

Democratic national convention in chicago 1968 history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When the 1968 Democratic National Convention finally came, the nation was in a state of turmoil. People were angry about the Vietnam War and the assassination of two prominent leaders, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. Outside the convention, violence raged between protestors and police. On the convention floor, delegates argued and general commotion ensued. Many Democrats saw the chaos of the 1968 Democratic National Convention as a main reason for their loss. The Chicago DNC showed the frustration of the year and the historical impact of that convention can still be seen today (REWORD). CHANGE FIRST PARAGRAPH TO MAKE IT FLOW BETTER, WORDING

In 1964, Lyndon Johnson had the largest popular vote win in US history (Lyndon B. Johnson.) During his first term, he experienced much success. He created a domestic program called the "Great Society." With this he formed Medicare, a health insurance program for the elderly and Medicaid, a health care program for the poor. (Lyndon B. Johnson). He pledged to fight a "war on poverty" and created many successful programs. He created VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), Head Start - a program allowing low income preschoolers to attend school, the food stamps program, and many others (Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society). As his presidency moved forward, his popularity declined. This was largely due to the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War, which Johnson inherited from John F. Kennedy, continued to create tension and political upheaval during his time in power. By the end of 1967, more than 500, 000 American soldiers were in Vietnam. (Simon).

President Johnson continued to tell the American people that the war was being won, but with continued media coverage the people of the country

<https://assignbuster.com/democratic-national-convention-in-chicago-1968-history-essay/>

were able to see that it was not. When communist Vietcong forces launched attacks on large cities in South Vietnam during the Tet Offensive of February 1968, there was an increase in criticism (Simon). People believed that the war was unwinnable. After the Vietcong forces infiltrated the U. S. Embassy in Saigon, the Johnson Administration claimed that the war could only be won by adding several hundred thousand more troops to South Vietnam.

Following the Tet Offensive, Johnson's approval went down to below 35% (Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention). Johnson's secret service did not allow him to make appearances at universities because of his incredible unpopularity in this demographic.

Since Johnson had only been elected once, the 22nd amendment allowed him to run again for a second term (1968: A Convention in Crisis). Many Democratic politicians were hesitant to challenge him. Senator Eugene McCarthy, however, who had a strong stance against the war decided to stand up and run against Johnson in the primary election. McCarthy had a well-built base among youth voters who were opposed to the war. Senator Kennedy announced his candidacy four days later, on March 16 (Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention). Many of Kennedy's supporters who had encouraged him to run earlier felt betrayed that it had taken him so long to decide to run. McCarthy supporters felt that he was a traitor for running with the possibility of taking away some of McCarty's votes. It did not take long for Kennedy to gain popularity, however, especially with minority voters (Robert Kennedy Biography).

On March 31, Johnson addressed the nation. He said " I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your
<https://assignbuster.com/democratic-national-convention-in-chicago-1968-history-essay/>

President (Farber).” On April 27th, Vice President Hubert Humphrey officially entered the race. Humphrey did not participate in the primaries but he received the support of many Democratic delegates (The Election of 1968). Humphrey did not, however, receive support of youth. He was seen as an extension of Johnson’s politics and more of the war that caused so much anger, violence and death.

Two events, which played a major role in the mood of the year, were the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and democratic candidate Robert Kennedy. On April 4th, standing on the balcony of his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN, Martin Luther King Jr. was shot (Martin Luther King Jr. Assassinated). Following this assassination, riots spread across the country. There were 168 riots in total, 3, 000 arrests, 20, 000 injuries and 55, 000 soldiers called in to restore order (1968 Chicago Race Riot). In Chicago, rioters broke windows, looted stores and set buildings fire. At the end in Chicago, one firefighter was hurt by gunfire, twelve civilians were killed and 170 buildings were destroyed. This created millions of dollars of damage and left over 1, 000 people homeless (Groves).

A few hours after the California primary on June 5th, 1968 Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The perpetrator, Sirhan Sirhan, shot him in the head at a close range. Kennedy was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital where he died the following morning (Robert F. Kennedy Assassination). News stations were present at the time and although the actual shooting was only caught on audio, the aftermath was all over the news. When the shooting happened, the news stations had already signed off. CBS’s Roger Mudd, who was in the ballroom at the time of the shooting, was alerted by a man who ran out of <https://assignbuster.com/democratic-national-convention-in-chicago-1968-history-essay/>

the kitchen holding his finger to his head like a gun and yelling “ bang bang bang.” Mudd was scared as he ran into the kitchen with his crew (What Was Going On.). By the time NBC, CBS and ABC were able to get their film processed and on the air nearly two hours had gone by. People were devastated and angry as they watched the news. Many saw Kennedy as a leader who would bring them the change they needed. He was brutally taken from them.

At this time many groups were created for protest and unity. Many of these groups expressed anguish over the violent events of that year as well as worked to face upcoming challenges such as the DNC. The Youth International Party or Yippies were a major group. Before the DNC, the Yippies created a “ yip-in” and “ yip-out” in New York City (Brief History Of Chicago’s 1968 Democratic Convention). These events had live music and were meant to promote peace, love, and harmony. They were also meant to be a trial for the events they were planning for the DNC in Chicago.

At the “ Yip-in” event a banner from an anarchist group was hung against a wall. It displayed the words “ Up Against the Wall Mother Fucker.” (Home) At first the police were peaceful and made jokes with the Yippies. Later the Yippies climbed a clock and removed the hands. The police were upset and cleared the station, forcing their way through the crowd (Home). Their Yip-out event went over much more peacefully. They saw this as a sign that they were more adequately prepared for the DNC (Farber). They made speeches, held rallies and wrote articles announcing their presence at the DNC. The Yippies wanted to make a strong statement that they were opposed to the war and to Hubert Humphrey as a candidate.

<https://assignbuster.com/democratic-national-convention-in-chicago-1968-history-essay/>

Another big group involved in the DNC protests was the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam or MOBE. MOBE was a coalition of many anti-war groups. It was run by an executive board that would send out invitations to more than 500 small independent groups on its mailing lists (Records of National Mobilization Committee). It would coordinate activities to create large crowds and huge projects. MOBE supported all types of demonstrations, from marching to civil disobedience. David Dellinger, MOBE's chairman, said that "The tendency to intensify militancy without organizing wide political support is self defeating. But so is the tendency to draw way from militancy into milder and core conventional forms of protest." (Farber) MOBE marshals were there to assist each group in organizing their certain type of protest. MOBE organized many successful demonstrations. Their first was the Pentagon March which took place at the Lincoln Memorial (Records of National Mobilization Committee). MOBE had planned for large scale marches at the convention.

Protests at the DNC were no great surprise. Many Democrats wanted to move their convention to Miami where Republicans were going to have their nominating event. Democrats were not only concerned about violent protests but also about a telephone strike taking place in Chicago which could cause technical problems (Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention). Television stations wanted to move the event to Miami as well. TV and phone lines were already set up at the Republican convention site. The phone strike in Chicago would cause television cameras to be limited to indoor areas. If footage were to be taken outside, it would need to be processed before it was broadcast which would take more time (Brief History

Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention). Mayor Richard J. Daley was upset by the calls for a change of location. He insisted the convention remain in Chicago. He said he would enforce the peace and would not allow out of hand protests (Johnson).

Mayor Daley wanted to be prepared. He called in forces to protect the convention. Outside the Democratic National Convention, anti-war demonstrators were met with 11,900 Chicago police, 7,500 army troops, 7,500 Illinois National Guardsmen and 1000 Secret Service over the 5 days of the convention (Going Back to Chicago). On Sunday August 25th, the violence started. The anti-war demonstrators tried to get permits from Chicago to demonstrate outside of the convention site but the requests were denied. When the park closed, Chicago police moved in with tear gas and billy-clubs to move the protesters from the park. Many protesters were injured and 17 were reported to be "attacked" by police (1968: A Convention in Crisis).

Wednesday has been called the worst day for the fight between the police and the protestors. It has been labeled as the "Battle of Michigan Avenue." The media recorded major violence. Innocent people standing nearby, reporters and doctors offering assistance were severely beaten by the police. Hotels were affected by the tear gas used by the police. Guests of the Conrad Hilton hotel, where many delegates were staying, could feel effects of the tear gas. After the convention, 589 arrests were reported. The injuries included 119 police and 100 protesters (Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention).

There was tension inside of the Amphitheatre as well. Anti-war delegates, who supported Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern, opposed Humphrey in every way possible. They challenged the credentials of 15 delegations, a record number. Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut made a speech nominating anti-war candidate George McGovern. He stated that “ with George McGovern as President of the United States, we wouldn’t have Gestapo tactics in the streets of Chicago.”(Johnson) Mayor Daley was furious. His angry response was documented on television. There was a two day debate over an anti-Vietnam war plank. Two very different planks were addressed. One supported the Administration’s position and the other called for an end to the war and a phased withdrawal of troops. The Administration’s plank won with 1, 527 to 1, 041 votes (Johnson). This failure of an anti-war win caused even more anger on the streets. Humphrey’s supporters were eventually able to gain control over the convention and he won the nomination.

After the convention, eight people were arrested on March 20th, 1969. These people, marked “ the Chicago 8”, were the first to be charged under the provisions in the 1968 Civil Rights Act (Home). This act made it a crime to cross state lines to provoke a riot. David Dellinger was chairman of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam(Brief History Of Chicago’s 1968 Democratic Convention). Rennie Davis and Tom Hayden were members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin were leaders of the Youth International Party (YIPPIES). Lee Weiner was a research assistant at Northwestern University. John Froines was a professor at the University at the University of Oregon.

Bobby Seale was a founder of the Black Panthers. (Brief History Of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention.)

The trial was before Judge Julius Hoffman on September 24th 1969 (Chicago 8 Trial Opens in Chicago). The defendants continuously talked back to the judge. Seale was especially disruptive and repeatedly called Hoffman a racist, fascist and a pig. Seale's trial was moved from the others on November 5th and he was charged separately (Chicago 8 Trial Opens in Chicago). They became the "Chicago 7". Dellinger, Davis, Hayden, Hoffman and Ruben were convicted of "crossing state to incite a riot and giving inflammatory speeches to further their purpose." They were all fined \$5,000 plus court costs, and given five years in prison (1968 Democratic Convention).

During the 1968 election, Republican Richard Nixon ran his campaign with a theme of "Law and Order." Humphrey campaigned to continue Johnson's great society programs. In the end, the central issue became the war. The country was divided and Humphrey was overrun with anti-war demonstrators whenever he made an appearance. The election ended up close but Nixon won by 43.4% to Humphrey's 42.7% in the popular vote (U. S. Presidential Election, 1968). The protest activity contrasted with the Republican's message of Law and Order. Nixon created an appearance of change, a complete switch from the current administration. This can all account for the loss of this election. In 1972 there was a landslide victory for Nixon again, with 23.2 percentage margin of victory (U. S. Presidential Election, 1968).

At the 2008 Democratic convention, the United States was once again in a time of war and frustrated with the current system. In preparation for the DNC, a large group was formed called "Recreate '68". This organization's name was meant to get attention and for the purpose of recreating the spirit of 1968 (Who We Are). When the group arrived at the convention, they were met with an official demonstration zone. This zone was nearly 300 yards from the convention hall (Jaffe). The protestors called this "The Freedom Cage". This zone was surrounded by two layers of fencing behind a white tent which was set up for the media. If the protestors cared to march, there was a route set up for them. This route led them more than a quarter of a mile away from the convention site (Jaffe).

Recreate 68' and other protest groups tried to sue the city of Denver for rights to get closer to the convention but the federal judge maintained the plans. Katherine Archuleta, the lead planner for the convention stated, "People can go and come as they like. The other thing that we are doing in the demonstration zone is to provide a stage and speakers and microphone, so that they can be heard [at] a greater distance. And that's the city's role - finding a balance between safety and security and the rights of those who would come and want to raise their voices." (Jaffe) Protest leaders felt that being caged and controlled by the police was not giving them their correct right to protest.

The 1968 DNC brought the feelings of the year together into a giant act of rage. This public display of disorder outside the DNC led the Democrats to change the way they control their conventions. Is caging in protestors going too far? Is there a way to maintain safety, the right image, and still allow the <https://assignbuster.com/democratic-national-convention-in-chicago-1968-history-essay/>

freedom to protest? Forty years have passed since the Chicago convention. Hopefully, in the future, the right balance will be found between control and freedom of speech