

Gopher Giants: Hubert, Fritz, Eugene, the Long Road to Chicago and Beyond

Thomas L. Harnisch
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Professor Lawrence Jacobs
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Preface

The following analysis was written for the Walter F. Mondale Seminar at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute during the Fall Semester of 2006. It is an account of the battle for the 1968 Democratic nomination seen through the eyes of three “Gopher Giants”--- Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and Eugene McCarthy. This paper is not merely a historical analysis, but rather, a demonstration of the origins of many of the political norms, institutions, and public policies that we have today. These origins, I argue, can be traced to the events involving three ambitious Minnesota politicians during the traumatic year that was 1968.

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Thomas L. Harnisch

Around 10 a.m. President Lyndon Johnson gathered up aid Jim Jones and Luci and drove to St. Dominic's to attend mass. During the service, he instructed Jones to get the Secret Service to fetch the draft of the speech from his bedroom and to call Vice President Humphrey and tell him that they were coming over. When the speech and LBJ arrived at the Humphrey's apartment, the Vice President was preparing to fly to Mexico City for a state visit. When Johnson arrived, Mrs. Humphrey and Luci visited while the President gave Mr. Humphrey the speech. When he got to the final paragraph, the Vice President's face flushed, his eyes watered and he protested that President Johnson could not step down. "Don't mention this to anyone until Jim calls you in Mexico tonight. But you'd better start now planning your campaign for President." Humphrey's face went slack, his shoulders hunched. "There's no way I can beat the Kennedys," he said.¹

This dramatic scene kicked off one of the most turbulent, tragic, and far-reaching elections in modern American history, the Presidential Election of 1968---an election featured a national clashing of giants of the Minnesota political scene. The struggle between Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and Senator Eugene McCarthy for the Democratic nomination for President amid the backdrop of deep social, political, economic, and racial tensions fueled with a intensely unpopular war and political assassinations would set the scene for one of the most dramatic years of American history. The divisions of that year would ultimately boil over on the streets of Chicago, symbolizing the "most domestically dangerous, chaotic, American era since the Civil War."²

First, this analysis will provide a window into the struggle of those painful spring and summer months in 1968 through an investigation of the personal records of Vice

President Humphrey and interviews with Humphrey's campaign's co-chairman and future Vice President, Walter Mondale. Through Humphrey and McCarthy's tragic battle for the nomination and the disastrous events that unfolded, a painful transition in society occurs that would define the next generation of American culture and politics.

Second, this campaign would also have career-changing ramifications for whole team of Minnesota actors involved, and eventually facilitate a change in the role of the Vice President and change the course of Minnesota history. While Humphrey and McCarthy would never quite recover from 1968, the young and ambitious U.S. Senator who managed Humphrey's campaign, Walter F. Mondale, would have a new space to grow into a leader, culminating in his ascension to power in 1977. For Senator Mondale, this campaign would 1) provide him opportunities for creative and unhindered leadership in the 1970's 2) facilitate a change towards the political center, and 3) offer national political experience and exposure to the very real limitations of the institution of the vice-presidency. The active, modern vice presidency, started by Mondale in 1977 and continuing to Vice President Cheney, has its roots in the frenzied campaign during the turbulent year that was 1968.

Finally, a political legacy of this battle of giants from Minnesota is offered. From a political standpoint, this election 1) uncovered the gross inadequacies and failures of old party delegate system, which led to sweeping political reforms in the 1970's and fundamentally changed the way presidential campaigns are run 2) aggravated and accelerated the existing unraveling of the New Deal coalition, which subsequently ended the Great Society and the political liberalism of the 1960's and 3) ushered in a new era of more cautious foreign policy and questioning of the containment doctrine.

“It Changes the Political Picture in the United States in 1968”

By March 1968, the stalemated Vietnam War had taken its toll on President Lyndon Johnson. With student protests becoming more active and violent throughout the nation, his daughter asking why her new husband had to go to Vietnam and the Tet Offensive symbolizing a war with no end in sight, President Johnson was a seemingly beaten man. The constant beat of “Hey, Hey, LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?” took a toll on his health and ability to lead, as aides described him as old, battered, drained, and “tormented by Vietnam.”³ He feared that he might not live through another term or would be unable to carry out his duties, like President Wilson after World War I.

While Johnson anguished and assessed his chances for re-election in the fall, upstart Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy sensed Johnson’s vulnerabilities and made a long-shot, anti-war challenge for the Democratic nomination. No one inside the Beltway gave McCarthy much of a chance. In a shocking turn of events, however, Senator McCarthy and his “clean for Gene” students captured a stunning 42% of the vote in the New Hampshire primary. Because of this, many believed that Johnson faced the very real possibility of defeat to McCarthy in the Wisconsin primary later that spring.

After the disappointing performance in New Hampshire, Johnson began to have nightmares that his presidency would be “trapped between the two Kennedys” because New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy entered the race. He despised Robert Kennedy, while Kennedy, in turn, believed Johnson was “mean, bitter, vicious---an animal in many ways.”⁴ Johnson would never allow defeat at the hands of Bobby Kennedy. Few, however, thought that Johnson would ever abandon his love of the presidency by not running for re-election.

The campaign rolled on to Wisconsin at the end of March 1968. With a confident McCarthy starting his stump speech in Milwaukee, Johnson addressed the nation from the White House. Twenty minutes later, reporters and students swarmed over the stage and voices shouted at McCarthy, “He quit! Johnson quit! He’s not running!” McCarthy, looking stunned, responded with a classic understatement that personified his character. McCarthy replied, “It changes the political picture in the United States for 1968.”⁵

The Happy Warrior Joins the Race

With Johnson out of the way, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey now had a chance to fulfill his very real presidential ambitions. Humphrey had a relentless passion to be president, and joined Johnson’s ticket in 1964 as a route to the White House after a failed attempt at the White House in 1960.

The dynamics among the men running for President assured that none would strike a deal with the others and bow out of the race. While Humphrey had known Senator Eugene McCarthy from many years in Minnesota politics, and had even served with him in the U.S. Senate, the two were never very close due to deep differences in personalities. Any past friendship between the two men was shattered by the war, as Humphrey thought that McCarthy’s anti-war views were a matter of political convenience, while McCarthy thought Humphrey’s viewpoints were different in private than in public. The bottom line, however, was that Humphrey supported the Vietnam War, and McCarthy’s campaign was based on ending the war.

McCarthy would not support Bobby Kennedy either, as he thought the Kennedys were bad examples of Irish Catholics.⁶ As a note, President Johnson told all parties that he was remaining neutral---Johnson, in fact, didn’t think much of any of them.

While the “Happy Warrior” Hubert Humphrey had the desire and drive to be President, he immediately hesitated to declare his candidacy because of Robert Kennedy’s presence in the race. Eight years earlier, Humphrey had been crushed by the well-financed Kennedy machine, and remembered Kennedy’s often vicious and ruthless tactics to lock up the nomination for his brother, John F. Kennedy. Humphrey never forgave Bobby for saying that Humphrey dodged being in World War II, when Humphrey was not physically eligible for the draft. “I don’t want to be destroyed again in a fight with the Kennedys,” Humphrey said. He later asked William Connell, his closest and most trusted aide, “Has Bobby got it locked up yet?”⁷ Even Senator Mondale concluded after Johnson’s announcement, “Bobby’s nominated. Hubert shouldn’t even get into the race.”⁸

However, after numerous meetings with his advisors, Humphrey recognized that Kennedy’s support was soft and a Humphrey win was not out of the question. Humphrey wrote in his memoirs, “It was clear quite quickly that Bob Kennedy was not going to run away with the nomination. In fact, he had far less organizational support than one would have imagined. Gene McCarthy had even less. I stood then with the odds sufficiently favorable and for the first time in my national political life with what seemed firm financial pledges.”⁹ Indeed, Humphrey had advanced political and financial power by being close to the President. However, he would eventually realize that the power from the office would come at a costly price.

Meanwhile, Senator Walter Mondale, who as a teenager helped Humphrey win his first Senate race in 1948 and who knew Humphrey since his years as mayor of Minneapolis, joined the Humphrey campaign as his co-chairman with Oklahoma Senator

Fred Harris. Humphrey wanted to have these senators to help reach out and take back some of McCarthy's base of youth support, and dispel the notion that Humphrey was part of the out of touch "establishment." Humphrey argued in his autobiography, "I knew I needed a bridge to disaffected youth who found Gene McCarthy and Bob Kennedy immensely appealing. I did not realize how deep the hatred and anger of the young had become, what little effective appeal I could make as a part of the Johnson-Humphrey administration."¹⁰ Humphrey simply didn't realize at the time that his support of Johnson's policies in Vietnam was the main reason for his lack of support from young people.

Humphrey announced his candidacy in Washington with Senators Harris and Mondale at his side on April 27, 1968. The Happy Warrior boisterously proclaimed,

"And here we are, just as we ought to be, here we are, the people, here we are the spirit of dedication, here we are they way politics ought to be in America, the politics of happiness, politics of purpose, the politics of joy, and the way it's going to be, all the way, too, from here on out."¹¹

Humphrey's campaign would be riddled with mishaps and mistakes, and it did not take long for the first one to occur. He proclaimed the "politics of joy" during one of the most miserable spans of time in the 20th century, due to constant death tolls in Vietnam and the assassinations of civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which occurred earlier that month. With race-related riots in urban centers across America, angry student protests, and dozens of young men dying in Vietnam every day, the "politics of joy" seemed out of place. Humphrey wrote in his autobiography *The Education of a Public Man*, "The McCarthy and Kennedy forces, and particularly some of the press who agreed with them, pummeled me verbally as a fatuous man, ignorant and blind to the miseries of

the world.”¹² This mistake demonstrates that Humphrey may simply have been the wrong man for the time period, as the Humphrey style of optimistic politics contrasted heavily with the grim reality of life in 1968. Others, however, might contend that Humphrey may simply have been trying to provide hope to the weary nation.

“At Least 3 Humphrey Campaigns”

From the beginning, the Humphrey campaign was in disarray, or as South Carolina Governor Terry Sanford described it, “badly organized and badly run.”¹³ Humphrey did not effectively discipline the campaign staff and friends to stay on message and follow the lead of Senators Mondale and Harris. Finlay Lewis wrote in *Mondale: Portrait of an American Politician*, “Nonetheless, about a week after having been installed a cochairman; Mondale and Harris were chagrined to discover that another Washington organization, Citizens for Humphrey, was raising and spending money. They also became aware of a third group located in Humphrey’s vice-presidential office and headed by his chief of staff, Bill Connell. With some exceptions, Connell’s group and Citizens for Humphrey took positions on issues considerably to the right of Mondale and Harris.”¹⁴ Mondale recalls “at least 3 Humphrey campaigns” during this time period.¹⁵

Throughout the primary campaign, these contrasting factions challenged Mondale and Harris and took different policy viewpoints, which would lead to confusion regarding the positions of the Humphrey campaign. There were nearly irreconcilable differences between the different factions in the campaign. Senators Mondale and Harris encouraged Humphrey to solidify his liberal base of support by emphasizing his commitment to social justice and distancing himself from Johnson on the war. The other advisors, more concerned about losing the white middle class than pacifying liberals, suggested the Vice

President stress his commitment to law and order and campaign as the President's candidate.¹⁶

The New vs. Old Politics

In 1968, the system of electing nominees for President was different than it is today. While the "new" politics of today consists of caucuses and primary elections, the state conventions chose the vast majority of delegates for the national convention in 1968, and were essential to winning the nomination. This "old politics" was much more undemocratic, perhaps viewed as "shady", as it allowed for back-room "wheeling and dealing" among party faithful and not the public at large. This "old" politics included such things as "currying governors, cosseting county chairmen, egging on their ninety-five local coordinators."¹⁷ Humphrey's campaign only participated in the "old" politics events, and did not participate in the glitzy open primaries.

A classic example of the "old politics" can be found in Pennsylvania, which sent the third largest delegation to the convention. Upon arriving in Pennsylvania, Walter Mondale gathered information that both the Kennedy and McCarthy camps were trying to keep the delegation uncommitted, in order to obscure Kennedy's lack of support. Mondale then called the McCarthy forces in Washington, and told them this plan would be harmful to McCarthy's candidacy. Convinced by Mondale, the McCarthy forces did not cooperate with Kennedy. Mondale then lobbied the Pennsylvania delegates to side with Humphrey. Humphrey eventually scored over eighty-three delegates to Kennedy's six. As Humphrey was cutting the cake for his 57th birthday, he received a called from Al Barken, a political operative for the AFL-CIO. "Hubert, we did it, we did it, we did it for

you.” Kenneth O’Donnell, a top aide to the Kennedy camp, held a press conference to denounce the “Pennsylvania railroad that had just run over the Kennedy bandwagon.”¹⁸

While the Humphrey campaign savored the victory in Pennsylvania, the next day was expected to be a Kennedy triumph in the Oregon primary. However, this was not the case. Much to everyone’s surprise, Senator McCarthy won Oregon. This left Robert Kennedy at an extraordinary disadvantage, with Kennedy only winning the Indiana and Nebraska primaries, and basically splitting the non-Humphrey delegates with McCarthy. Humphrey, at this point, was far ahead of both of them in the delegate count. McCarthy felt that Kennedy should have quit his campaign after this point and endorsed him.¹⁹

However, the Kennedy campaign recovered quickly and scored decisive victories in California and Humphrey’s native South Dakota. These wins showed Robert Kennedy to be Humphrey’s main competitor, with McCarthy now far behind. Kennedy had won the important primaries like California, while Humphrey had won key delegates through state conventions in places in Pennsylvania. A newly confident Robert Kennedy challenged Humphrey to a debate during his victory celebration at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. The stage seemed set for a convention showdown: Kennedy’s popular support versus Humphrey’s institutional strength, or the new politics versus the old.²⁰

RFK Assassination

Robert Kennedy was tragically gunned down shortly after winning the California primary. This was not only a disaster to the already-weary nation and the grief-stricken Kennedy family, but it was a blow to the Humphrey campaign. Humphrey could have claimed a popular mandate by defeating Kennedy outright, but now he was the nominee simply by default. This may well have discouraged many Kennedy supporters and others

in the Democratic ranks to continue to work to win the White House, as the excitement of the primary campaign season ended so suddenly.

Many may have also believed that Humphrey unfairly benefited from this tragedy, causing feelings of resentment towards his candidacy. Some may even have thought that Bobby would have won the nomination, had he not been assassinated. Muriel Humphrey, Hubert's wife, explained this to Hubert. Muriel said, "Daddy, the shot that killed Bobby has wounded you, maybe very seriously."

"Why do you say that?" Hubert asked.

"Because people are just going to be so sick of politics, so sick of Democrats, that it's just going to be impossible to do anything," she replied.²¹

Muriel was correct. Humphrey concedes in *Education of a Public Man*, "But in the harsh terms of the political fact, it had three practical consequences. First, his death had a demoralizing and depressing effect. Second, it caused a month's hiatus in my campaign; momentum lost was barely regained and only toward the end of the campaign. Third, a large share of the money pledged to me came from New York business leaders who feared and distrusted Bob. With his death, their interest in me waned."²² With this as a backdrop, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who had not competed in any open primaries, was destined to be the nominee for the world's oldest party.

Gene and Hubert Meet

Senator McCarthy, almost relegated to a footnote in history after Kennedy's win in California, was now still a factor in the campaign because of his energy and support in opposition to the Vietnam War. Humphrey met with McCarthy the day following the shooting, and internal documents show an interesting exchange between the two

Minnesota legends. Humphrey attempted to get McCarthy to issue a joint statement showing a cutback in campaign activities. Humphrey said he wanted this because “I felt the Kennedy friends would feel offended if we were active; and that I thought there was little or no reason to be too active—both out of respect for Kennedy and in terms of our own interests.” McCarthy rejected the idea, but indicated that his public activities would be limited. In addition, the issue of a running mate was brought up. Humphrey indicated how he was getting pressure to take Senator McCarthy as Vice President. While this scenario seems ridiculous and even unlawful, the issue did surface in the conversation according to a memo released by Humphrey. The memo also notes how the Gene commented that he was struggling to control the student protesters that were a large part of his campaign.

Finally, the issue of Vietnam was brought up. Humphrey told McCarthy that his public views on the war were not different than his private views, which many today believe not be to true. McCarthy said that he never thought Humphrey’s public and private views were different, according to the memo, which is also believed today not to be true. Humphrey wrote that he and McCarthy “undoubtedly will be disagreeing on some matters but hopefully could do it in good taste.”²³ However, McCarthy would continue to accuse Humphrey over the summer months as a puppet of party bosses of the “old politics” and a supporter of Johnson’s Vietnam policy.

Interestingly enough, other notes taken during this meeting shed an entirely different light on the meeting. According to notes taken by an aide and scribbled on the back of an envelope at the meeting, McCarthy insists that Humphrey should not take Senator Edward Kennedy as Vice President, even if people urge him to do so. The

feelings between the Kennedys and McCarthy are clearly shown to be quite cool; if this is what was indeed took place. In addition, McCarthy makes it quite clear in these notes that he wants Humphrey to get troops out of Vietnam. The primary documents about this meeting are critical because they shed light on the important issues facing both campaigns during that time period, as well as show contrasting takes on the meeting of Humphrey and McCarthy. It is important to note, however, that McCarthy refused to endorse his Minnesota colleague at this point, which demonstrates deep divisions between the two men.

In order to bring in some of the disillusioned Kennedy supporters, Senator Ted Kennedy was indeed considered as a possible running mate at this point. Internal memos demonstrate a real debate over a Humphrey-Kennedy ticket. Future National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned, "If your ticket wins, the general verdict will be that it was thanks to Kennedy. He will be his own Vice President, with his own people, with his own major and growing national constituency, able to take independent positions on policy matters."²⁴ Orville Freeman, on the other hand, forwards a message to Humphrey that suggests that it would be fine if he could be chosen, but warned that it should not be initiated unless a real interest is expressed by those close to Ted Kennedy.²⁵ Still other reports suggest that Edward Kennedy had been Humphrey's first choice for vice president, but Kennedy was recovering from the trauma of losing his brother and refused to go on the ticket. Humphrey also thought about resigning from the vice-presidency, and flying to Cape Cod to ask Kennedy to be on his ticket.²⁶ History may have been completely changed if Kennedy would have been chosen, but we will never know how.

Anguish and Division over Vietnam

Now that Humphrey was almost completely assured of the nomination, the focus shifted to the convention and winning in November, which involved tackling the largest, and perhaps only, real issue---the dreadful war in Vietnam. According to Mondale, the Vietnam War explained almost everything about the '68 campaign.²⁷ The main issue at stake was Vice President Humphrey's association with President Johnson's failing Vietnam strategy, and Humphrey's image as captive to Lyndon Johnson. Humphrey needed to show independence from Johnson on the war, while not denouncing the President completely, which could have quickly destroyed his campaign.

Humphrey's personal views on the war may not have been the same as his professional support on the war. Humphrey had publicly suggested three years earlier that he favored a negotiated settlement in Vietnam, a position which isolated him within the Johnson administration and cut him out of all important foreign policy meetings. Because of his lockout in the administration, Humphrey responded by vigorously supporting Johnson's foreign policies, which by 1968 were in tatters.

His active encouragement of Johnson's failed foreign policies was now carried over to his campaign, draining his support with every casualty in Vietnam. This loyalty to Johnson would hurt his credibility, for example, when *Esquire* magazine demonstrated Humphrey's reliance on Johnson by illustrating him as a ventriloquist in the President's lap.²⁸ Internal campaign discussions noted that Humphrey's reliance on Johnson made people view him as weak. In a campaign memo, Dr. Kirkpatrick, a political analyst of the Humphrey campaign, suggested that polling data suggested people saw the Vice President as indecisive, not courageous and not a strong leader."²⁹

Humphrey's support of the war hounded his campaign. After the Kennedy assassination, the traditional Democratic base of students, blacks, and left-leaning activists realized that Humphrey, a non-participant in the primary elections and a supporter of the Vietnam War, was on course to be the nominee of the Democratic Party. Finlay Lewis argued, "First there was McCarthy, with his hordes of college volunteers working the precincts for 'clean Gene'. Then volunteers followed Kennedy, in his shirtsleeves, plunging into crowds of adoring migrants. The imagery of these campaigns signaled a sharp break with the sleazy, special-interest, influence-peddling practices of the 'old politics.'"³⁰ Basically, Humphrey's resentment for lack of popular support and legitimacy was a real issue that the campaign had to confront.

As the Happy Warrior continued the campaign, the feelings of ill-will based on Vietnam and the "old politics" increased. The crowds gathered for Humphrey were "thin, apathetic, and ominously hostile."³¹ When he made public speeches, such as those at Kent State University, Bucknell University, or in major cities, he was screamed at, interrupted by demonstrators, or embarrassed by massive walkouts of antiwar groups.³² In Los Angeles, he was greeted by 5,000 anti-war protesters. During a trip to Watts, young blacks yelled "Honky, Go Home!" driving Humphrey, a hero of the Civil Rights movement, out of the hall. In Detroit, there were boos, and blacks scoffed at Humphrey, with Congressman Conyers telling Humphrey that he was "behind the times."³³

With his base split and trailing badly in the polls, tough choices had to be made in order to save the faltering campaign. Again, the campaign was split. Mondale and Harris argued that the war policy no longer corresponded to the best interests of the nation, and unless the Vice President declared himself committed to withdrawal from Vietnam, he

would lose because he didn't have the votes and support of liberal Democrats needed to win in November. Steve Gillon writes, "With the campaign in disarray and Humphrey under assault from every direction, Mondale pleaded for changes....Mondale believed that politically and militarily, the President's Vietnam policy was flawed. Unless the Vice President supported a unilateral bombing halt, the party's nomination would be worthless."³⁴

Internal memos show that others wrote to Humphrey insisting on changes. Brzezinski wrote to the campaign and said "As I sense the political scene, I am more and more convinced that every day's delay in making a fuller statement on Vietnam further diminishes the eventual impact of whatever you do say. Otherwise there is a distinct danger that the public's negative feelings about the war will be transferred from the President to you."³⁵

On the other hand, many powerful brokers inside the Humphrey camp insisted on sticking close to President Johnson. Bill Connell and Max Kampelman kept insisting that the public still backed the war. They believed that Humphrey should be the administration's candidate.

Finally, minutes taken during campaign discussions reveal dialogue of confusion on the political cost of Vietnam, with both Mondale's and Connell's positions viewed as supported by the majority of people. Dr. Kirkpatrick of the campaign stated, "On Vietnam, there can be no doubt that the voters are unhappy. They want the war ended...Over 50% regard it as the greatest failure of the Johnson administration. HH inherits this failure." But another staff member said, "We're faced with an inconsistency in logic. People are unhappy with the Administration, but still support its policies."³⁶

Humphrey desperately searched for a policy on Vietnam that would please antiwar groups but not displease Lyndon Johnson.³⁷ Humphrey staffer David Ginsberg wrote to the Vice President with a suggestion. “Many have considered and some have suggested the possibility of your resigning from the Office of the Vice President—in order to permit you to speak out more freely and effectively. There is an alternative: an announcement that you intend to limit your efforts to constitutional functions of the Vice Presidency: to preside over the Senate and to be available in case of Presidential inability.”³⁸

Senator Mondale and others worked tirelessly to forge consensus on the issue in order to calm the anti-war movement---while not displeasing President Johnson, who was eager to engage in talks to bring the conflict to an end. Mondale devised a compromise solution on the Vietnam War; one that they hoped would take Humphrey out of Johnson’s shadow and bring in the McCarthy anti-war crowd. Mondale said, “So we thought we had something that could help the party unite, yet would make it possible for Humphrey to start winding down the war.” The plan was to halt the bombing of Vietnam, and start talks with North Vietnam. The language pleased the McCarthy and Kennedy crowd, and Humphrey liked the statement, but cautioned, “I’ll have to show it to the President.”³⁹

Johnson was furious when he received the idea. Johnson launched into a tirade, noting that Humphrey didn’t need to get the McCarthy or Kennedy folks to join him. He also warned Humphrey that he had two son-in-laws in Vietnam, and that wavering on his policies would put their lives’ in danger. On August 22, Johnson challenged the Vice President at the White House over his wavering stance on Vietnam, lecturing him to the

effect that the only way the communists would be persuaded to talk was if they were faced with a tough, hard position. “Humphrey looked terrible,” Orville Freeman recalled. “I’ve never seen such dark pouches under his eyes.”⁴⁰ Mondale continued to lobby Humphrey to break from the President. Humphrey, however, simply would not repudiate Johnson’s policies on Vietnam. He firmly believed that the Vice President should not challenge the President, and was afraid of repercussions by Johnson.

President Johnson went further than humiliating and getting angry at Humphrey, though. According to Robert Dallek, Johnson had the FBI tap Humphrey’s phones. If Humphrey were going to come out against the war, Johnson wanted advance notice and a chance to dissuade him. Johnson rightfully feared that Humphrey would abandon the war the minute he took the oath of office, and ruin his legacy. Moreover, close aides believed Johnson saw Humphrey as weak, Nixon strong, and preferred the Republican---especially since Nixon would probably stay the course in Vietnam with more toughness than the Minnesotan. Johnson concluded, “Maybe he doesn’t have enough reserve because he feels very deeply about human problems.”⁴¹

Without breaking from Johnson, any semblance of Humphrey’s political and financial base was crumbling. He wasn’t getting enough money to run his campaign, much less support. Humphrey was reduced to begging. “Because of the more recent attacks upon me in the press,” Humphrey wrote to an African American leader in Washington D.C., “would you feel free to write a Letter to the Editor” explaining the Minnesotan’s long commitment to “the Negro, the disadvantaged, the poor, the young?” The letter was written, but neither liberal support nor cash flow improved.⁴² The campaign needed quick changes or disaster and defeat would ensue.

“I’m Afraid We’re Going to Have Some Serious Troubles Here”

The campaign focus shifted to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Before the convention, Mondale phoned Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and indicated that thousands of college activists would be in Chicago, and with many of them protesting Humphrey and the war. He suggested that Daley provide some entertainment to divert attention away from the convention and show restraint towards their actions. Humphrey also wrote to Daley to provide the students a hall during the convention. Daley, however, did not seem to accommodate either request.⁴³

With the party deeply divided on many different levels, Humphrey feared the backlash of having the convention in Chicago, close to many large, liberal college campuses. Humphrey recalls, “The Democratic convention in 1968 would have been a difficult one anywhere. Chicago was just the worst possible place for it.”⁴⁴ The campaign received threats of kidnapping Humphrey’s children and dumping red paint on Humphrey’s wife to symbolize the blood of the war. He at first tried to have the convention moved to Miami, but President Johnson made a deal with Daley to have the convention in Chicago, and was by no means going to break it. Daley promised Johnson that the convention would go smoothly.

In the end, Johnson would control almost everything about the convention. His control of its arrangements was so complete that Humphrey’s son-in law had to line up every morning for tickets for members of the Humphrey family.”⁴⁵ When McCarthy complained of the logistics, Humphrey exclaimed, “What the hell’s he complaining for? I’m the Vice President of the United States and I’m being treated like a Yugoslavian peasant!”⁴⁶

With chain links fence, barbed wire, 12,000 police officers and 7,500 national guardsmen as a backdrop, the convention began. The opening act of the Chicago convention occurred on the platform committee. Delegates introduced Mondale's compromise solution on Vietnam. The compromise proposal supported ending the bombing unilaterally, while the Johnson policy supported ending the bombing "when this action would not endanger the lives of our troops in the field; this action should take into account the response from Hanoi." Humphrey did not openly support the President's approach and tried to walk a fine line between the warring factions.

Johnson learned this and berated Humphrey. Johnson said. "This (compromise) plank just undercuts our whole policy and by God, the Democratic Party ought not to be doing this to me, and you ought not be doing it---you've been a part of this policy!"⁴⁷ Humphrey, desperate for a solution, shot back to Johnson that the plank was acceptable, but Johnson would not give in. The Vice President finally exclaimed, "Well, Mr. President, we'll have to do the best we can. Possibly we can get something here that is acceptable, but I'm afraid we're going to have serious troubles here."⁴⁸

"The Whole World is Watching! The Whole World is Watching!"

Mondale stood expressionless as the compromise plank sank on the convention floor. The delegates wore then wore black armbands and sang "We Shall Overcome."⁴⁹ Meanwhile, all hell broke loose outside the convention center. The Battle of Chicago, as it was called, began shortly thereafter between anti-war protesters and Chicago police. Ten thousand demonstrators and McCarthy supporters were in Grant Park, and marched towards the convention center after the plank failed. Police ripped through the demonstration, relentlessly and savagely beating protesters, some of the point of

unconsciousness. Tear gas and mace was sprayed throughout the area, some of it reaching into the convention hall.

While Humphrey supporters gave speeches supporting Hubert on the convention floor and Humphrey wrote his acceptance speech in his room, television cameras cut to scenes of police bashing the heads of demonstrators with clubs on Michigan Avenue. The protesters saw the television crews and chanted “The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!” And, through the new medium of television, 89 million people were.

McCarthy was furious at Humphrey for allowing this spectacle of violence to happen, as were many at the convention. McCarthy brought in his brother, a physician, to care for the beaten and bloodied students. A movement then started to put McCarthy’s name in nomination, but McCarthy wanted it to end, as he believed that it would only fuel the protests. McCarthy was so mad that he would refuse to appear with Humphrey at the traditional reconciliation of winners and losers.⁵⁰ As one person murmured criticism of Humphrey, McCarthy shot back, “It’s no use being bitter about Hubert. He’s too dumb to understand bitterness.”⁵¹

In the end, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey was the nominee of the Democratic Party, with Senator Ed Muskie as his running mate. Humphrey’s acceptance speech, while calling for unity, was booed and infuriated many delegates by declaring “And tonight to you, Mr. President, I say thank you. Thank you, Mr. President.” The Happy Warrior, ironically, was thanking a person who was tanking his candidacy, had destroyed his convention, and was crushing his dream to be Commander in Chief, a dream that he had tirelessly worked towards for over twenty years.

After Chicago

After this spectacle in Chicago, it was plainly obvious that the campaign needed drastic changes to succeed in November. Humphrey chose to have centralized power in one person, instead of a power-sharing system with the two Senators. Senator Mondale would nearly disappear from the campaign, resigned to helping Humphrey win Minnesota's electoral votes. Mondale said, "The stories about me going home and putting Humpty Dumpty together sound fine. There's not really much I can do. Nothing cute or contrived is going to work. There nothing magic I can bring to the problem."⁵² Fred Harris, the other campaign chair, was disappointed that he wasn't picked as a running mate, and would also lessen his campaign activities.

Humphrey would alter his position on Vietnam in late September, calling for a bombing halt. This change would reinvigorate his campaign, and the Humphrey campaign would pick up needed momentum towards the end. However, the full effects of his change would not take effect quickly enough, and Humphrey could never attract enough money to match Nixon's financial advantage. Vice President Humphrey would narrowly lose to Richard Nixon in November. Many historians believed that if Humphrey had switched on Vietnam a week earlier, he would have won.

1968 Election Ramifications on its Actors

This traumatic election would be critical turning points for the career of all three men involved, with McCarthy and Humphrey knocking each other out of the political ring and neither ever reaching the pinnacle of 1968 again. However, for Humphrey's young campaign manager, Walter Mondale, the election would be a watershed year that

would pave the way for leadership in the 1970's and lead to an active, powerful vice presidency that we still have today.

Hubert Humphrey

Humphrey would never quite recover from the events on the streets of Chicago. After a two year exile, he would return to the Senate with diminished power in 1971. He would run again for President in 1972, only to lose to in a primary to George McGovern. In 1976, he announced he had cancer, and passed away in early 1978.

Eugene McCarthy

Like Humphrey, McCarthy's profile would be drastically lowered after the events of 1968. He would formally break from the Democratic Party, and have multiple failed runs on third-party tickets for the White House. He would become a prolific writer, activist, and columnist. He passed away in 2005.

Walter Mondale

The aftermath of 1968 for Walter Mondale would be one of unhindered and increased leadership for the 1970's, in sharp contrast to Humphrey and McCarthy. Finlay Lewis contends, "The events of 1968 liberated Mondale. Having called for an unconditional bombing halt, Mondale was no longer encumbered by Vietnam. Had Humphrey been elected, he could not have strayed far from administration policy."⁵³ Senator Mondale was now free to pursue his own agenda and provide leadership on issues that he felt were important, and even could take on the Nixon administration. For example, Senator Mondale effectively brought to light the miserable conditions of migratory workers in Southern states. In addition, Mondale would advocate on behalf of children, issuing a bill to tackle the health, nutrition, and developmental challenges for

children. While most of these attempts at reforms were ultimately unsuccessful, they showed leadership and initiative that probably would not have been brought to light if Humphrey was elected. Mondale's leadership would culminate in being chosen as Jimmy Carter's running mate in 1976.

While Mondale suggested these programs, he also shifted to the political center to reflect the mood of the changing times. The liberalism of the 1960's would be replaced by the moderation of the 1970's, and a search for consensus among party leaders. A new generation of fiscally-moderate Democrats that were lukewarm to the idea of more federal spending would arrive in Washington in the 1970's, and Mondale would have to adjust to the changing political winds, in both the Congress and the Executive Branch. Gillon concludes, "Limited resources, a conservative public backlash, and unfulfilled promise of many Great Society programs severed the connection between morality and politics that had sustained his liberalism."⁵⁴ Creating new programs would be much more difficult, and maintaining existing social programs would become a top priority for Senator Mondale after 1968.

Finally, the election of 1968 would demonstrate the inherent problems of the vice-presidency, with limitations of loyalty and the often powerless role of the office. Mondale said in an email to the author, "I could see how Johnson humiliated Humphrey, how he failed to use Humphrey's talents, failed to listen to him, how, at times, he was cruel toward Humphrey. I vowed never to get into a relationship like that. So when Carter I began to talk I was very alert to any suggestion that I would get into Hubert's trap. Thank god, I didn't."⁵⁵

The modern Vice-Presidency, with an active, robust partner and advisor to the President, would grow out of Mondale's reaction against being like Humphrey was to President Lyndon Johnson. Indeed, the 1968 election, while tragic, would be an important experience in politics and foreign policy that would not be forgotten as Senator Mondale took important steps towards his election as Vice President and as an effective American leader in the late 1970's and 1980's. Today, Mondale even fears that the Vice President may be even too powerful, and superseding the role of the President.⁵⁶

Aftermath of 1968—A National Political Analysis

The traumatic events of this story would not be forgotten in the minds' of the American electorate---but rather, would pave the way for a new kind of politics in the late 20th century. While the above mentioned story is significant on many racial, economic, cultural, and social levels, it also represents a key turning point in American politics.

From a political perspective, the 1968 election loss had four profound effects. First, it exposed the troubles of the "old" party politics and opened efforts to reform. Second, it showed the fault lines in the New Deal political coalition, as they cracked wide open in 1968 (after severe defeats in 1966) and would eventually end the liberalism of the 1960's. Finally, it would alter longstanding foreign policy beliefs in the United States.

Rise of the "New" politics

From this campaign, one of the highlights of Senator Mondale's term as campaign co-chair was his effective work on getting state party delegates into the Humphrey camp. While Humphrey did not compete in the primaries, he won by having "institutional" strength of state party leaders and important party faithful. This may have ultimately contributed to the demise of Humphrey's campaign, as he did not enjoy broad public

support for his candidacy, or at least could not claim of symbolic mandate by pointing to a majority of votes in state primaries. The old delegate system projected an image that a campaign like Humphrey's was beholden to only a certain group of people, and not reflective of the will of the people.

In retrospect, this system of choosing delegates was indeed undemocratic, perhaps unfair, and unwise for some candidates. After the election, Hubert Humphrey recognized this gaping flaw in the primary system and vowed to change it. John Aldrich writes in *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*, "Humphrey apparently saw that the process by which he had won nomination, largely the old-fashioned way of behind-the-scenes coalition building, could not be used again. For one simple example, about one-third of all 1968 delegates had been selected before that year, when Johnson appeared unassailable."⁵⁷ Humphrey's political reform movement, sparked by the events of 1968, would have sweeping effects on party politics in America.

First, the reforms enacted national standards to govern state and local parties. National rules came to govern aspects of when and how delegates could be selected, and even those who would become a delegate. This would lead to a nationalization of party standards and rules, while opening the party to greater public participation by the public, making voters the choosers of the presidential nominees.⁵⁸ Some scholars credit the emergence of relatively-unknown Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter in 1976 as a direct result of these reforms.⁵⁹

End of New Deal Coalition

One of the casualties of 1968 for the Democratic Party would be the acceleration of the break up of the New Deal coalition started in the 1930's. The disastrous midterm

election for Democrats in 1966 exposed the fault lines of this coalition made up of immigrants and their children in big-city ethnic blocs, of workingmen in their unions, of Southern rural machines terrified of Negroes; and of intellectuals.⁶⁰ This formula of people with mostly common economic interests worked to elect Democrats since 1932, but was slashed apart in 1966 and eventually faded away, helped by the events of 1968.

Theodore H. White argues in *The Making of the President 1968*, that three assumptions guided the New Deal coalition, and these assumptions would crumble in 1966 and 1968. First, as long as the President met the economic needs of the Democratic voting blocs, he was free to make any foreign policy that he wished. Second, the assumption was that Democratic politics was limited to professionals, like politicians and party bosses in big cities. Third, that if a Democrat was in the White House, he would share or stretch the wealth so that everyone would get his share of money, goods or comfort, and thus be content.

White maintains that the first assumption would be ended by the horrors of the Vietnam War, a war that showed no signs of progress. While four Democratic administrations (Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman, and Johnson) had promised peace, each of them ended up in a war. By the mid to late 60's this assumption of trusting Democrats on foreign policy had been thrown into flux, with many poor people---constituents of the Roosevelt's New Deal---drafted into a bloody, endless war in Southeast Asia.

The second assumption, he argues, had been slowly crumbling in the 1950's, as the party machines began to decay in big cities around the nation, especially in the North. White, like Aldrich, believes that in the first half of the 20th century, the Democratic Party was exclusively a "politician's party" controlled by professionals. Through the

1950's, however, new people were challenging the status quo of machine politics, and were becoming a force on the political circuit. By 1968, no one person controlled New York, and the old system of mechanized politics was "out of date as a Ptolemaic chart of the Mediterranean."⁶¹

The third assumption would phase out because African Americans would want to get their share of not only the wealth, White believes, but also in dignity and equality. In essence, concerns about race would trump economic concerns that held the coalition together. White contends that middle-income whites were forced to share their schools, neighborhoods, and places of amusement with the blacks, which fueled resentment and backlash. This resentment would be tapped by the Wallace campaign, and eventually the Republican Party. Humphrey would concede this fact in his book, writing "I remember going through a Ford plant in Flint, Michigan where man after man on the assembly line wore a paper Wallace hat modeled after the American Legion cap. Some were friendly enough under the circumstance, but more than a few exuded the hate I found on the right and left that year."⁶²

Moreover, the internal debates in the campaign between Mondale and Connell would be symbolic of this schism in the party----with Mondale representing the African Americans, students, and the poor. Connell, on the other hand, was concerned about losing white conservatives and blue collar workers, the white "workingmen" that Theodore White refers to. For example, Mondale thought that Humphrey should make an appearance in the Poor People's March---a gathering of welfare mothers, community organizers, ghetto militants, and civil-rights workers. Connell, on the other hand, thought that this would needlessly risk alienation of white conservatives. The Poor's People

March is symbolic of 1960's activism that would grow to be disdained by white conservatives and the white workingmen, and phased out of mainstream political existence in the 1970's.

From a public policy perspective, the legacy of that year would be the end of Johnson's Great Society, and a movement towards a more moderate, pragmatic, and politically-sensitive ideology for liberals in the 1970's. As Steven Gillon pointed out regarding post-1960's Democrats, "They promised to make government more efficient and responsible, not to address economic grievance or class interests." Gary Hart would symbolize this transformation by saying in the 1970's, "We're all not a bunch of little Hubert Humphreys."⁶³

Change in Foreign Policy

At the beginning of the 1960's, John F. Kennedy boldly proclaimed, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."⁶⁴ The Vietnam War was an outgrowth of this containment policy --an active, aggressive foreign policy that would match the communists wherever they went.

By 1968, with the financial and economic costs in the billions, and the toll of human lives and suffering stacking up, it seemed to many that support for this policy had been abandoned, that the price of Kennedy's plan was too high and the burden was simply too heavy. The student protests and the rise of Eugene McCarthy would symbolize this discontent and disillusionment with Kennedy and Johnson-style containment.

This foreign policy would be called into question in 1968, with policy ramifications spreading into the 1970's and 80's. The tumultuous election of 1968 and Vietnam War did not make America an isolationist nation, but rather, provided needed skepticism to American foreign policy. Walter LaFeber writes in *The Deadly Bet: LBJ, Vietnam, and the 1968 Election*, "A most important ghost, indeed, a giant specter that haunted U.S. foreign policy for the next generation, was the American people's determination never again to become trapped in a Vietnam-like quagmire."⁶⁵

This issue of the revision of the containment policy would not go away. Steven Gillon contends that the memories of Vietnam haunted the Carter administration's attempts to construct a new foreign policy. With the party still divided over America's role in the world, the use of military force, and superpower competition, President Carter found it impossible to forge a consensus around a post-containment strategy.⁶⁶

Likewise, in his reflections on Vietnam and 1968, Humphrey stated eight lessons that "reasonable" Americans learned. Four of these are specifically relevant to today's world. Humphrey argued the following:

- The United States cannot be a full-world power with half-world knowledge
- The United States remains the "last, best hope of mankind" but we delude ourselves if we think we can export freedom and democratic ideals. We can encourage democracy to grow, but it is an arduous, long-term effort with inevitable setback
- The President must find new and imaginative ways to institutionalize skepticism and dissent in his official ranks without that, there is no way for a President to save him, and the country, from the costs of excessive "yesmanship"
- A democracy cannot fight a war without substantial majority support.⁶⁷

These all would be important lessons in government and public policy taught by the Vietnam War and election of 1968, with even greater relevance in today's world.

Conclusion

The primary election of 1968 was a critical turning point in American history. The culture, institutions, and politics that we have today were in no small part a reaction to the traumatic events of that year. As we go forth in the 21st century, we should remember that the origins of our modern system of having strong and capable Vice Presidents, electing candidates through open primaries, and finally asking tough questions of our foreign policies all started with a contest featuring Hubert, Fritz, and Eugene---memorable personalities and truly giants from the Land of 10,000 Lakes.

¹ Woods, Randall B. *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006

² LaFaber, Walter. *The Deadly Bet: LBJ, Vietnam, and the 1968 Election*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

³ Dallek, Robert. *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1975*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Page 529.

⁴ Woods, 713.

⁵ Eisele, Albert. *Almost to the Presidency: A Biography of Two American Politicians*. Blue Earth: The Piper Company, 1972. Page 307

⁶ Mondale, Walter F. Personal Interview. 11 December 2006.

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- ⁷ Solberg, Carl. *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984. Page 324
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 331.
- ⁹ Humphrey, Hubert. *The Education of A Public Man: My Life in Politics*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1976. Page 361.
- ¹⁰ Humphrey, 370.
- ¹¹ “HHH-Washington Declaration of Candidacy for Presidential Nomination.” 4President.org. Accessed 12 November 2006. <<http://www.4president.org/speeches/hhh1968announcement.htm>>
- ¹² Humphrey, 306
- ¹³ Sanford, Terry. Personal Letter to Vice President Humphrey.
- ¹⁴ Lewis, Finlay. *Mondale: Portrait of an American Politician*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984
- ¹⁵ Mondale, Walter F. Personal Interview. 11 December 2006.
- ¹⁶ Gillon, 112.
- ¹⁷ Solberg, 336.
- ¹⁸ Lewis, 134.
- ¹⁹ Humphrey, Hubert H. “Memorandum for the Record, From the Vice President”. 7 June 1968.
- ²⁰ Gillon, 113.
- ²¹ Eisele, 322.
- ²² Humphrey, 375.
- ²³ Memorandum, meeting between Humphrey and McCarthy, 7 June 1968.
- ²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Memo to Humphrey, 19 July 1968.
- ²⁵ Freeman, Orville. Message forwarded from Gerald Heaney, 12 June 1968.
- ²⁶ Eisele, 359.
- ²⁷ Mondale, email to author, 22 November 2006.
- ²⁸ Eisele, 344.
- ²⁹ Minutes taken during Policy Committee Meeting, Democratic National Committee, September 1968.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 132.
- ³¹ Gillon, 114.
- ³² LaFeber, 124
- ³³ Solberg, 343.
- ³⁴ Gillon, 115.
- ³⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Memo to Humphrey, 7/16/68.
- ³⁶ Democratic Policy Committee Notes. June 1968.
- ³⁷ LaFaber, 124.
- ³⁸ Ginsberg, David. Memorandum to the Vice President.
- ³⁹ Solberg, 348.
- ⁴⁰ Dallek, 863.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 544.
- ⁴² LaFeber, 125.
- ⁴³ Mondale, Walter F. Personal Interview. 17 October 2006.
- ⁴⁴ Humphrey, 384.
- ⁴⁵ Dallek, 574.
- ⁴⁶ Eisele, 348
- ⁴⁷ Gillon, 115.
- ⁴⁸ Solberg, 320.
- ⁴⁹ Gillon, 118.
- ⁵⁰ Gillon, 118.
- ⁵¹ Eisele, 357.
- ⁵² Gillon, 119.
- ⁵³ Lewis, 141.
- ⁵⁴ Gillon, 156
- ⁵⁵ Mondale, Walter F. Email to author, 2006.
- ⁵⁶ Salisbury, Bill. “30 Years Later: A Legacy of Strong VPs.” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*. 29 January 2007.
- ⁵⁷ Aldrich, John. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. Page 255.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid, 255.

⁵⁹ “Eugene J. McCarthy.” Wikipedia.com http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_McCarthy

⁶⁰ White, Theodore H. *The Making of the President 1968*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969. Page 64.

⁶¹ White, 65

⁶² Humphrey, 379.

⁶³ Gillon, 153.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, John. Inaugural Address. 20 January 1961.

⁶⁵ LaFeber, 178.

⁶⁶ Gillon, 248.

⁶⁷ Humphrey, 424