

Democratic national convention 1968 essay



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Matthew Aguayo English 2 Chris Thayer June 1, 2010 The 1968 Democratic National Convention Riots The year 1968 was one of the most controversial years in all of American history. It was a year of struggles for the heroes fighting in Vietnam, for the youth, women, and for black Americans facing both political and social discrimination. Through the year, some of the most famous events in American history took place, from the assassination of Robert Kennedy to the My Lai Massacre, to the most famous Democratic National Convention riots.

The 1968 Democratic National Convention (DNC) turned out thousands of supporters, and tens of thousands of protesters. The DNC itself lasted for three historical days, but the effects of the eight days of actions led to major social changes. The Democratic National Convention riots will always be known as one of the most historical and commemorative events in all of American history. August 28, 1968, delegates began to arrive in Chicago, Illinois, for the 35th Democratic National Convention, with the intention of choosing the new democratic presidential nominee.

Chicago was a major “ hot spot” for civil uprising, making it the perfect setting for a major political demonstration. The 1960’s gave birth to opinionated activist organizations, such as the famous Yippies, Students for a Democratic Society and the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, who all co-organized the demonstrations outside of the Democratic National Convention. Mayor Richard J. Daley was in great disagreement to the Yippie movement, and after getting word of the protests he publically announced, repeatedly, “ Law and order will be maintained,” and gave the order “ shoot to kill”, if necessary.

Mayor Daley kept his promise; for the 10, 000 demonstrators that arrived for the event, they were matched with about 20, 000 state police and National Guardsmen. The nation was already facing heavy tension between police and civilian activity after the peace protests and the MLK riots earlier that year. Mayor Daley confidentially knew this confrontation would immediately turn violent. The convention started as scheduled, delegates from around the nation poured into Chicago's International Amphitheatre, while protesters, from all corners of the county, poured onto the streets in the surrounding blocks.

After the city denied permits for the demonstrators they illegally gathered and began a march. Police quickly confronted the protesters and violence erupted. The " Police Riots", as they would later be known, began with warnings to disperse, and escalated to violent clubbing. Police shot eye burning tear gas into the crowds hoping to disperse and contain the situation, but it only escalated the situation further. The riots became complete havoc. Police and National Guardsmen rushed into crowds and nearby churches clubbing and attacking any protestor in sight.

Five hundred and ninety eight people were arrested on that day, while thousands of innocent demonstrators found themselves in local hospitals being treated for severe face and limb injuries. While no deaths occurred on that day it has come to be known as one of the most violent riots in all of American History. After six hours of a constant riot, order was finally maintained and most protestors fled back to their temporary housing stations, most of which were churches and nearby homes.

After the riots the nearby parks and building looked as though there had been a deadly war. The floors were bloodstained and thousands of littered items trashed most public facilities. The “ Police Riots” damaged the city much more than any protest or rally could have potentially reached. Months after the riots, the famous “ Chicago Seven” trial took place. The “ Chicago Seven” were a group of radicals from different organizations all charged with conspiracy to incite a riot at the Democratic National Convention.

As the “ Chicago Seven” faced the oak-panel it became much more than a normal trial. They faced a predominately white middle aged panel that held a strong prejudice against the entire hippie movement. The trial became a battle between the conservative white male and the liberal free hippie. In the end jurors acquitted all defendants on the conspiracy charge, while finding five defendants charged with intent to incite a riot guilty. The trial gained massive publicity and appeal which led to major social changes and a more open minded America.

The riots at the Democratic National Convention would be a major battle in the hippie movement during the 1960's. While thousands of protestors gathered around the surrounding streets to protest the war in Vietnam tens of thousands of police and national guardsmen arrived with the intention to attack and disrupt any kind of “ peace rally. ” The events would be forever remembered as a tragedy in a peaceful demonstration. To this day, protestors are still fighting the same battle fought forty year ago with protests of police reunions.

The Democratic National Convention riots will always be known as one of the most historical and commemorative events in all of American history. Works Cited Johnson, Haynes. "1968 Democratic Convention". Smithsonian.

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