

Chapter 6

THE MOVEMENT'S DEATH AND BEQUEST

(W)hat yawning moats or what stretched chain-lengths lay
 across your path to force you to abandon
 all hope of pressing further on your way?

— Dante, *Purgatorio* (XXXI, 25-27)

He not busy being born is busy dying.

— Bob Dylan, “It’s Alright Ma, I’m Only Bleeding”

Why did the Movement die? The answers that have been offered most frequently by the Movement’s friends and foes — internal division, external pressure, and the end of the draft — each have some validity, but can not by themselves explain the dramatic way the air came out of the balloon after 1971. Activists have blamed the Movement’s demise on bickering between its strains, and the previous chapter certainly shows that they were fraying even before the Mobe in 1969, causing the rope to become completely unwound over the next two years. Scenes like the 1971 NPAC conference, where a pitched battle erupted when an SDS splinter tried to bull-horn down Senator Vance Hartke and other “lackeys of the ruling class,” became common. It was almost expected that a march or a meeting would face disruption from the crazies and demands from black groups for “reparations” for slavery. Rather than focusing on how to fight the war, NPAC had to expend much of its energy protecting itself from attacks from its left. Its demonstrations that fall were quite small, with turn-out hurt by the fact that PCPJ, no longer cooperating with NPAC, held its own demonstrations a week earlier. The Movement was committing suicide, with the encouragement of government agents hidden in the radical white and black groups.

Damaging as these divisions and disruptions were, however, the Movement had endured similar challenges before and simply pushed through them by bringing more people into the streets. The leaders were still giving the same parties, but signifi-

cantly less people were coming, and of those who stayed away, few were aware of the struggles or even the names of the organizers. In their frustration and confusion, the four strains of the Movement blamed each other for burning people out by demoralizing them with fruitless tactics. However, demoralization had been a constant factor from 1965 on. As each cohort of high school students came of age, it replaced with hundreds of thousands of new activists those who had given up on anti-war activity. The classes of the early 1970s simply weren't turning out the bodies. Assume that the Sitters were right, and that the lack of immediate results from the April 1971 march discouraged most of the half million Marchers from coming out again. Assume as well that the Marchers were right, and that the willingness of the government to scoop up the 10,000 Sitters during the May Days convinced them to leave the Movement forever. In earlier years, all these drop-outs would have been offset by the next angry wave.

Another explanation of the demise of the Movement was that the tough, indiscriminate police action at Kent and Jackson scared activists away. Certainly the killings made even the non-violent majority of demonstrators think twice about participation, since it only took a few rock-throwing Trashers to trigger a lethal response. The message was made clear when, in 1971, Governor Nelson Rockefeller refused to grant amnesty to prisoners at Attica, NY, who had seized their guards and killed one, and state police gratuitously killed 39 people, including many of the hostages, in retaking the prison. As at Kent and Jackson, as in the bombing raids on North Vietnam, from Rolling Thunder in 1965 to the Christmas bombings in 1972, as in the Vietnam War as a whole, the message from Attica in 1971 was clear: you fuck with the state, it will fuck you right back, and much of America will applaud. Still, this message could not have been responsible for the rapid decline in the number of Marchers. Demonstrators had understood since 1968 in Chicago that any march could lead to police beatings and tear-gas, neither of which anyone in their right mind would volunteer to suffer. The large crowds not just at protests in the emotional aftermath of the campus killings in 1970, but also a year later, both at the April marches and the May Days, indicate that people were not scared away from the Movement.

The explanation most frequently offered by the Movement's detractors for its death was the end of the draft. The first time that young people were no longer at risk of being hauled

off to Vietnam, says this mean-spirited theory, they failed to hear the moral call of concern for the Vietnamese that had supposedly been at the heart of the Movement. There certainly was a correlation, with a lag of a year or two, between the size of draft calls and the size of the Movement. Draft calls peaked in 1968, and the movement peaked in 1969 and 1970; the draft was minimal by 1971, and so was the movement by 1972 and 1973. If the war had been fought without a draft or, as William Buckley cynically proposed, only volunteers from among draftees went to Vietnam, would demonstrations have remained limited to the original core of pacifists and socialists?

At first glance, this explanation seems easy to refute, because so few protesters were in danger of being drafted into combat. Women, whom I recall being excluded from leadership but making up half of Marchers, weren't eligible for the draft, nor were most people over 26, who were well-represented among both leaders and followers. Male college students formed a large part of the Movement, but because of the student deferment, they had four years in which to find a way through the Selective Service's porous regulations — and it was a pretty unresourceful college graduate who couldn't do so. As noted previously, only one in nine American men of draft age even went to Vietnam and only one in 27 were exposed to combat; for an alumnus to be one of them almost took a concerted effort on his part.

There were broad avenues to continued deferment, including medical problems, responsibility for children or other members of one's family who required support, graduate school (until 1968), and a one-year window of eligibility for the draft and a high lottery number (after 1969). In 1969, of the 18 million men from ages 18 to 26 who had not completed their "military obligation," five million were unfit to serve, primarily on medical grounds, and four million had been deferred for fatherhood or some other family "hardship." Another two million were in college, and a million held miscellaneous deferments. With three million in the active armed forces and a million in the guard or reserves, that left only one and a half million eligible for the draft, but only 55 percent of draftees passed the physical and mental exams for induction. If the draft was imminent, it was far easier for a college graduate, with his higher test scores, to enlist in a less dangerous branch of the armed forces, such as the National

Guard, Coast Guard, Navy, the Air Force, or a technical branch of the Army. If all else failed, one could delay the draft board with appeals while negotiating a place in the Peace Corps.

Overwhelming as this litany is, though, it doesn't itself refute the theory that the draft was the primary factor behind the Movement. If women and older people weren't eligible for the draft, they knew and cared about people who were. Men in college might dispassionately calculate that they were unlikely to be forced into danger, but were hardly dispassionate about having to make the calculation. The draft, the very notion that the government could force kids to fight and die in a war of no real import to the security of the country, was a cultural declaration of war of the old on the young. The average age of soldiers in Vietnam was 19, five to seven years younger than in previous American wars. In their minds if not with their bodies, the draft pushed young people up against the wall and forced them to surrender or fight back. Those who took student and other deferments, and with them the subconscious guilt of surrendering to the demands of the System, often fought back all the harder.

While the end of the draft coincided with the end of the Movement, both also coincided with the winding down of the War. US forces in Vietnam fell during Nixon's first term from half a million to one-tenth that number. An average of 320 Americans died in combat each week in the first six months of 1969, compared with 50 a week in the last six months of 1970 and 10 per week in the last six months of 1971. Difficult as it is to separate the two causes, it is my recollection that the knowledge that the draft was over was less to blame for the death of the Movement than the belief that the war was over. Of course, that belief was incorrect in the short term, as the war churned ahead with the only difference being, as George McGovern put it before he toned down his rhetoric after capturing the Democratic nomination in 1972, the color of the corpses sacrificed to a failed policy. Still, public perception wasn't off by too many years: the end of American combat meant that the war, if not immediately over, was inevitably ending. The reason that the Movement could not surmount the feeling after 1971 that protest was irrelevant was that it was true. A majority of Americans and more importantly a majority of the ruling elite had come to the conclusion, some for pragmatic and some for moral reasons, that the Movement's rallying

cry of "Out now!" was correct. Herein lies the primary reason for the Movement's demise: it had won.

Despite its savagery, Nixon's retreat robbed the Movement of the atmosphere of crisis surrounding Tet and then Cambodia. The Movement hit the wall in 1972, when, as historian Marilyn Young argues, being "already fragile and to some degree burned-out," it crumbled rapidly under a mysterious "fatigue factor." SWP's Halstead traced the end of the Movement to Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union at the height of the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in mid-1972, implying that the Movement felt deserted when even North Vietnam's primary ally seemed to be acceding to the war. Halstead's socialist mindset caused him to see the trees, not the forest: Nixon's trip demoralized the Movement not because people expected a moral stance out of Moscow, but because it implied that a deal was being cut to end the war. For the rest of the year the Movement simply watched and waited for the results of various peace talks and foreign visits. The Christmas bombings brought some public protests, but the peace accord of January 1973 defused any revival of the Movement.

I recall Young's fatigue factor all too well, but I recall it applying more to the troops than to the leaders, who were still plotting, right up until the end. In the fall of 1972, when Nixon's campaign announced a visit to near-by Rochester, the Cornell anti-war elite met to plan a protest. Fed up with a boring debate over which slogans to use with the thousand or so students these leaders expected would go, my brother David and I slipped away from the back of the packed room and went to the dormitories to sell bus tickets for the trip. Two hours later we returned to the meeting, where the debate was still bubbling along, and forced our way to the front to announce that we had worked on a couple of hundred students and sold only three tickets. Everybody had been sympathetic, everybody was against the war, but nobody had thought the trip was worth making, since the war was over, no matter what Nixon wanted to do. After a moment's silence, the debate over slogans simply started up again as if we hadn't said a word, until the chair of the meeting, a professor named Ben Nichols who later became mayor of Ithaca, shouted the group to silence and lectured it about the need of the leaders to get in touch with the mood of the troops before making grandiose plans. The

Napoleons were still in the field, but their Grand Armée had dissolved in the winter snows.

The Movement died because it had won, and because of the type of victory it had won, a US-funded rather than US-fought bloodbath that lasted two more horrifying years. This reality, the awareness that the System was going to go down swinging, and extract maximum damage for its defeat, thoroughly depressed the Movement. It was outrageous, but rage is the easiest emotion to spend and the hardest to sustain. The rage of the Movement had burned itself out like the ghetto riots of the 1960s, and was never to return. What was left was bitterness and frustration, and a hollow victory made even hollower by the punishment the System continued to deliver to Vietnam even up to the last minute of the war, and then for 30 more petulant years. Commentator Sarah Evans said in 1991 that because of the devastation being visited on Vietnam during America's retreat, the Movement was a success "that continually felt like failure." Even in retrospect it is difficult to say what was working and what was not. At the time, it took an act of faith to think that you were helping, and it is hard to maintain faith in the presence of death.

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Some analysts of the Vietnam War have suggested that the Movement really wasn't very important, and that the war would have pretty much run the same course without it. It is tempting to dismiss such a contention as sophistry, especially when it emanates from someone like Dean Rusk, who during the war blamed the Movement for prolonging the war by encouraging the NLF and North Vietnamese in the chimera that US resolve would wane. If we were so potent then, how could we be so irrelevant when the false hope we provided came true? However, disinterested historians have also questioned whether US public opinion turned against the war not because of protests, but because the war wasn't being won.

It is one thing to say that perseverance by North Vietnam and the NLF was the sine qua non of the Movement, to acknowledge that by refusing to crack under US punishment, they gave the Movement time to start turning public opinion against the sacrificing of more bodies to determine the nature of Indochina's governments. It is quite another thing to say that the Movement didn't initiate that transition in public opinion or accelerate it tre-

mendously, and so didn't constrain the administration from wreaking enormous additional havoc on the region. The process by which first the Johnson and then Nixon administrations were convinced that the public would not support the duration and amount of violence that were needed to manufacture a stalemate, let alone the tremendous escalation that would be needed to obtain a victory, was a mysterious one. There is no doubt, though, that the Movement was central to the process.

When Lyndon Johnson decided to escalate in 1965, he certainly had public opinion on his mind. However, it was pro-war, not anti-war sentiment that concerned him. He was sure that the public would punish the Democratic Party and its domestic agenda if it gave up in Vietnam, as it had when the right wing's cries of "Who Lost China?" led not just to a Republican presidential victory in 1952, but also to a favorable climate for the McCarthyism that tarred the Democratic party indelibly with being weak on defense. Undersecretary of state George Ball presented charts to Johnson that showed how public support for the Korean War had fallen as it dragged on, but Johnson plunged ahead: faced with a choice of being hanged today or tomorrow, one naturally chooses tomorrow and hopes for a reprieve in the meantime. By 1968, though, he had to balance the chances of his party's demise for losing Vietnam with the chances of its demise for continuing to fight, and this change in the odds was in large part the work of the Movement.

Leslie Gelb, who was working in the Pentagon at the time, calls public opinion "the essential domino" in Johnson's complex reasoning when he concurrently decided to de-escalate the war and withdraw from the presidential race in 1968. Not only had the Movement blackmailed Johnson into stepping aside with its threat of unremitting disruption of his campaign, but it had played a crucial role in turning the Tet offensive into a public relations catastrophe that changed the US goal from victory to face-saving settlement. Young shows how the 1967 March on the Pentagon goaded the administration and Pentagon into grand and frequent claims about the war being already won. When Tet hit, the administration was hoist with the petard it was aiming at the Movement. As Young says, Johnson "had claimed victory once too often." Gen. Westmoreland's request for more troops soon after Tet broke the back of public opinion precisely because the adminis-

tration had, in its attempt to defuse the Movement's critique, run out of credibility. By March, when Johnson convened the Establishment's "Wise Men" for their advice on Vietnam, it had changed dramatically from their approval of intervention three years before. Now they said that the public would not support escalation and that he had to seek a settlement. Johnson agreed, and the die was cast, although it would rattle around the table for seven bloody years.

The Movement's opposition to the war did not in itself threaten Johnson and America's amorphous ruling elite; an identifiable minority opposes most important decisions by our government. What was threatening was the way that this opposition escalated first into vehement dissent and then into contempt for a government that would persist in waging a unwinnable war. The breakdown of the consensus over Vietnam felt manageable to the ruling elite, but the looming breakdown of the consensus that one owed elemental loyalty to the government portended such difficulties and uncertainties that winning the war no longer seemed worth the price. Grudgingly, because it still believed in the goals of the Vietnam War but had seen the cost of attaining them come to exceed their value both at home and in America's standing abroad, the Establishment de-escalated the war in order to de-escalate the Movement.

The secret plan that Nixon pursued upon assuming the presidency tried to reinstate Johnson's earlier strategy of attrition in the South and punishment in the North. The only difference was that South Vietnam was to supply the troops that would be traded with North Vietnam and the NLF. Since the ARVN weren't yet ready for the task, US operations and casualties continued at a high level in 1969, fueling the Movement's anger and the public's concerns once again. By chance, the Movement peaked in the fall just as the deadline neared that Nixon had secretly passed to North Vietnam as its last chance to settle the war on US terms and escape "Duck Hook," the tremendous escalation in the punishment from the air. As noted previously, all that stopped the attack, in the view of Kissinger's staff and even Nixon's memoirs, was the negative public reaction that the Movement's success portended. Like Johnson before him, Nixon was forced to back down, fearful not just of the white protesters but of a possible ripple effect among urban blacks. Instead of raining physical abuse on North Viet-

nam in the first few days of November, Nixon had to settle for raining verbal abuse on the Movement in his "Silent Majority" speech.

Kissinger said years later that one lesson he learned from the war was that the United States should have done in 1969 what it did in 1972, which was pulverize North Vietnam's cities and harbors in an attempt to achieve a settlement. Certainly such attacks would have been more destructive in 1969, before North Vietnam had built up its formidable anti-aircraft systems. What Kissinger refuses to acknowledge was that the Movement had closed off that option in 1969. He was able to carry out a mining and bombing campaign in 1972 that was similar to Duck Hook, but only because public opinion had been calmed by meeting the essential demand of the Movement, the withdrawal of US troops.

The percentage of Americans favoring withdrawal from Vietnam climbed from 35 percent in February 1970 to 55 percent by September and 72 percent by January 1971. What could explain such a rapid transition to the point where the anti-war position was now the mainstream's, other than the paralysis of the educational system after Kent State, and the way it forced everyone to reconsider their opinion on Vietnam? We had finally made America sick beyond hope with the whole mess. According to the Army Chief of Staff at the time, Gen. Bruce Palmer, "Domestic pressures had already compelled an accelerated schedule of US troop withdrawal which would reduce our forces to roughly 180,000 by the end of...1971....Thus, the dry season of 1970-71 was the last opportunity for South Vietnam to take the offensive..." with US combat support. With the ARVN perpetually on the defensive, the war was as good as over.

Like someone caught in quicksand, with every desperate move — Cambodia, Laos, the mining of Haiphong, the Christmas bombings — Nixon not only failed to extricate himself from his predicament but found himself constrained all the more fatally by loss of public support. Had he not kept withdrawing troops, an increasingly concerned congress would have done it for him; had he not agreed to end US air strikes as part of the peace accord in 1973, congress, returning after the Christmas bombings that had been denounced as barbaric even by close US allies, would have ended them itself. To hammer home that point, in 1973 congress enacted over Nixon's veto the War Powers resolu-

tion, which gave a president six months at most to conduct military operations without explicit congressional approval. He was left to fight the North Vietnamese and NLF with South Vietnamese troops and US military and economic aid, and congress even began to squeeze that once-sacrosanct spigot, ignoring the pleas first of a president weakened by the Watergate scandal and then of the caretaker who succeeded him.

It wasn't Watergate that ended the war, though, since more aid could only have briefly delayed the outcome. It was the success of the Movement that had finally turned the weather-vane of public opinion against continued intervention. Even the final spurt of US combat support in 1971 was hindered by the Movement, since anti-war coffee-houses and newspapers within the armed forces and the demoralization caused by withdrawal were stripping the Army of offensive capability. Palmer dates these problems from 1969, "when dissent at home began to be reflected in troop attitudes and conduct in Vietnam." By 1971, it was nearly impossible to get troops to take risks in combat; they knew that upwards of a million people were in the streets calling for their withdrawal, that their peers in VVAW were throwing their medals over the fence at the Capitol, and that hundreds of soldiers in uniform were defying orders and attending an anti-war memorial service at the Washington Cathedral.

The Marine Corps pulled its forces out as quickly as possible during Vietnamization, so it was the Army that took the bullet. The Pentagon reported toward the end of the war that 20 percent of ground soldiers were hooked on heroin, and desertions escalated rapidly to a total of half a million for the war as a whole, mostly in the Army. The death of the Army that Col. Ed King titled his book, discussed in a later chapter, was no metaphor. It was real, and would not have happened without the Movement. The millions of men who beat the draft, although not overt resisters like the few thousands risking prison to challenge it, did more than wound the morale of those who lacked the desire and where-withal to do so. They also forced the Pentagon to lower its standards and rely on McNamara's Project 100,000 to meet its calls. These soldiers were disruptive in both aptitude, since the armed forces were not geared to soldiers with such low IQs, and attitude, since their cultural resistance to taking orders led them to have twice as many disciplinary problems of other soldiers. Much

of the genesis of the massive military problems of the early 1970s can be found in Project 100,000, and the genesis of Project 100,000 can be found in the need to replace draft-dodgers without calling up the middle-class National Guard.

So Johnson's strategy of attrition with American bodies and Nixon's strategy of attrition with Vietnamese bodies were both thwarted by the Movement. They did not teach-in in vain at Ann Arbor, they did not march in vain at the Pentagon and the Mobe, they did not die in vain at Kent and Jackson. We had won the "hearts and minds" of America, as Young says, to the same degree that the Pentagon had hoped to win those of the Vietnamese: just enough to get our way. The proof came when the "cease-fire war" heated up and Gerald Ford came to congress for more aid for the ARVN in the spring of 1975. Congress, which didn't want to re-open that can of worms with the public, simply deflected the request. A final irony that shows the Movement's impact was that Ford was the president making the request only because of Watergate, and the "Plumbers" unit that bugged the Watergate and started Nixon's demise had been formed as part of a plan to harass the Movement, starting with Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg.

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While the Movement achieved its primary goal of ending the war, albeit much more slowly than it wished, it failed to achieve the secondary goals that had been set by its more radical members, such as rejecting the interventionist foreign policy that led to the war, and softening the war culture on which the assumption of interventionism was based. McGeorge Bundy's advice to Nixon after the invasion of Cambodia was well-taken. Withdrawal took the steam out of a movement that from the System's perspective was expanding dangerously from opposition to one war to opposition to an entire foreign policy and culture. The Movement's appeal to an exhausted country was undercut by the withdrawal, and the horrors that followed the US withdrawal we had advocated — genocide in Cambodia, boat people in Vietnam, grinding poverty and communist rule in both countries and Laos — shattered any vision of a new foreign policy.

We knew that the fault for Indochina's devastation lay not with us, but with US policy-makers who had blinked at each point of decision: the French return with American permission after

World War II, US funding for their war with the Viet Minh, the creation of the Diem regime, the start of the NLF's war, the coups and repression of 1963, the moment of impending South Vietnamese collapse in 1965, the escalation of US air and man-power that year, the realization of the impossibility of victory on the ground after Tet, the realization of the impossibility of victory on the home front after the Mobe, Cambodia in 1970, Laos in 1971, the bombing campaign of 1972, the funding of ARVN after the peace accords. Another nail was driven into Indochina's coffin every second of every day from 1945 to 1975 that US policy-makers accepted the assumptions of the Vietnam foreign policy of abetting repressive forces in the developing world who cooperated with our military initiatives and our economic design.

The earlier the Movement's prescription had been followed, the better off Indochina would have been, and miserable as Indochina was when the prescription finally was followed in 1975, had it not been, there would simply have been more devastation before the inevitable communist victories. However, this reality could not wash away the despair we felt standing amidst the wreckage of our victory. We were disheartened and stripped of the belief that our efforts had done or could do good. All we had achieved was to reduce the bad, and that was hardly a call to arms that could continue to move the masses.

The way the American public was calmed by the winding down of direct US involvement in the war even as US funding kept it raging was an ominous indication that the Vietnam foreign policy would survive even the debacle of the Vietnam War. The assumption that Henry Steele Commanger had alluded to before Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech at Riverside Church in 1967 — that America had a reason, a right, the means, and even the duty to interfere in others' affairs to its own advantage — was incorporated into the Nixon doctrine of arming and financing allies rather than using US troops to defeat their internal enemies. This was, of course, simply a reprise of the Kennedy doctrine, which had failed in Vietnam, leading to the introduction of US troops to make good its commitment. The fact that the 1970 Cooper-Church amendment that barred US troops from Cambodia was folded into an aid bill for the repressive Lon Nol government was telling: even at the height of the Movement, the best congress could do was pursue the goals of the Vietnam foreign policy with

American treasure but not American blood. The substitution of Asians for Americans in the great game of foreign policy was to many in the Movement, myself included, an evil with which our nation would always be soiled.

The Movement had failed to finish off the Vietnam foreign policy while it was down, failed to build a consensus that the war, the foreign policy, and the culture had foundered not just on bad tactics but on improper goals. In the Movement's defense, it is hard to see how that would have been possible. You can't hammer home a point if nobody is listening, and in the waning days of the war, the nation was exhausted beyond measure with the war and its critiques. We took the silence of the right during the leftward swing in the conventional wisdom as a sign that the nation agreed with the need for a fundamental change in our role in the world. But the right was just licking its wounds, waiting for the memory of Vietnam to recede so that it could promote the Vietnam foreign policy once more.

The Movement can be faulted for not articulating what it wanted to substitute for the Vietnam foreign policy. We were against the war and the assumptions that led to it, but we were not clearly enough for anything in particular in international affairs. The belief that US involvement in a bloody civil war was making a bad problem worse was the only common denominator between the business executives in their best suits carrying American flags and the crazies who wore their Chinese Army caps despite the Beatles' warning that "If you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't gonna make it with anyone anyhow." We had gone out to stop our mad beast in its careenings through other people's homesteads, but after we had smacked it on the head and brought it up short, we didn't know what to do next. We assumed that the country now agreed with us that the war had been a mistake, and we were right, with 71 percent of Americans saying that by 1971. We assumed further that the country agreed with us on the more troubling proposition that the war had been immoral, and we were barely right, with 58 percent saying that by 1971. Finally, we assumed that the country agreed with us that the foreign policy behind the war should be jettisoned, and we were wrong. That was too great a leap to make without a concerted effort to explain why. We were too tired to talk, and the country was too tired to listen.

For a few years after the war, the implications of the survival of the Vietnam foreign policy were hidden, because of the strange hiatus of US adventurism during much of the Carter presidency. Jimmy Carter offered a confused vision of American foreign policy, and institutionalized it by hiring top staff who were diametrically opposed in their views. The result was not so much a middle course between the restraint counseled by secretary of state Cyrus Vance and the belligerence advocated by national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski as it was a paralysis caused by the refusal of their soul-mates in the bureaucracy to compromise without a clear signal from Carter. On arms sales, relations with dictators, strategic weapons, the future of the spy agencies, and above all human rights, the Carter administration just couldn't make up its mind.

The gridlock was finally broken in the last year of his presidency when Iran seized the American embassy following the successful lobbying campaign by Henry Kissinger, John McCloy, and David Rockefeller to let the Shah into the United States, and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Like water bursting out of a just-opened pipe, the Vietnam foreign policy shot forth with all the pressure of its four years of confinement propelling it. On military spending, weapons production, Central America, arms control, and covert operations, the tough guys finally got to dance. When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he did not so much remilitarize foreign policy and re-assert the mindset that led to the Vietnam War as continue a militarization and a re-assertion that were already well underway.

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By focusing only on our failures — our inability to stop the War sooner, and the survival of the Vietnam foreign policy — we sell ourselves short. Not only did we end a war and challenge the underlying foreign policy that caused it, but we also exploded the anti-democratic, anti-intellectual myth that only those in the know in Washington, only the president and the experts in and out of uniform, are capable of making wise decisions. This changed American politics forever, and for the better. While there have been thousands of people killed or deprived of fundamental rights by the Vietnam foreign policy since the end of the war, there would have been many more had the Movement not convinced the pub-

lic that experts could be wrong, and that they could be backed down or replaced.

The military brass, bedecked with ribbons and bows; the field commanders, gung-ho in their camouflage and body counts; the members of congress, white men in suits and ties, nodding sagely to expert testimony in favor of the war; the local Wise Men in every American town, rallied around the flag and the draft; the "Best and the Brightest" in Washington, the Rusks, Bundys, and McNamaras portrayed in David Halberstam's angry book; the Chairman of the American Establishment himself, old Jack McCloy, telling them in 1965, "You've got to go in," just a few weeks after sanctimoniously advising Haverford's graduating seniors to emulate these elders' *gravitas*, weighty judgment, in public affairs.... We showed America that they were wrong in their assumptions, motives, judgment, and finally in their cowardice, when they failed to speak out against the stately withdrawal that was intended to save face for America's world power, but only cost other Americans and Vietnamese their entire bodies.

We also smoked out Johnson and Nixon and their henchmen not just as incompetents and cowards, but as liars, long before Tet and Watergate proved it to the world. During Watergate, Seymour Hersh said, "I know these people. The abiding characteristic of this administration is that it lies." We knew these people, too, and we knew that the Vietnam foreign policy and the national security state lived in a lie, and that their minions could therefore be expected to lie congenitally, for structural as well as personal reasons, like a car salesman who says whatever is necessary to close a deal. When Nixon's spokesman Ron Ziegler said, "I am not going to dignify these types of stories with a comment," we knew that the allegations were true, and by the time the war ended, our attitude had spread to the public as a whole. People properly expected falsehood from public figures, forcing Richard Nixon to proclaim himself not a crook and Jimmy Carter to make the unlikely pledge that he would never lie to the American people.

Senator Hatfield recalls that when first confronted with proof of their lies, the national security managers had publicly argued to congress that, "it is the right of the government to lie to its people" in pursuit of the greater good of a US victory. Pro-war senators supported this contention, asking Hatfield: "Would you lie to a German who asked you if you had a Jew hidden in

your cellar?" Howls of laughter from the Movement, more than congressional backbone, swept aside such patronizing nonsense and historical cant. After the Movement died, congress gradually reverted to its compliant worship of "national security." By the mid-1980s it had knowingly accepted so many lies from the Reagan administration that it looked silly acting shocked when White House aide Oliver North histrionically defended his lying to congress as necessary to save the lives of people taking part in covert operations, and called on the ghosts of the Founding Fathers, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt to justify unconstitutional support for Nicaraguan rebels.

Reagan, ironically enough, became president because of the greatest achievement of the anti-war movement he had fought tooth and nail as governor of California, what David Farber called the Movement's "de-authorization" of the Establishment. Mistrust of experts escalated into contempt for all politicians, and Reagan won as an opponent of the Washington know-it-alls. Once in office, his congenial falsehoods were also excused by the cynicism that had been bred first by the Movement. Also regrettably, the disgusting assault by the media on the reputations and privacy of national political figures in the 1980s and 1990s can trace its roots to the Movement's de-authorization of leaders: our calling out that the emperors had no clothes in terms of policy spiraled down to the media stripping them of the clothing of their private lives.

By successfully assailing the apparently unassailable, the Movement permanently added to American politics a new openness. No matter how bland and inane the political analysis and social message of the media become, nothing can ever erase the subtext, the silent message that the Movement etched into every screen, every front-page, and every mind: this may not last. It's hard to change a government policy, even one that is a disaster in its own terms and dramatically repulsive to boot — after all, it took five years of organizing and the shock of heavy losses during and after Tet, conditions that may not repeat themselves in other American adventures, just to give the Movement a window to talk to the nation. The awful secret of the human condition is that outrageous injustice lives cheek by jowl with complacency, and always will. But the Movement showed that people can change policy and attitudes, slowly but surely, if they'll just take

the frightening first step of declaring a wrong unacceptable. We showed that determined activists aching for justice in every little town, if they have the political maturity to define a goal and stick to it through all the frustrations, can make a difference.

Teach-in leader Bob Browne looks back on the 1960s as a uniquely moving time when individuals realized that power could be challenged, and at least blunted if not defeated. Browne is certainly right that the spirit of community within the Movement was qualitatively different from any cause before or since. As military strategist John Collins says about comparing armies, quantity has its own quality. Being part of something as tremendously large and widespread as the Movement of the late 1960s was energizing in itself, and provided a special sense of hope — just as being part of something small like the early and late parts of Movement was daunting in itself, and provided a special sense of despair. In addition, the Movement was special because it was concerned with the well-being of others, whereas the large civil rights marches that preceded it and the large pro-choice marches of the 1990s were dominated by interested parties, African-Americans and women, respectively. People worked in the Movement because they wanted to end the injustice their country was visiting on others, not on themselves.

When Henry Kissinger made his remark about protesters being “brought up by skeptics, relativists and psychiatrists,” he was probably referring to the legendary Dr. Spock, since this leader of the Movement mixed in fair amounts of skepticism and relativism, if not psychiatry, in his books of guidance for parents. However, the good doctor had only advised our parents, not replaced them. For young people in general and for myself in particular, Kissinger couldn't have been more wrong. Far from being brought up by skeptics, I had parents who were joyously, unabashedly hopeful about their country; far from being brought up by relativists, I had parents who preached a strict code of right and wrong in which America was right; and far from being brought up by psychiatrists, I had parents who abhorred that branch of medicine, much to the detriment of my father's own health. To get to the streets, to become skeptics and relativists, to save Vietnam from America and America from itself, to start redeeming America's insouciant soul, we had to prevail over the best efforts of our parents and the ruling culture. Kissinger said that we

“couldn’t help it,” given our Spockian upbringing. In fact, we could well have “helped it,” but to our credit we refused to do so.

We were the first generation to think it was normal that everybody should have an interest in politics and a social conscience, and that the purpose of education was to help others, and not to help yourself to material possessions. We questioned almost everything around us. It isn’t our failing if that sense of purpose faded away...and it has. Consider the remarks of past and current students at Kent State on the twentieth anniversary of the killings there, as reported by Newsweek. Dean Kahler, who was shot and permanently paralyzed by the National Guard, said: “I guess we were fairly naïve in thinking that anything would happen as a result of our protests, but we did. We thought we could end the war.” And, of course, we did. But Trish Hooper, the editor of the student newspaper in 1990, believes instead in this bit of hopelessness: “Students then thought that one person could make a difference. But how can one student stop the ozone problem or the disappearance of the rainforest? We can’t.” And her thoughts, while off-base (since all change, of course, must come from the efforts of one person, and another, and another), are brilliant compared to the ruminations of the clown who said, “We’re tanner, we look better...we have nicer clothes. We don’t think as much, we have a better time.”

Of course, not everyone in his generation subscribes to self-ish materialism, any more than everyone in my generation subscribed to selfless spirituality, but the dominant difference in mood is, I think, accurately reflected in these quotes. I don’t feel any inherent superiority because of that, any reason to be proud and condescending, since whatever qualities of courage and altruism we displayed came almost of necessity from the blatant challenges of our times. A small handful of American students, then and now, is naturally activist. The crowd joined the handful in the 1960s not from the analytic anger at the soulless culture of capitalism that led to the student rebellion in Europe in 1968, but because of the immediacy of the long, brutal, failed policies of war abroad and racism at home. We should consider ourselves lucky that a similar spirit hasn’t arisen today if it would have had to come from similar tragedies.

My excusing the differences between my generation and those coming of age today doesn't mean that it didn't depress, even terrify me to plunge serendipitously while I was working on this chapter into...the Spy Club, a Washington dance club where hundreds of the Aryan youth of Capitol Hill, obnoxiously well-dressed and well-groomed, gathered to celebrate their version of the still-soulless ruling culture. I thought we had dropped in on the set of the movie "Animal House" during the shooting of the scenes featuring the fascist fraternity. It was just too strange in Washington, a predominantly African-American city, to be at a club with hundreds of whites, with the only blacks being in the dance band and the kitchen. The pudgy blond preppies who will rule the world gyrated conventionally in their office clothes, and one had the nerve to take a tambourine from where the saxophone player had laid it down and parade around arhythmically with it...just picked up this man's instrument as if the world was his oyster for the shelling, which I suppose it is. As the kids danced on, oblivious to the band, a line from Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone" jumped to my mind: "You never turned around to see the frowns on the jugglers and the clowns when they all did tricks for you."

I was unfair to judge these kids so harshly, I said the next day to some of the interns at a congressional office where I had once worked. How could I have sensed simply by looking in the faces of the privileged young the complacency that I had sensed by looking in the faces of privileged adults during the 1960s? How could I be so pompous as to conclude from this brief peep at the presently wealthy and futurely powerful at play that they would have no urgency or compassion for the world's problems and the people these problems strip of dignity and hope, that we had lost the struggle for their hearts and minds? "Oh no, but you were right," the interns told me, immediately understanding from my description that these were the very people who were the bane of their attempt to infuse their college existence with social meaning, that these were the complacent they had to do battle with daily back in school.

It was clear from our conversation that the interns longed for the aura of social commitment that they associated with the Movement. So do I.

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