Power** Movement bridging the gap between Black Nationalism and the civil rights struggle; its leaders argued that black people should have control over the social, educational, and religious institutions in their communities and advocated black pride



>> A dramatic and emphatic speaker, Malcolm X (shown here in 1964) sought a form of black nationalism, promoting a vision of America starkly different than that of the more integration-minded Martin Luther King, Jr.

persistent and increasingly aggressive demands was the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968. King had flown to Memphis to lead the city's African American sanitation workers in a strike protesting their pay and work conditions, both of which were worse than white workers who performed the same work. While on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, King was shot by James Earl Ray, an escaped convict from the Missouri State Penitentiary and a professed segregationist. Ray fled the country only to be found in London two months later and eventually sentenced to 99 years in prison (he plead guilty so he wouldn't be eligible for the death penalty). More immediately, however, angry riots flared in more than 100 cities across the country.

### THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

Following in the wake of the Black Power movement came several other movements to earn respect for their particular group. Hispanics powered one influential movement. Throughout the 1960s, most Mexican Americans were farm laborers in California and the Southwest. Many lived in dire poverty and faced discrimination. Between 1965 and 1970, labor leaders César Chávez and Dolores Huerta organized many farm laborers in a series of strikes. Their initial targets were grape growers, who were known for treating their employees badly. Chávez and Huerta drew national attention when they called for a national boycott of grapes. In the highly charged atmosphere of the decade's social activism, the boycott was successful, and Chávez and Huerta won their demands for higher wages and better living conditions.

Maintaining their successes would be difficult, though, and throughout the early 1970s, Chavez and Huerta fought not only for further advances but also even to retain the ones they had already achieved. Nevertheless, their movement awoke a sense of solidarity among many Hispanics, who would follow the lead of African Americans already struggling against the persistent prejudices they encountered in 1960s America.

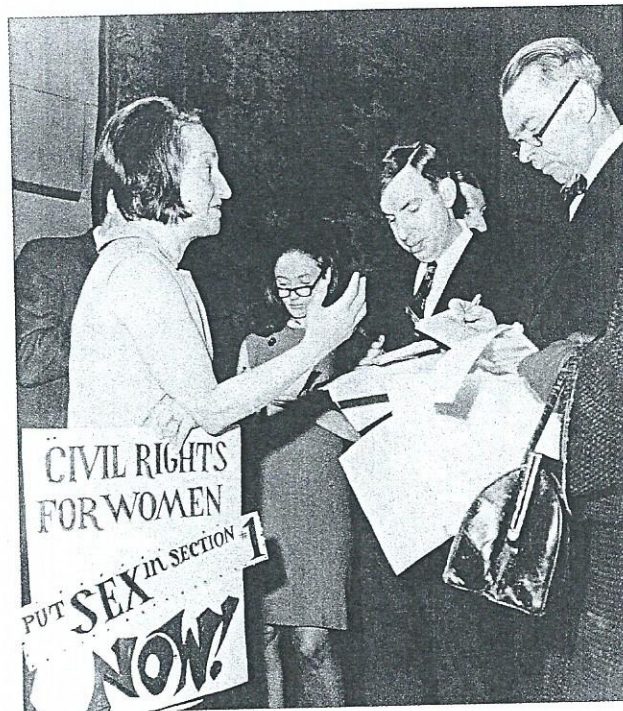
### 25-5c The Women's Movement

As before, a movement to increase the voice of women in American life grew alongside activism for African Americans. The inception of the revived women's movement is usually identified as Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan described "the problem that has no name," which she defined as the pervasive dissatisfaction of middle- and upper-class women who had confined their lives to raising children and keeping a home. Friedan's book sparked a long consideration of

the social norms that defined a woman's role in American society.

In addition to the critique of middle-class gender roles, Friedan and a group of politically engaged women had grown frustrated by the federal government's refusal to enforce a provision in the Civil Rights Act that outlawed discrimination against women. To fight against this, these women created an organization modeled on the NAACP that would fight for equality for women. In 1966, they created the National Organization for Women (NOW), a still-potent organization fighting for women's rights.

A second strand of the women's movement emerged more directly from the civil rights and student movements. These women were less interested in pursuing fulfilling jobs and in critiquing middle-class domesticity. Instead, they sought a broader cultural change to the way in which women were valued and viewed in society. They rejected the gendered aspects of standard social norms, more pointedly discussed the



Everett Collection/Newscom

>>Betty Friedan, pictured here, sparked to life the women's movement with her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. The book discussed society's expectations for middle-class women, and how it limited their capacities to achieve. Friedan followed up the book by starting in 1966 the National Organization for Women (NOW).

deeply entrenched social oppression faced by American women, and sought to revolutionize things such as the conception of female beauty and the legitimacy of marriage. Many members of this second strand were racial minorities, many of whom were already in the workplace and did not desire to fight for access to the workplace. Sometimes called radical feminists, what they sought to challenge instead was woman's assumed status as second-class citizens in American culture and life.

## 25-5d The Vietnam War at Home

In the late 1960s, all of these contentious issues—the frustration of youth searching for a more authentic status quo, the rise of Black Power, women seeking to change American society's perceptions of gender roles—fused together with protests against the war in Vietnam to create a swirling, acrimonious time filled with change, hope, and frustration. From 1965 to 1970, opposition to the war increased in proportion to the American military commitment and the increased implementation of the military draft that had begun in 1965. By 1968 there were more than half a million American troops in Vietnam. Opposition grew from a small-scale protest movement in the middle 1960s to a mainstream force by 1967 and 1968. By the early 1970s, it had had a major impact on American society.

### TEACH-INS

Opposition to the war crystallized on college campuses. There, the Free Speech Movement had politicized students, who were also of draft age (although, as students, they could defer). In March 1965, faculty and students at the University of Michigan held special night lectures and classes to speak out against the war. Such “teach-ins” spread to other universities in the following months.

### ESCALATING ANTIWAR PROTEST

In 1967, protests calling for an end to the war dramatically increased, and the antiwar movement became a mainstream phenomenon, as a number of leading politicians grew critical of the war. In 1966, Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, the powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, openly criticized the war. In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., publicly



Bill Eppridge/Ine & Life Pictures/Getty Images

>> The counterculture, shown here at the Woodstock Music Festival in 1969, tried to ignore social and cultural norms, proposing instead a new moral foundation for American life.

criticized the war too. Many other religious leaders joined King in protesting what seemed to be an unjust war.

These streams of dissent converged by mid-1967 in massive protests. Campuses grew increasingly restive. In October 1967, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (the MOBE) led a march of more than 100,000 people from the Mall in Washington, D.C., to the Pentagon. In addition, throughout the conflict more than half a million men committed draft violations, sometimes burning their draft cards. Thousands moved to other countries, primarily Canada and Mexico, to avoid the conflict.

### COUNTERCULTURE

The radical antiwar protesters' attacks implied broader challenges to American culture. As a result, 1966 and 1967 saw the dramatic growth of a **counterculture** of young people consciously rejecting traditional politics, social values, and corporate consumerism. Counterculture adherents, sometimes called **hippies**, who rejected attempts to change American society and chose instead to “check out” of society, formed

**counterculture** Social movement of the sixties that consciously rejected traditional politics, social values, and corporate consumerism

**hippies** Counterculture adherents who embraced new attitudes toward drugs, sex, popular culture, and politics

communities throughout the United States, most famously in the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco. Some formed communes, relying less on consumerism and more on sharing their possessions and responsibilities. Members of the counterculture often demonstrated their change in lifestyle by embracing new attitudes toward drugs, sex, popular culture, and politics.

Drugs and popular music often came together in the counterculture to reflect the political currents at large. Bob Dylan and other folk singers wrote songs about civil rights and social justice and spoke out against the Vietnam War. The Beatles, the most popular musical group of the decade, transitioned from singing about paltry childhood romances in the early 1960s to singing about revolution and drugs by the end of the decade. This musical output culminated in the Woodstock Music Festival, held in the summer of 1969 in upstate New York. Woodstock attracted 400,000 people to celebrate “peace, love, and freedom,” symbolizing the ability of popular culture to be explicitly political and successfully promote an agenda of social justice.

## 25-5e Social Divisions and Popular Unrest

### THE ANTI-ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

A considerable number of Americans were shocked by the antiwar protests and by the rise of the counterculture, which seemed to solidify by 1967. Although one poll in 1967 showed that 46 percent of the public thought the war was a “mistake,” most Americans believed that the United States should attempt to win now that it was involved. As the antiwar movement spread, it provoked anger from conservatives, who saw protests against the war as treasonous. In 1970, construction workers (known as “hard hats”) violently attacked antiwar demonstrators in New York City. The hard hats viewed their attacks as their patriotic duty against treasonous kids. It was true, however, that many of the war’s protesters were students who had deferrals from the military, while most of the soldiers were from working-class families who did not have the money to go to college and thus had no way of avoiding the draft.

### 1968

In 1968, such tensions began to split the Democratic Party, which had succeeded in the past as a coalition of union workers, Southern segregationists, and racial and religious minorities. In the aftermath of the Tet Offensive of January, an increasing number of Americans came to believe that the war could not be won. In March, President

Johnson suffered a humiliating near-defeat in the New Hampshire Democratic primary against peace candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy. Johnson subsequently withdrew from the race and backed his vice president, Hubert Humphrey. Robert Kennedy, the brother of John F. Kennedy and also a peace candidate, entered the race and attracted substantial public support. But, like his brother, he too was shockingly killed by an assassin. With strong support among “establishment” Democrats, Humphrey won the party nomination, committing the Democrats to a continuation of Johnson’s Vietnam policies.

Before he won the nomination, though, members of the New Left organized a protest against the war in August 1968 at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. While Humphrey supporters defeated antiwar planks to the party platform inside the convention, between 10,000 and 15,000 demonstrators protested outside. Chicago police and the protesters had been battling throughout the convention, but on the third night, a near riot broke out, and hundreds were injured as police

“There’s Money Enough To Support Both Of You —  
Now, Doesn’t That Make You Feel Better?”



---from The Herblock Gallery (Simon & Schuster, 1968)

A 1967 Herblock Cartoon, copyright © by The Herb Block Foundation

>> LBJ’s dreams of using the federal government to create a Great Society bottomed out as the cost of the Vietnam War soared.



>> When Nixon reneged on his promise to wind down the Vietnam War, protests erupted on college campuses across the United States. Pictured here, tear gas disperses a crowd on Kent State University Commons. Shortly afterward, National Guardsmen fired 67 rounds in 13 seconds into a crowd of 500 anti-war protesters, killing four students.

attacked demonstrators and passersby who were caught in the melee. Some protesters responded violently. Police then waded into the crowd to beat the protesters who refused to follow their orders to disband. The violence, which played out on national television, was later described as a “police riot” in an official inquiry. Many people were appalled by the level of violence used against the demonstrators. Others viewed the police action as appropriate against the actions of the defiant youth. Nevertheless, the violence and abuse symbolized the loss of control many of America’s established organizations once possessed.

With the entire political system seeming to be teetering, some members of the New Left became even more militant. By 1969, SDS had dissolved because its members could not agree on tactics. One of SDS’s offshoots, the “Weathermen” (or the “Weather Underground”), committed bombings and arson on various college campuses where technical aid for the Vietnam War was being developed. In 1970, three members of the Weather Underground died when a bomb they were preparing exploded in a Greenwich Village brownstone in New York. In the following years, much of the New Left movement dissipated as its former organizations collapsed while debating the issue of violence in political protest. The New Left was becoming more violent,

and as such, it was becoming a polemical voice in American politics, rather than the unifying one it had hoped to become in the early 1960s.

## NIXON

Amid the turbulence, the Republican presidential nominee Richard Nixon argued for a restoration of “law and order” and “traditional values.” He claimed there was a “silent majority” of Americans who still supported the Vietnam War and who hadn’t joined the counterculture. Nixon also vaguely promised to end the war in Vietnam by achieving “peace with honor.” Paralleling the New Left’s SDS, the 1960s also witnessed the creation of the **Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)**, a student movement fashioned to advocate conservatism. At the same time, as challenges arose from African Americans, Hispanics, and women, a growing coalition of conservatives became increasingly eager to defend conservative values and retain some aspects of the traditional social order. The fall election featured three pro-war candidates (Nixon, Humphrey, and segregationist George Wallace, a Democrat who rejected the Democrats’ civil rights plank) and ended in a Nixon victory.

## 25-5f Nixon and Vietnam

After Richard Nixon took office in 1969, he began to withdraw American troops from Vietnam. This decreased the strength of antiwar protests. Nixon’s solution (known as **Vietnamization**) attempted to replace U.S. troops with South Vietnamese forces and keep Vietnam from falling to the communists. While Vietnamization proceeded, Nixon continued bombing raids on Vietnam’s neighbors, Cambodia and Laos, in an attempt to destroy communist posts. And in April 1970, American forces invaded Cambodia to wipe out North Vietnamese staging areas. Nixon was trying to have it both ways: remain in the war, yet look as if he was pulling out.

**Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)** A conservative student organization begun in 1960 and paralleling the left’s SDS. Always larger than SDS, YAF advocated conservative principles including free markets and a smaller government

**Vietnamization** Nixon’s plan to reduce American troops in Vietnam by encouraging South Vietnamese troops to take more responsibility for fighting

## The Reasons Why...

There are several reasons why the Vietnam War was so divisive in the United States:

**A questionable rationale.** After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, many Americans were skeptical about the very rationale of the Cold War. Was communism really a threat to American well-being? Was fighting the Cold War worth potentially destroying all of humankind? Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* made exactly this critique. Thus, while most Americans initially approved of American involvement in Vietnam (especially after the articulation of the Domino Theory and the Gulf of Tonkin incident), many Americans by the mid-1960s did not think fighting the Cold War was worth the potential costs. Plus, many Americans realized that the Vietnamese people simply wanted independence after centuries of colonial rule. Antiwar protests based on these critiques began in 1964 and gathered strength when President Johnson committed ground troops in 1965, which greatly increased the number of men drafted. At the same time, and despite the protests, many Americans still firmly believed the United States had to fight communism wherever it might be budding. To the war's supporters, the protesters seemed to be cowards unwilling to fight a dangerous enemy. From the beginning, it was a contentious war.

**Class conflicts.** These divisions developed class distinctions throughout the 1960s. The initial protests against the Vietnam War swirled together with the other protests of the era, particularly the civil rights movement and the student protests. These other movements were, at root, questioning the United States' commitment to extending liberty to all and, indeed, its very integrity as a nation. To those fighting the war, or to their families, this seemed unpatriotic or even treasonous. Furthermore, most of the initial protesters were university students with student deferrals from the draft, while many working-class young men did not have access to such

deferrals. Thus, many of those protesting the war did so in front of parents whose children were fighting in it.

**Economic costs.** These arguments took a political turn when it became evident that the financial cost of the war was infringing on the benefits proposed by Johnson's Great Society. In the end, the war cost \$140 billion. To those who felt their tax dollars were better spent on improving education, eliminating poverty, and other social services, the Vietnam War seemed like a misappropriation of funds. For those who felt that fighting communism was the most important issue of the day, this money was well spent.

**Government deceit.** From these roots, the antiwar movement picked up steam once it became clear, well before the end of the conflict, that the federal government had deliberately deceived the American population about what was happening in Vietnam. This deception was confirmed with the 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers, a secret history of the Vietnam War leaked to the *New York Times*. The study revealed that four presidents, from Truman to Johnson, had deceived Americans about American involvement in Southeast Asia; that the conflict would have been avoided had the United States honored the 1954 Geneva Convention, which mandated democratic elections in Vietnam; that Nixon had ordered carpet-bombing of large swaths of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; and that the most important reason the federal government maintained troops in Vietnam was to avoid a humiliating defeat, not to improve the lives of the South Vietnamese or win a strategic battle in the Cold War. War protesters argued that the leaders of a democratic nation should not deliberately lie to their constituents in order to wage war. Many of the war's supporters argued that it was acceptable for the federal government to maintain secrets in the name of national defense.

**Anger.** These divisive reasons created anger and resentment on both sides. Some Americans spit on and harassed returning American soldiers, even though many of these veterans were simply eighteen-year-old kids who had been drafted into the army. Others declared that all protesters were spineless weaklings. These kinds of actions further polarized the sides, and the nation as well.

The invasion of Cambodia reinvigorated antiwar protests, which erupted on a massive scale in 1970. The protests shut down more than four hundred college campuses, and more than 100,000 demonstrators converged on Washington, D.C., surrounding the White House.

On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed four Kent State University students during antiwar demonstrations on campus. Days later, police killed two more students at Jackson State University in Mississippi during demonstrations. In both episodes,

the use of deadly force by government troops against unarmed protesters shocked the country.

### VIETNAM AS A MISTAKE

The campus unrest eventually dissipated, and protests declined in 1970 and 1971. Nixon was, after all, also actively reducing the American troop presence in Vietnam from its 1969 peak of 540,000 to only 60,000 in 1972. But the widespread conviction that Vietnam had been a mistake deepened in American society and originated a trend of public suspicion of and cynicism about its political leaders. News of American troops' abuses of Vietnamese civilians shocked the public, too, most notably after reports surfaced in 1970 of a massacre of more than three hundred women, children, and old men in the village of My Lai. The June 1971 publication of a secret Defense Department study known as the **Pentagon Papers** was another disillusionment. It revealed that the government had lied to the American public over major events in the Vietnam War in an attempt to manipulate public opinion. More basically, many Americans questioned whether the threat of communism existing in Southeast Asia was really a threat worth spilling American blood for. This was just one of the reasons why the Vietnam War was so divisive in American society in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For more, see "The Reasons Why . . ." box on the next page.

### >LOOKING AHEAD...

In January 1973, the United States signed a treaty with North Vietnam to end the war, and by March 1975, the United States removed its final troops and support staff, including many Vietnamese who had aided their effort. Shortly after the U.S. departed, the Viet Cong unified Vietnam under communist control. Yet the announcement did little to heal the wounds raised by years of internal argument over the war's merits. The war had led to the death of more than 58,000 American soldiers and some 3 million Vietnamese. But it also exposed deep rifts in American society. Perhaps the second tragedy of Vietnam, beyond the death toll, was that it drained resources from programs that attempted to rectify social wrongs, such as poverty, hunger, and unequal education. It was the Vietnam War as much as anything else that derailed Johnson's Great Society.

The Vietnam War also provoked a shift in American culture, both to the left, in the form of expanded women's rights and multicultural education, and to

the right, in prompting a resurgence of social conservatism in the political sphere and a white ethnic revival that often scorned the advances African Americans had won. It is to these transitions that we will turn next.

**Pentagon Papers** Secret Defense Department study, published in 1971, that revealed that the government had lied and purposely deceived the American public over major events in the Vietnam War in an attempt to manipulate public opinion

## STUDY TOOLS 25

### READY TO STUDY? IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN:

- Rip out the Chapter Review Card, which includes key terms and chapter summaries.

### ONLINE AT [WWW.CENGAGEBRAIN.COM](http://WWW.CENGAGEBRAIN.COM), YOU CAN:

- Collect StudyBits while you read and study the chapter.
- Quiz yourself on key concepts.
- Find videos for further exploration.
- Prepare for tests with HIST5 Flash Cards as well as those you create.
- Read the Port Huron Statement.
- Explore documents related to the Bay of Pigs invasion.
- Read oral histories and see pictures from the Freedom Riders' campaign.
- Hear Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.
- Hear Fannie Lou Hamer's address to the rules committee of the DNC.
- Read an oral history from Estell Harvey, who experienced Freedom Summer firsthand.
- Hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. discuss Vietnam.
- Hear LBJ's "We Shall Overcome" speech.
- Read a speech given by César Chávez during one of his protests.
- Hear Malcolm X speak on Black Nationalist demands.
- Read an account of the Tet Offensive.
- Read a denunciation of antiwar protesters by Vice President Spiro Agnew.