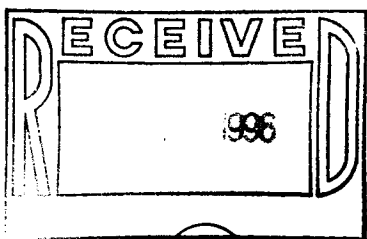


100 KEY DOCUMENTS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Edited by
Peter B. Levy

Foreword by **William E. Leuchtenburg**



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can be done to change circumstances in the school, the workplaces, the bureaucracies, the government? It is to this latter yearning, at once the spark and engine of change, that we direct our present appeal. The search for truly democratic alternatives to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation with them, is a worthy and fulfilling human enterprise, one which moves us and, we hope, others today. On such a basis do we offer this document of our convictions and analysis: as an effort in understanding and changing the conditions of humanity in the late twentieth century, an effort rooted in the ancient, still unfulfilled conception of man attaining determining influence over his circumstances of life.

Source: Students for a Democratic Society, "Port Huron Statement," SDS Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

For Further Reading:

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Jim Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

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92. J. William Fulbright, Excerpt from "A Sick Society" (1967)

1950 Truman grants aid to French in Indochina

1954-60 Eisenhower deepens American involvement in
Southeast Asia

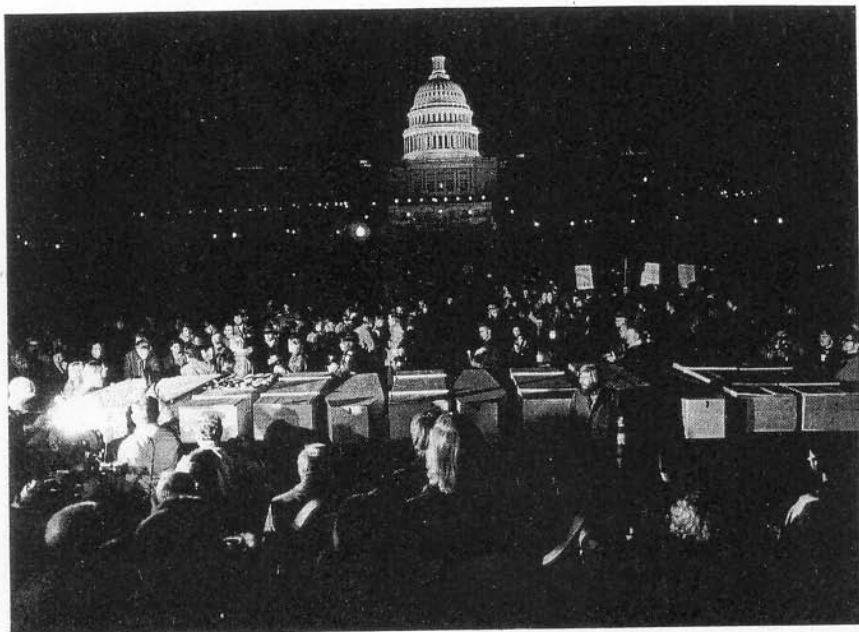
1961-63 Kennedy increases troop strength, including Green
Berets

1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

1965-68 Johnson escalates war in Vietnam

1965-68 Antiwar protests increase

The United States involvement in the war in Vietnam began in 1950 when President Truman granted military aid to the French, who were trying to maintain possession of their colonies in Indochina. For the next eighteen years, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson increased America's commitment to defeating Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of North Vietnam, so that by the end of 1967 over 500,000 American troops were in Vietnam and the United States was launching air strikes greater in number and tonnage than those of World War II. Yet it was not until 1965 that a substantial antiwar movement emerged, and even then it tended to attract fringe groups, not mainstream politicians.



"March Against Death," Washington, D.C., November 13, 1969 (Vietnam War Protestors deposit names of killed soldiers in casket) (Library of Congress).

By the end of 1967, however, the antiwar movement had grown considerably in size and strength. It counted as its members well-known Americans, from Benjamin Spock, the famous and respected baby doctor, to Martin Luther King, Jr. Among the more forceful opponents of the war was J. William Fulbright (Democrat, Ark.), head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His investigations into America's conduct in Vietnam revealed that President Johnson had intentionally misled the people in gaining passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution—the equivalent of the declaration of war. Indeed, in "A Sick Society" and other speeches, Fulbright argued that the Vietnam War was poisoning American society. Martin Luther King, Jr., George McGovern, and many other antiwar statesmen made the same claim.

Standing in the smoke and rubble of Detroit, a Negro veteran said: "I just got back from Vietnam a few months ago, but you know, I think the war is here."

There are in fact two wars going on. One is the war of power politics which our soldiers are fighting in the jungles of southeast Asia. The other is a war for America's soul which is being fought in the streets of Newark and Detroit and in the halls of Congress, in churches and protest meetings and on college campuses, and in the hearts and minds of silent Americans

from Maine to Hawaii. I believe that the two wars have something to do with each other, not in the direct, tangibly causal way that bureaucrats require as proof of a connection between two things, but in a subtler, moral and qualitative way that is no less real for being intangible. Each of these wars might well be going on in the absence of the other, but neither, I suspect, standing alone, would seem so hopeless and demoralizing.

The connection between Vietnam and Detroit is in their conflicting and incompatible demands upon traditional American values. The one demands that they be set aside, the other that they be fulfilled. The one demands the acceptance by America of an imperial role in the world, or of what our policy makers like to call the "responsibilities of power," or of what I have called the "arrogance of power." The other demands freedom and social justice at home, an end to poverty, the fulfillment of our flawed democracy, and an effort to create a role for ourselves in the world which is compatible with our traditional values. The question, it should be emphasized, is not whether it is *possible* to engage in traditional power politics abroad and at the same time the perfect democracy at home, but whether it is possible for *us Americans*, with our particular history and national character, to combine morally incompatible roles.

Administration officials tell us that we can indeed afford both Vietnam and the Great Society, and they produce impressive statistics of the gross national product to prove it. The statistics show financial capacity but they do not show moral and psychological capacity. They do not show how a President preoccupied with bombing missions over North and South Vietnam can provide strong and consistent leadership for the renewal of our cities. They do not show how a Congress burdened with war costs and war measures, with emergency briefings and an endless series of dramatic appeals, with anxious constituents and a mounting anxiety of their own, can tend to the workaday business of studying social problems and legislating programs to meet them. Nor do the statistics tell how an anxious and puzzled people, bombarded by press and television with the bad news of American deaths in Vietnam, the "good news" of enemy deaths—and with vividly horrifying pictures to illustrate them—can be expected to support neighborhood anti-poverty projects and national programs for urban renewal, employment and education. . . .

At present much of the world is repelled by America and what America seems to stand for in the world. Both in our foreign affairs and in our domestic life we convey an image of violence; I do not care very much about images as distinguished from the things they reflect, but this image is rooted in reality. Abroad we are engaged in a savage and unsuccessful war against poor people in a small and backward nation. At home—largely because of the neglect from twenty-five years of preoccupation with foreign involvements—our cities are exploding in violent protest against generations of social injustice. America, which only a few years ago seemed to the world

to be a model of democracy and social justice, has become a symbol of violence and undisciplined power. . . . By our undisciplined use of physical power we have divested ourselves of a greater power: the power of example. How, for example, can we commend peaceful compromise to the Arabs and the Israelis when we are unwilling to suspend our relentless bombing of North Vietnam? How can we commend democratic social reform to Latin America when Newark, Detroit, and Milwaukee are providing explosive evidence of our own inadequate efforts at democratic social reform? How can we commend the free enterprise system to Asians and Africans when in our own country it has produced vast, chaotic, noisy, dangerous and dirty urban complexes while poisoning the very air and land and water? . . .

While the death toll mounts in Vietnam, it is mounting too in the war at home. During a single week of July 1967, 164 Americans were killed and 1,442 wounded in Vietnam, while 65 Americans were killed and 2,100 were wounded in city riots in the United States. We are truly fighting a two-front war and doing badly in both. Each war feeds on the other and, although the President assures us that we have the resources to win both wars, in fact we are not winning either.

Together the two wars have set in motion a process of deterioration in American society and there is no question that each of the two crises is heightened by the impact of the other. Not only does the Vietnam war divert human and material resources from our festering cities; not only does it foster the conviction on the part of slum Negroes that their country is indifferent to their plight. In addition the war feeds the idea of violence as a way of solving problems. If, as Mr. Rusk tells us, only the rain of bombs can bring Ho Chi Minh to reason, why should not the same principle apply at home? Why should not riots and snipers' bullets bring the white man to an awareness of the Negro's plight when peaceful programs for housing and jobs and training have been more rhetoric than reality? Ugly and shocking thoughts are in the American air and they were forged in the Vietnam crucible. Black power extremists talk of "wars of liberation" in the urban ghettos of America. . . .

Priorities are reflected in the things we spend money on. Far from being a dry accounting of bookkeepers, a nation's budget is full of moral implications; it tells what a society cares about and what it does not care about; it tells what its values are.

Here are a few statistics on America's values: Since 1946 we have spent over \$1,578 billion through our regular national budget. Of this amount over \$904 billion, or 57.29 percent of the total, have gone for military power. By contrast, less than \$96 billion, or 6.08 percent, were spent on "social functions" including education, health, labor and welfare programs, housing and community development. The Administration's budget for fiscal year 1968 calls for almost \$76 billion to be spent on the military and only \$15 billion for "social functions."

I would not say that we have shown ourselves to value weapons five or ten times as much as we value domestic social needs, as the figures suggest; certainly much of our military spending has been necessitated by genuine requirements of national security. I think, however, that we have embraced the necessity with excessive enthusiasm, that the Congress has been too willing to provide unlimited sums for the military and not really very reluctant at all to offset these costs to a very small degree by cutting away funds for the poverty program and urban renewal, for rent supplements for the poor and even for a program to help protect slum children from being bitten by rats. . . .

While the country sickens for lack of moral leadership, a most remarkable younger generation has taken up the standard of American idealism. Unlike so many of their elders, they have perceived the fraud and sham in American life and are unequivocally rejecting it. Some, the hippies, have simply withdrawn, and while we may regret the loss of their energies and their sense of decency, we can hardly gainsay their evaluation of the state of society. Others of our youth are sardonic and skeptical, not, I think, because they do not want ideals but because they want the genuine article and will not tolerate fraud. Others—students who wrestle with their consciences about the draft, soldiers who wrestle with their consciences about the war, Peace Corps volunteers who strive to light the spark of human dignity among the poor of India or Brazil, and VISTA volunteers who try to do the same for our own poor in Harlem or Appalachia—are striving to keep alive the traditional values of American democracy.

They are not really radical, these young idealists, no more radical, that is, than Jefferson's idea of freedom, Lincoln's idea of equality, or Wilson's idea of a peaceful community of nations. Some of them, it is true, are taking what many regard as radical action, but they are doing it in defense of traditional values and in protest against the radical departure from those values embodied in the idea of an imperial destiny for America.

The focus of their protest is the war in Vietnam and the measure of their integrity is the fortitude with which they refused to be deceived about it. By striking contrast with the young Germans who accepted the Nazi evil because the values of their society had disintegrated and they had no normal frame of reference, these young Americans are demonstrating the vitality of American values. . . .

It may be that the challenge will succeed, that America will succumb to becoming a traditional empire and will reign for a time over what must surely be a moral if not a physical wasteland, and then, like the great empires of the past, will decline or fall. Or it may be that the effort to create so grotesque an anachronism will go up in flames of nuclear holocaust. But if I had to bet my money on what is going to happen, I would bet on this younger generation—this generation who reject the inhumanity of war in a poor and distant land, who reject the poverty and sham in their own country,

this generation who are telling their elders what their elders ought to have known, that the price of empire is America's soul and that price is too high.

Source: *Congressional Record, Senate*, August 9, 1967, pp. 22126-129.

For Further Reading:

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Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon and the Doves* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

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93. Lyndon B. Johnson, Excerpt from "The Great Society" (1964)

- 1964 Johnson signs Civil Rights Act; proposes War on Poverty; defeats Barry Goldwater in landslide
- 1965 Voting Rights Act and Great Society measures enacted
- 1968 Johnson announces that he will not seek reelection

Even though President Lyndon B. Johnson lacked John F. Kennedy's charisma, he inspired the nation by challenging it to help him create a "Great Society." For example, in a speech delivered to students at the University of Michigan, in the spring of 1964, Johnson presented his broad plans for improving America. Seeing himself as the heir to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Johnson declared that it was time to complete the struggle for economic justice initiated by the New Deal. While FDR had enacted Social Security, LBJ proposed providing medical coverage for the elderly and poor. Whereas the New Deal provided relief to the unemployed, the Great Society would create job-training programs. While one of Roosevelt's favorite programs had been the Civilian Conservation Corps, which brought unemployed urban youth out to the countryside to build trails and fight fires, Johnson created Vista, a domestic version of The Peace Corps, to fight urban blight, and the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, to uplift minds.

In the 1964 presidential election, President Johnson defeated his conservative opponent, Barry Goldwater, in the biggest landslide in modern American history. In 1965 he quickly enacted one Great Society measure after another. But by 1968 his dream lay in shambles. He was trapped in a quagmire in Vietnam, which was draining valuable resources from his do-