

administered according to federal guidelines. The Legal Services Program, staffed by attorneys, helped millions of poor people in legal battles with housing authorities, welfare departments, police, and slumlords. Head Start and Follow Through reached more than 2 million poor children and significantly improved the long-range educational achievement of participants. Comprehensive Community Health Centers provided basic medical services to patients who could not afford to see doctors. Upward Bound helped low-income teenagers develop the skills and confidence needed for college. Birth control programs dispensed contraceptive supplies and information to hundreds of thousands of poor women (see Figure 29.3).

But the root cause of poverty lay in the unequal distribution of power as well as of income. The Johnson administration never committed itself to reallocating income or wealth. Spending on social welfare jumped from 7.7 percent of the GNP in 1960 to 16 percent in 1974. But roughly three-quarters of social welfare payments went to the nonpoor. The largest sums went to Medicare, established by Congress in 1965 to provide basic health care for the aged, and to expanded Social Security payments and unemployment compensation.

The Great Society became a forgotten dream. "More than five years after the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act," a 1970 study concluded, "the war on poverty has barely scratched the surface. Most poor people have had no contact with it, except perhaps to hear the

promises of a better life to come." Having made the largest commitment to federal spending on social welfare since the New Deal, Johnson could take pride in the number of programs passed by Congress. At the same time, he had raised expectations higher than could be reached without a more drastic redistribution of economic and political power. Even in the short run, the president could not sustain the welfare programs and simultaneously fight a lengthy and expensive war abroad.

Crisis in the Cities

With funds for new construction limited during the Great Depression and World War II, and the postwar building boom taking place in the suburbs, the housing stock in the nation's cities declined. The Federal Housing Administration encouraged this trend by redlining poor urban neighborhoods (see Chapter 27). Slumlords took advantage of this situation, collecting high rents while allowing their properties to deteriorate. City officials meanwhile spearheaded civic revitalization programs that more often than not sliced up poor neighborhoods with new super highways, demolished them to build new office complexes, or, as in Chicago's Uptown, favored residential developments for the middle class rather than for the poor. In 1968, a federal survey showed that 80 percent of those displaced under these programs—dubbed "Negro removal" by former residents—were people of color.

Employment opportunities declined along with the housing stock. Nationwide, military spending for the Vietnam War brought the unemployment rate down from 6 percent, where it was in 1960, to 4 percent in 1966, where it remained until the end of the decade. Black unemployment, however, was nearly twice that of white unemployment. Moreover, the proportion working in the low-paying service sector continued to rise. In short, African Americans were steadily falling further behind whites.

Despite deteriorating conditions, millions of Americans continued to move to the cities, mainly African Americans from the Deep South, white people from the Appalachian Mountains, and Latinos from Puerto Rico. By the mid-1960s, African Americans had become near majorities in the nation's decaying inner cities. Many had fled rural poverty only to find themselves earning minimum wages at best and living in miserable, racially segregated neighborhoods. These conditions brought urban pressures to the boiling point.

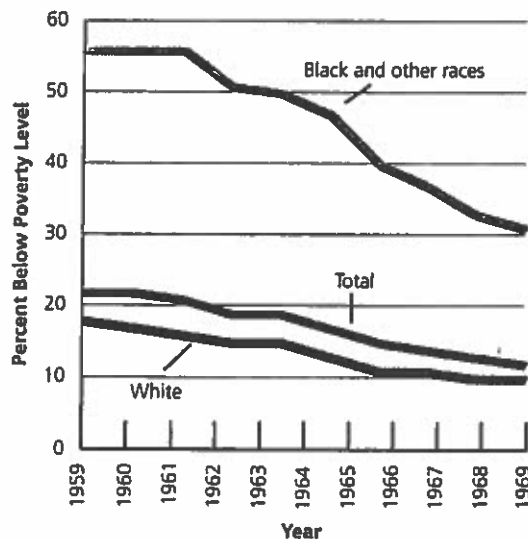


FIGURE 29.3 Percent of Population Below Poverty Level, by Race, 1959–69

NOTE: The poverty threshold for a nonfarm family of four was \$3,743 in 1969 and \$2,973 in 1959.

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Urban Uprisings

Just as the Vietnam War was heating up, more than 100 urban uprisings rocked the nation during the "long, hot summers" of 1964 to 1968. Unlike the race riots of the 1920s and 1940s, when angry whites assaulted blacks, masses of African Americans now took revenge for the

OVERVIEW The Great Society

Major Legislation

Civil Rights	Civil Rights Act of 1964, forbidding segregation in public accommodations and banning job discrimination Voting Rights Act of 1965, ensuring minority voter registration in places where patterns of past discrimination existed Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965, abolishing national-origin quotas in immigration law Civil Rights Act of 1968, banning discrimination in housing and extending constitutional protections to Native Americans on reservations
The War on Poverty	Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, establishing the Office of Economic Opportunity to oversee such community-based antipoverty programs as the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, VISTA, the Model Cities Program, Upward Bound, the Community Action Program, and Project Head Start
Education	Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, providing federal funds for programs to schools in low-income areas Bilingual Education Act of 1968, providing federal aid to school districts with large numbers of children needing to learn English as a second language
Health	Social Security Act of 1965, funding Medicare to help cover costs of health care for older Americans and Medicaid to provide funds for medical care of welfare recipients
Culture	National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, creating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, chartering the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which later established the Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR)
Transportation	Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, funding large-scale urban public and private rail projects National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, laying the foundation for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to effect policy to reduce traffic injuries and fatalities Highway Safety Act of 1966, permitting the federal government to set standards for motor vehicles and highways Department of Transportation, established in 1966
Consumer Protection	Nine major enactments between 1965 and 1968, covering such areas as cigarette warning labels, motor safety, "fair packaging and labeling," child safety and flammable fabrics, meat and poultry packaging, "truth in lending," and radiation safety
Environment	Nine major enactments between 1964 and 1968, covering such areas as wilderness and endangered species protection, land and water conservation, solid waste disposal, air pollution, aircraft noise abatement, and historic preservation National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, consolidating many of these gains, was passed in the first year of the Nixon administration

white domination of their communities and specifically for police abuse (see Map 29.1).

The first major uprising erupted in August 1965 in the Watts section of Los Angeles. There, one in three men was unemployed, and the nearest hospital was twelve miles away. It took only a minor arrest to set off

the uprising, which quickly spread outward for fifty miles. Throwing rocks and bottles through store windows, participants reportedly shouted, "This is for Selma! This is for Birmingham!" and "Burn, baby, burn!" Nearly 50,000 people turned out, and 20,000 National Guard troops were sent in. After six days, 34 people lay

1968: Year of Turmoil

The urban uprisings of the summer of 1967 marked the most drawn-out violence in the United States since the Civil War. Rather than offering a respite, however, 1968 proved to be even more turbulent. The bloodiest and most destructive fighting of the Vietnam War resulted in a hopeless stalemate that soured most Americans on the conflict and undermined their faith in U.S. invincibility in world affairs. Disillusionment deepened in the spring when two of the most revered political leaders were struck down by assassins' bullets. Once again, protesters and police clashed on the nation's campuses and city streets, and millions of Americans asked what was wrong with their country.

It was not just the United States that experienced 1968 as a year of turmoil. In May, hundreds of thousands of students and workers barricaded the streets of Paris in protest against their government. A sweeping series of liberal reforms in Czechoslovakia, known as the "Prague Spring," was followed in August by a massive invasion staged by Eastern-bloc countries. In October, an estimated 300 people were killed in the Tlatelolco section of Mexico City when government forces, using tanks and armored cars, broke up a student-led demonstration. And in China, Mao Zedong was deep into the "Cultural Revolution," a campaign to strengthen the Communist government against liberal reforms.

The Tet Offensive

On January 30, 1968, the North Vietnamese and their Vietcong allies launched the Tet Offensive (named for the Vietnamese lunar New Year holiday), stunning the U.S. military command in South Vietnam. The Vietcong pushed into the major cities and provincial capitals of the South, as far as the courtyard of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. U.S. troops ultimately halted the offensive, with comparatively modest casualties of 1,100 dead and 8,000 wounded. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong suffered more than 40,000 deaths, about one-fifth of their total forces. Civilian casualties ran to the tens of thousands. As many as 1 million South Vietnamese became refugees, their villages totally ruined (see Map 29.2).

The Tet Offensive, despite the U.S. success in stopping it, weakened the resolve of many Americans. News coverage—including scenes of U.S. personnel shooting from the embassy windows in Saigon—dismayed the nation. Television viewers saw the beautiful, ancient city of Hue devastated almost beyond recognition and heard a U.S. officer casually remark about a village in the Mekong Delta, "We had to destroy it, in order to save it."

The United States chalked up a major military victory, but lost the war at home. For the first time, polls showed strong opposition to the war, 49 percent concluding that the entire operation in Vietnam was a mistake. Meanwhile, in Rome, Berlin, Paris, and London, huge crowds protested U.S. involvement in Vietnam. President

Johnson, facing the 1968 election campaign, watched his popularity plummet to an all-time low.

On March 31, the haggard-looking president appeared on television to declare a pullback in bombing over North Vietnam and the readiness of the United States to enter into comprehensive peace talks with Hanoi. He then shocked the nation: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as president." Like Truman almost thirty years earlier, and despite his determination not to repeat that bit of history, Johnson had lost his presidency in Asia.

King, the War, and the Assassination

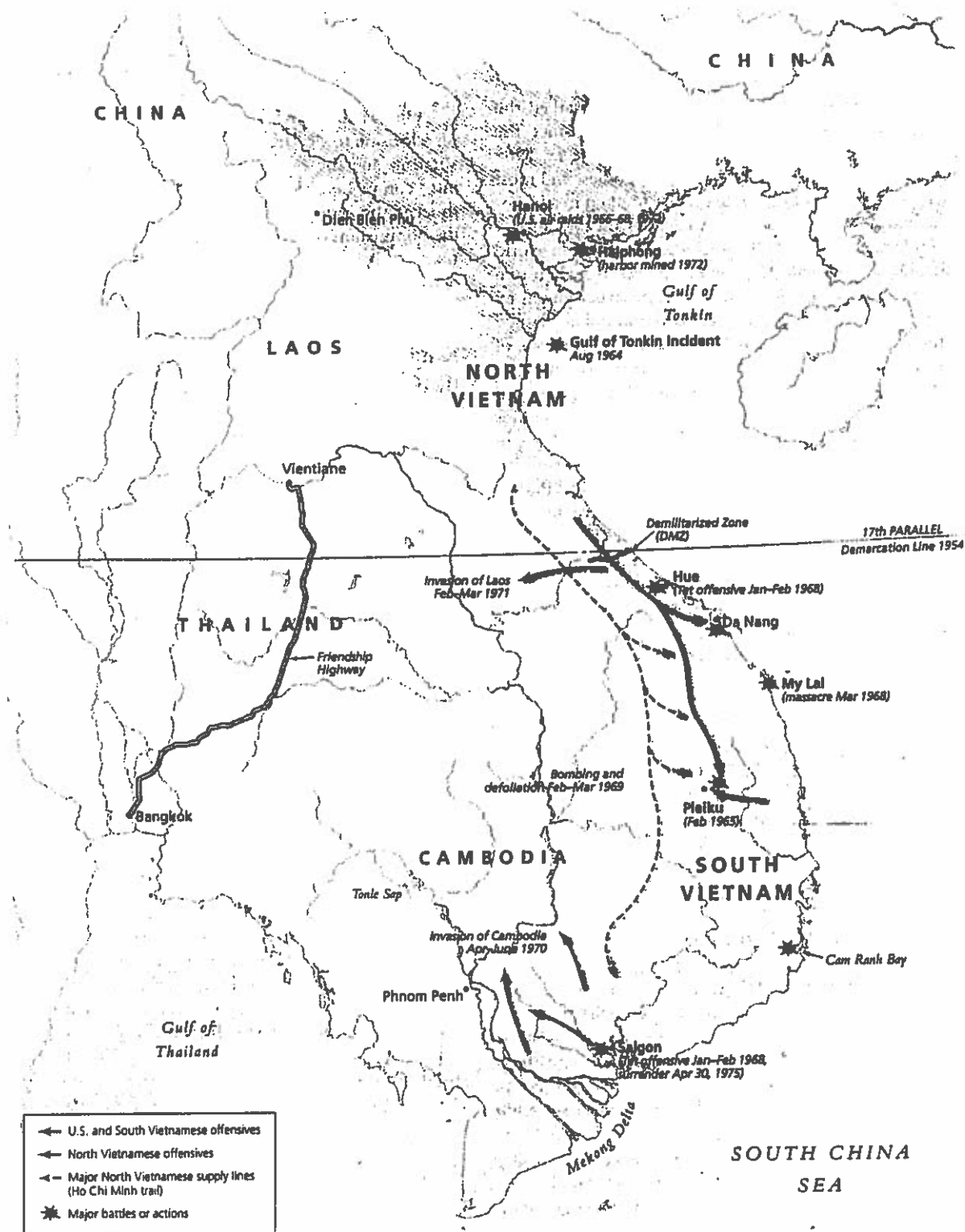
By 1968, the civil rights leadership stood firmly against the war, and Martin Luther King Jr. had reached a turning point in his life. The FBI had been harassing King, tapping his telephones and spreading malicious rumors about him. Despite these threats (Bureau Chief J. Edgar Hoover had sworn to "destroy the burrhead"), King abandoned his customary caution in criticizing U.S. policy in Vietnam. As early as 1965, he had connected domestic unrest with the war abroad, calling the U.S. government the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." He became yet more outspoken in his opposition to the war, even if it meant losing the support of those liberal Democrats loyal to Johnson. King refused to compromise.

In the spring of 1968, King chose Memphis, Tennessee, home of striking sanitation workers, to launch a Poor People's Campaign for peace and justice. There he delivered, in what was to be his final speech, a message of hope. "I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality," King told the crowd. "With this faith, I will go out and carve a tunnel of hope from a mountain of despair." The next evening, April 4, 1968, as he stood on the balcony of his motel, King was shot and killed.

Throughout the world, crowds turned out to mourn King's death. Former SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael stormed, "When white America killed Dr. King, she declared war on us." Riots broke out in more than a hundred cities, on college campuses, and on military bases in Vietnam. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley ordered his police to shoot to kill. In Washington, DC, U.S. Army units set up machine guns outside the Capitol and the White House. King's dream of the nation as a "Beloved Community" died with him.

The Democrats in Disarray

The dramatic events of the first part of the year had a direct impact on the presidential campaign. For those liberals dissatisfied with Johnson's conduct of the war, and especially for African Americans suffering the loss of their greatest leader, Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York emerged as the candidate of choice. Kennedy enjoyed a strong record on civil rights, and, like King, he had begun to interpret the war as a mirror of injustice at



MAP 29.2 The Southeast Asian War The Indo-Chinese subcontinent, home to long-standing regional conflict, became the center of a prolonged war with the United States.

home. On these notes, he began to campaign for the Democratic nomination.

Ironically, Kennedy faced an opponent who agreed with him, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota. The race for the Democratic nomination positioned McCarthy, the witty philosopher, against Kennedy, the charismatic campaigner. McCarthy did well with liberal Democrats and white suburbanites. On college campuses, his popularity with antiwar students was so great that his campaign became known as the "children's crusade."

Kennedy captured the votes of African Americans and Latinos and emerged as the Democratic Party's strongest candidate. Having won all but the Oregon primary, he moved on to California. But on June 4, as the final tabulation of his victory came in just past midnight, Robert Kennedy was struck down by an assassin's bullet.

Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, who had announced his candidacy in April, was now the sole Democrat with the credentials to succeed Johnson. He simultaneously courted Democrats who grimly supported the war and the King-Kennedy wing, which was sickened by it. He also skillfully cultivated the Democratic power brokers. Without entering a single state primary, he lined up delegates loyal to city bosses, labor leaders, and conservative southern Democrats. As the candidate least likely to rock the boat, he secured his party's nomination well before delegates met in convention.

"The Whole World Is Watching!"

The events surrounding the Democratic convention in Chicago, August 21–26, demonstrated how deep the divisions within the United States had become. Mayor Richard Daley, still reeling from the riots following King's assassination, refused to issue parade permits to the antiwar activists, who had called for a massive demonstration at the convention center. According to later accounts, he sent hundreds of undercover police into the crowds to encourage rock throwing and generally to incite violence so that retaliation would appear necessary and reasonable.

Daley's strategy boomeranged when his officers staged what a presidential commission later termed a "police riot," randomly assaulting demonstrators, casual passersby, and the television crews broadcasting the events. Angered by the embarrassing publicity, Daley sent his agents to raid McCarthy's campaign headquarters where antiwar Democrats had gathered.

Inside the convention hall, a raging debate over a peace resolution underscored the depth of the division within the party. Representative Wayne Hays of Ohio lashed out at those who substituted "beards for brains . . . [and] pot [for] patriotism." When the resolution failed, McCarthy delegates put on black armbands and sang "We Shall Overcome." Later, as tear gas used against the demonstrators outside turned the amphitheater air acrid, the beaming Humphrey praised Mayor Daley and Johnson's conduct of the Vietnam



Bernard Perlin, *Mayor Daley*, 1968, Oil on canvas. In 1968, Richard J. Daley had been elected mayor of Chicago four times and held power as a traditional city boss. In December of that year, the National Commission on Violence released a report that concluded that Chicago police, acting under Mayor Daley's orders, had been "unrestrained and indiscriminate" in their attacks on demonstrators at the National Democratic Convention held the previous August. In response, Mayor Daley brazenly announced a 22 percent salary increase for members of the city's police and fire personnel.

War. When Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut protested the "Gestapo tactics" of the Chicago police, television cameras focused on Mayor Daley saying, "You Jew son of a bitch . . . go home!" The crowd outside chanted, "The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!" Indeed, through satellite transmission, it was.

Protest had spread worldwide. Across the United States the antiwar movement picked up steam. In Paris, students and workers scrawled on building walls such humorous and half-serious slogans as "Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible!" In Prague, Czechoslovakia, students wearing blue jeans and singing Beatles songs threw rocks at Soviet tanks. Meanwhile, demonstrations in Japan, Italy, Ireland, Germany, and England all brought young people into the streets to demand democratic reforms in their own countries and an end to the U.S. war in Vietnam.

The Republican Victory

The Republicans stepped into the breach. Presidential contender Richard Nixon deftly built on voter hostility toward youthful protesters and the counterculture. He

wooded a growing constituency that he later termed the “silent majority”—those Americans who worked, paid taxes, and did not demonstrate or picket, “people who are not haters, people who love their country.” Recovering from election defeats for president in 1960 and California governor in 1962, Nixon claimed to be the one candidate who could restore law and order. He chose as his running mate the governor of Maryland, Spiro T. Agnew, known for treating dissent as near treason (see Map 29.3).

After signing the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson said privately, “I think we just delivered the South to the Republicans for a long time to come.” Republican strategists moved quickly to make this prediction come true. They also recognized the growing electoral importance of the Sunbelt, where populations grew with the rise of high-tech industries and retirement communities. A powerful conservatism dominated this region, home to many military bases, defense plants, and an increasingly influential religious right. Although Johnson enjoyed a landslide

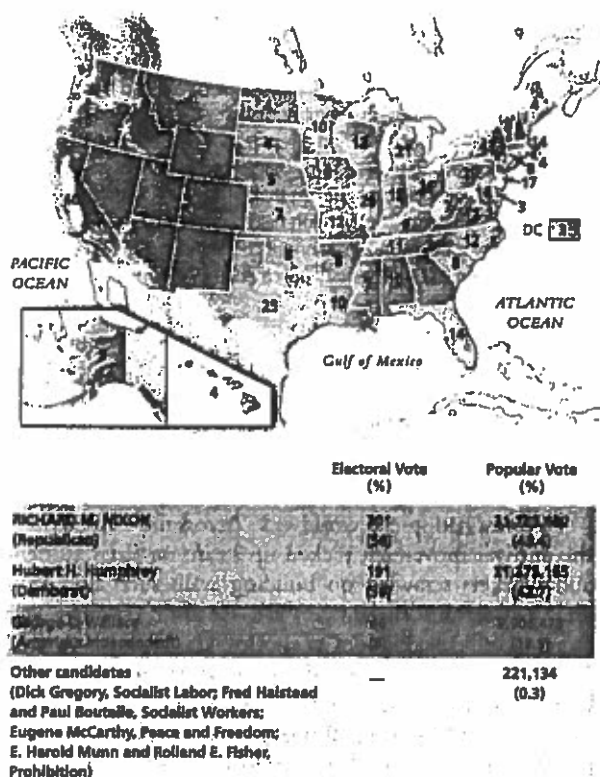
victory in 1964, his conservative Republican rival, Barry Goldwater, had trumped him in several states in the Deep South. Nixon took advantage of this trend.

The 1968 campaign exposed the increasing conservatism of white voters even outside the South. The most dramatic example was the relative success of Alabama governor George Wallace’s third-party bid for the presidency. Wallace took state office in 1963 promising white Alabamans “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” In 1968, he waged a national campaign and won five southern states and nearly 14 percent of the popular vote nationwide.

The Nixon-Agnew team ushered in the greatest political realignment since Franklin Roosevelt’s victory in 1932. They captured the popular vote by the slim margin of 43.4 percent to Democrat Hubert Humphrey and Maine senator Edmund Muskie’s 42.7 percent, but they took nearly all the West’s electoral votes. Bitterly divided by the campaign, the Democrats would remain out of presidential contention for more than two decades, except when the Republicans suffered scandal and disgrace. The Republicans in 1968 had paved the way for the conservative ascendancy.

 **Watch the Video**
LBJ Signing the Civil Rights Bill at
www.myhistorylab.com

 **Watch the Video**
Richard Nixon Presidential Campaign Ad at
www.myhistorylab.com



MAP 29.3 The Election of 1968 Although the Republican Nixon-Agnew team won the popular vote by only a small margin, the Democrats lost in most of the northern states that had voted Democratic since the days of FDR. Segregationist Governor George Wallace of Alabama polled more than 9 million votes.

The Politics of Identity

Richard Nixon campaigned promising to “bring Americans together again.” But, if anything, the divisions among Americans, especially among the young, grew sharper during his presidency. The tragic events of 1968 brought whole sectors of the counterculture to political activism. With great media fanfare, gay liberation and women’s liberation movements took shape while young Latinos, Asian Americans, and Indian peoples pressed their own claims. In different ways, these groups drew their own lessons from Black Power, the nationalist movement that formed in the wake of Malcolm X’s death. Soon, “Brown Power,” “Yellow Power,” and “Red Power” became the slogans of movements constituted distinctly as new communities of protest.

The politics of identity would continue to thrive through the next two decades of mainly conservative rule, broadening the content of literature, film, television, popular music, and even the curricula of the nation’s schools. Collectively, the various movements pushed issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation to the forefront of American politics and simultaneously spotlighted the nation’s cultural diversity as a major resource.

Black Power

Impatient with tactics based on voting rights and integration, many young activists spurned the civil disobedience of King’s generation for direct action and militant self-defense. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, who had helped