

# Political Divisions

## READING FOCUS

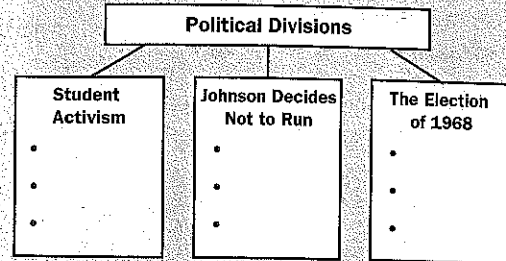
- What role did students play in the protest movements of the 1960s?
- Why did President Johnson decide not to seek reelection?
- How did the Vietnam War affect the election of 1968?

## KEY TERMS

generation gap  
New Left  
teach-in  
conscientious objector  
deferment  
Middle America

## TAKING NOTES

Copy the chart below. As you read, fill in each box with examples and events that reflected the growing divisions among the American people.



## MAIN IDEA

The Vietnam War created deep divisions in the Democratic Party and in the nation as a whole.

**Setting the Scene** As the war in Vietnam unfolded, many loyal and patriotic Americans favored increasing the war effort in order to bring about military victory. Others believed that the war was morally wrong and urged immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops. Opposing viewpoints created deep divisions within the United States:

*“A feeling is widely and strongly held that . . . we are trying to impose some U.S. image on distant peoples we cannot understand, and that we are carrying the thing to absurd lengths. Related to this feeling is the increased polarization that is taking place in the United States, with seeds of the worst split in our people in more than a century.”*

—John McNaughton, aide to Robert McNamara

## Student Activism

In the early 1960s, members of the baby-boom generation began to graduate from high school. Years of prosperity gave many of these students opportunities

Students were in the forefront of protests against the Vietnam War.



## Focus on CITIZENSHIP

**Twenty-sixth Amendment** Before 1971, nearly all states required voters to be at least 21 years old. (Georgia had allowed 18-year-olds to vote since 1943.) A movement to lower the voting age to 18 nationwide sparked controversy in the 1960s.

Opponents of the effort to lower the voting age pointed to radical student activists and asked, "Do you want people like that to take part in a national election?" Those who favored a lower voting age argued that if 18-year-olds were old enough to fight for their country in Vietnam, they were old enough to vote.

The Twenty-sixth Amendment, ratified in 1971, states: "The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be abridged by any state on account of age."

unknown to previous generations. Instead of going directly into the working world after high school, many young men and women could afford to continue their education. College enrollments swelled with more students than ever before.

Change was in the air. It had been building for a while, even through the conformist years of the 1950s. The popular culture of that decade, including rock-and-roll music and rebellious youths on the movie screen, indicated that many young Americans were not satisfied with the values of their parents. The early 1960s saw a widening of this **generation gap**.

**Students for a Democratic Society** The civil rights movement, discussed in an earlier chapter, also became a steppingstone to other movements for change. Civil rights activists were among those who helped organize Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960. The organization's declaration of principles and goals, called the Port Huron Statement, appeared in 1962. Written largely by Tom Hayden, a student at the University of Michigan, the statement explained some of the feelings behind a student movement that was gaining strength in the United States:

*"We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably at the world we inherit. When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world. . . . As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. . . . We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation."*

—Port Huron Statement

SDS was a tiny organization at the start. Still, it had a major influence on the development of a new political movement that came to be called the **New Left**. Members of the New Left believed that problems such as poverty and racism called for radical changes.

**The Free Speech Movement** Student activism led to confrontation at the University of California at Berkeley in September 1964. Students became angry when the university administration refused to allow them to distribute civil rights leaflets outside the main gate of the campus.

The students, who had fought for equal rights in the South, argued that their right to free speech was being challenged. They resisted the university's effort to restrict their political activity. When police came to arrest one of their leaders, students surrounded the police car and prevented it from moving. The free speech movement was underway.

The university administration tried to find a compromise, but then its governing board stepped in. The board had the final word over university policy. It decided to hold student leaders responsible for their actions and filed charges against some of them.

On December 2, 1964, thousands of irate students took over the university administration building. That night police moved in. They arrested more than 700 students. Other students, supported by some faculty members, went

on strike. They stopped attending classes to show their support for the free speech demonstrators.

Berkeley remained the most radical campus, but student activism spread to other colleges and universities across the United States. In the spring of 1965, activists at several schools launched protests against regulations they thought curbed their freedom. Students at Michigan State University and elsewhere challenged social restrictions, such as the hours when women and men could visit each other's dormitories. Students also sought greater involvement in college policy-making. Others left their campuses to work in campaigns to improve conditions in the inner cities.

**The Teach-in Movement** Students were among the first to protest the Vietnam War. Some opposed what they regarded as American imperialism. Others viewed the conflict as a civil war that should be resolved by the Vietnamese alone.

As escalation began, antiwar activists used new methods to protest the war. The first **teach-in** took place at the University of Michigan in March 1965 when a group of faculty members decided to make a public statement against the war. Some 50 or 60 professors taught a special night session in which issues concerning the war could be aired.

To their surprise, several thousand people showed up and made the evening a monumental success. Soon other teach-ins followed at colleges around the country. Supporters as well as opponents of the war appeared at the early teach-ins, but soon antiwar voices dominated the sessions.

**Draft Resistance** A Selective Service Act allowing the government to draft men between the ages of 18 and 26 had been in place since 1951. Relatively few people refused to be drafted in the first half of the 1960s. Most who did were **conscientious objectors** who opposed fighting in the war on moral or religious grounds.

## Fast Forward to Today

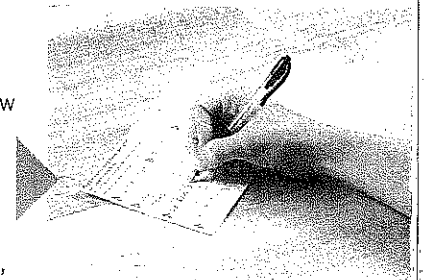
### Draft Registration

Since the Civil War, the United States has used a draft in wartime to meet its military needs. During the Vietnam War, about 1.8 million men were drafted between 1964 and 1973. Because college students could receive draft deferments, a large proportion of draftees were young men from minority communities who were too poor to afford college. Reacting to complaints about the system, Congress eliminated the deferment in 1971.



Another effort to make the draft more evenhanded was the lottery system instituted in 1969. This random drawing determined how likely a young man was to be called for military service. Despite these changes, opposition to the draft continued. Some young men burned their draft cards in protest. Thousands even left the country to avoid the draft. In 1973, Congress ended the draft, and the United States converted to an all-volunteer military force.

Today male citizens ages 18 through 25 are required by law to register with the Selective Service System. In a national crisis, if the country needs more soldiers than an all-volunteer service can provide, the draft can be resumed.



? Why do you think the government requires draft registration?

In July 1965, President Johnson doubled the number of men who could be drafted into the armed forces. By the end of the year he had doubled the number again. These actions led to the rise of a draft-resistance movement that urged young men not to cooperate with their local draft boards.

As more and more young men were called into service and sent to fight in Vietnam, Americans began to question the morality and fairness of the draft. College students could receive a **deferment**, or official postponement of their call to serve. Usually this meant they would not have to go to war. Those who could not afford college did not have this avenue open to them. In 1966, the Selective Service System announced that college students who ranked low academically could be drafted.

In 1967, resistance to the military draft began to sweep the country. Many young men tried to avoid the draft by claiming that they had physical disabilities. Others applied for conscientious-objector status. Still others left the country. By the end of the war an estimated 100,000 draft resisters were believed to have gone to countries such as Canada.

**Continued Protests** In the first six months of 1968, more than 200 major demonstrations erupted at colleges and universities around the country. One of the most dramatic incidents took place in April of 1968 at Columbia University

in New York City. Students there linked the issues of civil rights and the war. An SDS chapter sought to get the university to cut its ties with a research institute that did work for the military. At the same time, an African American student organization tried to halt construction of a gymnasium that would encroach upon a nearby minority neighborhood in Harlem.

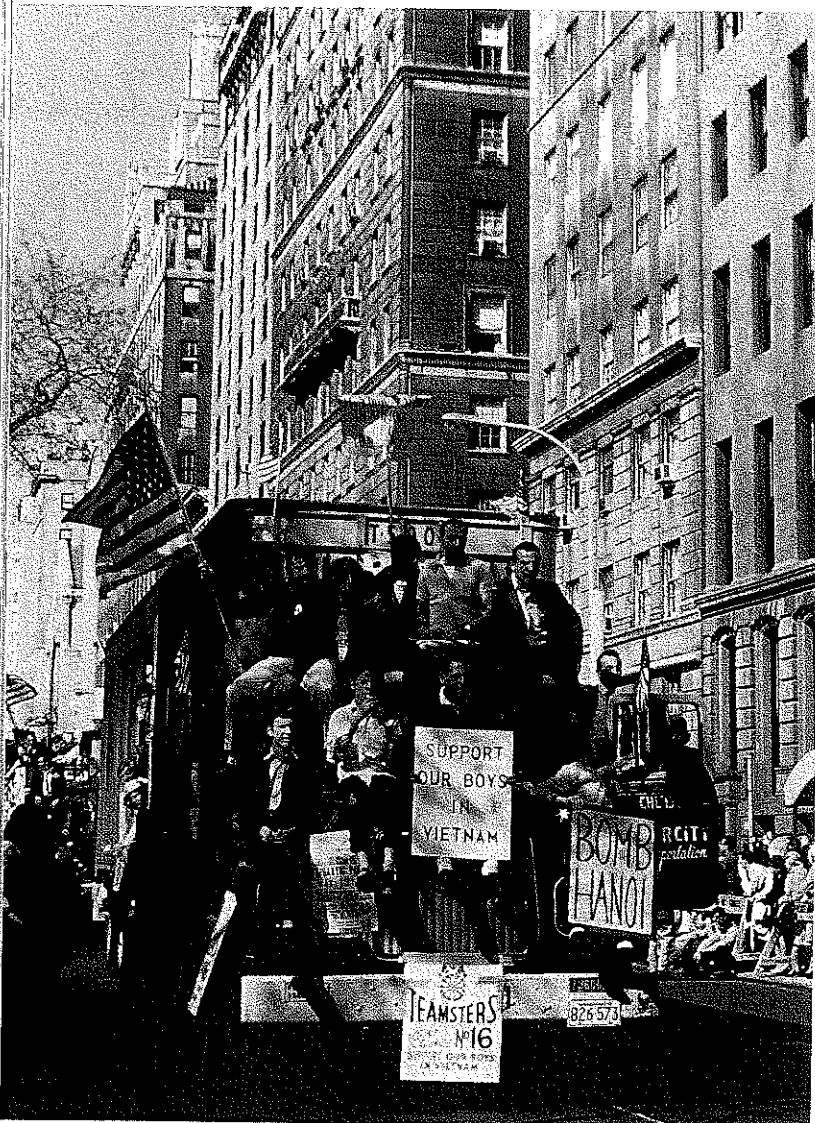
Together these two groups took over the president's office. Finally the president of Columbia called the police, and hundreds of students were arrested. A student sympathy strike followed, and the university closed early that spring.

## Johnson Decides Not to Run

Continuing protests and a growing list of American casualties had steadily increased public opposition to Johnson's handling of the war. By 1967, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had lost faith in the war effort. Privately, he urged the President to turn more of the fighting over to the South Vietnamese and to stop the bombing of North Vietnam. Johnson, fearful of risking defeat on the battlefield, ignored the proposal.

As a result of the Tet Offensive, polls showed for the first time that a majority of Americans opposed the war. Television news coverage of Tet increased the impact that the attack had on the public. Millions watched as news anchor Walter Cronkite, known for his objectivity and trustworthiness, said in February of 1968, "It now seems more certain than ever that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in stalemate." President Johnson

**VIEWING HISTORY** New York City Transportation Union members demonstrate in favor of the Vietnam War in 1967. Drawing **Inferences** Why do you think those in favor of the war felt it necessary to hold demonstrations like this one?



heard Cronkite's assessment of the war and reacted with dismay. Reportedly he said, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America."

After the Tet Offensive, Johnson rarely left the White House for fear of being assaulted by angry crowds of protesters. He said he felt like "a jackrabbit in a hailstorm, hunkering up and taking it." In early 1968, Johnson watched the campaign of antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy gain momentum. On March 12, McCarthy almost beat the President in the New Hampshire Democratic primary.

Four days later, another critic of the war, Robert Kennedy, joined the race for the Democratic nomination. Kennedy, the younger brother of President John Kennedy and a senator from New York, had been speaking out against the war in Congress. In March 1967, a year before he announced his candidacy, Kennedy had said this in a speech in the Senate:

*"All we say and all we do must be informed by our awareness that this horror is partly our responsibility; not just a nation's responsibility but yours and mine. It is we who live in abundance and send our young men out to die. It is our chemicals that scorch the children and our bombs that level the villages. We are all participants. To know this and feel the burden of this responsibility is not to ignore important interests, not to forget that freedom and security must, at times, be paid for in blood. Still, even though we must know as a nation what it is necessary to do, we must also feel as men the anguish of what we are doing."*

—Robert Kennedy

Now Kennedy was running against Johnson for the Democratic nomination for President.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson declared dramatically in a nationally televised speech that he would not run for another term as President:

*"I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office—the presidency of your country. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term."*

—Lyndon Johnson

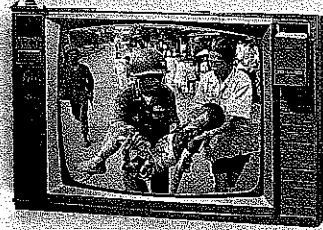
## The Election of 1968

Even before Johnson's announcement, the same issues that were dividing the American public had led to a split in the Democratic Party.

**The Democratic Convention** Delegates to the Democratic convention met in Chicago that summer to nominate candidates for President and Vice President. By the time the Democrats convened, their party was in shreds. Robert Kennedy had been assassinated in June, and party regulars thought McCarthy was too far out of the mainstream. Instead they supported Vice President Hubert Humphrey, longtime advocate of social justice and civil rights. Humphrey, however, was hurt by his defense of Johnson's policies on Vietnam. In the face of growing antiwar protest, he hardly seemed the one to bring the party together.

## Focus on CULTURE

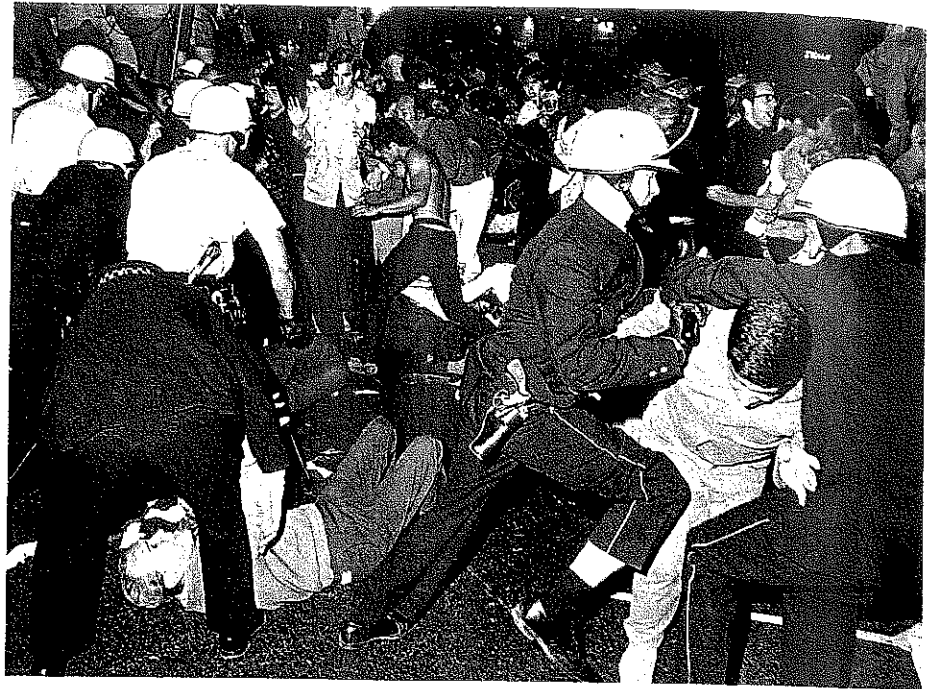
**The Living Room War** Television played a major role in influencing public opinion. Nightly news broadcasts brought the Vietnam War into the living rooms of more than 60 million American viewers. Scenes of dying soldiers and desperate civilians led many viewers to question American involvement in Vietnam.



**VIEWING HISTORY** Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy in March 1968. Here, he is campaigning in Nebraska. **Determining Relevance** How much do you think Robert Kennedy's entrance into the race affected Johnson's decision not to seek reelection? Explain your answer.



**VIEWING HISTORY** As the Democrats gathered in Chicago for their 1968 convention, antiwar protesters gathered too. Chicago police (under the direction of Democratic Mayor Richard Daley) and National Guardsmen used nightsticks, tear gas, and rifles against the demonstrators and others caught up in the protests. *Determining Relevance* How do you think television broadcasts of scenes like the one at right affected the election? Explain.



The climax came when the convention delegates voted down a peace resolution and seemed ready to nominate Humphrey for President. As thousands of protesters gathered for a rally near the convention hotel, the police moved in, using their nightsticks to club anyone on the street, including bystanders, hotel guests, and reporters. Historian Theodore H. White vividly recorded the scene that took place in Chicago during the Democratic convention in August 1968:

*“Slam! Like a fist jolting, like a piston exploding from its chamber, comes a hurtling column of police . . . into the intersection, and all things happen too fast: first the charge as the police wedge cleaves through the mob; then screams, whistles, confusion. . . . And as the scene clears, there are little knots in the open clearing—police clubbing youngsters, police dragging youngsters, police rushing them by the elbows, their heels dragging, to patrol wagons. . . .”*

—Theodore H. White

Much of the violence took place in front of television cameras, while crowds chanted “The whole world is watching.” As the convention delegates voted, Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut denounced the “Gestapo tactics on the streets of Chicago,” provoking an angry scene with Chicago mayor Daley. In the end, Humphrey was nominated, but the Democratic Party had been further torn apart.

**The Republicans and the Nation Choose Nixon** The Republicans had already held their convention in early August. They had chosen Richard M. Nixon, who had narrowly lost the presidential election of 1960 to John Kennedy. During his campaign, Nixon backed law and order and boasted of a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam.

Nixon was determined to stay “above the fray” and act presidential during the campaign. Therefore he let his running mate, Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland, make harsh accusations, such as calling Humphrey “squishy soft”

### READING CHECK

Describe what happened at the Democratic National Convention.

on communism. With a well-run and well-financed campaign, Nixon quickly took the lead in public-opinion polls.

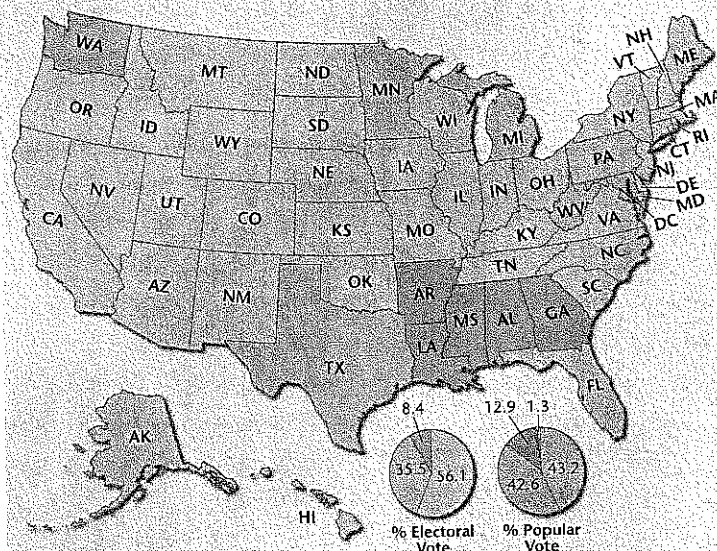
Adding to the Democrats' problems was a third-party candidate for President. Alabama governor George C. Wallace, who had been a lifelong Democrat, had gained national fame for playing on racial tensions among southerners. In 1968, representing the American Independent Party, he appealed to blue-collar voters in the North who resented campus radicals and antiwar activists. Wallace won support by attacking those he called "left-wing theoreticians, briefcase-totin' bureaucrats, ivory-tower guideline writers, bearded anarchists, smart-aleck editorial writers, and pointy-headed professors."

Late in the campaign, Humphrey began to catch up to Nixon in the public-opinion polls. But even though President Johnson stopped the bombing of North Vietnam on October 31, it was too late. Many disillusioned Democrats stayed home on election day, voting for no one.

The election, held on November 5, was close. Nixon won 43.4 percent of the popular vote—less than one percentage point more than Humphrey's 42.7 percent. Even so, Nixon gained 302 electoral votes to 191 for Humphrey and 45 for Wallace. Although Democrats kept control of both houses of Congress, the Republicans had regained the White House.

The war significantly influenced the election of 1968. Nixon's win marked the start of a Republican hold on the presidency that would last, with one interruption, for more than 20 years. This political shift reflected how unsettling the 1960s had become for mainstream Americans, a group sometimes called **Middle America**. In an era of chaos and confrontation, Middle America turned to the Republican Party for stability.

## Presidential Election of 1968



| Candidate/Party                          | Electoral Vote | Popular Vote |
|--|----------------|--------------|
| Richard M. Nixon (Republican)            | 302            | 31,785,480   |
| Hubert H. Humphrey (Democrat)            | 191            | 31,275,166   |
| George C. Wallace (American Independent) | 45             | 9,906,473    |
| Minor parties                            |                | 972,139      |

**MAP SKILLS** This map shows the results of the election of 1968. Regions (a) Where did Humphrey draw most of his support? (b) Where was Wallace's support? (c) What do you think might have happened if Wallace had given up his candidacy and returned to the Democratic Party?

## Section

# 3

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. What was the **generation gap**?
2. Who participated in **teach-ins**?
3. What is a **conscientious objector**?
4. Why did some Americans oppose the practice of **deferment**?
5. Describe the group sometimes referred to as **Middle America**.

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

6. **Making Comparisons** Write a brief summary comparing the different viewpoints that Americans held regarding the Vietnam War.
7. **Writing a List** List several reasons why students played a major role in the protest movements of the 1960s.



### Take It to the NET

**Activity: Analyzing Primary Sources** Select a primary source associated with student activism. Prepare a brief analysis of this source, including point of view, bias, and audience. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)