The entire world shook in 1968. Across cultures, people of all generations recognized the significance of the moment. A global wave of urban protests produced a crisis of authority in nearly every society. Many of the demonstrators who took to the streets in 1968 were young citizens, angered by what they perceived as a stagnant political status quo. Domestic revolution threatened to undermine the international balance of power—what one scholar calls a “long peace”—that had ensured stability among the great powers after World War II.1

The revolutions of 1968 did not begin with a vanguard party or a workers’ uprising. The upheavals grew from less glamorous political and social difficulties. Nuclear stalemate between the great powers, unresolved alliance disputes, and the increasingly impersonal nature of domestic institutions alienated citizens from their governments. The growing university population in each of the largest states had the resources to translate discontent into active protest. The brutality of the Vietnam War catalyzed public anger, contradicting the promises of “development” and “progress” espoused by national leaders.

These circumstances gave rise to a global disruption.2 A very wide chasm—one that still exists today—opened up between the aims of established elites and of social activists in every major society. Cold War divisions between communist and capitalist, East and West, and “developed” and “developing” lost much of their meaning. “National security” had always included international and domestic components, but after 1968 the latter gained importance over the former in many states. The urban crowds of protesters created serious anxieties for the most powerful political figures. By the end of 1968 the politics on the streets had changed the politics of government, but not as any of the protesters had hoped.

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Many scholars have examined the historical patterns of revolutionary upheaval. Most of their work has focused on why promising movements for radical change fail, frequently producing dictatorship in one repressive form or another. Why popular protests spread across diverse societies has received surprisingly little attention. The events of 1968 require a transnational analysis of social change.3

During the 1960s one factor was preeminent in igniting the flames of revolution. Leaders promised their citizens more “progress” than ever before—through education, material consumption, and individual equality. Even in China, Mao had pledged that through the Great Leap the impoverished state would soon surpass Great Britain. The government in Beijing consistently repressed freedoms on the mainland, but it did so in the name of a higher communist cause that many, including the chairman, believed would bring a better future for all citizens.

A number of societies—particularly in North America and Western Europe—were remarkably successful in creating affluence during the second half of the twentieth century. They failed, however, to meet the rising popular expectations that they inspired. The rhetoric of both capitalism and communism became harmfully exaggerated in the context of Cold War competition. A perception of “false promises” among young and ambitious citizens pervaded the language of dissent and contributed directly to protest activities in nearly every state.4

In this context of festering discontent, relatively innocuous incidents, especially on university campuses, sparked broad demonstrations. When local and national authorities overreacted with excessive police force—as they did in many cases—protest activities grew more radical, and often violent. Resistance to perceived police brutalities provided angry men and women with an apparent link between their local grievances and what they came to perceive as a larger “culture” of government repression.

Attempts by authorities to limit popular demands and prohibit public unrest only contributed to more of the same. From a small number of relatively isolated places, violence spread throughout many of the largest states. Governments deployed sufficient police power to anger large crowds, but they did not use enough force to smother future demonstrations.

Organizational ties between protesters across different societies were a minimal factor in these developments. Domestic conflicts grew from local conditions that, though unique in each case, produced a similar dynamic of rising expectations and attempted repressions. Men and women on diverse city streets perceived themselves as participants in a shared “movement” against the police, the military, and the established political institutions.
These were the common “others” that bonded dissidents together in struggle. Beyond daily street battles, however, protesters within and across societies did not have anything resembling an international program for political and social change. As protests escalated, the demonstrators in various societies became more united in their attacks on the existing order, but also more divided on what should come next.

Protesters never had to reach a consensus on the future. Despite the violence on the streets, governments managed to maintain their control over domestic society, with the notable exception of China during the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969). In the United States and Western Europe, domestic order required virtual military occupation of entire cities. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China, governments used even greater force, including foreign invasion, mass arrests, and forced migrations. Leaders repressed revolution, but they also contributed to a cycle of violence that deepened the chasm between public expectations and official authority.

The global disruption of 1968 grew from the declining ability of leaders to manufacture consent at home. Events during the year made this problem far more intractable. Political elites displayed their determination to retain power through the use of force, but they did so at the cost of their domestic legitimacy. No longer could political figures attempt to lead largely by persuasion. Order and unity now relied more heavily on police activities.5

Berkeley: “A State of Perpetual War”

Before the 1960s few Californians foresaw the domestic cataclysm on the other side of the state’s golden horizon. Perched on a tract of former cattle-grazing land on the eastern side of the San Francisco Bay, the city of Berkeley and its public university grew from a backwater into one of the preeminent Cold War institutions after 1945. Scientists at the school—particularly Robert Oppenheimer and Ernest Lawrence—were pioneers in American research on atomic energy (and bombs). As a state-run institution, blessed with large federal research grants, the University of California at Berkeley was a sprawling empire with a convoluted structure of authority that included various regents, a president, and countless decentralized departments, institutes, and allied organizations.6

Student enrollments at Berkeley expanded in line with its counterparts around the world. By 1968 the university’s student population totaled 28,132, compared with only 7,748 in 1944 and 21,909 in 1946, when an unusually large number of war veterans returned to school. Formerly a conservative white suburb of San Francisco, Berkeley developed into a diverse city in parallel with the growth of the university. By 1960 more than 100,000 people of widely varying incomes resided within the town limits, more than a quarter of whom were black, Asian, or Hispanic. Military, political, and social trends after World War II made Berkeley into a large and cosmopolitan community.7

Berkeley’s startling Cold War expansion produced profound vulnerabilities. The resources and intelligence packed into this small slice of northern California coalesced into a powderkeg of energy and ambition. Dissident impulses, born of the international and domestic difficulties in the late 1950s, spread with ease among the thousands of men and women gathering each day at the university and the various bars and cafés around town. Berkeley was a republic of letters where independent newspapers, poetry, music, art, and theater proliferated, transmitting dissident thoughts to a large community. University and government officials attempted to control the public discourse, but the diverse setting around the campus made this an impossible task. By the 1960s the city of Berkeley was large enough to nurture a cosmopolitan exchange of ideas, but it remained small enough to protect a space for youthful experimentation relatively free from the commercial pressures that naturally dominate an urban metropolis.

From 1964 through 1968 this university community spearheaded the development of a national protest movement in America. The ideas of the New Left provided students with an initial language of dissent during the early years of the decade. Protest activities in Berkeley converted words into action. Confrontations on and around campus—beginning with the Free Speech Movement in late 1964—sparked a series of disruptions that reached a crescendo within a few years.

The disruptions began when the university attempted to enforce a longstanding ban against political activities on campus. For many years activists had set up tables to publicize their causes on the edge of the university grounds. These facilities violated school regulations, but administrators generally ignored them. In September 1964, however, worries about growing student dissent—and the ferment around the civil rights movement in particular—led officials at Berkeley to change course. They prohibited groups such as the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) from organizing on campus. The Free Speech Movement rallied students, faculty, and local residents against the university restrictions. Representatives from CORE and other groups moved their tables in front of Sproul Hall, the main administration building. The university responded by calling in local law enforcement officers and suspending eight students. On 1 October 1964 hundreds of young
men and women staged a sit-in to prevent the police from arresting CORE activist Jacob Weinberg. After a tentative compromise between the students and the university broke down, members of the Free Speech Movement organized a long series of rallies on campus, culminating in an occupation of Sproul Hall on 2 December.8

Police promptly arrested the students who occupied the building, but their sit-in became a source of inspiration for many observers. Like their counterparts in the civil rights movement, the students channeled various energies into a form of “direct action” that highlighted the unjust use of authority by established institutions. Sitting peacefully, the students appeared morally pure. Using force to remove sitters, the police looked brutal and menacing.

Mario Savio, one of the leaders of the Free Speech Movement, recognized that this was the beginning of a crusade that would not end soon. Speaking to a large group before the sit-in at Sproul Hall, he merged New Left language with a call for immediate action. “There is a time,” Savio exclaimed, “when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you’ve got to make it stop.”9

Less than a week after the Sproul Hall sit-in, the faculty voted to lift most of the bans on political activity. Many professors and administrators sympathized with the students, but they also feared that dissent could quickly get out of hand. Berkeley’s pedagogical and research responsibilities required the maintenance of order on campus. External entities, including the federal and state governments, pressured the university to avoid embarrassing scenes. By adopting less stringent restrictions on student speech, the faculty hoped to appease the large mass of restless youth in the area. Berkeley gave political activists more freedom in the hope that they wouldn’t actually use it.10

This tactic might have worked if it hadn’t been for the Vietnam War. America’s military commitment in Southeast Asia, and the accompanying fear of the draft among Berkeley’s young population, inspired larger student protests. In the spring of 1965 Jerry Rubin and Stephen Smale—a former sociology student at Berkeley and a young professor of mathematics—founded the Vietnam Day Committee. This group directed the protest energies inspired by the Free Speech Movement against Lyndon Johnson’s policies in Southeast Asia. Following the first antiwar teach-in at the University of Michigan in March 1965, Rubin and Smale organized a number of public discussions at Berkeley.11

Students, faculty, and other activists traveled to the nation’s capital in April to participate in the first antiwar march. Twenty thousand young men and women from schools across the country formed a picket line around the White House. They then staged a rally at the Washington Monument. The Free Speech Movement had now gone to Washington on a national scale.12

Back in Berkeley, Rubin and Smale rallied more students against American intervention in Southeast Asia. On 21–22 May men and women from the community gathered for more than thirty hours on a softball field to debate the war. Celebrity antiwar activists such as journalist I. F. Stone, writer Norman Mailer, socialist Norman Thomas, and pediatrician Benjamin Spock lectured on the evils of U.S. military activities. Performers such as the musician Phil Ochs and the San Francisco Mime Troupe entertained the crowd. This Vietnam Day Committee rally became the model for similar gatherings in Berkeley that grew in size and frequency as American military activity escalated in Southeast Asia.13

The Vietnam War provoked a continual series of student demonstrations that included strikes, marches, sit-ins, teach-ins, and building takeovers. A majority of Berkeley residents never participated in these activities. What had been a very small cohort of protesters at the time of the Free Speech Movement, however, grew into a formidable insurrectionary mass. Roger Heyns, the newly appointed chancellor of the university in the fall of 1965, commented that the atmosphere in Berkeley had grown “sick.” Radical critics of American policy and dogmatic conservatives polarized the city, creating what one historian calls “a state of perpetual war.”14

The Berkeley Barb, founded as an antiwar weekly in August 1965 by a local activist, reflected the trend toward radicalism inspired by the Vietnam War. The raggy newspaper proclaimed that the “quality of the American war in Vietnam [has] rubbed off on Berkeley. The Vietnam War is beyond brutality. It is obscenity.” U.S. military activities in Southeast Asia made it clear, the Barb announced, that citizens must “nettle that amorphous but thickhided establishment that so often nettles us.”15

From 1965 through 1969 the Barb advocated and reported on protest activities. Its circulation rose from 1,200 to 90,000, exceeding the circulation of all other local newspapers. Surely every Barb reader did not take to the streets. Yet the astonishing growth of this radical paper—founded without any significant financial support or even a permanent staff—revealed how the climate of opinion in Berkeley became progressively insurrectionary during the second half of the 1960s.16

The Barb was a unifying source of information for diverse groups. Calling its expanding cohort of readers the “dissenting element of American society,” the newspaper explained that each daily act of protest, no matter how
small, demonstrated a benign refusal "to cooperate with the power structure which makes and enforces the rules." This was a "new style of confrontation" that promised to reverberate throughout the Bay Area and the rest of the nation.17 We are fighting a "revolution," the Barb announced; "nothing short of basic change will restore peace . . . Will the establishment recognize this at home—or are they after subjugation through extermination as in Vietnam?"18

In late 1967 the antiwar forces in Berkeley mobilized 10,000 demonstrators to block draft induction centers in Oakland and other areas nearby. Confronted by 2,000 law enforcement officers on 20 October, the protests turned violent, engulfing twenty city blocks in brawling instigated by both angry demonstrators and unprepared police. "Dissent is through!" the Barb angrily announced in its account of the violence. Police brutality required active, and sometimes forceful, retaliation: "Resistance is here!"19

Berkeley's protesters had become national leaders, setting a tone for demonstrations throughout the country. On 21 October more than 50,000 people from around the country traveled to Washington for another antiwar rally, this one modeled on the first Vietnam Day Committee gathering in Berkeley. The young men and women who assembled at the Lincoln Memorial marched across the Potomac River to the Pentagon, where they hoped to occupy the center of American war planning.

Prepared for this event, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara coordinated military maneuvers from the roof of the Pentagon. He deployed army and marshal service soldiers to remove the demonstrators attempting to block the building. The protesters were hardly innocent in their intentions, but the scenes around the Pentagon made the government forces appear brutal and callous. Soldiers brandished rifles against unarmed civilians, employed strong-arm tactics to arrest demonstrators, and herded men and women into buses for imprisonment. In addition to 647 arrests, 47 antiwar protesters suffered injuries requiring hospitalization.20

In the aftermath of the Oakland and Washington demonstrations, the Barb proclaimed that "the Berkeley style wins on both coasts." Antiwar protests in the Bay Area and other parts of the country continued through the last weeks of 1967 and the early days of the new year. According to reports, attendance at Berkeley rallies against the Vietnam War increased threefold.21

The Barb described the "normal" protest routine that continued into 1968: "Berkeley SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] Anti-Draft Union carpools arrive at the [Oakland] Induction Center every Monday through Friday at 6:30 A.M. Individuals picket the building and talk to inductees, pre-in-
called for more “ordinary heroes” who would fight for their ideals like the Argentine martyr.26

Che’s image proliferated on Berkeley’s sidewalks, but the streets of the city remained eerily quiet during the weeks around the Tet Offensive. This was the calm before the storm. Rumors about an anti-Vietnam War “convocation,” local strikes, and race riots circulated throughout town. One professor wrote to the president of the university, warning of widespread “treason.” California governor Ronald Reagan condemned the entire atmosphere in Berkeley as “obscene.”27

No group struck government officials as more “obscene” than the Black Panther Party. Formed in 1966 by two Berkeley area residents, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, the Panthers glorified the use of violence.28 They promised self-help and armed defense for African Americans who suffered from poverty, discrimination, and disproportionate Vietnam draft duties.29 By 1968 the Panthers had more than 2,000 followers, many of whom carried weapons in public, wore black berets reminiscent of Che Guevara, and distributed copies of Chairman Mao’s book of quotations around the Berkeley campus. The Panthers taunted the area police, calling them “pigs.” At one event, members of the group encouraged local children to chant: “We want a pork chop, off the pig!”30

A “guerrilla” mystique dominated Berkeley’s protest rhetoric in 1968. The sit-ins of the Free Speech Movement gave way to mob action against government installations. The threatening image of Black Power replaced the inclusive, multiracial examples of the freedom marches earlier in the decade. Violence, not pacifism, now fused the frustrated aspirations of the civil rights and youth movements. Talk around town focused on “arming” the right people for revolution.31

Stokely Carmichael, a prominent figure in the influential Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), commented that “it’s time to end this non-violence bullshit.”32 Even groups with “non-violence” in their title, like SNCC, turned to guerrilla warfare in 1968. The war in Vietnam, fought to carry American developmental ideas abroad, had now come home in ways that threatened to spiral out of control.33

**West Berlin: “Today Vietnam, Tomorrow Us”**

If Berkeley developed as a microcosm of the Cold War, West Berlin was at the center of the Cold War. The city served as a crucial battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union. Located deep within East German territory, its residents experienced recurring threats of forced isolation and armed conflict. During the Soviet-enforced Berlin blockade of 1948–49, the Korean War of 1950–1953, the Berlin Crises of 1958–1961, and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 Western policymakers feared an imminent communist takeover of the city. Recently declassified war plans reveal that the Soviet Union and its East European satellites did indeed contemplate the use of force to cut off West Berlin, in addition to attacks deeper into Western Europe.34

The Free University, founded largely on student initiative in November 1948, became an integral part of the Western alliance’s “magnet” strategy in West Berlin, and Central Europe in general. Contrary to the rigid administration of East Berlin’s Humboldt University, the Free University encouraged experimental courses and creative pedagogy. Students in the Western institution had an extensive voice in admissions and curricular decisions. West Germany, the United States, and institutions such as the Ford Foundation funded this unique school because they recognized its attraction for men and women in the East. Between 1949 and 1961 more than one-third of the student population at the Free University’s West Berlin campus came from East Germany. East-West contacts in this setting allowed Western authorities a unique opportunity to exert informal influence upon some of the best and brightest emerging from the communist milieu.35

During its first decade the Free University managed to balance Cold War pressures with a liberal environment for education and social interaction. The construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 undermined this enterprise. East German students could no longer travel by streetcar to the Western university. State-sponsored anticommunist propaganda became more dominant. The West German government began to discourage, and even repress, potentially dissident experimental ideas.36

The Wall transformed West Berlin from a battleground into a showcase. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his successors used the city to display the best of their society. They hoped to impress those in the East who peered into this now closed-off capitalist island in a sea of communist authority.37

Ironically, the Free University developed in this context as the “Berkeley of West Germany.” It symbolized the remarkable political and economic accomplishments of the Federal Republic while cultivating radical dissent. Students in West Berlin revolted against the division of the city, the government in Bonn, and the Cold War in general. By the late 1960s “most active groups among the student body,” according to West German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, “desire[d] the immediate overthrow of social structures.” Radical
students became "the backbone of an extra-parliamentary opposition that [sought] new forms of organization in clubs and informal centers, and a social basis wider than the university." 38

German youth dissent grew particularly disruptive in late 1966. Students blamed the U.S. government for prolonging the division of Germany and supporting a "Grand Coalition" of the dominant West German parties—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—which constrained political debate. In December groups of young men and women demonstrated throughout West Berlin, including the crowded shopping area known as the Kurfürstendamm. One student leaflet pledged to restore "democracy, a socialist alternative, [and] a new left party" in West Germany. The protesters proclaimed their opposition to the "bankruptcy of the established parties." 39

Altercations between students and law enforcement officers in West Berlin, including alleged incidents of police brutality, escalated through the end of 1966 and into the early months of 1967. In January West Berlin authorities entered the offices of the Socialist German Student Union, one of the leading West German youth groups. They searched through the organization's materials, confiscated membership files, and accused the group of conducting illegal activities against the government. This heavy-handed police behavior had the effect of strengthening public support for the student protesters. In addition, it contributed to a more confrontational climate, especially in West Berlin. The social tension in this old Prussian city now approximated the polarized atmosphere of Berkeley. 40

West German authorities worried not only about the mounting protests of the New Left. They also confronted a resurgent nationalist right. In 1967 and 1968 the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) won between 7 and 9.8 percent of the vote in local elections. Friedrich Thielen and Adolf von Thadden, the leaders of the NPD, called for a strong, independent, and reunited Germany, free of the "alien" interests that allegedly corrupted the states on both sides of the Berlin Wall. "Our nation," the NPD Manifesto proclaimed, "is being merged into two antagonistic systems . . . Territorially alien powers are assuming the guardianship of the peoples of Europe and jointly maintaining the division of Germany and of Europe for their own political aims." 41

Like the students on the left, the NPD attacked what it called the "unrestrained materialism" that harmed the people's spiritual and moral health. The party's 28,000 members condemned the "Grand Coalition" for repressing traditional German family and community norms. Instead of increased federal aid to universities, the NPD argued that the "youth want and need decent, clean standards to look up to." The NPD demanded a strong central government that would eliminate "public immorality." 42

In retrospect, the challenge from the nationalist right appears quite tame. The NPD never crossed the 5 percent threshold in national elections required for seating in the West German Bundestag. During the late 1960s, however, worries about the party animated radical students and government officials. Protesters at the Free University denounced the alleged return of "fascists" to German politics. Policymakers feared that continued student radicalism would inspire more counterdemonstrations on the right. Excessive repression of left-leaning protesters could also legitimize the militant rhetoric of the NPD. Student demonstrations at the Free University posed a very difficult dilemma for a society scarred by memories of both the Weimar period of social disorder and the Nazi years of excessive state power. 43

Washington's attempts to secure West German financial and moral support for the war in Vietnam added another layer to the Federal Republic's troubles. Repeatedly, President Johnson argued that anticommunist commitments in Southeast Asia were vital to NATO's international credibility. Allowing communist advances in Vietnam would encourage enemy incursions in Europe as well. 44

Student protesters in West Berlin turned this argument on its head. They contended that America's support for South Vietnamese dictators discredited the democratic claims of the anticommunist states. The war in Southeast Asia was not an isolated, distant event for the men and women attending the Free University. They felt the presence of military forces—Warsaw Pact and NATO—all around them. They feared that the indiscriminate and brutal violence exhibited by the allegedly most advanced societies in Vietnam would reverberate in their contested territory. The dogmatic reaction of local police and university officials to the protests of late 1966 only heightened these student anxieties. "Today Vietnam, Tomorrow Us," the protesters predicted. 45

The "America House" in West Berlin—established to build cultural contacts between the United States and West Germany—became a favored target for demonstrations and physical attacks in 1967. Early in the year members of the Socialist German Student Union defaced the building, throwing makeshift water balloons filled with red paint at its glass and concrete exterior. They accused the United States of propagating imperialism through its cultural, economic, and military programs overseas. Protesters argued that Washington acted as an "occupying" power in West Germany, stifling creative, sometimes socialist-inspired, reforms. The America House in West Berlin found itself under student siege for much of the next decade. 46
Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited the city on 6 April 1967, seeking to reinvigorate German-American friendship after the first attacks on the U.S. cultural center. Humphrey hoped to arouse the same public displays of goodwill that had greeted President Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in 1963. Kennedy had also spoken to an enthusiastic Free University audience about the "unity of the West" and future work for the "peaceful reunification of Germany."47

Humphrey's appearance in West Berlin succeeded only in extinguishing the lingering legacy of Kennedy's earlier trip. Before his arrival, rumors spread of an assassination attempt organized by some of the West German students who had attacked the America House. On the eve of the vice president's visit the police in West Berlin arrested eleven young people and tightened security. Kennedy had traveled in a topless car, mingled with crowds, and delivered his famous oration from an open platform. Humphrey, in contrast, gave a short, nondescript speech to the Berlin House of Representatives, avoiding any uncontrolled contact with citizens on the street.48

During Humphrey's short time in West Berlin more than 2,000 students demonstrated against American policies. The vice president was so dismayed by his treatment that he lashed out against his critics. In a meeting soon after his return to Washington, Humphrey uncharacteristically interjected that the "Europeans have rejected the world after the loss of their colonies. They resent U.S. power ... The Europeans are selfish. We should challenge them to participate in the world outside their borders. We must keep pounding at them on this problem."49

Humphrey correctly identified rising anti-American sentiment in West Berlin. Protesters had seized the initiative in the streets; they were now the ones pressuring state officials. Student demonstrations continued after the vice president's visit, including a sit-in of more than 300 men and women at the meeting of the Free University's Academic Senate. For the first time in its history, the rector of the school had to call police on to the campus. Fears of disorder and excessive reaction rose yet again as university officials struggled to punish disruptive individuals while avoiding additional provocation.50

In June another foreign visitor, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, undermined these efforts to preserve social peace. The Iranian dictator and his glamorous wife traveled around West Germany in an attempt to foster closer economic and cultural ties between the two societies. Leaders in both states saw themselves as emerging "middle" powers, poised to challenge Soviet and American global dominance, as well as growing Chinese power in Asia. During an extended discussion, the shah and West German chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger highlighted new opportunities for collaboration in weapons development and industrial production. West Germany would provide technical know-how and some capital; the Iranians would supply their own capital, labor, and, of course, oil. Working together the two states hoped to escape the constraints of the bipolar international system.51

For residents of West Berlin, however, it appeared that deeper relations with the shah would only perpetuate Cold War injustices. At the Free University a number of Iranian émigrés publicized the brutalities of the government in Tehran. The shah's security forces beat, tortured, and often murdered critics at home. No one could question the authority of the absolute ruler. The shah and his close associates flaunted ostentatious riches while the majority of the country's citizens were mired in poverty.52

The Iranian leader was an anticommunist and a modernizer who maintained friendly relations with the Western powers in an important strategic area, but he was hardly a democrat. In the rush to build deeper economic and cultural ties with the shah, the Federal Republic, like the United States and other Western nations, neglected the Iranian leader's grave domestic shortcomings.53 "We Germans," one student leaflet proclaimed, "have, with the help of the other great powers, supported a dictator. We cannot legitimize such a dictator with assistance and heartfelt reception ... Through our demonstration, we want to direct your attention to the true conditions in Iran."54

The domestic brutalities perpetrated in Iran, with Western aid, were not isolated occurrences. Students in West Berlin recognized that communist containment, economic development, and concerns for international stability frequently led democratic leaders to underwrite domestic violence. In Southeast Asia and Latin America this trend was so common by the 1960s as almost to escape notice. In Europe—especially West Germany—the widespread acceptance of the polarized status quo reflected a choice for security over self-determination. "Iran is for us," the protesting students explained, "just one example of the difficult problems in the developing countries today." The "realities" of international politics appeared to smother real democracy. By demonstrating against the Iranian shah, the American vice president, and other allies, members of the Free University hoped to inspire greater concern for "basic democratic rights." Although they did not completely overlook the violence of "leftist" regimes, especially those in the Soviet bloc, protesters focused on the brutalities of "right-wing" anti-communists.55

The shah arrived in West Berlin on 2 June 1967. Throughout the day protesting students trailed his entourage, shouting "Freedom for Iranians" and
“Shah, Shah, Charlatan.” In the evening, as the foreign guests traveled to the opera house for a performance of Mozart’s Magic Flute, more than 800 men and women attempted to block the streets. An army of police officers and the shah’s personal bodyguards reacted to the aggressive crowd with brutal force. After the delayed dignitaries finally reached their destination, Iranian personnel used large sticks and other projectiles to beat the protesters. According to some reports, the local police acted similarly.56

Amidst the disorder on the Berlin streets, a plainclothes police officer fired two shots. Benno Ohnesorg, a twenty-six-year-old Free University student, fell to the ground and died soon thereafter. By almost all accounts Ohnesorg was only a peripheral participant in the demonstrations. No one provided evidence that he directly provoked the West Berlin police in any way. According to the bishop of his church, Ohnesorg was “not a fanatic” but a good citizen, active in the student religious community.57

Ohnesorg’s murder threw the city into chaos. The anguish displayed by students and other sympathetic citizens after the incident raved the emotions unleashed by the construction of the Berlin Wall almost six years earlier. The mayor of West Berlin, Heinrich Albertz, gave an address on television the next day, pleading for “security and order.” He accused an extreme minority of “terrorizing” the population.58

This student minority grew in size and unruliness during the following days. On June 3 more than 4,000 men and women gathered to condemn the entire West Berlin city government for Ohnesorg’s death. The angry protesters demanded the resignation of the mayor, the police chief, and other officials. They also called for legal action against the West German media magnate, Axel Springer, for encouraging police violence during the demonstrations.59

Mayor Albertz soon resigned. The Springer press came under increasing attack throughout the Federal Republic. The city of West Berlin never regained the “security and order” that government and university officials demanded. A frustrated Chancellor Kiesinger lamented that the youth of his nation had fallen victim to an “international sickness” that had infected all the major states. The West German government struggled to repress proliferating student demonstrations without provoking more radicalism or an NPD-advocated reaction.60

In the second half of 1967 one fiery student emerged as the chief agitator for protest activity in West Berlin. Rudolf “Rudi” Dutschke came from the province of Brandenburg in East Germany. The communist government had barred him from higher education when he refused to participate in mandatory military service during the late 1950s. As a consequence, Dutschke attended the Free University, the only institution from which he was not excluded. After the construction of the Berlin Wall he fled to the western half of the city, continuing his studies in sociology, philosophy, and political science.

Unlike most other students in Western Europe and the United States, Dutschke had personal experience with the domestic cruelties of the Soviet bloc. In West Berlin, however, he found many of the promised freedoms unfulfilled. Dutschke took particular aim at the “manipulation” of power that allowed dominant political and economic groups to make policy without popular consent. He blamed government “bureaucracy” for prolonging Cold War divisions in Europe, supporting dictators around the world, employing violence in Southeast Asia, and neglecting inequalities between rich and poor. The established political institutions in West Germany “blocked” necessary reforms. “We must always make more people conscious and politically mobilized,” Dutschke announced. Active students would harass established elites, creating the foundation for what he called an “antiauthoritarian camp.”61

Dutschke’s rhetoric combined the example of protests in Berkeley with the writings of Herbert Marcuse and Mao Zedong. “We must use direct action,” he explained. Halting the machinery of everyday politics, individual citizens would gain a “critical awareness” of the injustices around them. Dutschke admitted that he had no “concrete utopia” to offer, but he believed that the “great refusal” advocated by Marcuse would eventually lead to a society that better approximated the “Garden of Eden.” West Berlin would have almost daily Berkeley-like demonstrations with the added sophistication of rhetoric inspired by the German “critical theorists.”62

Sit-ins, demonstrations, and organized student heckling prohibited regular instruction at the Free University throughout late 1967 and early 1968. Dutschke’s followers did much more than voice radical rhetoric. At times student activity became explicitly violent. Men and women began to identify themselves as members of an “academic proletariat” that, in Marxist terms, required the use of force against its oppressors. During protest marches students hurled tomatoes, rocks, and even bricks at the police. Dutschke was careful never to advocate student violence, but when pressed he refused to condemn it.63

Free University students saw themselves as players in a global revolution. In his diary Dutschke wrote with relish about the emergence of an international movement against both American and Soviet domination. He overlooked the domestic abuses of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro because these figures publicly challenged the Cold War status quo. They
were vanguards for radical change in image, if not in reality. Following Mao’s inspiration in particular, Dutschke called on students around the world to lead a “long march” through the institutions of society, overturning established centers of power from within and without. “The third front is set up,” Dutschke wrote in his diary. Like guerrilla fighters in Bolivia and South Vietnam, men and women in West Germany would wage a militant struggle to smash the existing order.64

The Vietnam War provided both an inspiration and an opportunity for the student protesters in West Berlin. Dutschke and others saw the fierce fighting around the Tet Offensive as confirmation of the destruction that followed from Western attempts to foster foreign “development.” In South Vietnam, American bombs and guns protected an unpopular, corrupt government that looked more like the shah’s dictatorship than a democratic state. America and its West European allies had become “imperialists.” Vietnamese villagers and German students would struggle as a united “third front” to “revolutionize the masses.”65

American setbacks in Vietnam opened the possibility for successful resistance from the periphery and from within. “Comrades, Antiauthoritarians, People!” Dutschke exclaimed. “We have an historic opening . . . Real solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution comes from the actual weakening and upheaval in the centers of imperialism.” Students, natives, and guerrilla fighters had all become proletarians under the domination of repressive “fascists.” The time for a global “emancipatory struggle and national self-determination” had arrived. After Tet the tide of history appeared to move in favor of the weak and downtrodden.66

In February 1968 students at the Free University organized an international Vietnam Congress, using the war to bring together 10,000 protesters and intellectuals from all across Western Europe. Reform through existing institutions had become “hopeless,” Dutschke remarked in his diary. “We must do something else.” “We will make the Vietnam Congress,” he wrote, “into an international manifestation of solidarity with the bombed and struggling people.” Accordingly, at the congress Dutschke called for “revolutionary struggle” against the domination of the great powers in Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the world.67

Demonstrations throughout West Berlin and the rest of West Germany grew more confrontational in succeeding weeks. Students besieged government buildings, foreign embassies, and the offices of university administrators. Instead of sitting in, men and women now staged “go-ins” that included physical harassment and deliberate property damage. Almost all institutions of authority came under attack, including communist-supported organizations that appeared hesitant to join the student radicals.68

On the afternoon of 11 April 1968 Josef Bachmann, an unemployed worker, shot Rudi Dutschke three times at close range. Dutschke miraculously survived, but he never fully recovered before his death in 1979. Students immediately blamed the government and the press for encouraging the attack. That night more than 5,000 men and women marched to the center of West Berlin, angrily condemning the entire “system.” The next day another 5,000 students protested in front of the city hall. Demonstrations with even larger numbers continued, reaching a crescendo in May. When the West German Bundestag passed the long-debated “emergency laws” for public order, protesters demanded popular “agitation” to undermine the existing regime. By this time, the youth revolt had become a self-conscious “guerrilla” struggle.69

The men and women who took to the streets did not achieve the radical changes they desired. They did, however, reorient West German society. Before 1968 West Berlin was a Cold War frontier, an outpost of communist containment. The East Germans and the Soviets constituted the greatest threat to the city. After 1968 the most pressing danger to West Berlin and the Federal Republic came from within. Moscow did not want war but expanded trade and economic assistance from the West. University students who received more financial aid from the state than other citizens were now the main enemies of order. They continuously attacked the government through words, demonstrations, and, in some cases, acts of terror. During the next decade, extreme “extraparliamentary opposition” would remain a source of violence and uncertainty for the West German leadership.70


In early 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remained the most recognized civil rights leader in America, but the national movement he had so effectively led since the beginning of the decade showed signs of coming apart. Groups such as the Black Panthers and SNCC challenged the nonviolent tactics of King and his followers. A white backlash against the civil rights movement gained momentum throughout both the South and the North, spearheaded by Alabama governor George Wallace. Most significant, King’s efforts to address poverty and the injustice of the Vietnam War failed to attract the sympathetic following that his calls for racial equality elicited. The violent segregation of the South was a far easier enemy to defeat than the less visible suffering of rural families, inner-city residents, and drafted soldiers.71

King’s approach to all these problems involved broad public mobilization. He relied upon an eloquent appeal to democratic values and Christian faith to inspire listeners. He used peaceful displays of personal courage—marches,
boycotts, sit-ins, and strikes—to attract sympathy from onlookers. King was, in the words of one historian, the “epitome of the liberal spirit”—a leader committed to reforming a political system that failed to fulfill its promises. He appealed to inherited American ideals for the purpose of correcting American behavior.\(^72\)

King remained consistent throughout the 1960s, but the world around him changed dramatically. By 1968 he had become a “liberal spirit” swimming against a strong illiberal tide. The polarization of American society in the wake of the Vietnam War left little room for consensus building. Berkeley and other cities grew deeply divided between radicals and conservative opponents. Groups at both ends of the political spectrum resorted to frequent violence out of frustration and fear.

In August 1965 the decade’s first major urban riot by poor African Americans began in Watts, a formerly peaceful enclave of southern Los Angeles. During the next two summers similar upheavals occurred in Chicago, Newark, Detroit, and more than forty other cities. These disruptions arose from diverse sources, but they all reflected a turn to violent protest rather than peaceful reform. Citizens and law enforcement personnel resorted to vicious assaults on one another. In 1968 nearly every observer, including King, expected more of the same.\(^73\)

Violence consumed the civil rights movement and its great leader within two months of the Tet Offensive. In late March 1968 King led a demonstration through downtown Memphis, Tennessee, on behalf of striking African-American sanitation workers. Young participants disregarded nonviolent urgings, breaking store windows and looting area businesses. As the peaceful march turned into a riot between rowdy youth and nervous police, King had to flee the scene for his own self-protection.

The civil rights movement’s tried and true tactics for peaceful change no longer focused the energies of protestors. “We live in a sick nation,” King observed after the disastrous Memphis march. “Maybe we just have to admit that the day of violence is here, and maybe we have to just give up and let violence take its course.” King prepared to deliver a sermon to his congregation, at Ebeneezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, titled “Why America May Go to Hell.”\(^74\)

Before this scheduled lecture, King visited Memphis again on 3 April 1968 to plan another march, one that he hoped would remain peaceful. In the swirl of violence during this period, King’s closest advisers observed that he had become preoccupied with death. He continued to refuse bodyguards, and he revealed a prevailing sense of doom. “We’ve got some difficult days ahead,” King announced to one crowd. Describing the “promised land” of equality that awaited his followers, he admitted that “I may not get there with you.”\(^75\)

King’s fatalism was well justified. On the evening of 4 April 1968 James Earl Ray shot the civil rights leader on the balcony of his Memphis motel. All evidence indicates that Ray acted alone, but he was hardly the only individual after King’s life.\(^76\) If not Ray, someone else would probably have attempted to assassinate King within months. He had already received countless death threats.

America had become a violent place. Instead of inspiring broad support among diverse groups, moderate advocates of peaceful reform became primary targets for attack. King understood this. He expected that he would be only one of many people to die as frustrated citizens turned from the logic of reason to the “voice of violence.”\(^77\)

The public reaction to King’s assassination differed considerably from the national agony that had followed John F. Kennedy’s murder less than five years earlier. In late November 1963 the nation was paralyzed with shock. Life seemed to slow down as the president’s casket lumbered down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Many Americans went on a spending spree, fearful that if this tragedy could occur to the most privileged of men, it could happen to anyone. Why save for a future that might never come?\(^78\)

King’s death had a different effect, occurring in a different America. Life now sped up. The future was not uncertain anymore; it was fatally doomed, as the slain civil rights leader had feared. A depressed American public did not pause in anguish over King’s death, nor did it enter upon a binge of hedonistic living. Many youth—especially African-American men residing in poor inner-city areas—raged against all signs of established authority. Rioters took part in what historians have called a “carnival” of violence that released pent-up anger and temporarily turned the structure of power in society upside down.\(^79\)

The upheavals beginning on the night of 4 April 1968 were not strategic undertakings, promising any durable accomplishment. Black Americans suffered the vast majority of all property damage and human injury during the riots. The violent reaction to King’s assassination reflected a widespread desire to lash out against the circumstances of poverty and discrimination that the African-American community seemed unable to overcome. “If we must die,” Stokely Carmichael exclaimed, “we better die fighting back.”\(^80\)

Riots occurred in more than 120 cities following King’s murder. The most devastating of disturbances took place in Washington, D.C., beginning only hours after James Earl Ray fired his fatal shot in Memphis. When news first reached the large African-American community in the nation’s capital, local
figures forced city businesses to close out of respect for their slain leader. By 10:30 p.m., parading groups of African Americans began to smash windows and loot displayed merchandise. More than 500 individuals marched into other, largely white neighborhoods. Some carried what they could—televisions, radios, clothing—from ransacked stores that they could not, under normal circumstances, afford to enter. Others stood in the middle of the street, throwing rocks and bottles at passing vehicles. After midnight, growing mobs began to light fires across town. When firefighters attempted to put out the blazes, they came under attack as well.

During the early hours of 5 April, the city where King had spoken of his “dream” for peaceful racial integration five years earlier became a war zone. Angry African Americans controlled many of the streets in the nation’s capital. They heavily outnumbered the local police officers hastily dispatched to maintain order. When Mayor Walter E. Washington attempted to survey the scene by car, he could only watch as the looting and burning continued around him. Instead of escorting the local leader through the damage, fearful police officers advised the mayor that “you better get out of here.” Despite their use of tear gas, nightsticks, and other implements, law enforcement personnel could not control or contain the rioting. 81

The mayor was not the only government official in danger. President Johnson, scheduled to address a fundraising dinner at the Washington Hilton Hotel, had to cancel his appearance for reasons of personal safety. Instead, Vice President Humphrey attended the affair. Substituting for the president in an environment filled with street violence, Humphrey must have felt a sense of déjà vu from his ill-fated trip to West Berlin almost exactly one year earlier. As the riots spread through Washington, D.C., police officers had to surround the Hilton in large numbers to ensure the security of the vice president and other guests. 82

Public looting spread to within ten blocks of the White House. Congressmen, cabinet officials, and other high-ranking figures became prisoners in their homes and offices. The rapid escalation of violence made the leaders of the “free world” fearful of walking or driving on their own streets. The U.S. government had contained adversaries abroad with relative success, but it was now physically imperiled by enemies within. Each additional sidewalk lost to the raging mobs represented another fallen domino, another further encroachment on the nation’s security by its own citizens. 83

On 6 April more than 11,000 troops from the U.S. Army entered Washington, D.C. They placed the nation’s capital under military “occupation,” with virtual martial law. Two to four soldiers patrolled each city block in the riot-torn areas. Personnel stationed at checkpoints on area highways stopped and searched all vehicles entering the city. Mounted machine guns appeared on the steps of the Capitol. A 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. curfew required all residents to remain indoors during the hours of darkness. Citizens and soldiers alike compared the circumstances in Washington, D.C., to “pacification” of villagers in Vietnam. 84

By the next morning the city had returned to an eerie quiet. Army troops remained in Washington through the following weekend, gradually lifting the curfew and other restrictions on citizen activity. Twelve civilians died during the riots, a relatively small number compared with the toll from similar disorders in other cities. This number should not, however, disguise the extreme violence of the events. During a four-day period local police fired more than 8,000 canisters of tear gas at unruly crowds, and 1,190 people suffered injuries at the hands of rioters or those attempting to enforce order. Law enforcement personnel arrested more than 7,600 people. Property damage and government expenses during the riots exceeded $27 million. 85

“Our nation is moving toward two societies,” the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders had warned before April 1968, “one black, one white—separate and unequal.” 86 The upheavals that followed Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination confirmed this pessimistic observation, but they also pointed to a more discouraging phenomenon. America was divided not only by race but also by age. The rioting mobs on the streets of Washington and other cities were disproportionately composed of young men. Unlike their elder counterparts who had participated in the peaceful demonstrations of the civil rights movement, these urban youths saw little hope in gradual reform. They thought of themselves as “guerrilla” fighters, not spiritual healers.

The African-American crowds that ransacked the nation’s capital shared more in language and behavior with their white counterparts at Berkeley and the Free University than with the earlier civil rights marchers. Although the material conditions of the inner city differed markedly from the privileged circumstances of elite colleges, youth from different races harbored a common disaffection with the established channels of social reform. Martin Luther King Jr.’s death appeared to provide incontrovertible evidence that nonviolent change could not work. Revolutions required armed struggle. A growing cohort of young Americans—black and white—believed that they could redress inequalities and end the war in Vietnam only through increased violence. Members of the Black Power movement and student radicals forged loose alliances during the tumultuous months of 1968. 87

Political leaders, including President Johnson, recognized this radical inclination among many young Americans. One could no longer dismiss them...
as an extremist fringe. With violence building in cities and universities, something clearly had to be done. Middle-aged leaders unaccustomed to dealing with angry young men and women were confounded and, frankly, scared.88

- Paris: “There’s a Battle Raging”

French President Charles de Gaulle was not someone easily scared. Comparing the 1960s with the harrowing days of World War II, the former leader of the French Resistance lamented that he now lived in “mediocre” times. De Gaulle expressed frustration with the difficulties of governing a large nation during a period that “is certainly not dramatic.” Charismatic leadership required a consensus on big threats. Public fear, in this sense, could prove very useful. De Gaulle—like John F. Kennedy years earlier—longed for a major challenge that would allow him to demonstrate his courage and galvanize popular support.89

Soon after de Gaulle deplored his “mediocre” times, an overriding public threat emerged in France. The president now had a clear “enemy,” but it was one he proved poorly equipped to confront. De Gaulle had fought foreign adversaries, communists, and domestic militarists throughout his career. He had never, however, dealt with broad generational conflict. A public divided by age rather than party affiliation showed frustrating indifference toward the president’s appeals to a common French language, culture, and historic grandeur. Young French citizens in the late 1960s had no recollection of World War II and the Resistance—the formative experiences for de Gaulle and his counterparts. Instead of national strength and unity against foreign challengers, university students looked to a “glorious revolutionary tradition” that harkened back to public protests and radicalism before the formation of the Fifth Republic.90

The Gaullist vision of national grandeur created what many citizens called “cultural alienation.” They contended that contemporary political decisions reflected the interests of national security but not the social concerns of the population. Hierarchies of authority limited freedom in the workplace, the university, and the local community. Students condemned what they called the contemporary “blockage” against “self-determination.” Instead of de Gaulle’s “popular monarchy,” they wanted a less hierarchical and more contentious democracy. The current government, one student pamphlet explained, “is for the people but is no longer operated by the people.”91

As violent upheaval swept the streets of Berkeley, West Berlin, Washington, D.C., and other cities in early 1968, Paris initially remained quiet. NaNterre, a new university on the outskirts of the French capital, became a center for student protests, but these activities received little public attention. Opened in 1964 to serve the burgeoning population of students, NaNterre was a “wasteland campus” without any cafés, movie theaters, or even a library. The 15,000 men and women at this university quickly grew dissatisfied with their insufficient facilities. In April 1967 a group of male students, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, used a sit-in at one of the all-female dormitories to voice their discontent with the social limits of university life. Without cafés and other locales where they could informally meet women, men rebelled against the prohibitions upon entrance into female campus residences. Police forces quickly dispersed the NaNterre demonstrators with little fanfare. Protests of this sort did not seem serious.

These apparently innocuous events were the early winds of a gathering storm. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a sociology student whose Jewish parents had fled Germany for France during the Nazi years, gained notoriety among his colleagues for his intrepid challenges to authority. In addition to condemning restrictions on student freedom. Cohn-Bendit attacked the so-called Fouchet Plan, designed to make higher education in France more disciplined and preprofessional. He also criticized the use of police power on university campuses and alleged French complicity in the Vietnam War. On the latter issue, students advocated more active protests, and even assaults, against American facilities in France.92

During March 1968 young men and women organized a series of anti-American demonstrations throughout Paris. At one event, protesters threw rocks at an American Express travel office, shattering its windows. The police arrested six NaNterre students who had participated in the violence. Simultaneously a rumor circulated that the university rector had compiled a “black list” of troublemakers—including Cohn-Bendit—for punishment and even extradition. Cohn-Bendit held German, not French, citizenship. He was therefore subject to possible deportation.93

NaNterre students reacted to the arrests and the talk of a “black list” with their largest demonstration to date. On 22 March more than 150 men and women, heavily influenced by recent protests in Berkeley and West Berlin, occupied the main administration building on campus—the first such student takeover in France. The protesters demanded that the university and the government stop trying to “run society like an army.” Broadening their agenda beyond the controversies surrounding university facilities and the Vietnam War, they called for a “vast debate” on the nature of capitalism, imperialism, and the “workers’ and students’ struggle in the East and the West.” In order to prevent a planned student teach-in on 29 March, the rec-
tor of Nanterre closed the school from 28 March through 1 April. This move only increased the ire of the protesters, whose numbers grew in reaction to the hard line of the university administration.94

More than 1,000 students assembled on 2 April to condemn the university's restrictive policies. They formed the "22 March Movement," designed to expose what they perceived as the systemic injustices of capitalism and imperialism. The students employed Marxist rhetoric in their criticism of class repression in France, but they deliberately distanced themselves from communists, whose primary allegiance remained with the party, not the men and women taking to the streets. The 22 March Movement marked the beginning of a broad-based anti-Soviet left among student radicals in France.95

By late April similar protest activities took shape in Paris around one of the nation's most distinguished universities, the Sorbonne. When a committee there summoned eight students participating in the 22 March Movement for possible discipline, demonstrations in the Latin quarter began in earnest. Suddenly French newspaper readers discovered the existence of a youth rebellion in their midst, similar to more publicized movements in Berkeley and West Berlin. Journalists began to write about a student "insurrection."96

As in West Berlin, large public demonstrations in Paris drew both radical students and right-wing organizations. Like their counterparts at the Free University, leftist groups at the Sorbonne announced that "exceptional domestic and international conditions" opened a unique opportunity for "revolution." According to one student leaflet, the "defeat of American imperialism in Vietnam" and the "radical crisis in the United States" gave formerly powerless people an opportunity to change the politics of the Cold War. The mobilization of allegedly "proletarianized" students and workers would promote an international "democratization of power" across Europe, North America, and Asia.97

Right-wing groups condemned this revolutionary rhetoric for applying alien ideas to the unique circumstances of French society. Members of an organization known as Occident called for an emphasis upon nationalism. Proclaiming themselves "neither Gaullist, nor communist," they wanted a reformed "New France" that would assert itself more forcefully abroad. They also pledged to rebuild France's bloated domestic institutions, allowing for more freedom, creativity, and civic spirit. Like the NPD in West Germany, Occident accepted the radical diagnosis of contemporary social stagnation. The organization sought to build a more vibrant state with new leaders who

could inspire the young. Occident promised even more grandeur than de Gaulle.98

On 3 May 1968 the rector of the Sorbonne hastily called the Parisian police to remove student demonstrators—leftist and rightist—blocking buildings at the university. Never in recent memory had the police entered the grounds of the Sorbonne. The crowds of protesters appeared threatening, but they remained relatively small, at least until law enforcement personnel arrived. The police allowed female demonstrators to leave the area peacefully. They herded male students into black vans for arrest.

News of alleged police brutality brought many people to the area. As the vans with the detained men drove away, onlookers attempted to block the vehicles. Students "ripped up the iron gratings from around the trees on the pavement to block the vans, threw everything they could lay their hands on at them. [and] burnt newspapers to prevent the motorcycle police from getting through." "It was a great battle," one young woman remembered, "a festival! I felt happy. The violence was restoring to the student movement what it had lost since the end of the Algerian War." These sentiments reflected the intoxicating experience of crowd protest for many participants. Similar feelings would draw more students to the street in the next few weeks.99

Extended urban violence, reminiscent of the unrest experienced in Paris during the late 1950s, constituted the worst nightmare for local leaders. In response to the obstruction of their vehicles, the police used brute force against the students, hoping to smother any future thoughts of rebellion. They attacked the crowd with truncheons and exploded large doses of tear gas to disperse people from the streets. By the end of the day, the police had arrested 590 men and women. Eighty officers suffered injuries, in addition to several hundred students and other civilians.100

These violent altercations provoked an immediate escalation of protests at the Sorbonne and other schools around Paris. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who traveled from Nanterre to join the demonstrations in the Latin Quarter, later commented that 3 May was the "day that really mobilized student opinion; the first great ripple of a swelling tide."101 High school pupils soon joined protests throughout the city. Imitating the Paris Commune of 1871, young men and women began to construct street barricades on the night of 10–11 May. These makeshift fortifications provided students with temporary freedom from police authority in the areas around various schools. The barricade builders moved cars, assembled building debris, and gathered whatever they could find to block off city streets. Various student factions united be-
Gaulle had cultivated so assiduously throughout his career. The man who had refused compromise with the likes of Hitler and Stalin—and, to a lesser degree, Kennedy and Johnson—could not afford to retreat when confronted by a few thousand unarmed youth. Compromise in these circumstances would diminish de Gaulle’s asserted grandeur.

During the early hours of 11 May 1968 riot police stormed the student barricades. Journalists on the scene provided close coverage of this event. Over the radio, an announcer who usually described soccer competitions offered colorful play-by-play for the bloody street match: “Now the [riot police] are charging, they’re storming the barricade—oh, my God! There’s a battle raging. The students are counter-attacking. You can hear the noise—the [riot police] are retreating . . . Now they’re re-grouping, getting ready to charge again. The inhabitants are throwing things from their windows at the [riot police]—oh! The police are retaliating, shooting grenades into the windows of apartments.”

By 6:00 A.M. on 11 May law enforcement personnel had won their match with the demonstrators, but at great cost. More than 376 people had suffered injuries, a third of whom were members of the riot police. Government authorities had arrested almost 500 men and women. Street fighting had caused serious damage to more than one hundred cars and countless storefronts.

Pictures of riot police attacking unarmed students appeared on the front pages of newspapers in France and much of the rest of the world. Paris was again the epicenter of a worldwide revolution. Men and women at the Sorbonne spoke of participating in upheavals “everywhere in Europe.” The use of brute force to destroy the barricades pushed the students off the streets, but it also killed the “Old Regime.” University and city life would never recapture its pre-May 1968 form. Mutual suspicion between students and administrators—and the general fear of future rioting—would mar any attempted return to “normalcy” in France, or in the rest of Europe for that matter.

Adopting the language of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, one student publication explained that the “reign of the Mandarins is finished.” Through their use of force, established elites had admitted that they could not command popular legitimacy among the young. De Gaulle’s regime would remain in power, but now only with the assistance of frequent violence.

Self-doubt began to creep in on the aging French president. When Pari sian students called a nationwide strike and were joined by factory workers across France, de Gaulle despaired that they might use their influence“absolutely” throughout the nation, but now only with the assistance of frequent violence. Self-doubt began to creep in on the aging French president. When Pari sian students called a nationwide strike and were joined by factory workers across France, de Gaulle despaired that they might use their influence

hind the Sorbonne’s “Action Committee,” pledging to deploy “all the forces” available to “abolish dictatorial power” in France.

The barricades symbolized the group autonomy that many young men and women desired. Transforming their immediate surroundings, the students hoped they would become the vanguard for a “new society.” “We oppose,” one Sorbonne group exclaimed, “the hierarchical military and Napoleonic organization of the state.” Students would experiment with new forms of living in order to make their education, and the nation as a whole, respond “to the real needs of society.” In this context, the Sorbonne Action Committee argued that violence might prove necessary. Like the heroes of Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables, men and women resorted to barricades and guerrilla fighting because “the entire world does violence to us.” Revolution against police brutality required more than peaceful protest.

Student communities behind the barricades really did approximate Hugo’s story. Young men and women used their newfound freedom to read radical literature and engage in “free love.” As Marius and Cosette found one another behind the barricades in Les Misérables, many students developed romantic attachments amidst the protests, spending hours together on the streets and living in close proximity.

Protest behind the barricades was serious, but it was also great fun. Demonstrations against authority provided much more romance, excitement, and esprit de corps than the daily drudgery at school or university. Lilly Metreaux recalled her exhilaration during these heady days. Before May 1968 “I had begun to acquire a real culture, Marxism, to understand what was at stake in Vietnam, to take on responsibilities although I was still very young. . . . one morning, my young brother comes running home, out of breath, with his little satchel, saying: ‘Come quick, there’s a demonstration!’ So instead of going to school I followed him and we found ourselves on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in the middle of this huge demonstration.”

The whirl of the crowd whipped its participants into an orgy of love and violence. “There was a sort of magic island coming out of nowhere, and it was us, the young ones, who were pulling it out,” Metreaux explained. “My brother’s best friend, Nicholas, and I fell in love . . . I helped them bring out their school on strike, going from classroom to classroom. All the kids ran into the streets.”

De Gaulle’s government would not accept the anarchy and “free love” of the students’ “magic island.” The police must “clean up the streets,” Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet exclaimed. “That’s all.” “Power does not retreat,” the president declared, as he had during previous periods of unrest.

Charismatic authority depended upon the image of omnipotence that de Gaulle had cultivated so assiduously throughout his career. The man who had refused compromise with the likes of Hitler and Stalin—and, to a lesser degree, Kennedy and Johnson—could not afford to retreat when confronted by a few thousand unarmed youth. Compromise in these circumstances would diminish de Gaulle’s asserted grandeur.

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Self-doubt began to creep in on the aging French president. When Pari sian students called a nationwide strike and were joined by factory workers across France, de Gaulle despaired that “in five days, ten years of struggle against the rottenness in the state have been lost.” For the first time in his
life de Gaulle suffered from insomnia, unable to reconcile his faith in the French "spirit" with the growing manifestations of popular protest against his leadership.\textsuperscript{112}

By 24 May striking students, workers, and various sympathizers had brought the city of Paris to a virtual standstill. Fearful of street violence, businesspeople and other citizens avoided any confrontation with the protesters or the police. French television ceased to report on the Paris upheavals because the state broadcasting company could not find enough working personnel. Truck drivers did not make many of their deliveries to the city, creating acute food and fuel shortages. Gasoline rationing prevented most citizens from driving. Government authority in Paris became, in the words of the metropolitan police chief, "a theater of shadows."\textsuperscript{113}

De Gaulle ordered Prime Minister Georges Pompidou to negotiate with laborers but not with students.\textsuperscript{114} Despondent, tired, and confused, the French president made a curious journey with his wife to the West German town of Baden-Baden. De Gaulle's advisers could not discern whether the president wanted to flee for his personal safety or to organize a military campaign against the revolutionaries who had shut down the government. Pompidou feared that de Gaulle would never return.\textsuperscript{115}

When de Gaulle arrived in Baden-Baden he went to see General Jacques Massu, the commander of French forces stationed in West Germany. No one was more surprised by the president's unannounced arrival than Massu. He received a call at 2:40 P.M. indicating that de Gaulle had entered his military base. The surprised general allegedly exclaimed: "Look, I'm naked in bed and I am having my siesta. Give me five minutes to get ready." The French president had never before made an unannounced visit to foreign territory. Massu was accustomed to quiet, languid days on duty.\textsuperscript{116}

Agitated and nervous in contrast to his slumbering subordinate, de Gaulle announced that "it's all over." Lamenting the "total paralysis of the country," he explained that "I'm not in charge of anything any more. I'm withdrawing... since I feel that I and my family are threatened in France. I've come to seek refuge with you... People don't want me anymore."\textsuperscript{117}

Massu urged the president not to resign, "for the country's sake, for your own sake... Everything that has been done over the past ten years cannot disappear in ten days. You will open the floodgates and accelerate the chaos that it is your duty to control. You must fight till the end," Massu advised, "on the terrain that you have chosen... If you leave power, it must only be after consulting the people."\textsuperscript{118}

His spirits lifted by this strange meeting in Baden-Baden, de Gaulle returned to Paris on 30 May. Confident of support from Massu and other military officers, the president dissolved the National Assembly. He called for new elections as a referendum on the student protests and his leadership. In a radio address to the nation, de Gaulle warned that the street demonstrations threatened to bring a "dictatorship" of "totalitarian communism." Playing upon public frustrations with continued disorder throughout Paris and much of the rest of the country, he argued that only a reaffirmation of his authority could assure "progress, independence, and peace."\textsuperscript{119}

As de Gaulle stood firm against the student protesters, Pompidou worked to buy off the striking workers. He offered them a general wage increase of 10 percent, accompanied by a 35 percent rise in the minimum pay for agricultural and industrial work. Pompidou also promised a shorter work week, a 5 percent increase in medical expenses reimbursed by the state, expanded union rights, and, most startlingly, 50 percent back pay for days on strike. The unions in France initially rejected this generous offer, hoping to get even more from a desperate government. During the early weeks of June, however, the continuing costs of striking and the increasing use of government force led most workers to accept what Pompidou proposed.\textsuperscript{120}

On 30 June voters overwhelmingly backed de Gaulle's supporters, electing them to 360 of 485 seats in the National Assembly. Once again the president had made an effective call upon "le peuple." He exploited the uncertainty and frustration born of the disorders in Paris and other cities. In a reprise of 1958, citizens backed de Gaulle as a bulwark against revolutionary upheaval on the streets.\textsuperscript{121}

Fifth Republic France remained intact, but it was badly shaken. Demonstrations continued across the country during the second half of 1968. If anything, the June elections proved that society was in fact "blocked," as protesters claimed. De Gaulle made the vote a referendum on order or chaos, "popular monarchy" or radicalism. Many citizens wanted to escape these polarities. As late as November 1968 students continued to agitate on the streets and in print for a "third force." Protesters gave increasing attention to the "Great Refusal" preached by Herbert Marcuse and the grassroots mobilization advocated by Mao Zedong's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." More factions and internal antagonisms dominated French society in late 1968 than at any time since de Gaulle's return to power a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{122}

No consensus emerged in France on what would constitute an effective and desirable "third force." The president had played upon this uncertainty in June 1968, but he could not continue to do so for very long. The demonstrators did not accomplish their revolution, but they did undermine de Gaulle's leadership. His initial hesitancy and confusion revealed the limits of
his charisma. De Gaulle no longer commanded the allegiance of the crowd. His vision of French grandeur did not have the same appeal, especially among the young, as in prior years. The great man now appeared very small.123

When de Gaulle submitted his plans for government reorganization to a popular referendum in April 1969, 53 percent of voters rejected the initiative. Humiliated and exhausted, he immediately resigned. This time he did not bother to consult with General Massu or any other members of the military.

De Gaulle had never regained the self-confidence that he lost in May 1968. He recognized that he could no longer lead the nation, that he no longer embodied "le peuple." The demonstrations in Paris and other cities made it clear that he could only expect more "difficulties." De Gaulle admitted that the 1968 rebellion had diminished "the figure that History has made of me." The students had worn the old man out.124

### Prague: "We Want Light!"

Prague in the late 1960s was the Paris of Eastern Europe. The city's long history as a magnet for artists, intellectuals, and interlopers made it a natural home for dissident thinkers. Under the watchful eyes of communist authorities, writers and students in the capital of Czechoslovakia continued to push the limits of accepted opinion. The Soviet-supported government had outlawed capitalism, but it could not eliminate the traditions of Bohemian iconoclasm.

During the years after the Hungarian revolt of 1956, the Czechoslovak leadership worked to smother the potential for a similar uprising in Prague. While the Soviet Union and other East European countries pursued de-Stalinization, Czechoslovak leader Antonin Novotny condemned most manifestations of "revisionism." Ironically, the clash between the strong-arm tactics of the state and a remarkably resilient dissident tradition produced the very revolutionary explosion that Novotny feared.125

In 1967 Czechoslovakia's most distinguished writers—Milan Kundera, Pavel Kohout, Ludvik Vaculik, and Vaclav Havel—condemned the tightening restrictions of communist censorship. Speaking at the Fourth Czechoslovak Writers' Congress, Havel publicly defied government authorities, pledging his "respect" for Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "true ethical stance" against the communist system. Vaculik went even further. He argued that under a repressive leadership Czechoslovak society had "lost so much moral and material strength." Despite the spread of education and industry, he observed, "We have not contributed any original thoughts or good ideas to humanity."126

The Czechoslovak Communist Party expelled the writers for their defiant words, making them official outcasts. This action, however, failed to repress what had become a mounting social crisis by the last quarter of 1967. Czechoslovakia suffered from all the signs of youth apathy and discontent evident in the Soviet Union at the time.127

Like its counterpart in Moscow, Novotny's government found it increasingly difficult to motivate citizens for patriotic duty in the military and the Communist Party. Warsaw Pact representatives observed a threatening decline in the operational effectiveness of the Czechoslovak armed forces as recruits challenged regimental discipline. The student population grew during the 1960s, but the number of men and women affiliated with the state-sponsored Czechoslovak Union of Youth declined by 33 percent, from 1.5 million in 1963 to barely 1 million in 1966. Students accounted for less than 0.5 percent of the Communist Party membership in 1966. Czechoslovakia was a state with aging leaders and a large cohort of young, disaffected citizens. Even state authorities spoke of a "youth problem."128

Czechoslovakia had become a dark and drab society, a "closed-minded," medieval world, according to Milan Kundera.129 Young citizens longed to enliven the city of Prague with bright and energetic ideas, many inspired by dissident figures in both the East and the West. Students distributed typed copies of Vaculik's scandalous speech at the writers' congress, they read Solzhenitsyn and other Soviet dissidents, they listened to rock and roll, and they followed the agitations for a "third way" in West Berlin, Paris, and the other cities of Europe. Forbidden thoughts reached the educated young in Prague through self-published (samizdat) journals, American-sponsored Radio Free Europe broadcasts, and occasional foreign visitors.130

Young women in Czechoslovakia, for example, managed to obtain feminist literature from abroad. Betty Friedan's book The Feminine Mystique was particularly popular.131 Even though Friedan focused upon the difficulties of the white, upper-middle-class American "housewife," her words resonated among disillusioned women in Prague. In late 1967 Friedan visited the city, meeting with the members of the new Czechoslovak Union of Women. "I found developments there very fascinating," Friedan wrote; "they certainly increased my insight into the depth and importance of the unfinished revolution . . . all of us are fighting to complete." This was one manifestation of a broader cultural and intellectual connection developing among angry, often young, citizens on both sides of the Iron Curtain.132

Novotny's heavy-handed repression of popular writers converted anger to
rebellion. Frustrated with the restrictions on their freedom, 1,500 students, mostly from the Czech Technical College, took to the streets of Prague on 31 October 1967. The most recent in a series of electrical power outages at a local dormitory sparked the protests. Carrying candles, student demonstrators chanted: “We want light!”—a plea for both electrical power and an openness to new ideas.

Novotný deployed special Public Security Police to disperse the protesters. Law enforcement personnel initially relied upon tear gas. When the demonstrators organized a mass meeting, the police attacked the unarmed men and women. Thirty students suffered injuries, as did three of the uniformed officers.

The overreaction of the police provoked more protest from students and sympathetic intellectuals in Prague. On 8 November a group of students from Charles University held a five-hour meeting, independent of Communist Party supervision. They adopted a resolution demanding punishment of the police officers responsible for attacking the students. More significant, the students condemned the official state media for distorted news coverage and called for more open and accurate reporting. Like the famous figures who had spoken out at the writers’ congress in June, students wanted a freer press. According to one analysis, the protesters in Prague contributed to a “broad oppositional front” with other rebellious intellectuals.

Alarmed by the boldness of student criticisms, the Czechoslovak government expressed regret about the violence on 31 October. Authorities in the Ministry of the Interior pledged to improve conditions for student life, especially with regard to electrical power in the dormitories. Novotný’s regime, however, refused to admit any errors in “restoring public order.” The state would not tolerate protests that challenged the one-party dictatorship. According to one analysis, the protesters in Prague contributed to a “broad oppositional front” with other rebellious intellectuals.

Through November and early December tensions in Prague continued to rise. Discontent among students, intellectuals, and other citizens bubbled to the surface throughout the city. The streets remained orderly, but young people became overtly critical of Novotný and his fellow party bosses. Students threatened future demonstrations if the government refused to initiate new reforms. They formed a coordinating committee for this purpose, against official prohibitions. In alliance with dissident writers, students demanded the right to publish their own journal, free of Communist Party censorship.

Novotný’s government faced an upsurge in domestic resistance that threatened imminent disorder. With each day, the demands of students and intellectuals seemed to grow. Foreign observers began to worry that Czechoslovakia would either descend into chaos or suffer from a round of violent neo-Stalinist repression. American Ambassador Jacob Beam reported that the population of Prague was visibly “unsatisfied”; unable to inspire or even enforce citizen loyalty, the Communist Party had entered a period of “internal confusion.”

Confusion quickly gave way to strife among leaders. Alexander Dubček, the first secretary of the Slovak Communist Party (subsumed within the larger Czechoslovak apparatus), criticized Novotný for following a method of governance that was too “conservative.” Novotný’s unwillingness to pursue necessary reforms contributed, Dubček argued, to threatening conditions among “concrete people.” Confronted with student unrest, intellectuals’ dissent, and many other domestic difficulties, the time appeared right for a new “long-term party program” that would strengthen communism, rather than brute repression.

Dubček’s criticisms resonated with other party leaders. A group of respected officials—Mária Sediáková, František Kriegel, and Josef Špacek—joined Dubček in demanding more energetic leadership and drastic policy change. Students and intellectuals had not overturned the ruling party, but they had made the political status quo appear untenable. The Czechoslovak leadership had to undertake new measures, either along a more conservative Novotný path or perhaps in a more “liberal” direction.

Alarmed by the divisions within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made an emergency visit to Prague on 8 December. He spent forty-eight hours in the city, meeting with different members of the regime. Brezhnev later reported that during his stay he had had only three hours free from discussion for “personal hygiene and food.” Although this was surely an exaggeration—particularly for a self-indulgent man like Brezhnev—the description of marathon deliberations captures the urgency of the moment.

Brezhnev was initially disposed against any change of leadership in Czechoslovakia. He came away from his visit, however, with the impression that “Comrade Novotný hasn’t the slightest idea about the true state of affairs.” His dictatorial control over government activities had inspired dangerous resentments among well-meaning communists. Groups seeking to resist state authority were taking advantage of the leader’s failed policies and the divisions among his associates. Brezhnev found Dubček’s call for a new Communist Party program more promising than Novotný’s continued adherence to a dogmatic hard line. He lamented that the longtime Czechoslovak leader “does not know what collective leadership is” or “how to handle people.”

Brezhnev did not explicitly endorse any side in the dispute among the
Czechoslovak communists. He emphasized that Czechoslovakia required a strong and unified government to deter external challengers. “Unity.” Brezhnev explained “is a supreme principle that begins at the nucleus of the [Communist] Party.” This call for unity favored the arguments of men like Dubček who promised new ideas, rather than more of the same dead-end policies. The Soviet leader’s failure to back Novotný against his challengers sealed his fate. Novotný could no longer rely on Moscow to ensure his legitimacy and, more important, his access to military force. Soon after Brezhnev’s departure, Novotný resigned.143

Alexander Dubček became the new leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on 5 January 1968. His mandate from the Central Committee reflected concerns about domestic discontent. In order to revitalize the public standing of the government, the party called for “far greater encouragement of an open exchange of views” within society. Dubček announced that the government would direct “all of our endeavors . . . toward a true invigoration and unification of all constructive and progressive forces in the republic . . . This is the necessary prerequisite for a new inception of socialism.” The future strength of the Czechoslovak Communist Party required the cultivation of what Dubček called “democratic forms” originating “from below”—among workers, scientists, intellectuals, and students.144

The new Czechoslovak leader believed in the sanctity of the Communist Party. He also understood the importance of following Soviet tutelage in Eastern Europe. For these reasons, he emphasized the “leading role” of the communists and the virtues of “centralism”: “We want to rally all the citizens of our republic to implement the progressive objectives of socialist development and strengthen confidence in the party.”145

Dubček hoped to build a new political consensus somewhere between the dogmatism of Novotný and the raucous behavior of the Prague students. As he preserved the anticapitalist shibboleths of the Communist Party, Dubček promoted “voluntary discipline” that would strengthen the Czechoslovak state. “Today more than ever,” he explained, “the important thing is not to reduce our policy to a struggle ‘against’ but, more importantly, to wage a struggle ‘for’ . . . We cannot preserve past values simply by defending them all the time.” Dubček called for all factions in society to explore “new problems boldly in the face . . . We shall tackle these in a new and creative manner, in a manner dictated by our present reality.”146

Singling out students for attention, Dubček argued that Communist Party reforms required “far greater participation” from the nation’s youth. Young men and women in Prague were better educated than their forebears. They could infuse Czechoslovak society with the creative energies needed to overcome what Dubček perceived as a contemporary malaise. Calls for open discussions served as a direct appeal to the young. Co-opting them in a project to strengthen the state rather than suppressing their dissident thoughts, Dubček expected that he could coax the unruly students into becoming loyal communists. Reforms would channel rebellious energies for constructive purpose.147

The “Action Program,” published in April 1968, followed along these general lines. It affirmed the “leading role of the Communist Party,” the continuing struggle against capitalist “imperialism,” and the fundamental importance of Prague’s alliance with Moscow. At the same time, the Action Program called for domestic pluralism. “The [Communist] Party does not want to and will not take the place of social organizations . . . The role of the Party is to find a way of satisfying the various interests without jeopardizing the interests of society as a whole.” In this context, Dubček went so far as to advocate “freedom of speech” and expanded rights of personal choice in profession and “lifestyle.” The Communist Party would lead by persuasion, not by coercive force.148

Czechoslovakia’s East European allies, especially in Poland and East Germany, quickly grew skeptical of Dubček’s reforms. They worried, in the words of Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, that Czechoslovakia risked following a “path to counterrevolution.” Free speech would allow “imperialists” to gain support among students and workers. “Why not draw conclusions from what happened in Hungary [in 1956]?” Gomułka asked. “That all began in a similar way.”149

Leonid Brezhnev had the same apprehensions, but he also recognized the promise of Dubček’s reforms. If the Czechoslovak leader could revitalize his society, he would inspire improvements in morale and unity throughout the Soviet bloc. Brezhnev understood the necessity of pursuing a more dynamic “route” to “socialist democracy.” Although the Soviet leader did not want to encourage the now-repudiated excesses of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization, he realized that one could not return to the days of dictatorial terror. Novotný had tried to rule like Stalin, and he had produced a stagnant, discontented, and divided society.

Brezhnev warily endorsed the Czechoslovak Action Program. He wrote a personal letter to Dubček explaining that “I understand very well that your work is aimed at overcoming certain difficulties, the most important of which is that amidst the healthy trends, revisionist and hostile forces are seeking to divert Czechoslovakia from the socialist path.” “You can always
Brezhnev warned about the “great dangers” that accompanied “crash” reforms. Referring indirectly to Khrushchev’s failures, he advised against the urge to seek “immediate solutions to all the problems that have accumulated.” The older Brezhnev adopted a paternalistic tone with his younger Czechoslovak counterpart: “I can tell you quite frankly that life and experience show that overly hasty corrections of past mistakes and imperfections, and the desire to solve everything at once, can make for new and even greater mistakes and consequences. That’s why I want to point out the danger that the current emphasis on immediately solving a broad array of complicated questions, which can evoke disagreements, could possibly undermine the very important process of consolidation that you’ve started.”

Brezhnev desired a gradual opening in Czechoslovakia. Dubček, however, saw a need for rapid reform. Both men sought to strengthen the authority of the Communist Party, but they disagreed fundamentally on tactics. Dubček’s methods allowed new freedoms for protesting students and intellectuals, exposing his regime to domestic criticism. Brezhnev feared the consequences of freer dissent among Czechoslovak citizens. The Soviet leader’s gradualism was rooted in a desire to maintain stability above all. Ironically, Dubček’s radicalism—like that of the Prague students—was much more orthodox in its socialist theory.

“The Prague Spring,” as unleashed by the forty-six-year-old Czechoslovak first secretary, aimed to build a more utopian society based on shared needs. In place of large bureaucracies and coercive police forces, government would run on a pledge to make everyone’s life better. Encouraging innovative ideas, public criticisms, and independent groupings, the Communist Party would serve as an umbrella organization bringing together the concerns of all citizens. A truly classless society would emerge as everyone cooperated on equal footing. This was a vision of democratic socialism, inspired by a long tradition of nineteenth-century European thought. Dubček hoped to build a workers’ and intellectuals’ state without the exploitative characteristics of either capitalism or Soviet-bloc communism.

Brezhnev’s worries about this program were well founded. By the middle of 1968 the promise of the Prague Spring had encouraged many students and intellectuals to challenge the “leading role” of the Communist Party. In June Ludvík Vaculík published a bold manifesto, “Two Thousand Words,” that extended his criticism of the Communist Party voiced a year earlier at the Czechoslovak Writers’ Congress. Referring to the years immediately af-
More than seventy prominent Czechoslovak intellectuals, scientists, and athletes signed Vaculík’s manifesto. The text appeared in four widely read journals—Práce, Mladá fronta, Zemědělské noviny, and Literární listy. The last publication alone had a circulation of 300,000. Almost immediately an outpouring of letters from inspired citizens arrived at newspaper, radio, and television offices throughout the country. Pressured by their followers to support Dubček’s eloquent clarion call, the Czechoslovak media advocated pluralism. I57

In a television address, Dubček offered a mild response to Vaculík’s challenge. He emphasized the importance of national unity and continued Communist Party leadership. In another speech he contended that “strikes and demonstrations” would not help the cause of reform. The Czechoslovak leader admitted that many problems required further domestic self-criticism, but he warned against a lapse into the extreme of either Novotný-like reaction or radical exuberance. As in January, Dubček spent the early summer of 1968 searching for a middle ground that would revitalize Czechoslovak society by building popular support for existing Communist Party institutions.158

Brezhnev’s earlier worries about the course of the Prague Spring now turned to panic. In July 1968 he sent an urgent letter to Dubček warning against the “destruction of the leading role of the Communist Party.” Singling out Vaculík for attack, Brezhnev argued that the “whole content of the Two Thousand Words’ platform is directed against the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and is intended to weaken the position of socialism in Czechoslovakia.” The letter expressed dismay at the “indiscriminate belittlement of party cadres.”159

Brezhnev spared no insult for those who dared to advocate political pluralism in place of the Communist Party’s monopoly on power. Dissidents “are bringing together under one political roof everyone who can serve their anti-socialist aims, ranging from the muddle-headed and those who are disoriented by the complicated political situation to open class enemies of the socialist system, from right-wing social democrats to former Hitlerites.” These groups allegedly used “various ‘clubs’ and other organizations for their subversive aims.”160

The Soviet government called on Dubček to take more vigorous action against “anti-socialist” forces before they brought “death” to the Communist Party. Abandoning the earlier hope that Dubček could inspire “unity in general” throughout Czechoslovakia, the Kremlin prohibited compromises that jeopardized established Eastern-bloc authority. Brezhnev’s letter demanded that the Czechoslovak regime “rally all communists” and “normalize” the domestic situation. A crackdown on critics and a strengthening of “healthy forces in the party” would ensure necessary order.161

Meeting with the leaders of Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria, Brezhnev voiced even more strident criticisms of the Prague Spring. In a long, rambling speech he exclaimed that “Czechoslovakia is at a dangerous phase on the path leading out of the socialist camp.” As happened during the years of Khrushchev’s leadership in the Soviet Union, limited reforms “snowballed” out of control. Brezhnev feared that Czechoslovakia “was only a small step” away from “open repudiation of Marxism and of socialism in general.”162

Soviet fears of spreading disorder—in Czechoslovakia and throughout the Eastern bloc—led to direct military intervention. Brezhnev really did not want to send Soviet tanks into Prague. He hoped that through both persuasion and threat he could convince Dubček to take a harder line with domestic opponents. The Soviet Union and its other East European allies called upon authorities in Prague to mobilize “all means of defense,” reassert “control over the mass media,” and close “the ranks of the Party” against dissident elements. These actions would protect the interests of the communist states without the cost of armed intervention against a “fraternal” nation.163

Brezhnev pleaded with Dubček to crack down on critics of the Communist Party. The Czechoslovak leader had, however, lost control of events. On 13 August Brezhnev telephoned Prague to press for an immediate internal restoration of order. Exhausted and distraught, Dubček explained that “it is impossible” to squash popular support for reform “in as short a time as you are suggesting.”164

The exuberance of the Prague Spring had infected all institutions of authority in Czechoslovak society. Dubček risked triggering a massive wave of protests if he attempted to call in military or police forces, as Novotný had tried in late 1967. “This is a complex process,” the Czechoslovak leader told Brezhnev. It “has encompassed the whole party, the whole country, the whole nation.” Confronted with Soviet demands for immediate action, Dubček responded that he did not have the capacity to make society over with a few simple moves: “I can’t just resolve these matters myself. It’s not so simple, Comrade Brezhnev, to resolve such matters.” Even if he wished to resort to force, Dubček could not count on the loyalty of the Czechoslovak army.165

The Soviet leader would not accept Dubček’s calls for patience while citizens attacked Communist Party authority. On the night of 20–21 August 1968, 165,000 soldiers and 4,600 tanks entered Czechoslovak territory from
across the Polish, Hungarian, and East German borders. This marked the beginning of "Operation Danube"—a Warsaw Pact plan to smother the Prague Spring and restore power to a reliable set of conservative leaders. The Soviet Union authored the plan, and it supplied the majority of the men and equipment.  

Hours after the invasion, Kirill Mazurov—one of Brezhnev's representatives in Prague—reported that despite the successful military operation, events had gone "haywire." "Thuggish elements have been throwing explosives and grenades at tanks, trying to provoke our soldiers. Crude anti-Soviet broadcasts are being transmitted on radio and television from various stations throughout the day." The hard-liners who Brezhnev hoped would create a more disciplined regime had "gone to pieces." In "shock" at the depth of public resistance to Warsaw Pact forces, conservatives in the Czechoslovak Communist Party failed to show what Mazurov called the necessary "initiative and firmness of purpose." "Our friends," he reported, "have made no real progress in forming a new government."  

The Warsaw Pact invasion transformed the Prague Spring from a broad search for domestic reform into a popular resistance movement against foreign occupiers. Tad Szulc, the New York Times bureau chief in the Czechoslovak capital at the time, witnessed countless manifestations of public rage. Men and women reacted with particular violence against Soviet soldiers. According to Szulc they "spat at the tanks and troopers, hurled garbage and insults, and, in many instances that first morning, tried and succeeded in setting the armored vehicles afire." Some students threw burning, gasoline-covered rags into the tanks that occupied the streets. Others painted swastika signs on foreign military vehicles. Prague descended into "guerrilla warfare." Szulc remembered watching "young people, many of them long-haired boys and girls in slacks, [fight] the tanks with their bare hands, setting them on fire with flaming torches and hitting at them with branches fallen from the trees."  

At the behest of defiant underground Czechoslovak radio broadcasts, citizens combined "guerrilla warfare" with passive resistance in the weeks after the invasion. Residents of Prague and other cities removed street signs and painted over house numbers. Unfamiliar with their surroundings, foreign soldiers found it difficult to conduct their activities without address markers. Workers initiated a series of general strikes, paralyzing necessary services throughout the country. Czechoslovak citizens denied foreign soldiers food and water. Communist Party officials who courageously defied Soviet authority issued a proclamation that captured the widespread sense of public resistance. "Do not aid the foreign troops," the reformers advised. "Pay no attention to them, ignore them!"  

Public condemnation of the Soviet invasion came from many communist countries. Rumania's leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, feared that Moscow might invade his state on the pretext of domestic "counterrevolutionary" developments. He argued that the Kremlin had no right to violate the sovereignty of its allies. "The problem of choosing the ways of socialist construction," Ceaușescu explained, "is a problem of each party, each state, and of every people... it is necessary to put an end once and for all to interference in the affairs of other states and other parties."  

The Yugoslav government contended that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was the equivalent of America's war in Vietnam. "The peoples of our country," the Communist Party of Yugoslavia announced, "once again raise their voice in protest, as they have been doing in the matters of American aggression in Vietnam... Viewed historically, the action against Czechoslovakia is all the more grave and far-reaching in its harmful effect on progress, peace, and freedom for having been undertaken by socialist countries ostensibly to protect socialism." "The progress of socialism is being opposed," the Yugoslav government proclaimed, by "the forces of stagnation and conservatism" in the United States and the Soviet Union. These two regimes had become the sources of "bloc divisions," "imperialism," "hegemony," and "war."  

The Yugoslav condemnation of Kremlin activities echoed the critical words that had come out of Beijing since the early 1960s. Moscow's hesitancy to support North Vietnam in its war against "American imperialism" had fueled Chinese allegations that Brezhnev opposed real socialist revolution. Beijing argued that the Soviet Union, like the United States, had become a "hegemon" pursuing domination rather than progressive change. In Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and the rest of the world, China contended that it was now the true guiding light of revolution. "Armed with Mao Zedong's thought," the Chinese government would "resolutely support the struggle of the people the world over against U.S. imperialism and Soviet modern revisionism."  

These criticisms of Soviet "hegemonic revisionism" and comparisons to American behavior in Vietnam resonated in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and even the Soviet Union. On 25 August 1968 eight demonstrators unfurled a collection of homemade banners in Moscow's Red Square, condemning Soviet aggression. They demanded "hands off the [Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]" and "freedom for Dubček." Another banner proclaimed "shame on
the occupiers." The protesters included a student from the Moscow Institute of Historical Archives, the mother of a young girl, and the grandson of former Soviet foreign minister Maxim Litvinov. 

When authorities placed the demonstrators on trial, ninety-five Soviet intellectuals circulated a letter condemning the prosecution. Similar criticisms of the government's repressive behavior circulated by samizdat and word of mouth. Government reports observed "negative processes" among students, intellectuals, and workers throughout the Soviet Union. One KGB informer reported that university attendees sympathized with the aims of the Prague Spring and condemned the Warsaw Pact invasion: "The very word 'opposition' is something students find appealing." Reported acts of student dissent and "hooliganism" within the Soviet Union increased during the next few months.

Brezhnev protected the "leading role" of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, but only at great cost. In response to domestic resistance throughout the Soviet bloc, he returned Dubček—after his initial incarceration—to power in Prague. Protests against the party's authority in Czechoslovakia continued until April 1969, when the Kremlin replaced Dubček with a more Novotny-like leader, Gustav Husak. Husak used concerted force to repress domestic critics.

In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Asia, Brezhnev's government never recovered the authority it had possessed before 1968. Open protests occurred less often in the early 1970s, but public disillusion became more palpable in every communist state. China, engaged in a self-proclaimed Cultural Revolution against superpower domination, emerged as a more credible model than the Soviet Union for radical change. While Mao's followers waved a "little red book" pledging power to the masses, the Soviet leader could only offer the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, a commitment to the use of force in defense of the status quo. In the eyes of many men and women, the heirs to the Russian Revolution had aged into a conservative Old Regime.

**Wuhan: "The People's Commune of China"**

Mao's China appeared to offer a "new direction" for revolution in a world dominated by conservative leaders. This image was, however, more myth than reality. By the middle of 1967 China had entered a period of virtual civil war.

Rival Red Guard factions of students and workers fought one another with escalating violence in almost every major urban area. From April through June 1967, according to one estimate, more than 100 clashes occurred in the industrial city of Wuhan alone. Of the 2.5 million people residing in this entrepôt of central China, 70,000 took part in street altercations. In less than three months, 158 people died from violence, and 1,060 suffered serious injuries. In Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Xinjiang factional disputes produced similar brutality.

During 1965 and 1966 Mao had roused public passions for the purposes of purging his opponents in the Communist Party and connecting his leadership with a growing cohort of restless youth. By 1967, however, this manufactured mass upheaval endangered the very foundations of Mao's authority. The street violence of the Red Guards undermined the functioning of Chinese society. The Great Leader could not lead in anything more than name when the basic institutions of government control suffered continued attack.

"Mao Zedong thought" became detached from the purposes of its author. Each Red Guard faction pledged its loyalty to the chairman's guiding light, but precise interpretations were a source of intense dispute. "Ultra-left" groups such as the "Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance Committee" and the "May 16 Corps" sought not only to purge "counterrevolutionary" elements in the state bureaucracy, but to create their "own political party" that would destroy all established ruling organizations, including Mao's CCP.

"Problems cannot be solved by merely dismissing a few officials," members of the Hunan group announced in an essay titled "Whither China?" Inspired by Mao, student radicals wanted to launch a revolution that would "negate the past 17 years" and "smash" the authority of old communists on the mainland. Criticizing the Great Leader's timidity, the "ultra-lefts" observed that "all of the basic social changes which must be carried out by the first Great Cultural Revolution, such as the overthrow of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie, changes in the armed forces, and the establishing of communes, have not been carried out." Radical Red Guards wanted to transform the People's Republic of China into the "People's Commune of China." Revolutionary upheaval would become a "permanent" way of life, and society would function without any institutionalized leadership.

The People's Liberation Army—China's military—reacted to the growing domestic disorder by taking matters into its own hands. Soldiers arrested hundreds of Red Guard activists. Military commanders created their own "revolutionary committees" to organize basic services and repress radical elements. The army also prevented the Cultural Revolution from spreading to frontier regions.
In Wuhan members of the military openly revolted against Mao's authority. On 13 July 1967 an entourage including Mao and Zhou Enlai came to the city, hoping to arrange an agreement between army and radical groups fighting one another in the streets. When Wang Li—a former mayor of Wuhan, and now the chairman's chief negotiator—showed some favor toward the "rebels" demands, local military officers launched a violent coup. On 20 July soldiers kidnapped Wang and his associate Xie Fuzhi. They attacked other members of the Beijing entourage and bludgeoned protesting Red Guards with the butts of their rifles. A Japanese journalist reported that soldiers “tied Wang up . . . before he was given a good beating. After that, Wang was taken to the headquarters of the military region command and paraded before demonstrators. For more than ten hours, Wang was insulted and savagely beaten.”

Mao secretly left Wuhan for Shanghai the next day. Fearful for his security against rioting members of the military, the chairman fled the situation. He sent naval gunboats and a unit of airborne paratroopers to Wuhan to restore order. On 25 July the Chinese government organized a mass rally in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square to denounce the “Wuhan reactionaries” and welcome Wang Li’s recent release. Two days later the mutiny crumbled, and Beijing purged the military leaders in the region.

The Wuhan mutiny marked what one writer calls “a decisive turning-point in the development of the Cultural Revolution.” The army’s heavy-handed actions inspired radical denunciations of the military for “separating itself from the masses.” For the first time, Red Guards seized weapons from army depots and barracks across the country. The rebels now became armed “guerrilla” fighters.

Startled by this new wave of “ultra-left” disorder, army units reacted with more force of their own. Local commanders exerted direct control over their immediate jurisdictions. As in Wuhan, soldiers battled local rebels. The Chinese military frequently acted against protesters without Beijing’s explicit approval. Everyone claimed to follow “Mao Zedong thought,” but no one was beholden to the chairman’s immediate orders any longer.

Mao really had only one choice in late 1967: to back the military against the most rebellious Red Guard groups. In earlier months the chairman had begun to advocate a “three-way alliance” among the revolutionary masses, the army, and the Communist Party. He frequently warned of the dangers arising from “extreme anarchism.” After the Wuhan mutiny these exhortations showed favoritism to the Chinese military. Mao recognized the army’s vital role in protecting domestic order and, most important, his personal authority. On 1 January 1968 the People’s Daily, Liberation Army Daily, and Red Flag (Hongqi)—all government-controlled newspapers—asserted that “the army is the fundamental pillar of the Cultural Revolution.” They emphasized the importance of reinforcing, rather than destroying, established leadership in China.

These statements marked the beginning of a government campaign to repress radical students who had gone too far in their challenges to authority. A People’s Daily editorial written by Mao announced that the nation must “resolutely overcome lack of discipline, or even, in many places, anarchy.” In later months the chairman called upon students to remain in their urban and village schools and in general to follow the orders of PLA officers.

Mao demoted the Red Guards from the vanguard of the Cultural Revolution to a secondary place, behind the more orderly soldiers in the military. Loyal worker organizations—those that rejected wage bargaining (“economism”) as practiced by Western trade unions—also attained a new prominence in the chairman’s calls for a return to factory and agricultural production. An August 1968 directive from Mao stipulated that “our country has 700 million people and the working class is the leading class.” He demanded “working-class leadership” and “cooperation with [People’s] Liberation Army fighters.” Workers, like soldiers, had the “practical experience” that radical students lacked. Mao had confidence that they would use revolutionary ideals for productive, not destructive, purposes.

In the second half of 1968 bodies of men and women began to wash up on the beaches of Hong Kong. Many were bound with rope, hand and foot, in a method called the “great binding of five flowers.” The use of this technique revealed the handiwork of organized military reprisals against radical protesters, rather than acts of random violence. The Chinese army not only repressed Red Guards; it now also summarily executed threatening elements throughout society. Mao probably learned of these brutalities from Western reports if not from his own mainland sources. The chairman made no apparent effort to curtail this military violence.

Men and women who escaped the harshest acts of the army often found themselves “sent down” to the countryside for “reeducation.” According to one scholar, the Chinese government forced more than 1.7 million urban youths to live and work in rural areas during 1968. The number of mandatory resettlements increased to approximately 2.7 million in 1969. By 1975 almost 12 million city-educated men and women had become rural toilers, many against their will. Resettlement in the countryside became a central element of the Cultural Revolution. Mao removed Red Guards from cities, where they caused trouble, and dispersed them in villages, where the challenge of producing for daily sustenance reduced the opportunities for mak-
ing revolution against the Communist Party. Resettled youths from Shanghai, for example, worked in the countryside to build canals, dig ditches, and tend the crops on collective farms. Instead of agitating for new policies, former radicals became intensive laborers, contributing to the Communist Party’s rural development projects.

The chairman spoke of peasants, workers, and soldiers in the countryside “reeducating” students and intellectuals, in direct contrast to the ideological proselytism he had advocated in earlier years. Mao turned to the peasants as a conservative force that could temper violent student anarchism. The “practical experience” of village residents would make sophisticated revolutionaries more humble and obedient. “It is absolutely necessary,” the People’s Daily explained in late 1968, “for educated young people to go to the countryside.” “They must be re-educated by workers, peasants, and soldiers under the guidance of the correct line [so that] their old thinking may be reformed thoroughly.”

Despite his criticisms of Soviet and American “hegemony,” Mao also acted in hegemonic ways. He employed anti-authoritarian rhetoric to launch the Cultural Revolution, but when public protests imperiled his authority he crushed advocates of radical change. Mao eventually relied upon the firepower and discipline of the military to maintain public obedience.

The “correct line” enforced by Mao had nothing to do with “Mao Zedong thought.” Ideas of revolution had become sources of dispute among Red Guard factions. The “correct line” represented a return to the same “democratic centralism” Lenin and Stalin had used to purge critics within the Soviet Union during earlier decades. Leonid Brezhnev employed similar rhetoric to repress fellow communists in Czechoslovakia. Mao did not invade a neighboring state in 1968, but he followed the Soviet example in deploying military force against idealistic communists who threatened to undermine his political dominance. The chairman used “reeducation” to close off creative thought and internal reform, as the Soviet leader had with his Brezhnev Doctrine.

Protesters in Paris, West Berlin, and Berkeley continued to identify Mao with the promise of a “third way”—a revolution against both American capitalism and Soviet communism. Students associated him with Che Guevara and the image of “guerrilla” warfare. In reality, Mao was a ruler (with some aspects of an emperor’s power) and not a revolutionary in the late 1960s. He sought to maintain and expand his power at virtually all costs.

Most contemporary observers failed to notice Chinese criticisms of Che for abandoning the discipline of the Cuban Communist Party. Similarly, Beijing was very circumspect in its support for student radicals overseas. Urban disorders in Europe and the United States served China’s interests by undermining rival governments, but Mao remained suspicious of the demonstrators because they acted independently. Even the self-proclaimed student “Maoists” did not appear sufficiently loyal to the chairman; in his eyes, they were still “bourgeois.” Like Soviet, American, and West European leaders, Mao favored order and discipline against the ubiquitous manifestations of popular protest in 1968.

The Social Crisis of the Nation-State

As the 1960s came to a violent close the leaders of the largest states still controlled most of the guns, finances, and communications media. The protesters on the streets remained relatively weak. The weak, however, now had momentum. The strong were on the offensive. Political power had lost its social component—its ability to command domestic obedience without force, in short its legitimacy.

Leaders in 1968 had to work much harder than in previous years to fight off challenges from their own citizens. University sit-ins, urban riots, and acts of assassination became almost normal occurrences. Public mobilization behind government programs was now increasingly rare. If the 1950s ended with widespread despair about conformist “organization men” who wore “gray flannel suits,” the 1960s closed with the commonly sung lyrics to the Beatles’ “Revolution” and John Lennon’s solo “Power to the People.”

A burst of violent energy convulsed every major society. Local grievances initially triggered protest activities, but dissatisfaction with Cold War politics broadened the range of public criticism beyond provincial concerns. Although street demonstrators in various countries drew inspiration from what they perceived as an international protest movement, they acted with little coordination or common understanding. Protesters operated in parallel, reflecting the similar—though certainly not identical—discontents and constraints that transcended national boundaries.

The combined effect of these activities was a truly “global disruption” that challenged the basic authority of the modern nation-state. A large cohort of radicals in each society sought to overturn the fundamental political structures that they perceived as corrupt and irredeemable. In the context of increasing domestic violence, gradual piecemeal reform no longer seemed feasible. This sentiment made the Chinese Cultural Revolution powerfully attractive as a mythic movement to dissolve inherited institutions.

Leaders in the United States, West Germany, France, the Soviet Union, and China managed to keep their states running, but they never recovered...
Like the protesters around them, leaders during the late 1960s questioned many of the inherited assumptions about hostility between capitalist and

The distinction between foreign and domestic politics is artificial. During the 1960s nuclear stalemate, alliance disputes, and the Vietnam War were issues of domestic, as well as foreign, policy. Excessive institutional growth, intellectual criticism, and public protest had international, in addition to obvious internal, repercussions. Social and cultural influences created tectonic shifts across frontiers, even in the largely “closed” lands of the Soviet Union and China. As the sources of international stalemate tightened and the evidence of transnational social unrest mounted, leaders in all the major states became aware of their precarious hold on power. Cold War antagonists now unexpectedly recognized their interdependence. Not only could they virtually annihilate one another; they also shared difficulties in maintaining basic order within their boundaries.

Policymakers cooperated to protect their authority against a wide range of internal challengers. Detente was, in this sense, a direct reaction to the “global disruption” of 1968. From 1969 through 1972 leaders in each of the major states attempted to reconstruct order from the international “top” down to the domestic “bottom.” They used agreement with foreign adversaries to contain increasingly virulent internal pressures. They used promises of international peace to deflect attention from domestic difficulties and to free their resources for repressive measures. Cooperation among the great powers reinforced established authorities.

Despite the chaos on the streets, the years after 1968 witnessed no significant institutional change in any of the major states. The politics of this period were profoundly conservative. At its core, detente was a mechanism for domestic fortification.

Like the protesters around them, leaders during the late 1960s questioned many of the inherited assumptions about hostility between capitalist and