

Uncivil Wars: Liberal Crisis and Conservative Rebirth

1961–1972

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following annotated chapter outline will help you review the major topics covered in this chapter.

I. Liberalism at High Tide

A. John F. Kennedy's Promise

1. President Kennedy called upon the American people to serve and improve their country. His youthful enthusiasm inspired a younger generation and laid the groundwork for an era of liberal reform.
2. Kennedy was not able to fulfill his promise or his legislative suggestions such as health insurance for the aged, a new antipoverty program, or a civil rights bill because of opposition in the Senate.
3. On November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald; Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president.
4. Kennedy's youthful image, the trauma of his assassination, and the sense that Americans had been robbed of a promising leader contributed to a powerful mystique that continues today.

B. Lyndon B. Johnson and the Great Society

1. The 1964 Election

- a. Lyndon Johnson was the opposite of Kennedy. A seasoned Texas politician and longtime Senate leader, he had risen to wealth and political eminence without too many scruples. But he never forgot his modest, hill-country origins or lost his sympathy for the downtrodden.
- b. Johnson lacked the Kennedy style, but he capitalized on Kennedy's assassination, applying his astonishing energy and negotiating skills to bring to fruition several of Kennedy's stalled programs and many more of his own, in the ambitious Great Society.
- c. On assuming the presidency, Johnson promptly and successfully pushed for civil rights legislation as a memorial to his slain predecessor (see Chapter 27). His motives were complex. As a southerner who had previously opposed civil rights for African Americans, Johnson wished to prove that he was more than a regional

- figure—he would be the president of all the people.
- d. Johnson’s ambitious goal was to “end poverty in our time.”
 - e. The Office of Economic Opportunity, established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, created programs such as Head Start, the Job Corps, Upward Bound, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the Community Action Program.
 - f. During the 1964 presidential election campaign, Johnson promised to continue the War on Poverty and hoped for a mandate by the people.
 - g. His opponent, archconservative Barry Goldwater of Arizona, ran on an anticommunist, antigovernment platform.
 - h. Johnson won by a landslide, and a Democratic congressional majority allowed him to push the Great Society ahead. Goldwater’s candidacy, however, marked the beginning of a grassroots conservative revolt.
- 2. Great Society Initiatives
 - a. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 authorized \$1 billion in federal funds to benefit impoverished children; the Higher Education Act provided the first federal scholarships for college students. Congress also established Medicare and Medicaid in 1965.
 - b. The Great Society also addressed the environment; Johnson pressed for expansion of the national parks system, improvement of the nation’s air and water, and increased land-use planning.
 - c. Liberal Democrats brought about significant changes in immigration policy with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which abandoned the quota system of the 1920s.
 - 3. Assessing the Great Society
 - a. By the end of 1965, the Johnson administration had compiled the most impressive legislative record of liberal reforms since the New Deal.
 - b. The results of the War on Poverty were that the poor were better off in an absolute sense, but they remained far behind the middle class in a relative sense. The proportion of Americans living below the poverty line dropped from 20 percent to 13 percent between 1963 and 1968.
 - c. Millions of African Americans moved into the middle class.
 - d. Although the Great Society benefitted many Americans, it did not solve basic problems, such as entrenched poverty, racial segregation in cities, and skewed distribution of wealth.
- C. Rebirth of the Women’s Movement
 - 1. Labor Feminists
 - a. Feminist concerns were kept alive in the 1950s and 1960s by working women, who campaigned for such things as maternity leave and equal pay for equal work.
 - b. Labor feminists, who belonged to unions, won passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, establishing the principle of equal pay for equal work.
 - c. Although more women than ever were working outside the home, the labor market undervalued their contributions and families still expected them to do their traditional domestic labor.
 - 2. Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women
 - a. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* suggested that women, who felt stifled by domestic routines, needed education and work outside the home.
 - b. Publication of Friedan’s book coincided with developing changes, such as women having fewer children owing to the birth control pill and more

women divorcing and gaining higher education levels.

- c. Women also had legal tools to fight sex discrimination owing to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- d. Friedan and many labor feminists founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. Modeled on the NAACP, NOW was intended to be a civil rights organization for women.
- e. Ironically, the calls by white middle-class women for reform helped to further fracture the fragile New Deal coalition.

II. The Vietnam War Begins

A. Escalation Under Johnson

- 1. Gulf of Tonkin
 - a. When Johnson became president, he continued and accelerated U.S. involvement in Vietnam based on the policy of containing communism.
 - b. Johnson in the summer of 1964 heard reports that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on American destroyers in international waters.
 - c. On August 7, 1964, Congress authorized the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allowed Johnson to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”
 - d. Johnson, however, did not reveal plans to the American people, fearing that it would mean the end of the Great Society.
- 2. The New American Presence
 - a. The Johnson administration moved toward the Americanization of the war in 1965 with deployment of American ground troops and intensive bombing against North Vietnam.
 - b. The deployment of ground troops, eventually numbering 536,000 in 1968, was intended to stabilize South Vietnam.

- c. Operation Rolling Thunder, a protracted bombing campaign that by 1968 had dropped a million tons of bombs on North Vietnam, failed to break the North Vietnamese’s will to fight; the flow of their troops and supplies continued to the south unabated as the communists rebuilt roads and bridges, moved munitions underground, and built networks of tunnels and shelters.
- d. Hoping to win a war of attrition, the Johnson administration assumed that American superiority in personnel and weaponry would ultimately triumph.

B. Public Opinion and the War

- 1. Although the American people initially approved escalation in Vietnam, by the late 1960s, public opinion began to turn against the war in Vietnam; television had much to do with these attitudes as Vietnam was the first televised war.
- 2. Despite glowing statements made on television, by 1967, many administration officials privately reached a more pessimistic conclusion regarding the war.
- 3. Reporters accused the administration of suffering from a “credibility gap;” televised hearings in 1966 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee raised further questions about U.S. policy.
- 4. Economic developments put Johnson and his advisors even more on the defensive; the costs of the war became evident as the growing federal deficit nudged the inflation rate upward, beginning the inflationary spiral that plagued the U.S. economy throughout the 1970s.
- 5. After the escalation in the spring of 1965, various antiwar coalitions organized several mass demonstrations in Washington; participants shared a common skepticism about the means and aims of U.S. policy and argued that the war was antithetical to American ideals.

C. Rise of the Student Movement

1. The New Left
 - a. Youth were among the key protestors of the era.
 - b. In their manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) expressed their disillusionment with the consumer culture and the gulf between the prosperous and the poor and rejected Cold War ideology and foreign policy.
 - c. The founders of SDS referred to themselves as the New Left to distinguish themselves from the Old Left of communists and socialists of the 1930s and 1940s.
 - d. At the University of California at Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement organized a sit-in in response to administrators' attempts to ban political activity on campus.
 - e. Many protests centered on the draft, especially after the Selective Service System abolished automatic student deferments in January 1966; in public demonstrations of civil disobedience, opponents of the war burned their draft cards, closed down induction centers, and broke into Selective Service offices and destroyed records.
 - f. The Johnson administration had to face the reality of large-scale opposition to the war. The 1967 Mobilization to End the War brought 100,000 protestors into the streets of San Francisco and over 250,000 in New York.
2. Young Americans for Freedom
 - a. Conservative students were also protesting on college campuses.
 - b. Inspired by the group Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), these students defended free enterprise and supported the war in Vietnam but feared that the government had taken on oppressive powers.
 - c. YAF's founding principles, outlined in "The Sharon Statement" in 1960, inspired young conservatives who would support the Reagan administration in the 1980s.
3. The Counterculture
 - a. The "hippie" symbolized the new counterculture, a youthful movement that glorified liberation from traditional social strictures.
 - b. Popular music by Pete Seger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan expressed political idealism, protest, and loss of patience with the war and was an important part of the counterculture.
 - c. Beatlemania helped to deepen the generational divide and paved the way for the more rebellious, angrier music of other British groups, notably the Rolling Stones.
 - d. Drugs and sex intertwined with music as a crucial element of the youth culture that was celebrated at rock concerts attended by hundreds of thousands of people.
 - e. In 1967, at the "world's first Human Be-In" at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, Timothy Leary urged gatherers to "turn on, tune in, and drop out;" 1967 was also the "Summer of Love," in which city neighborhoods swelled with young dropouts, drifters, and teenage runaways dubbed "flower children."
 - f. Many young people stayed out of the counterculture and the antiwar movement, yet media coverage made it seem that all of America's youth were

rejecting political, social, and cultural norms.

III. Days of Rage, 1968–1972

A. War Abroad, Tragedy at Home

1. The Tet Offensive

- a. The Johnson administration's hopes for Vietnam evaporated when the Vietcong unleashed a massive assault, known as the Tet offensive, on major urban areas in South Vietnam.
- b. Although in military terms a failure, the attack made a mockery of official pronouncements that the United States was winning the war and swung public opinion more strongly against the conflict.
- c. Antiwar Senator Eugene J. McCarthy's strong showing in the presidential primaries reflected profound public dissatisfaction with the course of the war and propelled Senator Robert F. Kennedy into the race on an antiwar platform.
- d. On March 31, 1968, Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that he would not seek reelection.

2. Political Assassinations

- a. 1968 also witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King and its ensuing riots.
- b. Robert Kennedy's plea to follow King's nonviolent example in Indianapolis kept the city from erupting in a riot.
- c. On June 5, Americans experienced another tragedy that shattered the dreams of those hoping for social change through political action. Kennedy, as he was celebrating his victory in the California primary, was shot dead by a young Palestinian, Sirhan Sirhan.
- d. The Democratic Party never fully recovered from Johnson's withdrawal and Robert Kennedy's assassination.

B. The Antiwar Movement and the 1968 Election

1. Democratic Convention

- a. The events of 1968 had radicalized the antiwar activists.
- b. At the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the political divisions generated by the war consumed the party; outside the convention "Yippies" demonstrated, diverting attention from the more serious and numerous activists who came to Chicago as delegates or volunteers.
- c. The Democratic mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, called out the police to break up the demonstrations. In what was later described as a "police riot," patrolmen attacked protestors at the convention with mace, tear gas, and clubs as TV viewers watched, which only cemented a popular impression of the Democrats as the party of disorder.
- d. Democrats dispiritedly nominated Hubert H. Humphrey and approved a platform that endorsed continued fighting in Vietnam while diplomatic means to an end were explored.

2. Richard Nixon

- a. Richard Nixon, after losing the presidential campaign in 1960 and the California gubernatorial race in 1962, tapped the increasingly conservative mood of the electorate in an amazing political comeback, winning the 1968 Republican presidential nomination.
- b. Nixon courted the "silent majority" of law-abiding Americans, including working-class voters who had traditionally supported the Democratic Party, but had become disillusioned.

3. George Wallace

- a. George Wallace, a third-party candidate, skillfully combined attacks on liberal intellectuals and government elites with denunciations of school segregation and forced busing.

- b. Wallace hoped that by carrying the South, he could deny a major candidate an electoral victory and force the election in the House of Representatives.
- c. Although this strategy failed, his campaign issues—liberal elitism, welfare policies, and law and order—became hallmarks for the next generation of conservatives.
- 4. Nixon's Strategy
 - a. Nixon offered a subtler version of Wallace's populism, adopting what his advisers called the "southern strategy" of courting disaffected southern white voters tired of the civil rights agenda of the Democratic Party.
 - b. By promising to strictly adhere to law and order, he also appealed to millions of suburban voters.
 - c. Nixon received 43.4 percent of the vote to Humphrey's 42.7 percent, defeating him by only 500,000 votes out of the 73 million that were cast. The New Deal coalition of the past thirty years was now broken for the Democratic Party.
- C. The Nationalist Turn
 - 1. Vietnam and the increasingly radical youth rebellion intersected with the turn toward nationalism by young African American and Chicano activists.
 - 2. Mexican Americans including Cesar Chavez marched in Los Angeles in 1970 against the war.
 - 3. The Black Panther Party and the National Black Antiwar Antidraft League spoke out against the war as well. Muhammad Ali, the most famous boxer in the world, refused to be inducted in the army.
- D. Women's Liberation
 - 1. The late 1960s spawned a new brand of feminism: women's liberation.
 - 2. Women's liberation was loosely structured. The movement went public by protesting at the Miss America pageant in 1968.
 - 3. A national Women's Strike for Equality in August 1970 brought hundreds of thousands of women into the streets demanding women's equality with men.
 - 4. The terms *sexism* and *male chauvinism* became new words in American culture.
 - 5. "Sisterhood" often did not include women of color because they were more focused on the shared struggle of the civil rights movement.
 - 6. Women's liberationists insisted that women take control of their bodies, campaigned for reproductive rights, and railed against a culture that blamed women in cases of sexual assault and ignored sexual harassment at work.
 - 7. Women's political mobilization resulted in significant legislative and administrative gains, such as Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments Act, which prohibited colleges and universities that received federal funds from discriminating on the basis of sex.
 - 8. Founded by congresswomen Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug in 1971, the National Women's Political Caucus promoted the election of women to public office.
 - 9. In 1972, Congress authorized child-care deductions for working parents; in 1974, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act improved women's access to credit.
 - 10. The antiwar movement and evolving rights liberalism of the sixties further splintered the Democratic Party.
- E. Stonewall and Gay Liberation
 - 1. The vast majority of gay men and lesbians remained "in the closet." Homosexuality was illegal in the vast majority of states—sodomy statutes outlawed same-sex relations, and police used other morals laws to harass and arrest gay men and lesbians.

2. In the late 1960s, inspired by Black Power and the women's movement, gay activists increasingly demanded unconditional recognition of their rights and encouraged people to "Come Out!"
3. The new gay liberation found multiple expressions in major cities across the country, but a defining event occurred in New York's Greenwich Village when a local gay bar called the Stonewall Inn was raided by police in the summer of 1969. Its patrons, including gay men, lesbians, transvestites, and transsexuals, rioted for two days.
4. The gay liberation movement grew quickly after Stonewall. Local gay and lesbian organizations proliferated, and activists began pushing for nondiscrimination ordinances and consensual sex laws at the state level.
5. By 1975, the National Gay Task Force and several other national organizations lobbied Congress, served as media watchdogs, and advanced suits in the courts.
- c. Far from abating, however, the antiwar movement intensified. In November 1969, half a million demonstrators staged a huge protest in Washington.
- d. On April 30, 1970, as part of a secret bombing campaign against Vietminh (Vietnamese liberation army) supply lines operating in neutral Cambodia, American troops destroyed enemy bases there. When news of the invasion of Cambodia came out, American campuses exploded in outrage.
- e. On May 4, 1970, at Kent State University in Ohio, panicky National Guardsmen fired into an antiwar rally, killing four students and wounding eleven. At Jackson State College in Mississippi, Guardsmen stormed a dormitory, killing two black students.
2. My Lai Massacre
 - a. Journalist Seymour Hersh revealed one of the worst atrocities of the war in *Life* magazine in 1969. U.S. Army troops had killed hundreds of villagers in My Lai.
 - b. Although high-ranking officers had participated, only one soldier, Second Lieutenant William Calley was convicted of the war crime.
 - c. A group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War, believing that Calley had been turned into a scapegoat, publicized other atrocities committed by U.S. troops. Their antiwar protest reflected the deep personal torment that Vietnam had caused many soldiers.

IV. Richard Nixon and the Politics of the Silent Majority

A. Nixon in Vietnam

1. Vietnamization and Cambodia
 - a. When it came to Vietnam, Nixon picked up where Johnson had left off. Abandoning Vietnam, Nixon insisted, would damage America's "credibility" and make the country seem "a pitiful, helpless giant." Nixon wanted peace, but only "peace with honor."
 - b. To neutralize criticism at home, Nixon began delegating the ground fighting to the South Vietnamese. Under this new policy of Vietnamization, American troop levels dropped from 543,000 in 1968 to 334,000 in 1971 to barely 24,000 by early 1973.
3. Détente
 - a. Nixon's policy of détente was to seek peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union and Communist China and to link these overtures of friendship with a plan to end the Vietnam War, a war fought ostensibly to halt the spread of communism.
 - b. He traveled to Moscow to sign the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty

(SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union.

- c. Nixon traveled to China in 1972, the first sitting U.S. president to do so, in a symbolic visit that set the stage for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations.

4. Exit America

- a. To strengthen his negotiating position at the Paris peace talks with North Vietnam, Nixon stepped up military action with a series of B-52 bombings; the Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 27, 1973.
- b. Congress gradually cut back aid to South Vietnam. In March 1975, North Vietnamese forces launched a final offensive, and on April 30, Vietnam was reunited.
- c. America's military involvement had barely altered the geopolitical reality in southeastern Asia.
- d. More than 58,000 Americans died and over 300,000 were wounded during a war that cost over \$150 billion and decreased Americans' confidence in their government system.

B. The Silent Majority Speaks Out

- 1. Law and Order and the Supreme Court
 - a. Under the leadership of Chief Justice Earl Warren, the U.S. Supreme Court issued some of the most far-reaching liberal jurisprudence in U.S. history.
 - b. Right-wing activists accused the Warren Court of legislating from the bench when it ruled that the accused had the right to counsel and that arrestees had to be informed by police of their right to remain silent.
 - c. The Court's decisions in regard to pornography and religious rituals in school convinced conservative and religious Americans that the Court had become immoral.
 - d. A myriad of social factors—drugs, income inequality, and proliferation of

guns—contributed to a drastic rise in crime, fueling conservatives' call for law and order.

2. Busing

- a. Because southern states had lagged in their intent to desegregate schools, federal courts by 1968 ordered an end to segregation.
- b. Using the strategy of busing students to or from heavily segregated schools proved effective; by the mid-1970s, 86 percent of southern black children attended school with whites.
- c. In northern states, busing was less successful because the separation of suburbia from the inner city had entrenched racial segregation of schools.
- d. As the 1972 presidential election neared, Nixon took advantage of the discontent over law and order issues and busing.

C. The 1972 Election

- 1. The disarray within the Democratic Party over Vietnam and civil rights gave Nixon's campaign a decisive edge.
- 2. Nixon's advantages against his weak opponent, Senator George McGovern, and a short-term upturn in the economy favored the Republicans.
- 3. Nixon appealed to the "silent majority" of non-protesters and easily won reelection with 61 percent of the popular vote, carrying every state except Massachusetts and the District of Columbia, although Democrats maintained control of both houses of Congress.
- 4. The election, nevertheless, marked a pivotal moment in the nation's shift to the right.