Chapter 29: War Abroad, War at Home, 1965–1974

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES Uptown, Chicago, Illinois

During “Freedom Summer” of 1964, while northern college students joined campaigns to register black Mississippi voters, others helped Chicago JOIN, a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) project to help the city’s poor people take control of their communities. Formed in June 1960, it was a new kind of campus-based political organization to address poverty and Cold War issues. In June 1962, in Port Huron, Michigan, SDS issued a declaration of principles, drafted mainly by graduate student Tom Hayden. In addition to promoting campus activism, SDS sent student activists into poor communities of Boston, Louisville, Cleveland, and Newark, as well as Chicago. Ultimately, none of these projects managed to recruit large numbers of people, and as Johnson escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam, SDS broke with liberal Democrats and threw its energies into the antiwar movement. Far from advancing its dream of greater community, SDS would come to symbolize youth’s alienation from their elders.

II. THE VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War had its roots in the Truman Doctrine and containment. Divided after France was defeated in 1954, Vietnam became, in JFK’s words, “the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike,” against the spread of communism, and, in LBJ’s words, a fight for American principles. The United States paid a huge price for its determination to turn back communism in Indochina. More than 58,000 Americans died in a war that only deepened divisions at home.

a. Johnson’s War

Kennedy had greatly increased the number of military advisors and Special Forces in South Vietnam, but it was Johnson who made the decision to engage the United States in a major war there. Throughout the winter and spring of 1964, as conditions grew steadily worse in South Vietnam, Johnson and his advisors prepared to launch a sustained bombing campaign against the North. After a—probably false—report of two attacks against U.S. destroyers by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress voted a resolution authorizing Johnson to defend U.S. forces and prevent furtherer aggression. Ironically, Johnson campaigned in 1964 with a call for restraint in Vietnam. Safely reelected and fearing the Saigon government was near collapses, Johnson chose to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam in order to avoid a disastrous and humiliating defeat.

b. Deeper into the Quagmire
In February 1965, Johnson used a Vietcong attack on Marines at Pleiku to justify Operation Rolling Thunder, a massive bombing of the North. Accepting the army’s premise that a combination of artillery, air power, and ground forces would grind down the North Vietnamese and Vietcong in a war of attrition, Johnson authorized a steady build up of forces, reaching 165,000 troops by November 1965, with more on the way. From the air, millions of tons of bombs and defoliants destroyed the countryside, while search-and-destroy ground missions made refugees of 4 million people. While advisers urged LBJ to explain his policy to the American people, LJB hesitated, fearing it would undermine his domestic reforms, and held to a course of intentional deceit.


MHL map: The Vietnam War at www.myhistorylab.com

c. The Credibility Gap

Scenes of human suffering and devastation recorded by television cameras increasingly undermined the administration’s moral justification of the war as a defense of freedom and democracy in South Vietnam. After a critical report on a ground operation against the South Vietnamese village of Cam Ne by CBS News’ Morley Safer in August 1965, President Johnson complained bitterly to the news director. The print media also questioned Johnson’s policies when Harrison Salisbury, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times reporter charged that U.S. planes had bombed the population center of Hanoi, capital of North Vietnam, and intentionally ravaged villages in the South. A strong supporter of the Cold War, Senator J. William Fulbright concluded that the war was unwinnable and destructive to domestic reform and urged a negotiated withdrawal. As the costs mounted, Johnson convinced Congress to levy a 10 percent individual and corporate tax surcharge, but inflation surged, fed by the cost of the war. Johnson replaced advisers who questioned his policy, but as casualties multiplied, more and more Americans began to question his handling of the war.

III. A GENERATION IN CONFLICT

As the war in Vietnam escalated, Americans from all walks of life protested U.S. involvement. But between 1965 and 1971, a peace movement took shape that had a distinctly generational character. This so-called sixties generation, the largest generation in American history, brought together SDS activism with music, dress, and hairstyles as “flower children” rejected their elders’ authority and formed an increasingly insistent antiwar movement.

a. “The Times They Are A-Changin’”

In the fall of 1964, students returning from Mississippi at the University of California at Berkeley began protesting Bay Area discrimination. When the University president cracked down on protests, students launched a free speech movement in defiance. A planned takeover of the administration building led to 800 arrests. Mario Savio, a
Freedom Summer volunteer and philosophy student, defended the free speech movement as seeking more than free political activity, but was an end to rules that treated students as children instead of as adults. After a string of campus protests, most large universities, including the University of California, relinquished in loco parentis (in the place of parents) policies and allowed students to live off-campus and to set their own hours. Across the bay in San Francisco, other young adults staked out a new form of community—a counterculture. During 1967’s Summer of Love, 75,000 young people flocked to Haight-Ashbury for a music- and drug-fueled “be-in.” The generational rebellion, taking advantage of the birth control pill, embraced free love, and communal living. Drugs—from marijuana to LSD, promoted by Harvard professor Timothy Leary—let youth “turn on, tune in and drop out.” Music inspired and reinforced youth rebellion as Bob Dylan and a wave of folkies and rockers warned parents that “the times, they are a-changing.” All these forces converged in the three-day Woodstock Music Festival in New York in August 1969 where the “Woodstock nation” took drugs, stripped naked, and made love on the grass. Even if hippies were a small minority, and the good vibes were short lived, the antiwar and counterculture sentiments of a generation came together in the slogan “Make Love, Not War.”

b. From Campus Protest to Mass Mobilization

At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, more than 3,000 students turned out for antiwar protests in 1965, “teach-ins” spread across American colleges and to Europe and Japan. And an antiwar march in Washington, D.C. attracted 20,000 people. Students demanded an end to on-campus war-related research and, receiving no response from administrators, turned to civil disobedience. Students chanted Sieg Heil at the police, who attempted to disperse them with tear gas and mace as protests broke out on campuses across the nation by 1967. In April 1967, a day-long antiwar rally in Manhattan’s Central Park drew more than 300,000 people. While some burned draft cards or refused induction, others sought to “bring the war home,” raiding draft offices. More than 40,000 bombings or bomb threats through 1970 damaged $21 in property and killed 43 people.


MHL video: Protests against the Vietnam War at www.myhistorylab.com

c. Teenage Soldiers

The average age of those who fought in Vietnam hovered around nineteen. Working-class young men, disproportionately African American and Latino, signed up in large numbers as the military promised vocational training and social mobility. Whereas college graduates constituted only 12 percent of the 2.5 million men who served in Vietnam and 9 percent of those who were killed in combat, high-school dropouts were the most likely to serve in Vietnam and by far the most likely to die there. The casualty rate for African Americans was approximately 30 percent higher than the overall death rate for U.S. forces in Southeast Asia. Some African American soldiers openly
complained about being asked to fight “a white man’s war” and emblazoned their helmets with slogans like “No Gook Ever Called Me Nigger.” The nature of the war fed feelings of disaffection in the armed forces. Moreover, American forces seemed to benefit little from their superior arms and air power. Vietnam veterans returned to civilian life quietly and without fanfare, denied the glory earned by the combat veterans of previous wars. Tens of thousands suffered debilitating physical injuries.

IV. WARS ON POVERTY

The 1960s civil rights movement spurred a new concern with poverty. Building on Kennedy’s legacy, Johnson pledged to expand antipoverty programs, pushing the most ambitious reform program since the New Deal through Congress. Ironically, violence at home as well as abroad ultimately undercut his aspiration to wage “an unconditional war on poverty.”

a. The Great Society

The cornerstone of Johnson’s war on poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act, enacted in August 1964. An Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) coordinated community-based “self-help” programs for education and employment, with only mixed results. While Community Action Programs, in theory, empowered the poor, local officials, such as Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, fought with the OEO over funding and control. Educational programs proved more successful. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a kind of domestic Peace Corps, brought several thousand idealistic volunteers into poor communities for social service work.

Legal Services Program attorneys helped millions of poor people in legal battles with housing authorities, welfare departments, police, and slumlords. Comprehensive Community Health Centers provided basic medical services to poor 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).

Spending on social welfare jumped from 7.7 percent of the gross national product in 1960 to 16 percent in 1974, but barely scratched the surface of the problem as three quarters of new spending went to the non-poor. Johnson raised expectations unrealistically, as his programs could not be fully funded while a war dragged on.
b. Crisis in the Cities

As the postwar building boom transformed the suburbs, the housing stock in the nation’s cities deteriorated. Race-based “redlining” policies marked off poor neighborhoods, denying residents access to mortgages and building loans. City officials used federal funds under the 1949 Housing Act for middle- and upper-class projects, and new urban expressways cut through poor neighborhoods and disproportionately displaced minorities. Urban employment opportunities declined along with the urban housing stock. While overall unemployment declined, black unemployment twice that of whites, and those who had jobs were relegated to the low-paying service sector. 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, where conditions would soon bring urban pressures to the boiling point.

c. Urban Uprisings

Between 1964 and 1968, more than 100 cities exploded in violence. Throwing rocks and bottles through store windows, rioters in Watts in August 1965 shouted, “This is for Selma! This is for Birmingham!” and “Burn, baby, burn!” After six days, 34 people lay dead, 900 were injured, and 4,000 more had been arrested. Los Angeles police blamed civil rights agitators, the mayor accused communists, and both feigned ignorance when the media reported that white police assigned to “charcoal alley”—their name for the Watts district—had for years referred to their nightsticks as “nigger knockers.”

The following summer, urban riots broke out in San Francisco, Milwaukee, Dayton, and Cleveland. On July 12, 1967, in Newark, New Jersey, a city with severe housing shortages and the nation’s highest black unemployment rate, the beating and arrest of a black taxi driver by a white police officer provoked a widespread protest that left 25 dead. A week later, Detroit police raided a bar to arrest after-hours patrons, leading to a week of rioting, 34 dead, and 7,000 arrests. In July 1967, President Johnson created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the cause of the riots. The Kerner Commission blamed racism, poverty, and police brutality for the nation’s movement toward two societies, one black and one white, separate and unequal. Yet the growing costs of war left little money to fight poverty. America was fighting two wars and winning neither.

V. 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. 1968 proved worse. Americans lost faith in U.S. invincibility in world affairs, and disillusionment deepened when two of the most revered political leaders were struck down by assassins’ bullets. While protesters and police clashed on the nation’s campuses and city streets, and millions of Americans asked what was wrong with their country, unrest spread abroad with students and workers taking
over the streets of Paris, Soviet tanks crushing Czechoslovakia’s Prague Spring, violent protests in Mexico, and the Cultural Revolution roiling China.

a. The Tet Offensive

On January 30, 1968, North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched the Tet Offensive (named for the Vietnamese lunar New Year holiday), stunning the U.S. military command in South Vietnam. U.S. troops halted the offensive, suffering comparatively modest casualties of 1,600 dead and 8,000 wounded, compared to 40,000 NVA and VC losses. As many as 1 million South Vietnamese became refugees, their villages totally ruined (see Map 29.2).

Television and press coverage of savage fighting in Saigon and Hue dismayed the public. The United States won a major military victory but lost the war at home as support for the war in Vietnam and Johnson’s popularity alike plummeted. Meanwhile, in Rome, Berlin, Paris, and London, students and others turned out in huge demonstrations to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam. After Congress rejected General Westmoreland’s call for more troops, Johnson went on TV on March 31 to announce a bombing halt and a willingness to negotiate an end to the war. His presidency in ruins, he shocked the nation by declaring he would not seek another term in office.

b. King, the War, and the Assassination

By 1968, the civil rights leadership firmly opposed the war, and Martin Luther King Jr. had reached a personal turning point. Under relentless FBI harassment and facing threats from FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover, who swore to “destroy the nigger,” King abandoned his customary caution in criticizing U.S. policy in Vietnam and broke decisively with Johnson and liberal Democrats.

In the spring of 1968, King chose Memphis, Tennessee, amidst a sanitation strike, to inaugurate a Poor People’s Campaign for peace and justice. On 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 a hundred cities, on college campuses and at American bases in Vietnam. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley ordered his police to shoot to kill and machine guns were set up outside the White House and Capitol. King’s dream of the nation as a “beloved community” died with him.

c. The Democrats in Disarray

Liberals dissatisfied with Johnson’s conduct of the war, and for African Americans suffering the loss of their great leader, turned to New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The race for the Democratic nomination pitted Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, a witty philosopher who shared his opposition to the war, against the charismatic Kennedy. McCarthy appealed to liberal Democrats and white suburbanites, while Kennedy reached
out successfully to African Americans and Latinos and took the lead in the primary race. But after winning the decisive California primary on June 4, Kennedy was assassinated. Incongruously calling his campaign the “Politics of Joy,” Vice President Hubert Humphrey emerged as the only credible Democratic nominee. Courting Democrats who grimly supported the war and the King-Kennedy wing, which was sickened by it, Humphrey also 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 to lock up the nomination.


Still reeling from the riots following King’s assassination, Chicago’s Mayor Richard Daley refused to issue parade permits to protestors at the Democratic National Convention. Daley’s strategy boomeranged when his officers staged what a presidential commission later termed a “police riot,” randomly assaulting demonstrators, casual passersby, and television crews filming the events. Angered by the embarrassing publicity, Daley sent his agents to raid McCarthy’s campaign headquarters, where Democrats opposed to the war had gathered.

Inside the convention hall, a raging debate over a peace resolution underscored the depth of the division within the party over the war. When Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut addressed the convention and protested the “Gestapo tactics” of the police, television cameras focused on Mayor Daley saying, “You Jew son of a bitch… go home!”

While the American antiwar movement picked up steam, protest spread worldwide as young people demanded an end to the war and democratic reforms.

i. The Republican Victory

Republican contender Richard Nixon deftly built on voter hostility toward youthful protesters and the counterculture, appealing to a “silent majority” of taxpaying, peaceful workers. Although Johnson enjoyed a landslide victory in 1964, his conservative Republican rival, Barry Goldwater, had trumped him in several states in the Deep South, and, as Johnson knew, civil rights legislation had antagonize the South. While Nixon employed a Sunbelt strategy appealing to southern whites and courted the religious right, third party candidate George Wallace appealed more openly to angry white conservatives and captured five states and 13.5 percent of the popular vote. Nixon squeaked to victory, with the popular vote but split the East and Midwest with Humphrey and won nearly all the West for a convincing electoral vote margin.

MHL video: LBJ Signing the Civil Rights Bill at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL video: Richard Nixon Presidential Campaign Ad at www.myhistorylab.com

VI. THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY
Nixon had promised to “bring Americans together again,” but 1960s activism and media attention fueled gay liberation and women’s liberation movements, while young Latinos, Asian Americans, and Indian peoples pressed their own claims, drawing their own lessons from the nationalist movement that formed in the wake of Malcolm X’s death—Black Power. Soon, “Brown Power,” “Yellow Power,” and “Red Power” became the slogans of movements constituted distinctly as new communities of protest. While politics turned in a conservative direction, cultural diversity emerged as a major counter theme.

a. Black Power

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, who had helped turn SNCC into an all-black organization, began to advocate Black Power as a means for African Americans to take control of their own communities. Formed in Oakland, CA, the Black Panthers demanded social justice and ran breakfast programs and offered medical and educational services while adopting a paramilitary style with black leather jackets, shoes, black berets, and firearms. Infuriated local authorities, whom the Panthers called “pigs,” responded with repeated raids on Panther offices, jailing many leaders. Black Power nevertheless continued to grow; in Chicago, Reverend Jesse Jackson rallied African Americans to boycott the A&P supermarket chain until the firm hired 700 black workers. Cultural nationalism became the most enduring component of Black Power. At San Francisco State University, students, with help from the Black Panthers, demanded the creation of a black studies department, shutting down the campus until their demands were met. Meanwhile, trendsetters put aside Western dress for African-style dashikis and hairdos and rejected their “slave names,” and black parents gave their children African names. This deepening sense of racial pride and solidarity was summed up in the popular slogan “Black Is Beautiful.”


b. Sisterhood Is Powerful

Betty Friedan’s Feminine Mystique had sparked formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and a campaign for equal rights. By the time Nixon took office, a more militant women’s liberation movement attracted young women who had been active in civil rights, SDS, and campus antiwar movements. Attacking “patriarchy,” the women’s liberation movement mirrored black activists by insisting that “Sisterhood is Powerful” and attracted media attention by disrupting the Miss America Pageant and staging bra burnings. Insisting that “the personal is political,” feminists critiqued the American family, marriage, and the workplace, and established women’s clinics, daycare and rape crisis centers and shelters for battered women. The women’s liberation movement also had a significant educational impact. Between 1970 and 1975, as many as 150 women’s studies programs had been established. The women’s liberation movement remained, however, a bastion of white middle-class women. Although some African American women were outraged at the posturing of Black Power leaders like Stokely Carmichael, who joked that “the only position for women in SNCC is prone,” the
majority remained wary of white women’s appeals to sisterhood. African American women formed their own “womanist” movement to address their distinct cultural and political concerns.


c. Gay Liberation

From the 1950s, gay rights groups like the Society for Individual Rights emerged in New York’s Greenwich Village, San Francisco’s North Beach, and other centers of gay night life. But it was during the tumultuous late 1960s that gay and lesbian movements encouraged many men and women to proclaim “Say It Loud, Gay Is Proud.”

On Friday, June 27, 1969, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a well-known gay bar in Greenwich Village, provoked an uprising of angry homosexuals and transsexuals that lasted the entire night. Gay men and women in New York City formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), announcing themselves as “a revolutionary homosexual group of men and women . . . who reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature.” Gay activism tied in with civil rights and antiwar protests led to changes in public opinion and policies. The San Francisco-based Council on Religion and Homosexuality established a network for clergy sympathetic to gay and lesbian parishioners. The founders of gay liberation encouraged not only legal changes and the establishment of supporting institutions but self-pride.


d. The Chicano Rebellion

The Chicano movement burst onto the scene in 1965, when United Farm Workers (UFW) migrant workers, struck against California grape growers. While strike leader César Chávez emerged as a national hero, many young Mexican Americans spearheaded an urban-based movement based on identity politics, that Chavez himself rejected. They adopted the slang term Chicano, in preference to Mexican American, to express a militant ethnic nationalism. In March 1968, a “blowout” (walkout) sent nearly 15,000 Chicano students into the streets of East Los Angeles, demanding that schools teach the history, literature, art, and language of Mexican Americans. Meanwhile, college students organized to demand Chicano studies on their campuses. Artistically, Teatro, comprising film and drama, drew creatively on Mexican and Anglo cultural forms to explore the political dimensions of Mexican American society. Chicano muralists painted an estimated 1,500 murals on public buildings throughout their communities, from the exteriors of retail shops to freeway overpasses, even to large drainage pipes. Even music was politicized as the rock group Los Lobos dedicated their first album to the United Farm Workers.

MHL document: Chávez, He Showed Us the Way (1978) at www.myhistorylab.com
e. Red Power

The American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in 1968, led the drive for pan-Indian identity. Its members represented mainly urban Indian communities, and its leaders were young and militant. On November 20, 1969, 89 Indians, identifying themselves as “Indians of All Tribes,” claimed Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay under the terms of an 1868 Sioux treaty that gave Indians rights to unused federal property on Indian land. They occupied the island for 19 months. In November 1972, AIM staged an event known as the “Trail of Broken Treaties” that culminated in a week-long occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. Another occupation, at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, turned violent in 1973 when the FBI killed two protestors after a ten-week siege. A 1978 “Longest Walk” from San Francisco to Washington, DC, called attention to Indians’ loss of tribal lands, a trend partly reversed by court cases and legislation. Yet on reservations and in urban areas with heavy Indian concentrations, alcohol abuse and ill health remained serious problems. An Indian literary renaissance began with Vine Deloria’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) and has continued to bring Indian culture to a wider audience and inspire young Indians to explore their heritage.

f. The Asian American Movement

In 1968, students at the University of California at Berkeley founded the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), one of the first pan-Asian political organizations bringing together Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American activists. In response, Asian American activists rallied behind the people of Vietnam and proclaimed racial solidarity with their “Asian brothers and sisters.”

Berkeley students sponsored the “Asian American Experience in America—Yellow Power”—conference, inviting their peers to learn about “Asian American history and destiny, and the need to express Asian American solidarity in a predominantly white society.” Between 1968 and 1973, major universities across the country introduced courses on Asian American studies, and a few set up interdisciplinary departments. Meanwhile, artists, writers, documentary filmmakers, oral historians, and anthropologists worked to recover the Asian American past. Community activists ranging from college students to neighborhood artists worked in a variety of campaigns to heighten public awareness. Other campaigns reflected the growing diversity of the Asian population. Filipinos, the fastest-growing group, organized to protest the destructive role of U.S.-backed Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Ultimately, however, in blurring intergroup differences, the Asian American movement failed to reach the growing populations of new immigrants, especially the numerous Southeast Asians fleeing their devastated homeland.

VII. THE NIXON PRESIDENCY

Richard M. Nixon inherited an increasingly unpopular war and a nation wracked by internal discord. He promised a vague “just and honorable peace” in Southeast Asia and the
restoration of law and order at home. Yet, once in office, Nixon puzzled both friends and foes with contradictory domestic policies. He made stunning moves toward détente with the People’s Republic of China but widened the Vietnam War. Nixon worked hard in the White House, centralizing authority and reigning defiantly as an “Imperial President”—until he brought himself down.

a. Domestic Policy

Nixon deeply desired to restore order in American society. “Drugs, crime, campus revolts, racial discord, draft resistance—on every hand we find old standards violated, old values discarded.” Despite his hostility to Great Society liberalism, Nixon surprised conservatives. He supported new Social Security benefits and subsidized housing for the poor and oversaw the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Conservatives judged a proposed Family Assistance Plan too generous while liberals found it inadequate. Moreover, the plan was expensive. Bipartisan opposition ultimately killed the bill.

Nixon also embraced a policy of fiscal liberalism accepting deficit spending and abandoning the gold standard while trying to halt inflation with wage and price controls. Finally, Nixon’s support of “black capitalism”—adjustments or quotas favoring minority contractors in construction projects—created an explosive precedent for “set-aside” programs later blamed on liberals. Yet his Supreme Court nominees were solid conservatives and he continued a “Southern Strategy” of resistance to civil rights. His most unifying achievement was the culmination of JFK’s quest to beat the Soviets in space as Apollo 11 landed on the moon in July 1969.

b. Nixon’s War

Nixon promised to bring “peace with honor,” but let the war drag on for four years. Brilliant and ruthless, Henry Kissinger helped Nixon centralize foreign policymaking in the White House. In public, Nixon followed a policy of “Vietnamization.” In private, Nixon mulled over the option of a “knockout blow” to the North Vietnamese. Hoping to cut off North Vietnamese infiltration of the South, in April 1970 Nixon authorized a secret invasion of Cambodia. When the invasion went public, protests erupted on college campuses including Kent State in Ohio, where National Guardsmen killed four unarmed students; days later, two students were killed and a dozen wounded by police at Jackson State, a black school in Mississippi. Congressional opposition forced Nixon to end the Cambodian incursion.

In February 1971, Nixon directed the South Vietnamese army to invade Laos and cut supply lines, but the demoralized invading force suffered a quick and humiliating defeat. While ordering stepped-up bombing of the North, Nixon also sent Kissinger to Paris for secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese, which were undercut by South Vietnamese opposition to a preliminary deal. On Christmas Day 1972, hoping for a better negotiating position, Nixon ordered one final wave of bomb attacks on North Vietnam’s cities. The January 1973 ceasefire under which U.S. troops were withdrawn
in return for a release of prisoners of war could have been signed in 1969 had Nixon been willing to admit the war was unwinnable. In April 1975, North Vietnamese troops took over Saigon, and the Communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam soon united the small nation. It had cost the United States 58,000 lives and $150 billion. Meanwhile, a 1971 Army court martial found Lt. William Calley guilty of killing at least 22 civilians in the My Lai Massacre, revealing the brutality of American policy and discrediting U.S. Army leadership further.

MHL document: Richard Nixon, Peace with Honor at www.myhistorylab.com

c. Nixon’s Foreign Policy

Apart from Vietnam, Nixon’s foreign policy defied the expectations of liberals and conservatives alike. He initiated a policy of détente that replaced U.S.-Soviet bipolarity with multilateral relations, cultivating relations with the People’s Republic of China, and relaxing tensions with the Soviet Union. Opponents of the Vietnam War accused Nixon of double-dealing, while conservatives howled at any compromise with Communist governments. But Nixon persisted in his plans, anticipating an end to the Cold War on American terms. “Ping pong diplomacy” began when a U.S. table tennis team visited China. After Kissinger had sounded out the Chinese leadership in secret, Nixon made a state visit in February 1972. Leveraging the China opening, Nixon went to Moscow and signed a series of agreements on science and technology, including a joint space program.

Nixon also completed negotiations of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT, known later as SALT I). Nixon’s last major diplomatic foray proved far less effective. Following the 1973 Yom Kippur Arab-Israeli War, Kissinger’s Middle Eastern shuttle diplomacy failed to secure a lasting peace.

Nixon continued the trend of covert Cold War operations, allowing the CIA to cut secret deals with leaders of the Philippines, Iran, Nicaragua, and South Africa, supporting repressive regimes in each state. More controversial was CIA involvement in the overthrow of Chile’s socialist leader, Salvador Allende, and subsequent support for the repressive Pinochet regime. Congressional and press investigations of covert actions only undermined the CIA’s reputation and eroded America’s superpower status.

d. Dirty Tricks and the 1972 Election

As the election of 1972 approached, Nixon tightened his White House inner circle that assisted him in withholding information from the public, discrediting critics, and engaging in assorted “dirty tricks.” After failing to prevent publication of the Pentagon Papers, secret documents revealing government deception in Vietnam, Nixon directed the Department of Justice to prosecute leaker Daniel Ellsberg for conspiracy, espionage, and theft. A team of “plumbers” led by Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy broke into the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist. Despite a huge campaign war chest and a well-organized Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP), Nixon ran a skillful negative campaign charging George McGovern, the liberal Democratic nominee, with supporting “abortion,
f. Watergate: Nixon’s Downfall

On June 17, 1972, a team of men was arrested while planting bugging devices in the DNC headquarters at the Watergate complex. Although Nixon disclaimed any knowledge of the plan, two *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, followed a trail of evidence back to the nation’s highest office.

As Congressional committees began investigating, a former Nixon aide revealed the existence of secret tape recordings of conversations held in the Oval Office. After special prosecutor Archibald Cox refused to allow Nixon to claim executive privilege and withhold the tapes, the president ordered Cox fired. On June 24, 1974, the Supreme Court voted unanimously that Nixon had to release the tapes to a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

Although incomplete, the Watergate tapes proved damning. They revealed Nixon’s foul-mouthed racism and anti-Semitism, his direct involvement in the break-in and coverup, and his conniving efforts to harass private citizens through federal agencies. The news media enjoyed a field day with the revelations of Nixon’s engagement in criminal conspiracy to obstruct justice. In July 1974, the House Judiciary Committee adopted three articles of impeachment, charging Nixon with obstructing justice, abusing the power of his office, and acting in contempt of Congress.

Charges of executive criminality had clouded the Nixon administration since his vice president, Spiro Agnew, had resigned in disgrace following a bribery and tax evasion scandal. Gerald Ford was confirmed to replace Agnew. Faced with certain impeachment and conviction, Nixon resigned on August 8, 1974, admitting to no more than a few errors in judgment.

**MHL document:** *House Judiciary Committee’s Assessment of Nixon’s Activities (1974)* at www.myhistorylab.com

VIII. CONCLUSION

Nixon’s resignation did little to relieve American bitterness and exhaustion after the tumultuous wind-down of the Vietnam War. Dreams of community that had inspired men from Martin Luther King to Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s lay shattered, with no new national vision to replace them. In 1968, antiwar protestors who had disrupted the Democratic National Convention might have been scapegoats for America’s ills, but by 1974 Johnson
and Nixon’s failures showed a moral failure at the heart of the political system. America seemed at war with itself.

**Learning Objectives**

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 29:

1. Why did President Johnson escalate the war in Vietnam?
2. How did campus protests shape national political debate?
3. What were the goals of Johnson’s Great Society?
4. What divided the Democratic Party in 1968?
5. How did Richard Nixon win the presidential election in 1968?
6. What is meant by the “politics of identity”?

**Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers**

1. Why did Johnson get the United States so deeply into Vietnam? What could he have done to avoid going deeper into the quagmire?

   **Answer:** Soon after taking office, President Johnson and his advisors began to lay the groundwork for escalating American involvement in the Vietnam War. Reports of attacks on two U.S. Navy ships off the coast of North Vietnam, later proven to be erroneous, prompted the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which gave Johnson the authority to dramatically increase the American presence in Southeast Asia. In the spring of 1965, Johnson launched a bombing campaign against the North (Rolling Thunder) while sending the first combat troops into Vietnam. Their numbers would reach 600,000 at their peak in 1968. Johnson believed that American involvement was necessary to prevent a Communist victory, and he did not want to be perceived as weak in the global confrontation against communism.

2. With which side do you identify—the protesters or the people who went to Vietnam? Why?

   **Answer:** Antiwar protesters opposed diverting government resources away from poverty and other social programs at home to pay for the war in Vietnam. They also feared being sent to fight what was increasingly seen as an unwinnable war. Most protesters were college students, who were exempt from the draft. The average Vietnam War soldier was only 19, many were high-school dropouts, and minority troops fought and died in greater percentages than did white soldiers. While many soldiers complained about antiwar protesters whom they saw as spoiled and safe, they also participated in the counterculture and increasingly criticized the war, while in Vietnam and after returning home.

3. How would you characterize the government’s response to poverty in the Great Society? Was it too much, or too little?

   **Answer:** The Great Society more than doubled government spending on social programs and a number of ambitious community based initiatives were established under the Office of Economic Opportunity. However, the “War on Poverty” was never able to be fully funded because of the costs of the War on Vietnam. Moreover, as the public image of poverty shifted
away from rural white to inner city blacks, many Americans grew more opposed to the Great Society.

4. Can you make a connection between the civil rights movement and the gay rights, Indian rights, etc., movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s?

   **Answer:** The various rights movements of the late 1960s and 1970s all emerged from the Civil Rights Movement. Each group sought to assert its own identity, claiming that they should be treated equally.

5. Was Watergate an aberration, or do you see the entire episode as part of a larger pattern of abuse of power?

   **Answer:** Watergate highlights the growing alienation of those in power from the American people. While taking actions he believed to be necessary to defend his presidency, Nixon, notoriously paranoid about opposition in the media and by the left, embarked on a series of dirty tricks to discredit critics and win reelection. In many ways this was the culmination of a political culture that misled the American people on a variety of issues, most notably the Vietnam War. Since Watergate, the American people have had a much more cynical view about government.

**Lecture Outline**

American Communities: Uptown, Chicago, Illinois

The Vietnam War
   - Tonkin Gulf and Johnson’s War
   - Deeper into Quagmire
   - The Credibility Gap

A Generation in Conflict
   - “The Times They Are A-Changin’”
   - From Campus Protest to Mass Mobilization
   - Teenage Soldiers

Wars on Poverty
   - The Great Society
   - Crisis in the Cities
   - Urban Uprisings
   - Riots: Watts, Newark, Detroit

1968: Year of Turmoil
   - The Tet Offensive
   - King, the War and the Assassination
   - Democratic in Disarray
   - “The Whole World is Watching”
The Republican Victory

The Politics of Identity
“Black Power”
Sisterhood is Power
Stonewall Riots and Gay Liberation
United Farm Workers and the Chicano Revolution
American Indian “Red Power”
The Asian-American Movement

The Nixon Presidency
Domestic Policy
Nixon’s War: Vietnamization
Foreign Policy: Détente with China and Russia
Covert War
Dirty Tricks and the 1972 Election
Watergate: Nixon’s Downfall

Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Films/Video
Making Sense of the 60s. 1991. A 6-hour series that looks at the range of youth rebellions and shows why they developed.

Eyes on the Prize II. An 8-hour continuation of the series mentioned in Chapter 28. It examines what happened to the Civil Rights movement once it reached the North.

Vietnam: A Television History. A 13-part series that covers the entire war.


Woodstock (184 minutes). Warner Home Video, 2006–original 1970. Chronicles the seminal 1969 rock concert from preparations to cleanup, including looks at the performers and the concert goers including drug use and nudity.


My History Lab Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
Johnson’s Defense of the U.S. Presence in Vietnam (1965)
The Report of the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest (1970)
Shirley Chisholm, Equal Rights for Women (1969)
Gay Liberation Front (1970)
Chávez, He Showed Us the Way (1978)
Richard Nixon, Peace with Honor (1973)
House Judiciary Committee’s Assessment of Nixon’s Activities (1974)

See the Maps
The Vietnam War

Research and Explore

Read the Documents
Exploring America: Rachel Carson
Whose History Is It? The Vietnam Memorial

Read the Biographies
Janis Joplin
Eugene McCarthy

See the Videos
Richard Nixon Presidential Campaign Ad: A Wavering Hubert Humphrey
Richard Nixon, “I am not a crook”
LBJ Signing the Civil Rights Bill
Protests against the Vietnam War
The Vietnam War
Newsreel: Peace March, Thousands Oppose Vietnam War

Critical Thinking Exercises

Assign teams of students to put together presentations of the music from the era 1965–1972 that illustrate the generation gap and the counter culture.