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**1968: Democratic National
Convention II**

Introduction: *A Moment in Time, 1968*: A special series on the 40th anniversary of a year of upheaval, in a world seemingly out of control.

Content: From August 26-29, 1968, the eyes of the political world were fixed on Chicago and nominating convention of the Democratic Party. It was not a pretty sight. Inside the Chicago Amphitheater where the Convention met, the bright divisions within the Party were laid bare for all to see. The issue animating the

struggle of course was the Vietnam War. It was seen as Lyndon Johnson's war, but he was not there to contend for the nomination. Having recognized his unpopularity and problem re-election prospects, in the Spring he had declined to run for a second full term. His heir apparent was Vice-president Hubert Humphrey, former Senator from Minnesota and early champion of civil rights. An old-line liberal, he had been abandoned by many of his colleagues on the left because of his steadfast support for Johnson's war policy.

The anti-war liberals had rallied around Senator Eugene McCarthy, then the late Bobby Kennedy. At the

convention they flirted with Ted Kennedy and settled on a futile nomination of Senator George McGovern. Party officials allied with Johnson maintained tight control of the convention, and Humphrey watched with mounting alarm as his natural allies dashed themselves against the seemingly impregnable convention machinery. He would need these activists in the fall against Richard Nixon and watched opportunity slip through his fingers as the events in and out of the Convention hall turned from silly to serious to bitter, sometimes bloody confrontation.

On the fourth day, a time usually set aside for celebration of the newly

nominated candidate, the Vietnam debate aroused tempers throughout the Hall. The Johnson pro-war position prevailed but that result was ill-received by war opponents who dominated the giant New York and California delegations. Their attempt to sing “We Shall Overcome” was squelched by the Chair who promptly turned down their microphones.

Democratic Conventions are usually rambunctious affairs, contentious meetings reflecting the Party’s diverse coalition, but the struggle inside the Amphitheater that summer was a model of decorum compared to what was happening in the streets of Chicago. Ten thousand, mostly white, middle-class, young

demonstrators had descended on the city to protest the Vietnam War, Johnson, Humphrey, and anything else they felt disagreeable in American Society. Soured by Vietnam and the events of 1968 they were there to disrupt the proceedings. Opposing this invasion were the strong, overwhelming police forces of Mayor Richard J. Daley.

Next time: the Battle of Michigan Avenue.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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