

The 1968 Democratic National Convention

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Description

NBC News takes a look back at the 1968 Democratic convention. The party divisions and police violence which traumatized the public in 1968 still influence the psychology of the Democratic party, and the way conventions are held.

Keywords

Democratic National Convention, 1968 Convention, Chicago, Vietnam War, Hubert Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, Protest, Chicago 7, Police, Violence, Anti-War, Delegates, Richard Daley, Jerry Rubin, Walter Mondale, Julian Bond

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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

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Transcript

The 1968 Democratic National Convention

LINDA ELLERBEE, anchor:

The Democratic Party, the majority party. It was so simple or seemed that way, there were more democrats than republicans, therefore there were more democratic presidents than republican presidents it was so for years, until 1968, an only one since then. It is possible the Democratic Party has never recovered since what happened in 1968, it is possible. To understand the party now, you have to see it then. The democrats were in power, but the country was in trouble over the war in Vietnam, and so the party was in trouble. Correspondent John Hart reports from Chicago, where in 1968 the democrats held a convention.

JOHN HART, reporting:

In the week before the convention, 300 Americans were killed in Vietnam, a typical week that year. In the 4 months before Robert Kennedy was murdered, Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, 125 cities had riots including this one, where the mayor scolded his police for going too easy. Many young people were saying the system didn't work and when 10,000 of them came here to demonstrate that and some of them put a Vietnamese Communist flag on the statue of a civil war hero, the mayor's police did not go easy. A federal investigation later concluded there had provocations been from the demonstrators, rocks bottles and other things thrown at police, but the response was, and in the words of the report 'unrestrained and indiscriminate police violence.'

It was as if the normal restraints on human behavior, having been lifted in Vietnam were slipping dangerously in this country as well. The violence of the war, which divided the country, was echoed by violence in the streets, which divided the country further. Anti-war delegates were harassed on the floor.

Mr. EDWIN NEWMAN: (From file footage) Why are you trying this strong-arm stuff, he's an elected delegate!

JOHN CHANCELLOR: (from file footage) This is John Chancellor on the floor, I'm standing looking

down at Edwin Newman in the middle of a huge bunch of security people, how did it get started to do you know?

Mr. NEWMAN: They keep coming around all day checking our credentials, and it's time they stop. There's nothing in the rules of the Democratic Party that says they have the right to check us every 10 minutes. They have harassed us an entire day.

CHANCELLOR: The Chicago police are now in the aisle here with billyclubs clearing people out, they aren't using them on people, they're carrying them and they're dragging people right out of the aisle here, it's a terrific crush. About one two three four five six, six police men, came in here, some of them wearing the blue helmets of the Chicago police force and they are dragging out the people that are involved in this. One delegate from New York who objected to having his credentials checked.

CHET HUNTEY, commentator: This surely is the first time that policemen have ever entered the floor of a convention.

DAVID BRINKLEY, commentator: In the United States.

COLORADO DELEGATE: Mr. Chairman, Colorado rises to a point of information, is there any rule under which Mayor Daley can be compelled to suspend the police state terror perpetrated this minute on kids in front of the Conrad Hilton?

HART: By the night of the presidential nomination the National Guard backed up the police to keep the streets clear of demonstrators, the guards used tear gas, but the police used nightsticks.

Senator GEORGE McGOVERN: (from file footage) And with George McGovern as President of the United States, we wouldn't have to stop those tactics in the streets of Chicago.

Chicago Mayor RICHARD DALEY: (from file footage) What are we coming to as a society? What are we coming to in this country? That policemen are treated how they have been treated, not only in Chicago, but all over the country. On the grounds that the confrontation has to be made because we got to get the action, we got to get the violence.

Mr. JERRY RUBIN, Yippie leader: (from file footage) It would have been impossible to hold the Democratic National Convention in any city in the United States, or throughout the world, without demonstrations or disruption. Daley's right on this point, Chicago just happened to be the city. It would've been impossible to hold it anywhere because the Democratic Party has blood on its hands.

HART: By the time Vice President Humphrey won the nomination, it was a broken prize, which his co-chairman Walter Mondale could only try to restore.

Mr. WALTER MONDALE: (from file footage) The Vice President was a candidate along with the rest. We were dealt with the same as they were, and we won I think in a convention, which is as fair as any has ever been.

HART: The establishment kept its power and lost the election. The outsiders were left with symbolic gestures, nominating a young black from Georgia for Vice President named Julian Bond, who had become a symbol of the rebellion

Mr. JULIAN BOND: (from file footage) Fellow delegates the people of America are watching us now as indeed the whole world is watching us.

CROWD: The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!

HART: 1968 was a struggle between the in's and the out's, and the out's left Chicago determined to take power. They did and some of those who were bloodied in the streets then are delegates in San Francisco now.

The outsiders of '68 nominated George McGovern 4 years later and he lost, they changed the party rules and elected Carter, and he disappointed. And now the two wings are being asked to join together behind Mondale and Ferraro and seek at last recovery from what happened here a generation ago.