



▲ Walter Cronkite

◀ A Vietnam veteran protests the war in 1970.

## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### The “Living-Room War”

Walter Cronkite, the anchor of the CBS Evening News, was the most respected television journalist of the 1960s. His many reports on the Vietnam War were models of balanced journalism and inspired the confidence of viewers across the United States. But during the Tet Offensive, Cronkite was shocked by the disconnect between Johnson’s optimistic statements and the gritty reality of the fighting. After visiting Vietnam in February of 1968, he told his viewers:

“We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds. . . . [I]t seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in stalemate.”

—Walter Cronkite, 1968

# The War Divides America

## Objectives

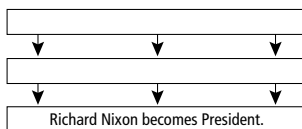
- Describe the divisions within American society over the Vietnam War.
- Analyze the Tet Offensive and the American reaction to it.
- Summarize the factors that influenced the outcome of the 1968 presidential election.

## Terms and People

draftee	Tet Offensive
SDS	Eugene McCarthy
“credibility gap”	Robert Kennedy

## NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Note the events leading up to the 1968 election.



**Why It Matters** President Johnson sent more American troops to Vietnam in order to win the war. But with each passing year, casualty lists got longer and victory seemed further away. As soldiers died abroad and hawks and doves argued at home, the Vietnam War opened up a deep emotional rift in American society. After the war ended, it would take years for the country to heal itself.

**Section Focus Question:** How did the American war effort in Vietnam lead to rising protests and social divisions back home?

## Antiwar Protests Increase

The war in Vietnam divided Americans more deeply than any conflict since the Civil War. Although most Americans initially supported President Johnson’s bombings and troop deployments, by 1966 critics began speaking out. Senator Fulbright’s opposition to the war hurt Johnson in Congress, and the senator was soon joined by like-minded activists who believed that American soldiers were dying in a war that had little to do with American interests.

**The Draft Becomes Increasingly Unpopular** By 1965, most of the troops sent to Vietnam were no longer volunteers who had enlisted in the army. Instead, they were **draftees**—young men drafted into military service—who had been assigned a tour in Vietnam. In accordance with the Selective Service Act of 1948, the government drafted more than 1.5 million men into military service during the Vietnam War. All males had to register for the draft when they turned 18, and the Selective Service System called up draftees based on projected military needs.

Critics of the Selective Service System argued that the draft was not fair. The system gave local draft boards considerable influence in selecting men for service, and it also granted deferments to college students and men who worked in certain designated occupations. Most of the 2.5 million men who served in Vietnam came from working-class and poor backgrounds.

During the Johnson presidency, the number of African American troops fighting and dying in Vietnam was also disproportionately high. At the beginning of the war, African Americans suffered more than 20 percent of the total combat deaths, roughly twice their percentage of the U.S. population. Additionally, African American soldiers were more likely to serve in combat positions and less likely to become commissioned officers.

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke out against the added war burden shouldered by African American soldiers. Speaking at a New York church in 1967, King said that the war was hurting both poor blacks and whites. Vietnam was drawing human and economic resources away from America's other wars on poverty and discrimination. He added that it hindered poor Americans in other more direct ways:

### Primary Source

“It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinary high proportions relative to the rest of the population. . . . [W]e have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967

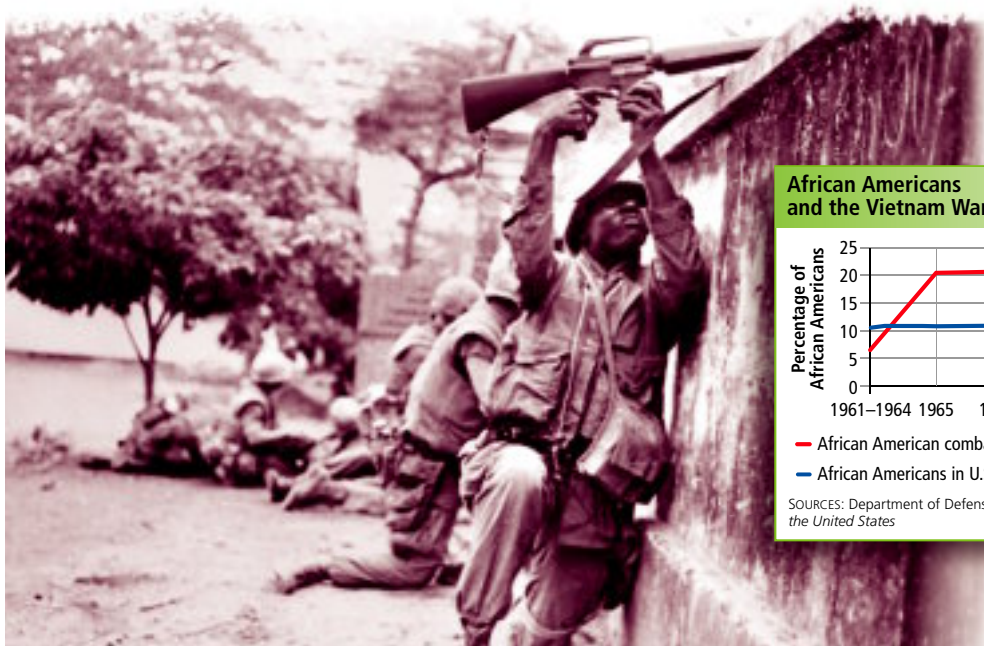
Perceived inequities in the draft led to widespread resistance. Antiwar advocates sponsored a Stop-the-Draft week in October 1967, and some draft-eligible males burned their draft cards in protest. Finally, in 1969, the Selective Service System adopted a lottery that was designed to eliminate deferment abuses and create a more diverse army of draftees.

### Vocabulary Builder

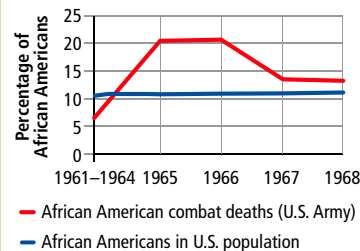
**deferment**—(dee FER muhnt) *n.*  
postponement

### African American Soldiers in Battle

The Vietnam War witnessed the highest proportion of African Americans ever to serve in an American war. Here, an African American Marine ducks behind a wall for cover while firing on an enemy position. *Based on the line graph, why might African American recruits be unhappy with the draft?*



**African Americans and the Vietnam War**



SOURCES: Department of Defense; *Historical Statistics of the United States*

**Activism Spreads on College Campuses** Across America, college campuses became centers of antiwar sentiment. Professors and students criticized the war for a variety of reasons, ranging from pacifism and the war's effects on the economy to a personal desire to avoid military service. Antiwar activity on college campuses did not, however, reflect the attitudes of Americans as a whole. In fact, many professors remained vocal in their defense of the war effort during lectures and at protest rallies. For the most part, though, colleges and universities represented the extreme antiwar opinion.

Antiwar activities were part of more significant changes taking place on college campuses. Never before the 1960s had so many Americans entered colleges and universities. Between 1946 and 1970, the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education increased from 2 million to 8 million. Many college students became a class unto themselves—segregated from the workforce, free from many adult responsibilities, and encouraged by their professors to think critically. Most of the students who embraced the antiwar cause came from upper-middle-class families. Students from working-class families were less likely to protest against the war.


The University of Michigan and the University of California at Berkeley became important hubs of the antiwar movement. The **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** was founded in 1960 at the University of Michigan. Originally formed to campaign against racism and poverty, the SDS soon began campaigning to end the war in Vietnam. By 1964, SDS had organized campus “teach-ins” and demonstrations against the war and encouraged draft-age males to sign “We Won’t Go” petitions.

**Students Clash With Authorities** Student activism led to a clash with administrators and police in 1964. Students at the University of California at Berkeley protested against the school’s decision not to allow them to use university grounds to organize off-campus political activities. The students formed the Free Speech Movement to contest the decision. When protesters occupied a university building, the police arrested them. In response, students cut classes to march in support of the FSM. University officials eventually relented and allowed students to engage in free speech activities on school grounds. The victory by students at Berkeley led to challenges at other colleges and universities.

**More and More Americans Oppose the War** Outside college campuses, other Americans soon enlisted in the antiwar cause. The war in Vietnam was the first “living-room war.” Americans watched the progress—or lack of it—in their living rooms on nightly newscasts. The intimacy of television made news of the war unavoidable. But unlike World War II, there was no march to victory.

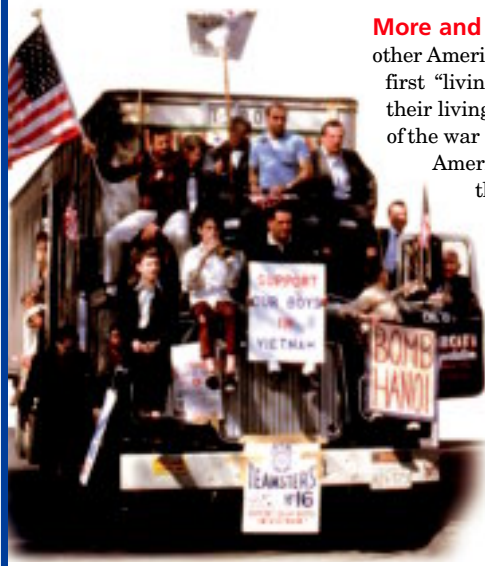
Americans could not put maps of Vietnam on their walls and trace the routes the troops were taking to Hanoi.

Hawks and doves drifted farther apart. More groups organized against the war, their names corresponding with whom they represented—Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Catholic Peace Fellowship, Another Mother for Peace. Antiwar Americans—rich and poor, black and white—read reports from war correspondents who questioned U.S. progress in Vietnam. They watched government officials issue optimistic statement after optimistic statement. Soon, a “**credibility gap**” emerged between what the Johnson administration said and what many journalists reported. This gap referred to the American public’s growing distrust of statements made by the government.

 **Checkpoint** Why did the antiwar movement grow across the nation?

## Hawks Respond to Protests

Despite doves’ vocal opposition to the war, hawks organized their own demonstrations to support U.S. policy in Vietnam. Below, New York City union members rally behind the American war effort in 1967.



## Tet Offensive Is the Turning Point

In November 1967, President Johnson brought General Westmoreland home from Vietnam to address the nation's concerns about the war. Westmoreland said that the Vietcong were declining in strength and could no longer mount a major offensive. As Westmoreland made his claims, however, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong were planning just such an attack.

### Communist Assault Shocks Americans

In early 1968, U.S. officials anticipated a communist offensive. As expected, on January 21, the North Vietnamese Army hit Khe Sanh in northwest South Vietnam. However, nine days later, the communists expanded their attack by hitting U.S. and ARVN positions throughout South Vietnam. The **Tet Offensive**—named after the Vietnamese lunar new year—was a coordinated assault on 36 provincial capitals and 5 major cities, as well as the U.S. embassy in Saigon.

The communists planned to take and hold the cities until the urban population took up arms in their support. They thought the Tet Offensive had a good chance of ending the war. The fighting was fierce, but in the end, American and South Vietnamese forces repelled the offensive and there was no popular uprising against the government of South Vietnam. Although U.S. forces won a tactical victory by preventing the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army from achieving their primary objectives, the Tet Offensive was a strategic blow to the Americans. It demonstrated that the communists had not lost the will or the ability to fight on.

**War's End Is Nowhere in Sight** After the Tet Offensive, American military leaders seemed less confident of a quick end to the war. When Westmoreland requested more troops, President Johnson asked his new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford to take an objective look at the military and political situation in Vietnam. The deeper Clifford delved into the matter, the more pessimistic he became. Sending more troops would inevitably require raising taxes, increasing draft rolls, and calling up reserves. It would lead to increased casualties in the field and dissent at home. And it still might not lead to victory. Clifford concluded that the President should radically shift U.S. policy from one that pursued victory to one that pursued a negotiated peace.

**Johnson Steps Down** While Clifford deliberated, many Americans began to turn dramatically against the war. Some marched in protest and engaged in antiwar activities. Others registered their disapproval at the polls. In early

## Tet Offensive, 1968



**Map Skills** In launching the Tet Offensive, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army wanted to demoralize South Vietnam and deal American forces a devastating blow.

- Regions** Identify two regions of South Vietnam that were hard-hit by the Tet Offensive.
- Draw Conclusions** How do you think the Tet Offensive affected the morale of North Vietnam? Explain.

**Vocabulary Builder**  
inevitable—(ihn EHV ih tuh buhl)  
*adj.* certain to happen



## Can the United States Win the War in Vietnam?

Despite the war's growing unpopularity, Johnson was reluctant to withdraw from Vietnam. Some urged him to get out of "Kennedy's war." His own Cabinet was divided on the issue.

### DEAN RUSK

Citing Chamberlain and Hitler as an example, Secretary of State Rusk opposed appeasement. He supported increased bombing and troops to force North Vietnam to negotiate a peace.

#### Primary Source

"If . . . North Vietnam will stop [its] campaign to destroy the Republic of Vietnam, the measures we are taking to assist South Vietnam . . . will no longer be necessary. . . . We see no necessity for international negotiations. . . . [W]e cannot [think of] any points that would be negotiable."

—Dean Rusk, 1963



### GEORGE BALL

Undersecretary of State Ball urged President Johnson in 1965 to stop sending U.S. soldiers to Vietnam.

#### Primary Source

"No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong . . . no matter how many . . . troops we deploy. No [ground forces] of whatever size can win a guerrilla war—which is at the same time a civil war . . . in jungle terrain in the midst of a population that refuses cooperation. . . ."

—George Ball, 1965

#### Compare

1. According to Rusk, when should the United States end its participation in the war?
2. Why does Ball think that Rusk's strategy will not work?

1968, Minnesota senator **Eugene McCarthy**, the antiwar candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, made a surprisingly strong showing in the New Hampshire primary. Sensing that Johnson was in a politically weakened position, New York's Democratic senator **Robert Kennedy** announced his candidacy for the presidency. Both McCarthy and Kennedy believed that the war had divided America and drained resources away from the fights against poverty and discrimination. What Johnson feared most was happening: The war was undermining his presidency.

On March 31, 1968, two months after the Tet Offensive, the President addressed the nation on television. He announced that America would limit its bombing of North Vietnam and seek a negotiated settlement to the war. Johnson then shocked the nation by announcing that he would not run for another term as President. The speech marked another turning point in the war. The fight for victory was over. Peace was now the official government policy.

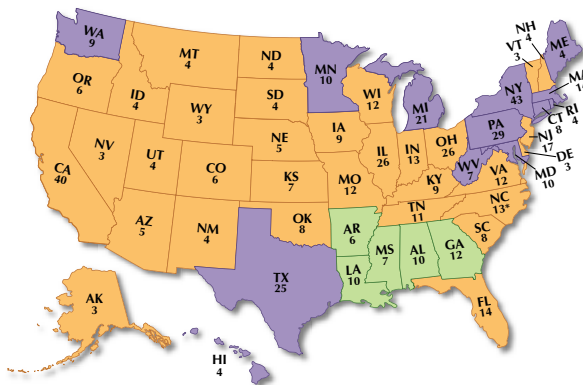


**Checkpoint** How was the Tet Offensive both a victory and a defeat for the United States?

## Violence Rocks 1968 Presidential Race

Johnson's decision not to seek reelection in 1968 threw the presidential race wide open. Many Americans believed it provided an opportunity to enact fundamental political and social changes. They argued that the future of the country was at stake. It was a time of new ideas and new plans. But the optimism and high hopes of the early campaign would soon die amidst political infighting, violence, and assassination.

# Presidential Election of 1968



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	% Electoral Vote	% Popular Vote**
Richard M. Nixon (Republican)	301	31,710,470	56	43.6
Hubert H. Humphrey (Democratic)	191	30,898,055	36	42.5
George C. Wallace (American Independent)	46	9,906,473	8	13.6

\* One Nixon elector voted outside the party's endorsement

\*\* Minor parties received 0.3% of the popular vote

**Map Skills** In 1968, Richard Nixon defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey and third-party candidate George Wallace, who had split from the Democratic Party.

**1. Regions** From where did Wallace draw most of his support?

**2. Draw Conclusions** What might have happened if Wallace had renounced his candidacy and rejoined the Democratic ranks?

**Two Leaders Fall** In the spring and summer of the campaign season, bullets struck down two Americans who spoke out eloquently for peace in Vietnam and peaceful change in American society. Martin Luther King, Jr., the most prominent leader of the civil rights movement, had publicly turned against the war in 1967. He contributed compelling social and moral reasons to the argument for peace. But his voice was tragically silenced on April 4, 1968, when a racist assassin shot and killed him in Memphis, Tennessee.

Robert Kennedy was the next leader to fall. He had based his campaign for the presidency on compassion and idealism, and millions of Americans rallied to his camp. On June 5, 1968, at a rally celebrating his victory in the California primary, Kennedy asserted that "we are a great country, an unselfish country, a compassionate country," and that he intended "to make that the basis of my running." Minutes later, a Palestinian immigrant named Sirhan Sirhan shot Kennedy in the head, killing him instantly. Sirhan may have wanted revenge for America's support for Israel in that country's war with Egypt the year before.

**Protesters Disrupt Chicago Democratic Convention** The murders of King and Kennedy cast a dark shadow over the election campaigns. In August 1968, the Democrats convened in Chicago to choose a presidential candidate to represent their party in the November election. As the delegates arrived, so too did antiwar protesters. Chicago's mayor deployed police and members of the National Guard to prevent any outbreaks of violence.

Inside the convention, the Democrats angrily debated placing an antiwar plank in the party platform. They chose Hubert Humphrey, Johnson's Vice President, over Eugene McCarthy, who had garnered support from many antiwar groups. As the delegates cast their votes, violence erupted outside the convention between police and protesters. After police beat activists with nightsticks, some protesters retaliated by throwing rocks and bottles at the onrushing tide of police.

The television coverage of the fierce fighting in the streets and bitter arguments on the convention floor shocked Americans. Chaos and civil disorder appeared to have replaced civil debate in the political arena. The divisions and violence in Chicago mirrored the deep divisions in American politics and the heartbreaking violence on the front lines in Vietnam.

**Richard Nixon Wins the Presidency** At a much more peaceful convention in Miami, Republicans nominated Richard M. Nixon, who promised if elected he would deliver “peace with honor.” He wanted the United States out of Vietnam, but he also demanded honorable peace terms. He promised to listen to “the great, quiet forgotten majority—the nonshouters and the nondemonstrators.” This large group of Americans, described by one commentator as “the young, the unblack, and the unpoor,” was dubbed the “silent majority.” Throughout his campaign, Nixon used a “southern strategy” of courting more conservative southern voters with appeals to law and order, striving to pull them away from their traditional support of the Democratic Party.

Alabama governor George Wallace also ran for the presidency on a third-party ticket. A lifelong Democrat prior to his entry into the race, Wallace said that neither of the traditional political parties represented southern voters who were unsettled by the cultural and social changes in the country. He had no sympathy for the demands of antiwar radicals, counterculture hippies, or African American militants. He represented the “white backlash” against the civil rights movement and the desire to press forward to victory in Vietnam.

The combination of Nixon’s “southern strategy” and Wallace’s third-party candidacy siphoned traditionally Democratic votes away from Humphrey. In a close election, Nixon captured victory by winning 43.6 percent of the popular vote and 301 electoral votes. Humphrey received 42.5 percent of the popular vote and Wallace 13.6 percent. The election marked the end of the Democratic “Solid South” and signaled significant changes in the nation’s political landscape. Richard Nixon’s ascendancy marked a new Republican domination of the American presidency.



**Checkpoint** What happened at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago?



### “Silent” Supporters

In 1969, President Nixon called his supporters the “silent majority.” Especially strong in the South and West, the silent majority consisted of patriotic veterans of World War II and the Korean War, middle class blue-collar workers, conservative young Americans, and many others.

## SECTION

# 3

## Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1608

### Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining its significance.
  - draftee
  - “credibility gap”
  - Tet Offensive
  - Eugene McCarthy
- 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Use your flowchart to answer the Section Focus Question: How did the American war effort in Vietnam lead to rising protests and social divisions back home?

### Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Answer Opposing Arguments** To write a strong persuasive essay, you need to address arguments that could be raised to refute your own position. Choose a topic from this section, such as whether Johnson made the right decision by withdrawing from the 1968 presidential race. Then, create a chart listing arguments on both sides of the debate.

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Evaluate Information** Identify three factors that led to the growth of the antiwar movement. Which do you think was the most important?
- 5. Identify Effects** How did the military outcome of the Tet Offensive differ from its impact on the American people?
- 6. Draw Conclusions** What were the chief weaknesses of the Democrats in the 1968 election? How did these weaknesses aid the election of Richard Nixon?