

The Shortest Decade

Joseph P. Tomain

In the middle of a Friday episode of *As The World Turns*, at 2:38 PM EST, the most trusted man in America announced the death of President John F. Kennedy. Walter Cronkite removed his thick black glasses, paused, put them back on and reported that Lyndon Johnson would assume the Office of the Presidency. The newsman, then, uncharacteristically, cleared his throat, blinked several times, looked down and away from the television camera and removed his glasses once more, eyes welling.

On November 5, 1968, 17 days shy of the fifth anniversary of the assassination, Richard Nixon was elected 37th President of the United States.

In those five years, between the bullet and the ballot, the decade we call the '60s happened.

In the next weeks, Johnson reached out to the Kennedys despite the hatred between them; kept government moving; and, built a Cabinet as the country changed deeply. The changes were decidedly political; they were also decidedly cultural.

Kennedy and his “wise men” were more Establishment than anyone in the Eisenhower Administration. The New Frontier appeared to be of a new order; an order of hope in an uncertain, cold war world. Yet, the bullet that killed Kennedy obliterated the unfulfilled promises of Camelot. When Kennedy died, the American Dream as shown on TVLand died too.

The Donna Reed Show, Leave it to Beaver, Ozzie and Harriet and other such shows, romanticized a particular kind of family life – a quiet home with the responsible father, the dutiful housewife, the white picket fence, and the 2.3 adorable, pesky children. The children watching those shows, though, knew that those were not the lives they were living. The white, nuclear, suburban family was neither the experience of most Americans; nor was that idealization particularly desirable. And, while Americans acknowledged the ‘50’s disquiet about the One-Dimensional, Organization Man; now, they were poised to reject and redirect their anxieties.

Change came with LBJ. An unwelcome interloper to Establishment boardrooms and country clubs; Johnson was more committed to the Hill Country than to Wall Street; more committed to civil rights, than to returns on investment.

On January 8, 1964, Johnson delivered his first State of the Union address. Its message was clear; its vision sweeping: “Let this session of Congress be known as the session which did more for civil rights than the last hundred sessions combined.” He led with civil rights; vowed deep tax cuts; and, advocated a range of initiatives asking all of Congress to “put your country ahead of your party.” Next, the new president unveiled his War on Poverty by targeting its underlying causes, which, quoting Johnson, “lie deep in our failure to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities, a lack of education and training, a lack of medical care and housing, and a lack of decent communities in which to live and bring up . . . children.” That one short sentence described the Great Society and, as Robert Caro tells us, with that address “he made the presidency his own.”

As “Master of the Senate,” Johnson worked with the Hill to deliver on the promises he made. In March, Congress passed the *Economic Opportunity Act* establishing the *Job Corps*, *Vista*, *Work Study*, and the *Community Action Program* to provide education, training and services to combat poverty. Other legislation included early environmental laws, together with support for mass transit, interstate highways, housing, criminal justice, and the creation of the Kennedy Center.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, considered the most important legislation in American history, was Johnson’s point of pride. It came with steep political costs levied by the Dixiecrats and Johnson well knew the price of the toll. On signing the bill, he told an aide that the Democrats “have lost the South for a generation.” Indeed. More Republicans voted for the Civil Rights Act than Democrats and, after the longest filibuster in Senate history, the bill passed 73 to 27. The Act touched on voting rights; more significantly, it outlawed discrimination in hotels, restaurants, theaters, and all other public accommodations; it established the *Civil Rights* and the *Equal Employment Opportunity* commissions; and, the Attorney General was directed and empowered to fight school segregation.

The Great Society is Johnson’s great legacy; Vietnam is his great and shameful scar. The slide to the end began in the Gulf of Tonkin. Before any encounter in those waters, the White House had drafted a resolution authorizing the President to step up aggression by blockading Haiphong Harbor and heavily bombing the North. The draft was also intended to legitimize (or sweep from public glare) the covert ops already undertaken by the CIA and its South Vietnamese collaborators.

Johnson was in a hard spot that election year; he could neither appear a warmonger nor “weak on defense.” Nevertheless, he used two skirmishes to move the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the floor. The first involved a destroyer, the *USS Maddox*. The *Maddox* spotted three North Vietnamese vessels and decided to avoid confrontation by sailing east away from any engagement. The North Vietnamese had another idea. They pursued, then fired on the *Maddox*. After 20 minutes, the destroyer crippled two of the enemy craft and sunk the third while one stray North Vietnamese bullet actually hit the ship.

Two days later, the second “skirmish.” On August 4, Johnson reported that two US destroyers had been attacked. At the time, the *Ticonderoga* and the *Constellation* had been secretly sending jets off their flight decks on the first US bombing missions against North Vietnam. Johnson reported that “a second deliberate attack” had occurred and ordered “limited” reprisals. That is if 64 damaging sorties can be called limited. Of this second incident, Stanley Karnow writes that “with almost total certainty . . . the second communist attack . . . never happened. It had not been deliberately faked, but Johnson and his staff . . . had seized upon a fuzzy set of circumstances to fulfill a contingency plan.” Well, perhaps.

Regardless, now Johnson had the necessary pluck to ask Congress to give him “all necessary measures” to repel attacks against US forces; to “prevent further aggression;” and, to let him, the Imperial President, determine “peace and security” in the area. Johnson quipped that the resolution was “like grandma’s nightshirt – it covered everything.” On August 5, the resolution passed the Senate 98 to 2 (Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening dissenting); it passed the House unanimously.

Politics, then, went to college.

Civil rights demonstrations hit the Bay Area that spring as Berkeley students were using tables on a campus plaza to distribute information about local activities. Annoyed state legislators demanded that administrators control the students. The University accommodated by restricting what students could say about “off campus political and social” events. The students asked the administration to reconsider its prohibitions in the name of the 1st Amendment. When rejected, they occupied the administration building but left at 3 AM. The next day the tables reappeared violating the restrictions. Then an alumnus was arrested increasing the agitation and leading to negotiations with President Clark Kerr. The President and the students agreed to resolve matters, continued to negotiate about the scope of speech rights, and organized a monitoring group.

The students honored the agreement and did not set up any tables until the negotiations went nowhere; then the tables reappeared. Negotiations broke down over whether or not students could advocate getting arrested for civil rights demonstrations. At that point, California Regents endorsed an Administration rule reasserting its disciplinary authority over the campus. When the students learned that the rule also reserved the power to impose “indefinite suspensions” without a hearing, they again occupied the administration building; again debated the issues; and, again left peaceably.

The continuing negotiations, debates, and reactions had to lead somewhere. They led to a rally on the steps of Sproul Hall. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Joan Baez spoke. So did Mario Savio who aroused the crowd saying “There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers,

upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop." A riveting moment. Check it out on YouTube.

After Savio, the gathered once again occupied the administration building. This time, Governor Pat Brown ordered in the police who cleared the building making over 700 arrests. Curiously, the Regents capitulated and agreed with the students that speech rights should be constitutionally construed, while they pointedly reserved the authority to maintain order. These were the circumstances that gave birth to the Free Speech Movement.

Moving from the Coast to the Midwest, our own Miami University became Ground Zero for training a thousand white kids to join a coalition of civil rights groups to register Negro voters during Freedom Summer. The organizers believed that the public would not tolerate police assaults on students from Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Princeton, etc. Volunteers were less sanguine; they knew (and felt) danger. What they could not know was that murder was near them. On June 21 Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney disappeared in Mississippi. Two days later their burned-out car was discovered. The whites, Goodman and Schwerner, had been shot through their hearts. Cheney had been so brutally beaten that the examining physician said "In my 25 years as a pathologist and medical examiner, I have never seen bones so severely shattered . . ."

The politics of 1964 were not insubstantial. It was a time of civil rights, escalating concern about the war, and free speech. At the same time, cultural change was all but guaranteed as the first wave of Baby Boomers entered their freshman college years.

The new culture can be symbolized by a car. The Ford Mustang was introduced in April, promoted at the New York World's Fair, and appeared in *Goldfinger*. It was a lower-cost

roadster than the Corvette or the Jaguar and was an unexpected success. Sales forecasts were 100,000 units for the first year; however, over 400,000 were sold and in 18 months over 1 million Mustangs had been manufactured.

One could *Round, Round, Get Around* in a ragtop listening to the Beach Boys or to Jan and Dean's *Dead Man's Curve* or *The Little Old Lady from Pasadena*. Or, if the car sound was not one's dish of tea, the 1964 Top Forty included: Louis Armstrong's *Hello-Dolly*; *Dancing in the Street* by Martha and the Vandellas; *Underneath the Boardwalk* by the Drifters; *Rag Doll* and *Dawn* by the Four Seasons; and assorted hits by incoming British invaders. The singles charts had pop, folk, rock, folk rock, surf songs, car songs, doo-wop, blues, rhythm and blues, country and western, alternative country, and rockabilly. Electric Dylan was a year away; Motown with the Supremes and the Four Tops was gaining air time; bossa nova brought a new beat with *The Girl from Ipanama*; and, there were girl groups such as the Shangri-La's and the Dixie Cups, and silly songs by Roger Miller. *Fun, Fun, Fun* was alive and well and enjoying America in the Summer of '64.

That year February 9 may lay legitimate claim as the event of the year, the decade, the generation when the Beatles appeared on Ed Sullivan. Times TV critic, one Jack Gould, did not succumb to Beatlemania. He noted their Captain Kangaroo hairdos, their "businesslike appearance," and called Ed Sullivan "the chaperon of the year." For Gould, the performance was "a fine mass placebo." Contrast his review with images of screaming, crying teenage girls. Contrast his review with the release of *A Hard Day's Night*, five Beatles songs in the top 16, and nine of their songs in the top 100. That's one powerful placebo.

Chart topping 45 vinyls were hot, but with the Long Playing album, the medium was the message.

Frank Sinatra had the idea of the concept album in the mid-50s. The concept was formulaic. Twelve songs, six on a side, roughly 2+ minutes each and arranged thematically. It made Sinatra rich. Sixties' musicians toyed with the idea. They kept the concept but broke away from the required 2'12" songs with a verse, a chorus or two, a bridge and a closing refrain. Instead, they experimented with time, largely abandoned the verse-chorus format, and ignored the sophisticated strains of the American Songbook. Consider *The Times They Are a-Changin'* and *Another Side of Bob Dylan* for openers.

Jazz musicians were more experimental as classic contributions were made by Charles Mingus, Eric Dolphy, Lee Morgan, Herbie Hancock and Stan Getz and Joao Gilberto among others. I suspect that I am not the only one to own these recordings.

It was a solid good year too for American poetry. Berryman's *77 Dream Songs*, Lowell's, *For the Union Dead*, O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* were published together with significant works by Anne Sexton, Karl Shapiro, Mark Strand, Denise Levertov, Donald Hall, Jack Spicer and others. The canon of American poetry was vibrant and healthy.

Theater lights were on for *Hello Dolly*, *Funny Girl*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *My Fair Lady*. These plays were pretty fluffy stuff but they represented the highest form of the genre even as the Golden Age of American Musical Theater had begun its decline. Still, this was a year when the likes of Julie Styne, Jerry Herman, Abe Burrows, Gower Champion, Lerner and Lowe, and Bernstein and Sondheim were the musical giants that roamed the Broadway earth.

There was no shortage of dramas with *After the Fall*, *Dylan*, *The Crucible*, *The Subject Was Roses*, and *The Deputy* for more serious theatergoers.

As for movies, it was largely light fare with *Mary Poppins*, *From Russia with Love*, *A Fistful of Dollars*, *Viva Las Vegas* and *The Pink Panther* among high grossing films. There were exceptions and *Doctor Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* stands out. This anti-Russkie sendup was easy pickins for a new generation of antiwar critics.

As for the art scene, Andy Warhol was up to his mischief as his Campbell Soup cans were first publically shown at a pivotal Pop Art exhibition on the Upper East Side called *The American Supermarket*.

By way of sports highlights, Ara Parseghian came within 93 seconds of winning a Fighting Irish national championship in his first year (he would do that two years later); the Cardinals beat the Yankees in seven games as David Halberstam chronicled that season as a lens focused on the end of the Yankee Dynasty and as an angle to understand society and race relations in his book *October 1964*. The Super Bowl was three years away, but in '64 the Browns defeated the Baltimore Colts for the NFL Championship; Arnold Palmer won the Masters; Northern Dancer won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness; some coach named John Wooden won one of his ten Bruins' titles; Cassius Clay defeated Sonny Liston for his first of five heavyweight championships; and, the Celtics won the 7th of their 17 NBA titles. These names, these sports, were of an age.

Politically, 1964 ended in a landslide; voters preferring Johnson to the image of a young blonde girl counting daisy petals as an atomic explosion with its mushroom cloud expanding behind her. Culturally, 1964 was a year of openings and possibilities. The spirit of '64 was, at

root, a rejection of 1950s alienation; a reclamation of the American creed; and, a hope for the reconstruction of a New City on a New Hill. The dream of '64 was not a utopian fantasy; it part of the small "d" democratic impulse; an impulse inspired by Emerson, Lincoln, and Whitman. 1964 constituted the Great Society's promise of expanded opportunities and increased participation in the country's diverse political, economic, and cultural marketplaces.

Let's move now to the terminus of this short decade. Let's jump to 1968. The year began blandly, but any complacency was shattered on January 30 by the Tet offensive. In violation of an agreed cease-fire, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army attacked the South. Northern forces occupied US Embassy grounds; seized Saigon's radio stations; assaulted the presidential palace, and attacked major American bases. Tet took the war out of the jungles and brought it to cities and seaside villages. Tet also brought the war to America. Although the offensive was quelled and communist troops sustained massive casualties; serious damage had been done. The war was real; it was on TV.

Cronkite expressed the mood of the nation when he asked "What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning this war." Eugene McCarthy put the matter differently: "We were told we were winning the war" in 1963, '64, '65, '66, '67 and "in 1968, only to learn that even our American Embassy was not secure." Later, Cronkite reported: "To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only reasonable, yet unsatisfactory conclusion." "*Mired in stalemate.*" LBJ's reply: "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." LBJ had his faults; political obtuseness was not one of them.

The images of war carnage were harrowing: wounded, dazed soldiers; body bags; napalmed villages and villagers; burning cities; and, that disturbing photograph of a Vietnam

police chief, his gun pointed at his captive's temple, summarily executing a Viet Cong suspect. The photo made world news; the blood spurting from the victim's head was edited out of the video footage. There was only so much realism to absorb at the family dinner table.

Tet was the beginning of the end of the war; of the Johnson administration; and, of the Sixties.

The first actor on stage in the decline and fall of LBJ was Senator Eugene McCarthy. McCarthy's path to the presidency was awkward. Challenging a sitting president was, and is, not the norm; McCarthy was not a firebrand; and, a clear campaign strategy was wanting. Adding to those challenges, Americans want their politicians smart, but not too pointy-headed. Adlai Stevenson's presidential run was barely a decade old, and poet McCarthy's resemblance was too reminiscent.

Still, a phalanx of "Clean for Gene" students trooped through New Hampshire for the year's first primary. White House pollsters predicted that McCarthy would win 6% of the vote compared with 76% for Johnson. On March 12, McCarthy won 42% of the vote and took 20 of 24 available delegates. Oops! Two days later, Bobby Kennedy entered the race. One can only imagine the moods at McCarthy headquarters and in the White House election war room with that news.

Johnson's Administration was shifting dramatically. Creighton Abrams replaced General Westmoreland as Vietnam Commander; Clark Clifford replaced Robert McNamara at Defense; and, LBJ's own coterie of "wise men" concluded that the United States could neither win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, nor win the war. These shifts concluded on March

31 with Johnson declaring “I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president.” Pretty good television; even more mind-boggling politics.

Four days later, an anonymous, small time crook and prison escapee told his brother I’m going to “get the big nigger.” That night, James Earl Ray murdered 39 year old Martin Luther King on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis. America burned and King’s Ghandian non-violence burned with it as the American Negro metamorphized into a Black Panther.

Riots erupted in Baltimore, Louisville, Chicago, Kansas City and a hundred other cities. Police and federal troops were called to halt vandalism; to calm crowds; and, to restore order but the rioting had its own trajectory. In Washington, D.C., 75,000 troops were deployed. By the end, 3,000 were dead; all but 5 were black. Cincinnati fared better. After two nights, the Ohio National Guard restored peace in Avondale with two fatalities, over 200 injured, and over 250 arrested.

King’s slaying radicalized the civil rights movement. Next stop on the radicalization train – college campuses.

By the end of April, student unrest escalated. Case in point: in protest against a gymnasium planned for Morningside Heights and against the school’s military research, Columbia students rioted. The riots radicalized the movement as Columbia student, and SDS leader, Mark Rudd, in an open letter to President Grayson Kirk, issued demands closing with a line from Le Roi Jones: “Up against the wall, motherfucker, this is a stick-up.”

The next day, students assaulted Kirk’s office. They smoked his cigars, drank his sherry, rummaged through his library, and “liberated” University documents. After eight days of occupation and failed negotiations, Kirk called in the police who made 700 arrests. The

revolution was televised as the students demanded that “We want the world and we want it now!” Did they have any idea that that chant contained their own demise?

May 1968 was the month of global student rebellion. Students and workers shut down Paris with general strikes to the point that de Gaulle secretly left France after securing his personal papers. He returned and promptly dissolved the National Assembly. Students also struck in Germany, Franco’s Spain, Warsaw and, most notably, Czechoslovakia during Prague Spring.

Back in the old US of A, the Democratic presidential race grew interesting.

After Memphis, RFK stepped up his candidacy. His speech in Indianapolis, the night of King’s death, was credited with having averted a riot there. Still, his path to the nomination was uncertain. McCarthy was the darling of the ‘60s generation; Kennedy’s antiwar position was equivocal; and, Hubert Horatio Humphrey had ties with the party’s base. Regardless of Humphrey’s Democratic cred, it is hard to imagine a more inapt strategy than the Happy Warrior being “proud as Punch” about his “politics of joy.” The real contest, though, was between Kennedy and McCarthy. Kennedy’s vivacity overshadowed McCarthy’s flatness. Still, the spring primaries were inconclusive as the candidates traveled to California.

Before we get to the Coast, a news flash: On June 3, Andy Warhol was shot by a radical feminist in a murder attempt.

The California primary was close. Kennedy won 46% to McCarthy’s 42%. Painfully, that victory, and the expectancy of the nomination, was short-lived. That very June 6th night, while thanking his supporters at the Ambassador Hotel, another Kennedy was gunned down. His body was taken from the hotel and put on a plane with three widows – his own, Jacqueline

Kennedy and Coretta Scott King. These women were symbols of the time; they were also symbols of the end of an era; the end of the aspirations of Camelot and of the Great Society.

For Democrats, the presidential race became more confused with the American Independent Party candidacy of George Wallace and his running mate, the back to the Stone Age General Curtis LeMay. That odd couple threatened to pick off Democratic conservatives and vie, against Nixon, for the votes of the Silent Majority.

Nixon won his nomination handily over liberal Rockefeller and conservative Reagan. Now, it was the Democrats turn to name a nominee.

And so, on to Chicago. Chicago was a magnet for students and anti-war protesters who wanted to nail a peace plank onto the Democratic platform. Any hope for real dialogue about the war could not have been more mistaken as serious politics gave way to street theater and street theater gave way to bedlam. Earlier that year, two charlatan clowns, Abbie Hoffman, and Walnut Hill's own Jerry Rubin, started the Youth International Party. The Yippies took over, co-opted, and dramatized the Convention. They "threatened" to put LSD in Chicago's water supply, distribute free cookies to the delegates, set off smoke bombs, parade naked and do it in the streets, release greased pigs, and any other number of absurdist acts. It was simply a matter of the young eating their own. It was a straightforward act of political self-immolation.

McCarthy and Humphrey fought for the nomination but Richard J. Daley dominated the show. Hizzoner was every bit a law and order man as Nixon, even more so. Inside the convention hall, he shut down proceedings one night by drawing his finger across his throat to end the anti-war debate. Outside the hall, his police rioted.

The chaos outside could not go unnoticed. Abe Ribicoff, in the process of nominating George McGovern, broke script, called attention to what was happening in the streets, and criticized the “Gestapo tactics” of the Chicago police. Daley responded with either “Faker” or “Fuck You, you Jew son of a Bitch” depending on whose reports you believe. Or, you can roll tape and read Daley’s lips.

The whole world was watching as Chicago police without their nametags, undercover agents, and National Guardsmen tore through Grant Park destroying any semblance of peaceful protest with tear gas and billy clubs aimed at anyone in their way including bystanders who police pushed through a plate glass window. Nor was the press safe. When Mike Wallace was roughed up and Dan Rather was driven to the ground, an astonished Cronkite called the police “thugs” on national television.

If in 1964, there was *Dancing in The Street*; then, in 1968, if you wanted to dance in those mean streets, you better become a *Street Fightin’ Man* and nowhere more so than in the streets of Chicago as the abomination that was the Democratic National Convention, in the words of Allard Lowenstein, just elected Richard Nixon.

The presidency was not Nixon’s yet; not before it took an ugly, although considered, turn.

Johnson’s earlier prediction that the Democrats would lose the South was not lost on Nixon as he and his party did what they could to make a Solid Republican South. The plan was simple – prey on racial fears; oppose school desegregation; weaken the Voting Rights Act; revive states’ rights; oppose affirmative action, and win the white vote. Well, it worked.

Nixon had a second act; he expanded his Southern Strategy to include a law and order ploy that could be used against students, anti-war advocates, and liberals more generally in his quest to capture the Silent Majority. One tactic of his law and order campaign was to divert attention from the war. By focusing on domestic policy, he could sidestep Vietnam; blame the Democrats; fight street crime; aggressively pursue criminal justice; and, in his acceptance speech, promise that “the long dark night for America is about to end.” Calls for law and order were not at all disconnected from racial politics. Rather, Nixon tied them together – that was his considered strategy.

The politics of ‘68 was reflected only to some extent in the culture.

The Fifth Dimension, the Delphonics, Otis Redding, Archie Bell and the Drells, Diana Ross and the Supremes, and the Dells all recorded hits as pop music was an entertainment to listen and dance to and to enjoy while avoiding politics. We can still hear those melodies and sing, at least some of, those lyrics. The album, though, overtook singles. As music shifted from entertainment to message; culture shifted with it. Consider the *White Album*, *Astral Weeks*, *Electric Lady Land*, *Beggars Banquet*, *Music from Big Pink*, *Johnny Cash from Folsom Prison*, and *Wheels of Fire* by the first great super group Cream.

And, the award for album of the year goes to . . . *Sinatra at the Sands with Count Basie and His Orchestra*. In all their swinging glory, live from the Vegas strip, Sinatra and Company delivered a blistering arrangement of songs whose set list could have been found on the bandstand of the Copacabana in 1957. Sinatra shed his Nehru jacket and love beads for the tuxedo that was his birthright as he moved on from the Rat Pack to reclaim the title of Chairman

of the Board and as he moved on politically from Camelot to Ronnie Ray Gun. *Ring a Ding Ding*, the '50s were back, baby.

Broadway was not as rich as it had been; it did, though, produce *Promises Promises*, *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, and *Hair*. For dramatic theater, *The Price*, *The Man in the Glass Booth*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *The Cocktail Party* offered higher-brow fare.

Movies were more adventurous. In addition to high grossing confections as *Funny Girl*, *Oliver*, and *The Love Bug*, Hollywood released *Bullitt*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Night of the Living Dead*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and, what seems like a last desperate effort to valorize the war, *The Green Berets*.

Now for a message from our television sponsors: Any talk show, with any combination of William F. Buckley, Norman Mailer and/or Gore Vidal was the original "must-see" TV.

Poetry offerings for 1968 have familiar names but nothing of the significance of four years earlier. Major poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, George Oppen, Kenneth Rexroth, Karl Shapiro, and Robert Duncan published alongside minor writers like Rod McKuen.

As for sports, first, the normal titles: Super Bowl II was won by Green Bay over Oakland; the Tigers beat the Cards in seven games; Joe Frazier beat Buster Mathis, but heavyweight boxing was on its inexorable slide to the margins of sports; the Bruins won another NCAA title; and, Woody Hayes' Buckeyes crushed Michigan and Southern Cal for the National Championship. Two odd things did happen: Dancer's Image was disqualified from the Kentucky Derby for taking phenylbutozone (was this the first time that drugs infected sports?) and Roberto

di Vincenzo was penalized, and lost, the Masters for recording a par rather than a birdie losing to Bob Goalby with the memorable phrase “What a stupid I am.”

Then, there was the Mexico Olympics and with it, one of the greatest photographs in sports and cultural history – Tommie Smith and John Carlos standing on the podium, shoeless, in black socks, heads bowed, arms raised with black-gloved fists as the Star Spangled Banner played while they were awarded gold and bronze medals for the 200 meter dash.

With the exception of singular music, the year’s cultural phenomena were, if not anodyne, then uninspiring, as the politics of 1968 eclipsed culture.

1968 ended on a sallow note. On December 10, as the story goes, a monk attending an interfaith conference in Bangkok, stepped out of the shower and was fatally electrocuted by a faulty electric fan. One might say that it was a sad, but not unusual occurrence. Or, maybe God punctuated the end of 1968 with the death of Father Louis a.k.a. Thomas Merton. It was the poet monk Merton, more so than the Brothers Berrigan, who brought an intellectual spirituality to the political consciousness of that demi-decade; now that voice was silenced.

Coda

On January 3, 1848, a Milanese knocked a cigar out of the mouth of an Austrian soldier. Italian citizens rioted. On February 23, in Paris, with signs of civil disturbance mounting, King Louis Phillippe dismissed Prime Minister François Guizot and abdicated while a new government formed. News spread throughout Europe as students, intellectuals, and workers combined to overthrow governments in Venice, Naples, Palermo, Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Kraków and

Berlin. This “Springtime of Peoples” was a drive to replace monarchies with constitutional governments and to expand democracy against aristocratic power. Within the year, though, every one of those provisional, constitutional governments was recaptured by the aristocracy thus ending the European Revolutions of 1848.

Such is the sociology of revolutions as established power overrides insurgency. Fast forward 120 years and history repeats as the events of 1968 demonstrate the triumph of established power over the political insurgency of 1964.

1968 was a year of resistance and radicalization. The movements that began in 1964 with non-violent civil rights and peaceful free speech by the end of 1968 had turned wilder, less coherent, even anarchic. The civil rights and free speech movements melded into the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Then, the radicalization intensified as the movements rejected passive resistance in favor of confrontation and as confrontation pushed past guerrilla theater into outright mayhem. Given a choice between street theater or violence, the opportunity to tune in, turn on, and drop out into psychedelic self-absorption was neither an unattractive alternative nor a difficult choice for many.

The SDS of the prolix, but tame, Port Huron Statement morphed into the Weather Underground whose weather reports predicted that next week’s weather would be gloomy with a chance of violence. They delivered more than predicted; they delivered burglary, arson and murder. As SNCC, CORE and King’s legacy receded, the Black Panther Party ascended to the upper Westside Dakota apartment of Leonard Bernstein’s radical chic dinner party. And with that ascension, the FBI’s COINTELPRO program did what it could, legal and otherwise, to crush Black pride, student protests, antiwar activities, and anything that went with them.

Disinformation, blackmail, trumped up raids and arrests, and very questionable police shootings were hardly beyond the range of Hoover operatives. The country's transformation to a radical politics literally included murder on both sides. Such politics were not sustainable. The backlash of 1968 crushed the New Left, a coherent political movement in name only. It also crushed the earlier hopes, possibilities and promises of the counterculture; while the country marched rightward.

So then, like the aristocratic reaction to the revolutions of 1848, the politics of 1968 vanquished the democratic dream of a Great Society. Did 1968, though, that last year of the shortest decade, also vanquish the cultural hopes of 1964. Was the California Dream exhausted? Were Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll forever banned from the Republic? After all, who today is open-minded about sex and sexuality; or, who would bother to bid on a Warhol painting? And these days, who smokes pot or listens to the Beatles, Dylan or the Stones? Does anyone?

Thank You

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