

## WALTER CRONKITE – IMAGE #7

The 1968 Democratic National Convention, held from August 26<sup>th</sup> through August 29<sup>th</sup>, was a very important event in the political and cultural history of the United States.

Throughout 1967 and 1968 the antiwar movement in the nation grew more volatile at the same time that inner-city ghettos were seething with tension and exploding into flames.

The historian Garry Wills wrote, “There was a sense everywhere, in 1968, that things were giving way. That man had not only lost control of his history, but might never regain it.”

The primary cause of the demonstrations and the subsequent riots during the 1968 convention in Chicago was opposition to the Vietnam War. Young peace activists had met at a camp in Lake Villa, Illinois, on March 23 to plan a protest march at the convention. Antiwar leaders coordinated efforts with over 100 antiwar groups. These leaders included: David Dellinger, editor of *Liberation Magazine* and chairman of the National Mobilization Committee to End War in Vietnam; Rennie Davis, head of the Center for Radical Research and a leader of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); Vernon Grizzard, a draft resistance leader; and Tom Hayden, also a leader of the SDS.

Other groups related to this effort also planned events. Jerry Rubin, a former associate of Dellinger, and Abbie Hoffman were both leaders of the Youth International Party, better known as the YIPPIES. These two men planned a Youth Festival with the goal of bringing over 100,000 young adults to Chicago. They tried to get a permit from Chicago to hold a YIPPIE convention. The permit was denied, but the YIPPIES still showed up.

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, after a narrow victory over Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota in the New Hampshire Democrat primary, President Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not continue his presidential campaign for reelection. His favorability ratings were in the mid-30% range, and polls showed even less support for his Vietnam War policies. Those polls were at 23%. Johnson’s announcement created uncertainty among the antiwar groups regarding their convention plans. Many antiwar activists also became involved in the presidential campaigns of Democrat war opponents, including McCarthy, Senator Robert Kennedy of New York, and Senator George McGovern of South Dakota.

However, by early April there was much talk of Hubert Humphrey, Johnson’s Vice President, running for the presidency. Humphrey, also a Democrat from Minnesota, officially entered the race on April 27<sup>th</sup>. Because of his close identity with the Johnson administration, the plans for demonstrations in Chicago were not cancelled.

Other events preceding the 1968 Democratic National Convention contributed to the tense national mood. On April 4<sup>th</sup> civil rights leader, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots broke out all over the nation. This included Chicago, where Mayor Richard J. Daley specifically gave instructions to city police “to shoot to kill any arsonist and to shoot to maim or cripple anyone looting.” Finally, on June 5<sup>th</sup> presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was shot in the head after winning the California Democratic primary. He died the next day. During that eventful spring, campus unrest spread across the country. Over 200 major demonstrations took place. The turmoil reached a climax with the disruption of Columbia University, where Mark Rudd, leader of the SDS chapter, who had earlier thrown pies at the faces of Selective Service officials and disrupted speeches at the campus memorial service for King, led a small cadre of radicals in occupying the president’s office and classroom buildings. They also kidnapped a dean – all in protest over the university’s insensitive decision to displace neighboring black housing in order to build a new gymnasium. During the next week, more buildings were occupied, faculty and administrative offices were ransacked, and classes were cancelled. University officials finally called in the New York City police. In the process of arresting the protesters, the police injured a number of innocent bystanders. Their excessive force aroused the anger of many previously unaligned students, and they staged a strike that effectively shut down the university for the remainder of the semester.

The events at Columbia buoyed the militants. Tom Hayden announced, “We are moving toward power.” Similar clashes between students, administrators, and police occurred at Harvard, Cornell, and San Francisco State. In response to unrest at the University of California-Berkeley, Governor Ronald Reagan dispatched a small army of police to evict 5,000 students and activists, who had turned a vacant lot into a “people’s park.” In the melee one student was killed, and another was blinded.

Before their deaths, both King and Robert Kennedy had spoken eloquently against the Vietnam War. To antiwar activists, however, bold speeches and marches had not produced the desired effect. One of the radical leaders declared: “We are no longer interested in merely protesting the war. We are out to stop it.” The activists sought nothing short of an immediate American withdrawal from Vietnam. Their anger at Johnson and the Democrat party, fueled by news of the Tet offensive in Southeast Asia, the murders of King and Kennedy, and the general youth rebellion, had radicalized the antiwar movement.

Many Democrats were eager to move their national convention from Chicago to Miami, Florida, where the Republicans were already scheduled to hold their national convention. Democrats were concerned not only about the possibility of unruly protests, but also about an ongoing telephone strike in Chicago that threatened to cause logistical nightmares. The major television networks also lobbied to move the event to Miami, because television and phone lines were already installed at the Republican convention site. In addition, because of the phone strike in Chicago, television cameras would be limited to the hotels and the convention center. New phone lines were needed to cover outside events. Any footage taken outside this area would have to be shot on film, which would require processing before it was broadcast.

Mayor Daley, however, would not let the Democrats' convention leave Chicago. He promised to enforce the peace and to allow no outrageous demonstrations. Daley also threatened to withdraw support for Humphrey, the apparent nominee, if the convention was moved. President Johnson also wanted to keep the convention in Chicago.

At the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago the polarization of American society reached a tragic and bizarre climax. Humphrey came to Chicago with the nomination virtually sewn up. He had between 100 and 200 more delegates than he needed, as well as the support of African Americans, labor unions, and Southern Democrats. Humphrey was clearly seen as Johnson's man. President Johnson still had a grip over the convention, even going so far as to guarantee that states supportive of him would receive the best seats at the convention hall. Johnson himself, however, did not appear for the event.

Mayor Daley wanted Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts to run for President. Daley had caucused his delegation of 118 Illinois Democrats the weekend before the convention and decided that they would remain "uncommitted."

Humphrey was at risk from the growing anti-war wing of the Democrats. After vacillating between the pro-war policies of the Johnson administration and the anti-war policies of his opponents, the Vice President had made it clear on the CBS program, Face the Nation, the weekend before the convention that he supported President Johnson's Vietnam policies.

On Monday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at the International Amphitheatre Mayor Daley formally opened the 1968 Democratic National Convention. In his welcoming address, Daley inauspiciously said, "As long as I am mayor of this city, there is going to be law and order in Chicago." Inside the tightly guarded convention Humphrey faced major credentials fights involving his supporters. Delegations from 15 states tried to unseat Humphrey's delegates and replace them with antiwar delegates. The Vice President's forces won every contest. But the political divisions within the Democrat party generated by the war consumed the Democrats.

The most contentious issue was Vietnam and the debate on the minority “peace plank.” The convention managers scheduled the debate for late Tuesday night – past prime-time on television. But the peace delegates staged a protest. As a result, the debate was re-scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. Debate was limited to one hour for each side and structured to prevent hostile exchanges. Representative Phil Burton of California was the featured speaker in support of the peace plank. Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine was the primary speaker advocating the Johnson-Humphrey language on Vietnam policy for the party platform. After the Humphrey wording was approved, the New York and California delegations began to sing, “We Shall Overcome,” and more delegations marched around the convention floor in protest. Television made it impossible for the convention planners to hide the protests of delegates favoring the peace plank. Even if those in charge had tried to hide rebel delegations by placing them in the back of the convention hall and turning down their microphones, a camera and sound-man covering the floor could have easily broadcast their protests across the nation. In the process of the protest veteran CBS network newsmen Mike Wallace and Dan Rather were both roughed up by the Chicago police while inside the hall of the convention. At one point, CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite remarked to a startled Rather, “I think we’ve got a bunch of thugs here, Dan.”

Humphrey was nominated by Mayor Joseph Alioto of San Francisco. Senator George McGovern was nominated by Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut. Ribicoff shocked the convention, when he went off-script by saying, “With George McGovern as President of the United States, we wouldn’t have Gestapo tactics in the streets of Chicago.” Mayor Daley erupted in anger and shook his fist at Ribicoff. Humphrey easily won the nomination by more than one thousand votes with the delegation from Pennsylvania putting him over the top.

Meanwhile, outside the proceedings in the Amphitheatre on the streets of Chicago the whole spectrum of antiwar dissenters had been gathering since the previous weekend – from the earnest supporters of Senator McCarthy to the Resistance and the SDS and the nihilistic Yippies. The Yippies, led by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman – a remarkable pair of troublemakers, were the most visible group on the streets. They were determined to provoke anarchy in the streets. Hoffman explained that they were revolutionary artists. He said, “Our conception of revolution is that it’s fun.” The Yippies distributed a leaflet outside the convention calling for the immediate legalization of marijuana and all psychedelic drugs, the abolition of money, student-run schools, and free sex. To mock those inside the convention hall, the Yippies nominated a pig, Pigasus, for president. Their stunts were geared toward maximum media exposure. But a far more serious group of activists had come to Chicago to demonstrate against the war. They staged what many came to call the “Siege of Chicago.”

During the weekend preceding the convention, Mayor Daley had ordered the police to break up any demonstrations. The violence had already begun on Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup>. Anti-war demonstrators clashed with over almost 12,000 Chicago police, 7,500 Army troops, 7,500 Illinois National Guardsmen, and 1,000 Secret Service agents over a period of five days.

The violence centered on two things: 1) the Chicago police forcing protesters out of areas where they were not permitted to be; and 2) protesters clashing with police, and their reinforcements, as they tried to march to the convention site. Altercations began on Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup>. Antiwar leaders had tried to get permits from the city to sleep in Lincoln Park and to demonstrate outside the Amphitheatre. Those permits were denied, although the city did offer the demonstrators a permit to protest miles away from the convention site. Nearly 2,000 protesters, however, were undeterred. When the park was officially closed, Chicago police bombed protesters with tear gas and moved in with billy-clubs to remove them forcibly from the park. Along with antiwar protesters, 17 reporters, including Hal Bruno (then a reporter for *Newsweek* and later political news director at ABC), were attacked by police. Throughout the convention, police saw the press as the enemy. Subsequent battles between police and protesters occurred nightly in Lincoln Park and Grant Park. Also present that first night and throughout the convention were famous Beat artists Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs as well as French poet Jean Genet. Most events and protests featured speeches from Hayden, Davis, Hoffman, and Rubin.

Several days and nights of skirmishing culminated on the evening of the nominations – Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup>. On that day the peace plank was voted down, and the presidential nominations took place. On that worst day of rioting occurred the so-called “Battle of Michigan Avenue.” Between 10,000 and 15,000 gathered at the Grant Park band shell for an antiwar rally. Many of the same leaders spoke. About 600 police surrounded the rally on all sides. National Guardsmen were posted on the roof of the nearby Field Museum. When news of the defeat of the peace plank was heard on radios, a young man began to lower the American flag flying near the band shell. Police pushed through the crowd to arrest him. Then a group, including at least one undercover police officer, completed the lowering of the flag and raised a red or blood-spattered shirt. Police moved in again. Rennie Davis was beaten unconscious. At the end of the rally Dellinger announced a march to the Amphitheatre. Meanwhile, Hayden urged the crowd to move in small groups to the Loop. Close to 6,000 joined the march line. Since the group had no permit and the police refused to allow it to use the sidewalks, the march did not move forward right away. After an hour of negotiation the march line began to break up. Protesters tried to cross over to Michigan Avenue, but the National Guardsmen with .30 caliber machine guns and grenade launchers had sealed off the Balbo and Congress bridges leading to that street. The crowd moved north and found that the Jackson Street bridge was unguarded. Thousands of demonstrators surged onto Michigan Avenue. Coincidentally, a group of African Americans, who were members of the Poor People’s Campaign led by civil rights leader, Reverend Ralph David Abernathy, was passing south on Michigan Avenue. That group had a permit to go to the Amphitheatre. The crowd of antiwar protesters joined them. At the intersection of Michigan and Balbo, the crowd was halted again in its march to the convention site. Only Abernathy’s group was allowed to continue. Deputy Police Superintendent James Rochford ordered the police to clear the streets. In the process everything spiraled rapidly out of control. The media recorded graphic violence on the part of the Chicago police. As a horrified television audience watched, many of the police went berserk, clubbing and gassing demonstrators as well as

innocent bystanders, including reporters and physicians, caught up in the chaotic scene. Some of the activists fought back, and the attack escalated. The melee lasted about 17 minutes and was filmed by the television crews positioned at the Conrad Hilton, the headquarters for the Democrat party and the press. Fumes from the tear gas used by the police and “stink bombs” thrown by the protesters drifted into the buildings. The Hilton and many other hotels where the delegates were staying were affected by the riots and the tear gas.

Another major clash took place on Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, the final day of the convention. Protesters once again tried to reach the convention center and twice were turned away. A barricade was put up around the Amphitheatre to prevent anyone without credentials from entering the facility.

When the convention finally ended, the Chicago police reported that 589 arrests had been made. Among the injured were 100 protesters and 119 police. The riots, widely covered by the media, led to a government funded study to determine the cause of the violence. The study was led by Daniel Walker, a Democrat businessman from Illinois, who later ran successfully for governor of that state in 1972. The study placed most of the blame on the Chicago police and labeled the incident a “police riot.” Mayor Daley disagreed with the report and issued the Chicago police a raise in pay. However, the unrestrained response of Mayor Daley and his army of police severely damaged his political reputation. Support for the last of the big-city political bosses was significantly weakened. His opponents clamored for political reform. The violence between police and Vietnam war protesters in the streets and parks of Chicago also gave that city a black eye from which it has yet to recover.

Moreover, the violence also drastically impacted the Democrat party. As the nominating speeches proceeded, television networks had broadcast scenes of the riots, which cemented a popular impression among angry middle class Americans that the Democrats were the party of disorder. Inside the hall the Democrats dispiritedly nominated Humphrey and approved a middle-of-the-road platform that endorsed continued fighting in Vietnam, while urging a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Meanwhile, at their convention in Miami, Richard Nixon and the Republicans shrewdly exploited the middle class anger at the Democrats. One gleeful Republican stated that the Democrats “are going to be spending the next four years picking up the pieces.” Events in Chicago in 1968 doomed the candidacy of Humphrey, who lost a close election that November to Nixon, the Republican nominee for President.

**On March 20, 1969, a Chicago grand jury indicted eight police officers and eight civilians in connection with the disorders during the Democratic convention. The eight civilians were dubbed the “Chicago 8.” They were the first persons to be charged under the provisions of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, which made it a federal crime to cross state lines to incite a riot. They included: David Dellinger; Rennie Davis; Tom Hayden; Abbie Hoffman; Jerry Rubin; Lee Weiner, a research assistant in sociology at Northwestern University; John Froines, an assistant professor of chemistry at the University of Oregon; and Bobby Seale, a founder of the Black Panthers.**

**The trial of the “Chicago 8” opened before Judge Julius Hoffman in Chicago on September 24, 1969. It was a circus. The defendants disrupted the trial and talked back to the judge. The defense attorneys, William Kunstler and Leonard Weinglass, repeatedly accused the judge of bias against them. Because of Seale’s repeated outbursts, Judge Hoffman ordered him gagged and chained to his chair on October 29<sup>th</sup>. When the restraints were removed on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Seale resumed his outbursts, calling the judge a “racist,” a “fascist,” and a “pig.” Seale’s trial was severed from that of the other seven defendants on November 5<sup>th</sup>, when Judge Hoffman declared a mistrial on the conspiracy charges and sentenced him to four years in prison for contempt.**

**The long “Chicago 7” case finally went to the jury on February 14, 1970. The next day Judge Hoffman convicted all seven defendants, plus attorneys Kunstler and Weinglass, of contempt of court. Kunstler had told the judge the trial was a “legal lynching” for which Judge Hoffman was “wholly responsible.” Froines and Weiner were acquitted of conspiracy. Dellinger, Davis, Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, and Rubin were convicted of crossing state lines with intent to incite a riot and giving inflammatory speeches to further their purpose. Each was fined \$5,000, plus court costs, and sentenced to five years in prison.**

**The Chicago riots helped to fragment the antiwar movement. Those groups committed to nonviolent protest, while castigating the reactionary policies of Mayor Daley and the Chicago police, also felt betrayed by the actions of the Yippies and another anarchistic militants. For the New Left Chicago 1968 hastened the demise of the SDS and intensified the revolutionary fervor that spawned street violence and bombings. By the end of that year the SDS began to break up into rival factions. The most extreme of these factions was the Weathermen – a term derived from one of Bob Dylan’s lyrics: “You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.” Also known as the Weather Underground, its leaders included Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. These hardened young radicals decided that revolutionary terrorism was the only appropriate strategy. During 1969, they embarked on a campaign of violence and disruption, fire-bombing university buildings and killing innocent people – as well as several of themselves. Government forces responded by arresting most of the Weathermen and sending the rest underground. By 1971 the New Left was dead as a political movement. In large measure it had committed suicide by abandoning the democratic and pacifist principles that had originally inspired participants and had given the movement some moral legitimacy. The larger antiwar movement also began to fade. A wave of student protests occurred against**

**the Nixon administration in 1970. But, thereafter, campus unrest virtually disappeared.**