

Chapter 4

TANGLED MORNING AND DISMAL TWILIGHT

(I)n our youth our Hearts were touched with fire. It was given us to learn that life is a profound and passionate thing. We have seen with our own eyes the snowy heights of honor...

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, on the Civil War generation.

It's easy enough to take fortresses, but not so easy to win a campaign. To do that, it's not storming fortresses and attacking but patience and time that are needed.

- General Kutuzov to Prince Andrei, in Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace

The Movement was born on March 24, 1965, in a lecture hall at the University of Michigan, when anti-war professors sponsored an all-night "teach-in" that was quickly copied across the country. The ragtag teach-ins were ideologically tame, usually presenting speakers for and against the war, but they were revolutionary simply for showing how to question the hawkish conventional wisdom. The Movement's precursors were tiny rallies by SANE, SWP, Quakers, and other "ban-the-bombers" or socialists, but the old guard was the first to acknowledge that the teach-ins were, in size and breadth of audience, something completely different.

President Johnson had raised the ante, ordering the bombing of North Vietnam in February and sending the first US combat troops to Vietnam in March, and he had been seen and raised. The teach-ins brought 20,000 people to Washington in April for a march sponsored by SDS, and the Movement began to escalate along with the war. US forces in Vietnam and attendance at marches both rose to the hundreds of thousands by 1967, and from 1969 to the end of the war, there was a protest every year in which the marchers exceeded the troops. Students formed the bulk of the marches, but labor unions and church groups were also prominent. Supporters of the war made much of the role of more radical groups like SWP and SDS, and it is true that much of the leg-

work for demonstrations — arranging publicity, banners, marshals and speakers — was done by people to the left of most participants. But the only organizers of consequence were Johnson and Nixon, and it was their drive for victory that brought people out to marches, not loyalty to or even awareness of the sponsors.

The Movement was not just group activities, like marches and sit-ins, but also a collection of individual acts of conscience: a teacher wearing an armband, a veteran carrying a flag upside-down, a student refusing to go to class, a soldier refusing to go to Vietnam, a draftee going to jail, a lawyer defending a resister. Every day somebody figured out a new way to say no, like the “Fort Hood 3” renouncing orders to ship out to Vietnam, a Chicago professor refusing to report students’ academic status to draft boards, citizens paying their telephone “war tax” to a charity, or troubled souls mimicking Buddhists in Vietnam and burning themselves to death. These symbolic pinpricks were everywhere, forcing other people to ask themselves what they had done to stop the war.

From 1965 on, emissaries of the administration could count on a steady flow of anti-war incidents. Johnson brooded over them, recognizing that they would turn his re-election campaign into a circus. Nor was he safe in the White House, as every event suffered from suspense: which singer might stop and denounce the war, which poet might loudly refuse to attend, which guests might circulate petitions? Johnson and then Nixon were livid when protest infringed on their families, as when singer Eartha Kitt attacked the war at a lunch given by Lady Bird Johnson, and Nixon “couldn’t even go to (his daughter’s) graduation” because the students would protest, and ruin her big day. Civility waned on both sides as the administration’s castigation of even moderate dissent like the teach-ins radicalized its targets. Then, in June 1967, police attacked a sit-in outside a Los Angeles hotel where Johnson was speaking, injuring hundreds and bringing a shocked clarity to protesters throughout the country: this was a war at home as well.

From the start, the Movement was the target of derision and attack. *Time* called on the “Vietniks” at teach-ins to stop their caterwauling, which encouraged the enemy, lengthening a war that was almost won. The White House organized and arranged funding for a persistent assault by supposedly independent opin-

ion, in which speeches and ads came quickly in response to anti-war activity or disturbing news from Vietnam. Leading faculty and public figures signed a widely-distributed pamphlet called "Why Vietnam?" and Freedom House ran pro-administration newspaper ads, while the Friends of Vietnam successfully promoted Johnson's claims that US spies knew that the Movement was being fed its stances by the Soviets. The media were awash in pro-war commentary, from favorable articles to angry editorials to ads juxtaposing dead GIs with anti-war demonstrators. The administration complained loudly about any critical coverage, and Johnson threatened the president of CBS with non-renewal of its license after it aired Morley Safer's footage of GIs "torching" huts with Zippo lighters. Fearing similar harassment, NBC killed a story about GIs desecrating corpses; American media rarely reported the brutality of US and allied forces that was noted as a matter of course in the European and Asian press.

Some damaging stories did get away, notably in the New York Times, like Harrison Salisbury's 1966 confirmation of US bombing of Hanoi's civilian areas, which rendered absurd the Pentagon's claim that the damage was done by anti-aircraft rounds falling back on the city, and David Halberstam's juxtaposition of the stalemate in the field with the claims of success by our "best and brightest" leaders. The administration began to argue that while it may have been wrong to go in, it would be worse to leave. At the populist end of the cultural spectrum, this stance took the form of bumper stickers saying, "These Colors Don't Run." At the sophisticated end, it was expressed as a world-weary pragmatism: great powers can't back down without losing their greatness, so poor Vietnam has to be sacrificed. Historian Arthur Schlesinger and reporter Neil Sheehan wrote New York Times Magazine articles on this theme in 1966, which SANE reprinted because they at least challenged some of the administration's claims. Schlesinger opposed "widening the war," but rejected a "humiliating withdrawal":

Why we are in Vietnam is today a question of only historical interest. We are there, for better or for worse...Our national security may not have compelled us to draw a line across Southeast Asia where we did, but, having drawn it, we cannot lightly abandon it.

He acknowledged that US troops could not win this civil war, and called for a South Vietnamese government that could gain the “active loyalty of the country-side” by battling corruption, promoting development, and deploying soldiers who fought hard and didn’t torture prisoners (and wasn’t the NLF, which already met these criteria). Sheehan’s years on the ground allowed him to eviscerate such silly hopes about a government created by foreigners and backed by local strongmen, yet he coldly advocated keeping our necessarily indiscriminate “killing machine” running:

(I)t would be very difficult to prevent any precipitate retreat from degenerating into a rout...(that) might undermine our entire position in Southeast Asia. We shall, I am afraid, have to put up with our Vietnamese mandarin allies. We shall not be able to reform them....We shall have to continue to rely mainly on our military power, accept the odium attached to its use, and hope that someday this power will bring us to a favorable settlement.

Sheehan mused about “whether the United States or any other nation has the right to inflict this suffering and degradation on another people for its own ends.” His qualified answer epitomized American liberalism refusing to bite the bullet implied by its stated values, and sacrificing innocent people to US world power: “I hope we will not, in the name of some anti-Communist crusade, do this again.” He worried about the spiritual effect on America of waging such a cynical war, but it was already evident in his own cynical deferral of his ideals. Such abdication by liberals drove the Movement toward a more radical critique of first the war, then the foreign policy behind it, then the economic and political System behind the foreign policy, and finally the culture and society behind the System. Nobody walked this path more clearly and more quickly than the Students for a Democratic Society.

Of course, SDS was not the only group to argue that the war was no mistake, but rather the inexorable result of American foreign policy. The longer the war persisted in defiance of both morality and the self-interest of most Americans, the more important became the search for an explanation of why we had intervened and why we weren’t disengaging. Historian Henry Steele Commanger rejected the concept that the war was “somehow an

aberration," and argued that it followed with "a kind of nightmare logic" from "a body of political and historical miscalculations" about America's need to stop communist gains. But SDS went a step further with what their president, Paul Potter, called the "terrible and bitter insight" that the foreign policy of global counter-revolution itself flowed from America's undemocratic distribution of power.

In a defining speech at the 1965 march on Washington, Potter talked a little about the war and a lot about "the system" that led to it: "What kind of system," he asked, allows the war in Vietnam, deprives blacks of the vote, keeps millions of Americans in poverty, creates numbing bureaucracy and boring workplaces, "puts material values before human values" and can still claim it should "police the world?" To end this war and prevent others, he said, "We must name that system. We must name it, describe it, analyze it, understand it and change it." To the chagrin of old-line socialists in the crowd (but to the relief of groups like SANE, which had forced SDS to replace the demand of "immediate withdrawal" in its banners with "negotiate") he did not name the system as capitalism, because he considered it a "hollow, dead word tied to the thirties," one his successor Carl Oglesby wrote could not "explain by itself" America's behavior.

SDS could not believe, to update Lenin, that neo-imperialism was merely corporate capitalism fully evolved; too many capitalist countries were decent to their neighbors and too many socialist countries weren't. SDS was leading the Movement toward a cultural, almost spiritual explanation of the "deeper malaise" of which Vietnam was but a symptom. At the core of it was "the tormented heart of America," which beat in the privileged class that benefited from repression at home and abroad. SDS made anguished, hopeful appeals to their liberal allies in this class, only to be spurned in the manner of Schlesinger and Sheehan. Debate soon seemed irrelevant, and actions designed to put the System "up against the wall" became inevitable.

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Like so much of what is uniquely American — jazz, blues, modern dance, oratory, carriage, and perseverance — the Movement was heavily dependent on the African-American experience. Without the civil rights movement of the early 1960s and the urban riots of the decade's later years, the Movement would not

only have been ignorant about what to do, but more importantly, unaware that anything could be done at all. The Movement aspired to the same combination of moral crusade and threat as the black revolt, and some of its most telling moments came directly from it, as when activists in Mississippi called on blacks to refuse to go to Vietnam as long as segregation ruled at home, Martin Luther King Jr. railed against a "senseless and unjust war" arising from "our pride and arrogance as a nation," and Muhammed Ali said more succinctly when he lost his boxing title for resisting the draft: "No Viet Cong never called me nigger."

The linkage between the two movements, however, was tenuous. There were few blacks in the Movement's leadership or troops, and the best-known civil rights groups, such as Roy Wilkins' NAACP and King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, eschewed collaboration because it would cost them financial support from the Rockefeller family and political support from allies in government. The first black leaders to oppose the war were less dependent on the white establishment. Malcolm X denounced the war as "criminal" and "imperialist" in January 1965, and in February, just weeks before he was assassinated, was hosted in Selma, Alabama, by the young and angry Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee ("Snick"). When police attacked marchers there that spring, Snick chairman John Lewis echoed a speech by Malcolm, asking why US troops could be sent to Vietnam but not Alabama, and Snick endorsed the SDS march in Washington. The next year, following the murder of one of its workers, Snick adopted an anti-war platform, and supported men who resisted a draft that sustained "aggression (overseas)...in the name of the 'freedom' we find so false in this country."

The Movement was pursuing a bigger fish than Snick, and that was King, the world's most prominent moral leader. Leading the effort to land him was a rare black at the top of the Movement, Farleigh Dickinson professor Robert Browne. An economist with the US foreign aid program in South Vietnam in the 1950s whose first-hand knowledge was badly needed and eagerly exploited, Browne was the Alexander Hamilton of the Movement, a "host unto himself." He lived in a whirlwind from 1962 to 1968, peppering the media and congress with ads, letters, and reports, and speaking from the wild Berkeley campus in the west to the tame Bucks County Peace Fair in the east, from white and wealthy

Cornell in the north to black and struggling Tuskegee in the south. He wrote the opening salvo of the Movement, a 1963 *New York Times* ad headlined "We Too Protest!" that showed a Buddhist monk burning himself to death, and included a mailing form that created a core list of funders. After speaking at the Michigan teach-in in March 1965 and the first meeting on the war at Carnegie Hall the following week, he organized the faculty group that advised teach-ins everywhere.

As someone who regretted that his commitment to Vietnam had kept him from being more involved in the civil rights struggle, Browne felt a special incentive to bring King into the Movement; as someone who knew first-hand about the effectiveness of campaigns to discredit activists as communists, King adviser Bayard Rustin felt a special incentive to keep him out. The FBI had driven some of King's top aides out of the SCLC and forced Rustin into the background with charges of communism, and helped segregationists place billboards across the country showing King at a "Communist training school." Rustin developed such grudging respect for the FBI and red-baiting in general that he opposed allying with the Movement and tried to drive unnamed advocates of "totalitarianism" from the 1965 SDS march. Browne challenged Rustin's perspective in the civil rights bulletin board, *Freedomways*, acknowledging the financial risks of alliance, but predicting that it would "spark an international purification" of a racist policy "clothed...in the modern cloak of resisting the spread of international communism."

Browne helped A. J. Muste's Fellowship of Reconciliation prepare an open letter to King from a Buddhist monk who argued, "You yourself cannot remain silent." After King joined the monk in a mild expression of concern about US policy, Browne brought back from Vietnam a private letter from leading Buddhists pleading for more, which he delivered to King as Rustin looked on with apprehension. Success came in January 1967, when quixotic SCLC leader Rev. James Bevel attended a meeting of the Spring Mobilization and was named its national director. King soon agreed to lead what would be the biggest anti-war march to date, the April Mobe in New York that drew hundreds of thousands. Prior to the march, he gave a nationally-reported speech at New York's Riverside Church in which he called for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of US forces. King condemned the war

for destroying not only Vietnam but America, by draining resources from domestic programs, and he juxtaposed blacks' lack of opportunity at home with their being sent "to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions."

This last point was a volatile one in the black community, and caused great concern in the administration and even greater tension in the armed forces. Historian Guenter Lewy has branded King's claim "false," because blacks accounted for 12 percent of combat deaths in the entire war, about their same share of males of military age, but it is Lewy who errs: when King made his speech, the 9 percent of soldiers who were black were suffering 17 percent of combat deaths. The reasons for heavy black casualties were obvious: it was a lower-middle class ground war and blacks had only half the median income of whites; and draft boards were 99 percent white, so twice as many whites as blacks received medical deferments. Blacks received a break from their usual nemesis, standardized "intelligence" tests, with six times as many blacks as whites failing the draft's "mental" standards, but this was countered by Defense Secretary McNamara's "Project 100,000," which waived standards for 300,000 low scorers, 41 percent of whom were black. Grotesquely portrayed as an opportunity for disadvantaged youth, this press-ganging in poor neighborhoods obviated a call-up of white, well-educated National Guardsmen. Low test scores and combat pay made blacks the majority in many field units, and soon after King's speech the Pentagon took steps to reduce black death rates.

When asked if joining the anti-war movement would undermine the civil rights movement, King replied that it was the war itself that was undermining his work. He felt he had to have an answer for the "desperate, rejected and angry young men" who countered his argument that "Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems" by asking whether America itself "wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems":

I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today — my own government...

King headlined the march, but his protégé Bevel upstaged him by announcing to everyone's surprise: "We are going to give LBJ one

month to stop murdering those folks in Vietnam.” If he didn’t, Bevel threatened, LBJ would find the Movement in Washington, committing civil disobedience against the machinery of war. From this pledge came the greatest piece of street theater in American history since the Boston Tea Party, the march on the Pentagon in October 1967. Through the power of television, the protesters who forced their way up to the walls of the Pentagon (a few thousand out of the 30,000 who marched over the bridge from a legal rally of 100,000) looked to America like the “Armies of the Night” Norman Mailer said they were. Had the civil rights movement continued to help the anti-war forces, many more such events would have resulted, and the war would have ended that much sooner. After King’s assassination in 1968, though, the civil rights movement could barely help itself.

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In response to the nationwide publicity given to both the march on the Pentagon and to repeated attempts to shut down the Oakland induction center, the Johnson administration made a flurry of claims like this one from Army Gen. Bruce Palmer: “The military war...is nearly won....The Viet Cong has been defeated....He can’t get food and he can’t recruit.” When the Tet Offensive exploded in January 1968, the contrast of such boasts with the loss of every major city destroyed the administration’s credibility. In a ferocious counter-attack epitomized by a US officer’s explanation at Ben Tre that “It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it,” US forces threw airpower and artillery at the cities and regained them. Most of the American media answered Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s angry query — “Which side are you on?” — by dutifully reporting the victory the administration claimed, but the fact that such a battle had occurred at all made any such claims suspect. One picture, the summary execution of a prisoner by Saigon’s chief of police, washed away the thousands of compliant words.

As one of the primary architects of the war, the CIA’s Robert Komer, recalled, Tet “changed absolutely everything” in Washington. Tet shocked Americans with the realization that as a matter of course their leaders lied to them. Cartoonist Herblock, who had been sympathetic to US policy, captured the new contempt by drawing an officer inside a heavily-damaged US embassy cranking out a press release claiming that no vital component of

the war effort (i.e. the duplicating machine) had been damaged. Public discontent with a supposedly won war in which US dead soared to over 500 a week set the stage for Eugene McCarthy's success as a peace candidate in the New Hampshire primary, Robert Kennedy's appropriation of his banner, and Johnson's announcement in March that he would not run again and was denying a request for more troops. There would be no victory in Vietnam, only a grudging retreat in which as many US troops and more Vietnamese would die than before Tet.

In April 1968, the first student strike against the war took place on scores of campuses, the most notable of which was Columbia, where the strike continued on the strength of local issues until a police attack made it national news. The Movement was heating up internationally as well, with US policy under constant criticism and US embassies the targets of massive rallies that spring in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. Student revolts in other countries, notably in France and Mexico, gave American protesters a sense not only of camaraderie, but also of competition. Encouraged by the publicity that a small number of demonstrators at the Pentagon and Columbia had generated, a loose coalition of activists made plans to go to Chicago for the Democratic convention in August. Their general purpose was clear, which was to spread their rejection of the war-making political system and the reasonable generation of men who ran it. Their tactical purposes, however, were murky, and ranged from scaring the Democrats into an anti-war position by rallying for McCarthy to punishing them for being a pro-war party by presenting images of chaos and contempt on national television.

Given their links with liberal Democrats and the potential for violence by a notorious police force, most anti-war groups opposed going to Chicago. In a sense, the protest was as much against them and their stodgy legal marches as it was against the war-makers and their party. A band of at most 10,000 came to Chicago, and made history when police wantonly attacked them and the media who were observing. The whole world was watching, as their chant went, but as the election season heated up, the world turned to watch Humphrey and Nixon illogically promising both victory and peace in Vietnam. There was reason for liberal Democrats like Tip O'Neill to blame Humphrey's razor-thin loss in the popular vote on the Chicago protests, but the "Hump"

the left wanted to dump was already saddled with urban riots and a morass in Vietnam, making him an easy target for someone selling "law and order" at home and a "secret plan" to end the war abroad. Nixon would have won in a waltz had it not been for George Wallace, who took 46 electoral votes from him outright and probably gave Humphrey a few states as well.

Chicago radicalized the Movement. Most of its leaders now considered both major candidates enemies, and so were not susceptible to pleas from liberals to be responsible and help Humphrey because he would appoint better people to the Supreme Court. The Movement considered it irresponsible to collaborate with the war machine of which Humphrey was a part, and considered this argument a prime example of how the Democrats had become the party of war. If the peace movement was a threat to Humphrey, the threat to Nixon was peace itself, specifically the settlement being explored in Paris the month before the election. As Seymour Hersh showed well beyond a reasonable doubt in his book on Henry Kissinger, Nixon used information Kissinger provided in violation of his duties as a US adviser to the talks to encourage South Vietnamese president Thieu to shatter a US-Hanoi agreement three days before the election, dashing Johnson's hopes that it would boost the fast-closing Humphrey over the top.

There was a lull in anti-war activity as America waited to see Nixon's plan. Many in the Movement expected him to end the war rather than face the political punishment they had inflicted first on Johnson and then Humphrey, but on taking office in 1969 Nixon unveiled a strategy of "Vietnamization," which meant a stepped-up US air war over North and South Vietnam, Laos, and, in secret, Cambodia, and an expanded ground war fought by US-funded South Vietnamese troops. The realization that Nixon was after precisely the same goals that had eluded Johnson, at a minimum the avoidance of defeat and at a maximum a victory, angered and galvanized the Movement. That spring, anti-war protests spread to far more cities and campuses than ever, and during the summer, the SMC, the Moratorium, and the other Mobe groups swallowed their differences and moved into a single building in Washington to plan the fall offensive. The usual infighting over slogans and activities was quickly overwhelmed by the apparent size of the coming Mobe. Driven together by the only two

enemies they had in common, the administration on their right and the crazies on their left, these disparate groups threw together the logistics for the largest gathering ever recorded of citizens protesting their own government's war.

The result of this tangled morning of the Movement, the accretion of individual acts of dissent and mass marches of protest from the first escalation by Johnson in 1965 through the re-escalation by Nixon in 1969, was quite simply legitimacy for opposition to the war, which made it impossible for the war to go on indefinitely. Without the fire from the Movement generating both heat that worried the ruling elite and light that more and more people used to examine US policy, Johnson and Nixon would have had far freer hands to do far worse damage before accepting inevitable defeat. The Movement's impact can be seen in the contrast between the Washington Post's patronizing attack on King in 1967 after he denounced the war and its no less biting attack on Nixon in 1969 after the giant Mobe, a contrast that is an unwitting tribute to a Movement that had become the uninvited, unruly, and unavoidable central reality in American politics:

Dr. King has done a grave injustice to those who are his natural allies in a great struggle to remove ancient abuses from our public life....Many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence. He has diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country and to his people. (April 1967)....The effort...to characterize the weekend demonstrations as (a) small, (b) violent, and (c) treacherous will not succeed because it is demonstrably untrue....It was a fine afternoon for football, (Nixon) is quoted as saying on Saturday, and for sheer piquancy, we have not heard the likes of that since Marie Antoinette. (November, 1969)

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On May 4, 1970, troops of the Ohio National Guard on the campus of Kent State University, tired and angry, harassed but not endangered by a crowd of students trailing well behind them, turned around sharply at the top of a rise. With no audible order but as if in a coordinated movement, they sighted their guns and opened fire. A surprised officer ran in front of his soldiers, beat-

ing their helmets with his baton, and stopped the assault after 13 seconds, after 54 shots from 29 guns. There were now, as the song went, “four dead in Ohio.” The working-class Guardsmen had answered their slightly social superiors who for three days of protests over the invasion of Cambodia had been throwing rocks and curses at them: “You say ‘Fuck this war, this system, these soldiers?’ No: We say ‘Fuck you!’” The soldiers had defined the state’s limits, just as they had earlier that week, busting a labor rather than a student strike.

“Gotta get down to it,” Crosby et al.’s song went, “soldiers are shooting us down.” Getting down to it meant realizing that people who would shoot you or say “good riddance” when it happened were your mortal enemy, beyond the realm of debate and compromise. We were “finally on our own.” The slight hope and deep frustration on which the Movement had been floating was transformed to pure despair and pure rage. There was nothing to talk about, only sides to be taken. After Nixon’s speech announcing the invasion, scores of campuses had gone out on strike in a contagious competition. After Kent State, it was hundreds, and it was untenable for students opposed to the war to cooperate with the part of the System with which they had the most contact and the most control, their universities.

Not just for students but for their parents, who were part of the Silent Majority Nixon needed, Kent State was a stunning event. A gasp of recognition rippled through mainstream America: these were their kids being shot down! The madness of the war, if not the war itself, had finally come home. These “average Americans” could accept the use of state power to draft lower and middle-class kids, since the draft was rooted in the good war against Hitler and the Japs. They could accept the unleashing of the raw power of the state against unruly and disdainful foreigners. They could even accept police killings of black activists who constituted another class of unruly and disdainful aliens, as at Orangeburg State, South Carolina, (3 students), Chicago (2 Black Panthers), Jackson State, Mississippi, (2 students), and Southern University, Louisiana (2 students). What they could not accept was the state turning on their own kind, and when parents of Kent State’s dead went on television, bitterly denouncing the attack, the Silent Majority listened.

Historian Marilyn Young has concluded that the college system was “paralyzed” after Kent State, with over half of all colleges, about 550, shutting down. Then came the killings at Jackson State, and black campuses went out in large numbers too, giving black as well as white soldiers even more reason to avoid combat. Violence resulted on 73 campuses, and the National Guard was called to 24. Both the uprising of students and the capitulation by the administration at the University of Chicago were so complete that I saw no reason to stick around. Between the invasion and Kent State, there was a tussle over the campus, with some classes still meeting. When I and two other strikers began leafleting in an advanced science class, the professor recovered from his astonishment at the sight of these hairy barbarians and politely asked us to wait a few minutes until class ended. We complied equally politely, but after Kent State, bands of raging strikers roamed the campus in search of offending classes, and Chicago went down for the count. I flew to Buffalo to see Ann, and the sting of tear-gas that greeted me as I got to her quiet, working-class, former teachers’ college told me that these strikes were different. I then went on to Cornell, which like Chicago had enough experience to fold before tear-gas came.

Polls showed that campus protest was the primary concern of the American public. While 70 percent of Americans supported the invasion of Cambodia, most did so because Nixon portrayed it as a way of speeding the withdrawal from Vietnam. For the first time, a majority opposed the continued use of US combat troops. Nixon didn’t give in easily, though, joining in the war at home with relish, pushing FBI director Hoover and CIA director Helms to step up infiltration and attacks on the Movement, and prodding the IRS to audit troublesome media and protest groups. He fêted construction workers who had attacked protesters in New York City, and appropriated the symbolic centerpiece of their attack, surrounding himself with American flags at every appearance. The Movement had often marched under the flag as a way of showing its refusal to be considered un-American, but for the rest of the war, the few flags displayed at protests were likely to be flown upside down in the symbol of distress.

Ironically, until Kent State, radicals who wanted to foment revolution were diligently trying to end a war that was undermining the System, while the System’s guardians were obstinately

trying to sustain it. Now America's ruling elite worried less about how to win the war and more about how to avoid losing the country. The young were gone, the troops were unreliable, and unions were starting to break ranks with the hawkish AFL-CIO. America's house was becoming divided, and the owners' strongest instinct was to tone down the war as much as was needed to save their power at home. An example came soon after Kent State, in an open letter to Nixon from Ford Foundation director McGeorge Bundy, who as Johnson's national security advisor had vilified advocates of the sort of restraint he was now proposing:

Not only must there be no new incursion...but nothing that feels like that to the American people must happen again....Congress would stop money for the war, and the chances of general domestic upheaval would be real.

Bundy still wanted to win the war, but with less controversial tactics. College presidents went a step further, beseeching Nixon and congress simply to end the war, and calm their maelstrom of discontent. Anti-war students had shut down campuses and reduced ROTC membership by two-thirds; now they began demanding a say in who was hired and what they would teach. To forestall such demands, colleges gave in to less fundamental ones, approving pass-fail grades for strike semesters and suspending classes so students could help peace candidates, and presidents dropped their vaunted neutrality and signed anti-war letters. Pleas like those of Bundy and the college presidents led Kissinger to denounce the "cowardice of the eastern establishment," but even for bloody geopoliticians the benefits of victory were rapidly palling beside the costs. US influence in Europe and the developing world was being weakened by the war, just as it had been when the world focused on segregation.

By the fall of 1970, America's elite, unrepentant but pragmatic, had moved to a new consensus, in essence telling Nixon and congress to cut the necessary deal: the end of the war for the end of the Movement. Now the war was really over, even more obviously than after Tet, Woodstock, and the Mobe. Still, the ocean liner of state turned painfully slowly, as Nixon and Kissinger committed their foulest war crime: seeking to preserve the aura of US power and their own bold image, they cynically promoted a "savage retreat" over five years.

It would have been even longer had not a scared congress begun to help wind down the war. Congress had previously been purposely passive, eager to defer to the executive's usurpation of war-making power and political responsibility. There were a few notable but soundly outvoted "doves" — in the Senate Democrat William Fulbright, who held well-publicized hearings, and Republican Mark Hatfield, who said the only thing to negotiate was "the time and method for the withdrawal of our military presence," and in the more hawkish House, Democrat George Brown and Republican Ogden Reid. In 1967 the Senate approved funds for the war 89-2, and the House defeated Brown's ban on operations over North Vietnam 372-18. In 1968, the war's most lethal year, *Congressional Quarterly* said there was not one "significant roll-call vote taken on the Vietnam issue." In 1969 Rep. Jim Wright pre-empted doves with a resolution supporting Nixon's efforts to obtain a "just peace" and win the release of US prisoners, and by 225-132, the House barred the consideration of anti-war amendments to it. Senate doves offered a glancing shot rather than a frontal assault, passing by 48-41 a ban on US military forces in Laos, even though it was the CIA that ran that war. This superficially inane tactic was in fact a key "bridge" vote that moved senators half way from complete support for the war to complete opposition.

The atmosphere of crisis after Cambodia and Kent gave the doves a boost. The Senate repealed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution that Johnson had used to justify the war, and Rep. Reid's amendment barring US troops from Cambodia, Thailand and Laos was hotly debated before Paul Findley gutted it with a waiver letting the president protect US soldiers as he saw fit. The McGovern-Hatfield "end the war" amendment, which required a US withdrawal in one year, gained a solid 39 votes, although in the type of turn-around that drove the Movement wild, only five senators then opposed the overall defense bill to which it had been offered. The first clear victory was the Cooper-Church amendment banning US ground forces in Cambodia, which survived by one vote Sen. Robert Byrd's attempt to add a waiver like Findley's, and then passed 58-37.

The ban became law, but it was a bittersweet victory: the bill that included it also funded Cambodia's rightist government in its civil war. For the rest of the war, Nixon defeated doves'

attempts to enact a withdrawal by keeping his withdrawal moving more rapidly than the military situation warranted. US soldiers kept streaming home, leaving the South Vietnamese army alone to face heavily-armed North Vietnamese divisions at its front and resurgent NLF guerrillas at its back. Nixon was finally boxed in, not just by nameless masses in the streets, but by prominent legislators whom he needed for his entire domestic and foreign agenda.

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The Movement dwindled and died from 1970 to 1973 as all US forces came home. At times the numbers were high — nearly a million marchers on both coasts in April, 1971; 12,000 activists performing civil disobedience in Washington in May; and 100,000 marching in 1972 against the mining of North Vietnam's harbors, and at the January, 1973, "counter-inaugural" against the bombing of Hanoi — but the hope was gone. After the US air and ground combat role ended with the signing of the 1973 peace accords, the Movement could only watch the slaughter from the sidelines. It had become a Sword of Damocles, as the SWP's Fred Halstead said, hanging over Nixon and then Ford should they try to increase aid or reintroduce US forces, but the sword stayed in its sheath.

The Movement cut a memorable swath across America during its bitter decline. The Weathermen became a household word in March 1970, when an anti-personnel bomb they were making exploded inside their expensive New York brownstone. A similar bomb was lobbed into a Detroit police association the same day, but failed to explode. Later that year, the Weather Underground issued a statement grounded in another Dylan song, "New Morning," in which it renounced anti-personnel weapons in favor of "armed propaganda," meaning bombings of structures related to the state, and it carried out 26 bombings at the Pentagon, State Department, congress, federal buildings, and banks with no loss of life. They also directed the escape of drug maven Timothy Leary from a low-security California state prison in September 1970.

Another famed part of the Movement was the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, who revitalized the peace veterans for one final push in 1971. VVAW's young, angry soldiers wore their unassailable credentials — field uniforms — on their backs, and

the media couldn't keep their cameras off them. Coming from the lower and lower-middle classes, they talked not about theories of imperialism but about a brutal war and a rotten ally. At their war crimes investigation in Detroit in January (named "Winter Soldier" to contrast with Tom Paine's "sunshine patriots"), the vets told tales to the nation, some true and some tall, about atrocities by US and allied troops, and argued that the My Lai massacre was standard operating procedure.

In literal terms, VVAW was wrong: the execution of hundreds of civilians ("And babies? And babies." read the trial transcript that became a favored anti-war poster) was unique, and the evasive behavior of the soldiers afterwards indicated that they knew it. However, VVAW was correct that the nature of the war led our side to inflict casualties many times those of My Lai's. Once a US or allied unit had been hit by booby-traps or snipers, its soldiers tended to shoot first and ask questions, brutally, later of the villagers who had either attacked them or not warned them. The lavish use of bombing and artillery in "free-fire" zones and to "prep" an area for combat troops showed a systematic contempt for the lives of the people the Americans simply referred to as "gooks." The event in Detroit brought these realities home, discrediting war-makers' platitudes about "surgical strikes" and bringing "freedom" to the Vietnamese.

The vets joined the spring anti-war offensive in which the two groups that had emerged from the Mobe collaborated. The People's Coalition for Peace and Justice agreed to co-sponsor the National Peace Action Coalition's legal marches in Washington and San Francisco April 24, and then a week later would try to shut down Washington with civil disobedience with its "May Days." The VVAW contingent of 1,200 encamped on the mall before the march, refusing to leave even after the Supreme Court upheld an injunction. Fearful of negative publicity if the vets were evicted, and perhaps of a refusal by active-duty troops to evict them, the administration backed down. Among the VVAW's well-publicized activities were a march by legless veterans past the White House, an attempt by veterans to turn themselves in at the Pentagon for committing war crimes, and nationally-televised testimony against the war in a Senate hearing by John Kerry, who later served on the same committee. The final blow, though, was the most gripping image from the Movement since the candles of the March Against Death in 1969: a march past the Capitol on

April 23 in which 600 veterans threw their combat and service decorations over the fence.

On April 24 half a million people swarmed down the parade route to the Capitol, and 300,000 marched in San Francisco. The television networks, emboldened by polls showing the war's unpopularity, provided live coverage of the Washington march, as well as numerous features on the VVAW's activities. A week later, 12,000 gutsy people roamed Washington, forming illegal sit-downs that tied up traffic. The police and national guard were over-ready, and simply gassed and then arrested anyone who looked suspicious. Some 10,000 people were herded into a football stadium, but the courts threw out nearly all the arrests and rendered a \$12 million judgment against the government. The nation was riveted on the Movement's demands and activities, the Senate passed the Mansfield amendment mandating a nine-month withdrawal, and the New York Times published the "Pentagon Papers," a secret history of US involvement in Vietnam that exposed as a lie the government's public version and further inflamed public sentiment against the war.

Yet six months later, when Nixon and Kissinger started a year-long bombing campaign of unprecedented intensity to sustain South Vietnam and punish the North as US troops withdrew, the Movement was essentially gone for good. It was as if Phil Ochs's disgusted song, "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," had entered everyone's brain simultaneously. An emergency demonstration in 1972 after the mining of North Vietnam's harbors drew 15,000 marchers to the Mall and 500 civil disobedients to the Pentagon, roughly one-thirtieth of the previous year's turn-out. Revulsion at the 1972 "Christmas" bombing of Hanoi (Christmas was in fact the one day off in the two weeks) did bring out 100,000 to the counter-inaugural, five times the number watching Nixon's triumphal ride, but congressional threats and heavy losses in US flight crews had already forced Nixon to agree to the same cease-fire terms that the bombing was intended to improve. US air and ground forces had to leave, while NVA forces remained. The Movement threatened Nixon with another four years of disruption if he tried to win the war with foreign aid, but the threat was not credible. Congress continued to fund US allies in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam until their opponents simply won the wars. The Movement couldn't bring people to a fever pitch over US funding for Asians to kill Asians.

The National Council that was to implement the cease-fire and the formation of a new government in Vietnam never got going. Neither the North nor the South expected the peace accord to do more than shield US withdrawal, and they immediately began the two-year "cease-fire war" in which more ARVN troops died than US troops did in the entire war. After the failure of their Johnson-like strategy of negotiating by air war, Nixon and Kissinger rewound history even farther to Kennedy's initial strategy of simply funding South Vietnam and equipping its forces. Congress reduced the administration's annual \$1 billion request to \$700 million by 1975, but even so, the economy was swamped with goods intended to buy loyalty, and ARVN had the world's fourth largest air force and over 50 times the ammunition of its enemy. Corruption and an unwillingness to die for a non-existent nation and a suspect government, exactly what caused Kennedy's strategy to fail and led to Johnson's introduction of US ground troops to hold off NLF guerrillas, again negated ARVN's tremendous advantage in size, equipment and funding.

This time, however, the enemy was the NVA, arrayed for conventional combat despite a lack of air cover. When the NVA probed south in the spring of 1975, ARVN simply collapsed, its few crack units isolated by other units and civilians retreating. Congress rejected Gerald Ford's politically-astute request for emergency aid, which could not have changed the outcome by more than a few months. As NVA tanks rolled toward Saigon, a war crime of staggering implications occurred, a banal evil that captured perfectly the deadly virus of self-congratulation that America's elite and their cheerleaders had brought to Vietnam. US forces scooped up Vietnamese orphans, the youngest victims of the devastation we had wrought on their society, and began to ferry them out under "Operation Babylift." What can account for such a crime, other than the megalomaniac assumption that one belongs to a superior culture, and so has an absolute right, indeed the duty, to determine others' futures? And is that not the same assumption that the Movement showed had led to the war, after all the explanations about power politics, economic advantage, and Cold Wars, truthful as they were, were stripped away? In a fitting final metaphor for America's involvement in Vietnam, and for the Movement's failure to change the thinking that led to it, the first flight of the baby-napping crashed, sacrificing over 100 infants to America's hubris.

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