Chapter 29: Vietnam War and the End of Liberalism
OBJECTIVES

- We will study the growing opposition to the Vietnam War.
- We will study the decline of the Democrats in holding on to the White House.
- We will study the rise of a conservative backlash toward liberal reforms.
Psa_73:6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- The Geneva Conference produced an agreement to end the Vietnam Conflict without American participation.

- There would be an immediate cease fire in the war; Vietnam would be temporarily partitioned along the 17th parallel with the Vietminh control of North Vietnam and the pro-western government in control of the South.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- In 1956, elections would be held to reunite the country under a single government.
- With the French leaving Vietnam, the U.S. stepped in.
- And help support the new government in the South, led by Ngo Dinh Diem.
- Diem was an aristocratic Catholic from Central Vietnam and was a nationalist that did not have ties with collaborating with France.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- The CIA help support his rise to power and the U.S. supported the South Vietnamese president’s refusal in 1956 to permit the elections called by the Geneva accords that Ho Chi Minh would easily win any such election.
- Ho was very popular in the more populous North and had support in the South as well.
- Diem sought to eliminate Vietminh supporters (Ho Chi Minh supporters) and at first he was successful.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- In 1959, the Vietminh cadres in the south created the National Liberation Front (NLF) known to many Americans as the Viet Cong, an organization closely allied with the North Vietnamese government.
- It was committed to overthrowing Diem and reuniting the nation.
- North Vietnam began to support with manpower and materials.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- By 1963, the NLF forces were successful in destabilizing the Diem regime.
- Diem was losing support even within his own military.
- Diem sought to make Catholicism the dominant religion that led to enormous protest from the Buddhists.
- American officials pressured Diem to reform his government, but Diem made no significant concessions.
The Agony of Vietnam:

- In the fall of 1963, Kennedy gave his tacit approval of South Vietnamese generals to overthrow Diem’s government.
- The staged a coup and to the surprise of the Americans, Diem was assassinated.
From Aid to Intervention:

- Lyndon Johnson inherited what was already a substantial American commitment to the survival of an anticommunist South Vietnam.
- During his first two years of office, he expanded the commitment into a full-scale war.
From Aid to Intervention:

- In Early August of 1964, the president announced that American destroyers on patrol in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.
- Later information raised doubts as to whether the administration reported the attacks accurately.
- At that time, Johnson’s portrayal of the incident as a serious act of aggression, or his insistence that the U.S. must respond.
From Aid to Intervention:

- With wide support from Congress, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized the president to take all necessary measures to protect American forces and prevent further aggression in Southeast Asia.
- The resolution became in Johnson’s view at least an open-ended legal authorization for escalation of the conflict.
From Aid to Intervention:

- In February 1965, Seven marines died when communist forces attacked an American military base at Pleiku.
- Johnson retaliated by ordering the first American bombings of the north since the 1964 Tonkin crisis in an attempt to destroy the depots and transportation lines responsible for the flow of North Vietnamese soldiers and supplies into South Vietnam.
From Aid to Intervention:

- Troop numbers began to increase consistently.
- Ultimately Johnson announced that American troops would have an active role in combat.
- In 1967, the number of American troops in Vietnam surpassed to 500,000.
From Aid to Intervention:

- However the Viet Cong controlled the majority of the countryside of South Vietnam.
The Quagmire:

- Central to the American war effort was a commitment to what the military called “attrition.”
- A strategy premised on the belief that the United States could inflict so many casualties and so much damage on the enemy that eventually they would be unable and unwilling to continue the struggle.
The Quagmire:

- But the attrition strategy failed because the North Vietnamese proved willing to commit many more soldiers to the conflict than the United States had expected.
- The North Vietnamese was not a modern, industrial society, it had few targets which bombing was effective.
- The North Vietnamese responded to the air raids with ingenuity.
The Quagmire:

- They created a great network of underground tunnels, shops, and factories.
- And they kept moving the Ho Chi Minh trail the routes by which North Vietnamese soldiers infiltrated the South.
The Quagmire:

- Another crucial part of the American strategy was the pacification program which was intended to push the Vietcong from areas chosen by the United States.
- And then “pacify” those regions by winning the “hearts and minds” of the people.
The Quagmire:

- But the American forces were not adept at establishing the rapport of the Vietcong and gradually, the pacification program gave way to the heavy handed relocation strategy.

- Through which American troops uprooted villagers from their homes, sent them fleeing to refugee camps or into the cities and then destroyed the vacated villages and surrounding countryside.
The War at Home

- Opposition of the War started to brew in the colleges and universities in the United States beginning at the University of Michigan.

- In popular culture, folk musicians began to use their voice and music to oppose the war.

- Journalists also added to the antiwar chorus with their frank reporting of the war’s brutality.
The War at Home

- In January 1966, Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, turned against the war and in January 1966 began to stage highly publicized congressional hearings to air criticism of it.
By the end of 1967, the twin crises of the war in Vietnam and the deteriorating racial situation at home, these crises fed upon and inflamed each other.
The Tet Offensive:

- In January 31, 1968, the first day of the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), Communist forces launched an enormous concerted attack on American strongholds throughout South Vietnam.
- A few cities fell to the Communists.
- During their occupation of the provincial capital, Hue, the communist forces rounded up supporters of Saigon regime and massacred them.
- Other cities suffered major disruptions.
The Tet Offensive:

- Americans saw vivid reports on television of communist forces in the heart of Saigon, setting off bombs, shooting South Vietnamese officials and troops and holding down fortified areas including briefly the American embassy.
- Such images shocked many Americans and proved devastating to popular support for the war.
- The Tet Offensive also suggested to the American public, of the brutality of the struggle in Vietnam.
The Tet Offensive:

- American forces soon dislodged the Viet Cong from most of the positions they had seized.
- The Tet offensive in the end cost the communists such appalling casualties that they were significantly weakened for months to come.
- The Tet defeats permanently depleted the ranks of the NLF and forced North Vietnamese troops to take on a much larger share of the subsequent fighting.
The Tet Offensive:

- Tet may have been a military victory for the U.S. but it was a political defeat for President Johnson’s administration.
- Public opposition to the war doubled.
- Johnson’s approval rate lowered to 35 percent.
The Political Challenge:

- Democrats who opposed the war turned to Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota to run for president and supplant Johnson as the Democratic nominee for the 1968 election.
- Robert Kennedy entered the campaign who was initially approached to be the candidate for the antiwar democrat faction but refused.
- Kennedy had the support of the poor, workers, and African Americans to the antiwar cause.
The Political Challenge:

- Johnson who initially running for reelection announced after the Wisconsin primary that he will not seek reelection.
The Political Challenge:

- Robert Kennedy established himself as the champion of Democratic primaries.
- Vice President Hubert Humphrey with the support of the president entered the contest and began to attract the support of party leaders and of many delegates that were selected not by popular primaries but by state party organizations.
- He was soon the front runner of the race.
The King and Kennedy Assassinations:

- On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated at a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee where he was lending his support to striking black sanitation workers.
- James Earl Ray was captured days later in London and eventually convicted with no apparent motive.
- Later evidence suggested that he had been hired by others to do the killing, but he never revealed the identity of his employers.
The King and Kennedy Assassinations:

- King’s death led to a series of urban riots.
- On June 6, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in a Los Angeles hotel after winning the California primary, by a Palestinian named Sirhan Sirhan who was angry of Kennedy’s pro-Israel comments.
The King and Kennedy Assassinations:

- When the Democrats finally gathered in August for their convention, there was bitter debate of an antiwar plank in the party platform.
- Antiwar protesters staged demonstrations and demonstrators clashed in bloody riots in the streets of Chicago.
- Hundreds of protestors were injured as police attempted to disperse them with tear gas and Billy clubs.
The Conservative Response:

- There was also a conservative backlash as segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace ran for president in 1968 as a third party candidate.
- His campaign was based on a host of conservative grievances, not all of them connected to race.
- He denounced the forced busing of students, the proliferation of government regulations and social programs, and the permissiveness of authorities toward race riots and antiwar demonstrators.
The Conservative Response:

- A more effective effort to mobilize the “silent majority” in favor of order and stability was under way within the Republican Party.
- Richard Nixon was its champion.
The Conservative Response:

- Nixon recognized that many Americans were tired of hearing about their obligations to the poor, tired of hearing about the sacrifices necessary to achieve racial justice, tired of judicial reforms that seemed designed to help criminals.
- He offered a vision of stability, law and order, government retrenchment and “peace with honor.” in Vietnam.
- Nixon easily captured the Republican presidential nomination.
The Conservative Response:

- However, questions on Nixon’s character coupled with Wallace drawing more Conservative than Democrat votes, and a surge by Humphreys led to a very close election.
- Nixon received 43.4 percent of the popular vote to Humphreys 42.3.
- A margin about 800,000 votes.
- 301 Electoral Votes to Humphrey’s 191.
The Conservative Response:

- George Wallace carried five southern states with 46 electoral votes.
- But the election made clear that a majority of the American electorate was more interested in restoring stability than in promoting social change.