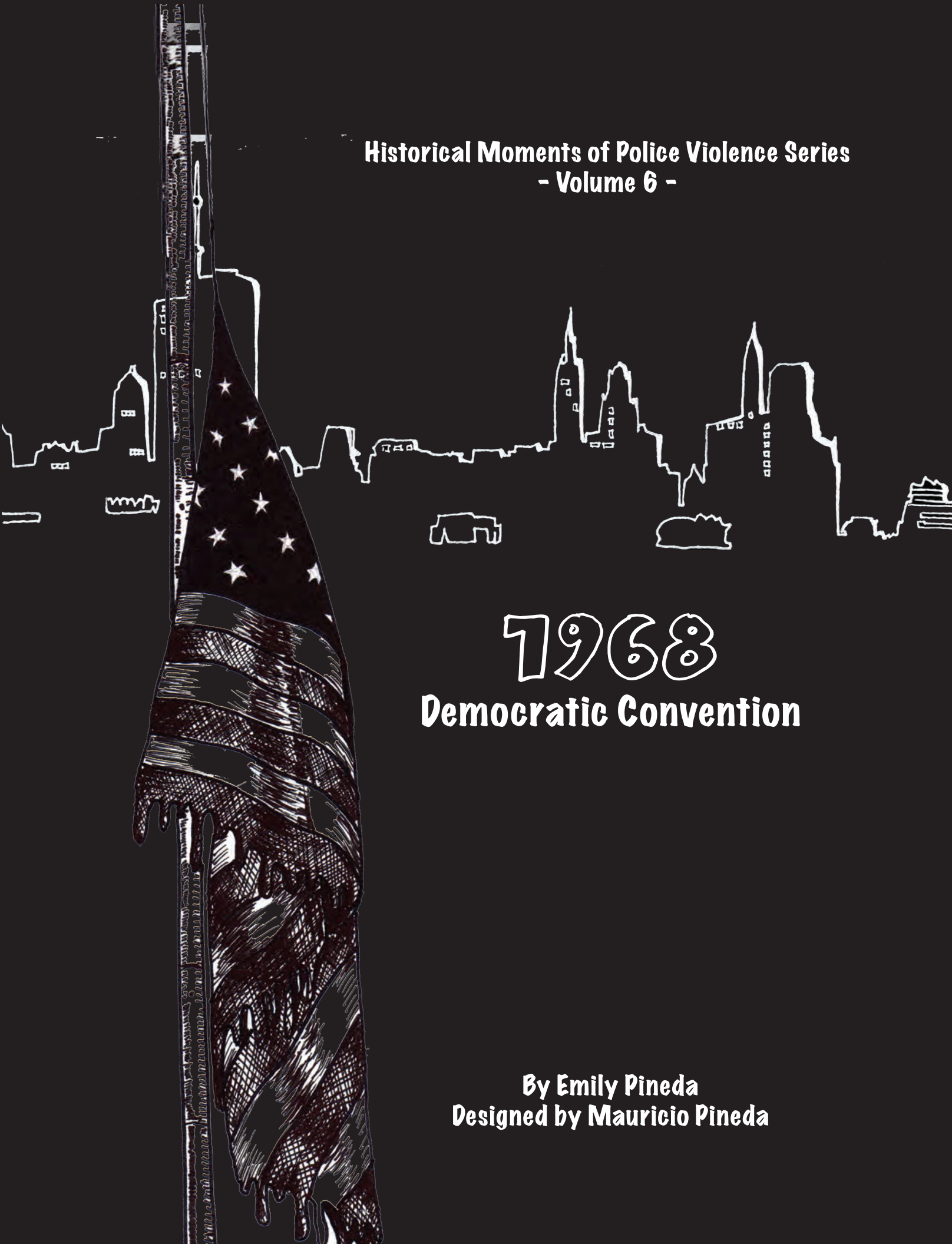


**Historical Moments of Police Violence Series
- Volume 6 -**



**1968
Democratic Convention**

**By Emily Pineda
Designed by Mauricio Pineda**

ABOUT THIS SERIES

In the last few months of 2011 into early 2012, the issue of police violence once again burst into the mainstream with the treatment of Occupy protesters.

While we were appalled at the violence directed at peaceful protesters by law enforcement, we were also dismayed that this phenomenon was treated as a novel one. The incidents were discussed in a way that was divorced from historical context. After all, the black and white images of police dogs being unleashed on peaceful protesters during the black freedom movement of the 1950s and 60s would not have been alien to the young people who were abused by law enforcement in New York and Oakland at the Occupy protests. Police violence is unfortunately not new.

In an attempt to inject some historical memory into the current considerations of police violence, Project NIA and the Chicago Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) Teaching Collective decided to develop a series of pamphlets to inform and educate the broader public about the longstanding tradition of oppressive policing toward marginalized populations (including some activists and organizers).

This series titled "Historical Moments of Policing, Violence & Resistance" features pamphlets on various topics including: Oscar Grant, the Mississippi Black Papers, Slave Patrols, the Young Lords, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the Danzinger Bridge Shootings, Black Student Protests on College Campuses, Timothy Thomas, Resistance to Police Violence in Harlem, and the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre, among others.

The pamphlets are available for free downloading at <http://policeviolence.wordpress.com>. Please spread the word about the availability of these publications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

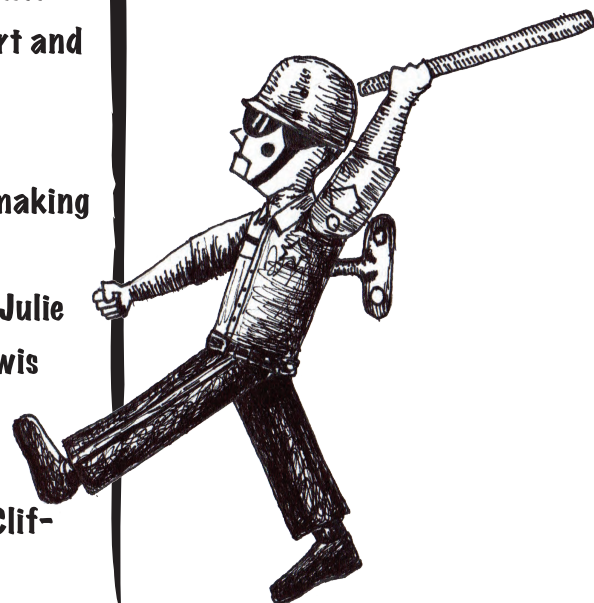
Every single person who worked on this series volunteered his or her time to this effort. We are grateful beyond words for your support and for your talents.

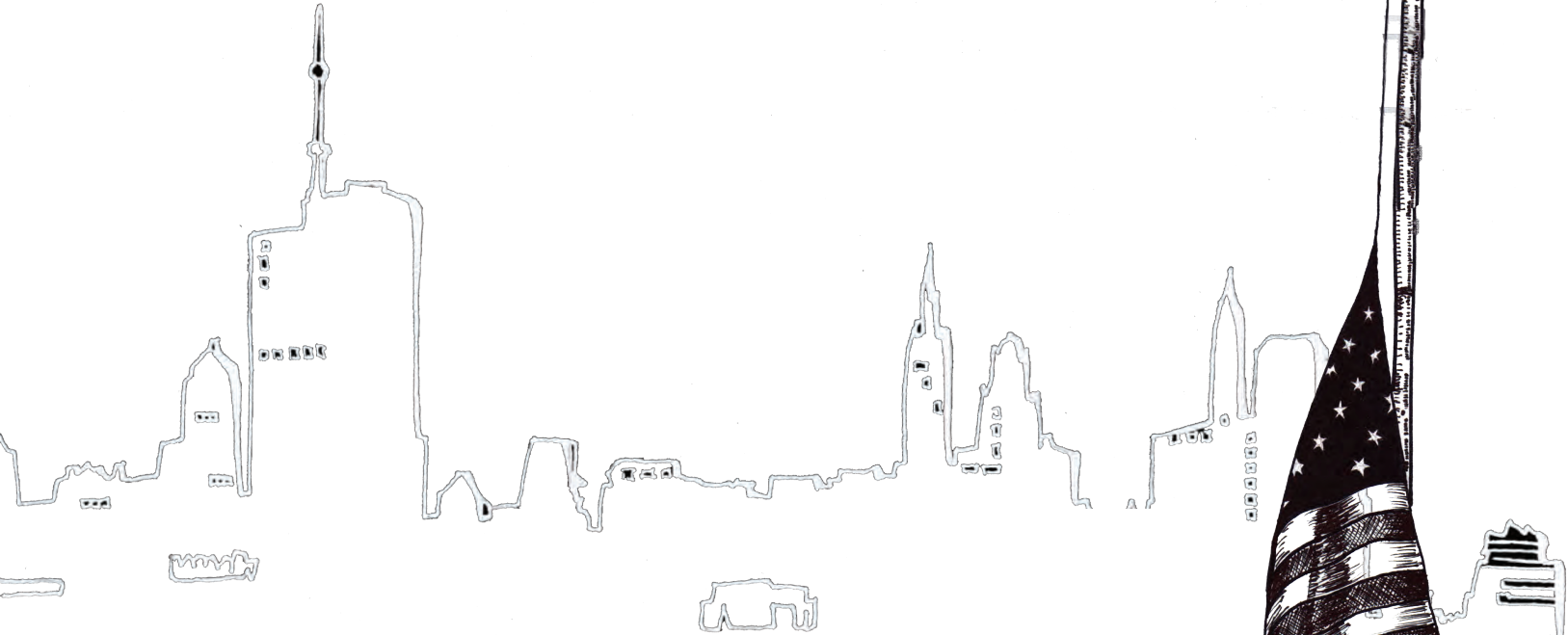
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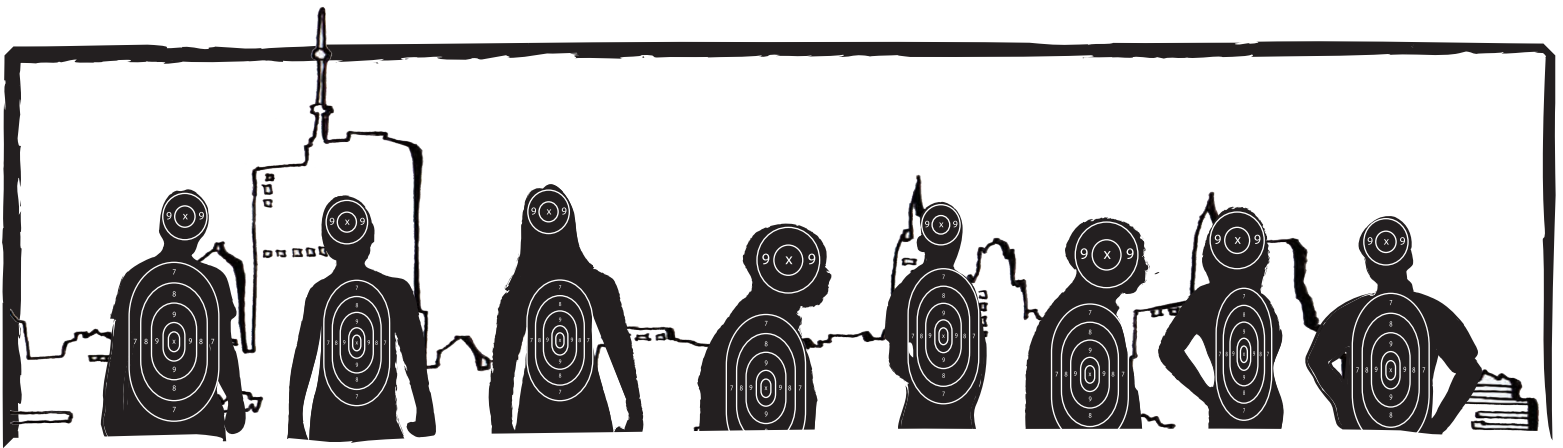
1968 Democratic Convention

In 1968, tensions were high as the Vietnam War churned on. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated, Civil Rights issues were front and center in American hearts, minds and politics, and President Lyndon B. Johnson was up for re-election. Protests and riots were commonplace as many frustrated Americans clamored for fairness and freedom.

This was the backdrop to the Democratic Convention in Chicago, scheduled to take place from August 26 through August 29, 1968. Law enforcement—including the National Guard—was on high alert for this big event. Police were on the defensive and when minor disturbances did break out, they were quick to resort to oppressive and extreme actions against protestors and innocent bystanders. In order to ensure “safety” and “order,” law enforcement relied on tear gas, mace, and clubbing to control the crowds. Most shockingly, Chicago Police already had a standing order from Mayor Richard J. Daley to “shoot to kill” any individuals who were deemed to be a threat.

The tactics used by police led to indiscriminate violence toward anyone situated near or around protestors gathered in Chicago in August 1968. This included onlookers, residents who happened to be passing through, newsmen and women, and photographers. The events surrounding the convention, which aired live on television for the entire nation to witness, were among the most brutal police assaults that Americans had ever seen. The violence shocked the entire country. The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence described the events surrounding the 1968 Democratic Convention as a “police riot.” The truth, however, is that rather than being a “riot” which conveys something spontaneous and perhaps disorganized, law enforcement in Chicago displayed systematic brutality over the course of five days.

¹ Daniel Walker and the Chicago Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence published a report immediately following the events of the Democratic Convention. Released in December 1968, *Rights in Conflict: Chicago's 7 Brutal Days* was a review of over 20,000 pages of statements from 3437 eyewitnesses and participants, 180 hours of film, and over 12,000 still photographs. The report stands today as one of the authoritative accounts of what transpired in Chicago during the Convention. Much of the information cited in this pamphlet is derived from Walker and his team's investigation.



BACKGROUND

In retrospect, it seems that all of the ingredients were present for an eruption at the 1968 Democratic Convention...

On October 21-22, 1967, the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE) organized a protest march and rally of 100,000 people to the Pentagon. After this successful demonstration, activists began to plan for antiwar protests to take place in Chicago when it was announced as the site for the Democratic Convention. Even after Lyndon B. Johnson announced his decision not to seek another Presidential term on March 31, 1968, frustrations with the war and civil rights issues continued to run high (especially among young people and students).

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4th—just four months short of the convention—riots broke out in more than 100 cities, including Chicago. There, nine black citizens were killed and 20 blocks were burned on the Westside of the city. In the aftermath of the Chicago riots, Mayor Daley voiced his dissatisfaction with the police force's "conservative" handling of the rioters and subsequently issued a "shoot to kill" order for law enforcement, insisting that future rioters would be handled harshly. His orders were that the police should "shoot to kill any arsonist and shoot to maim or cripple anyone looting."



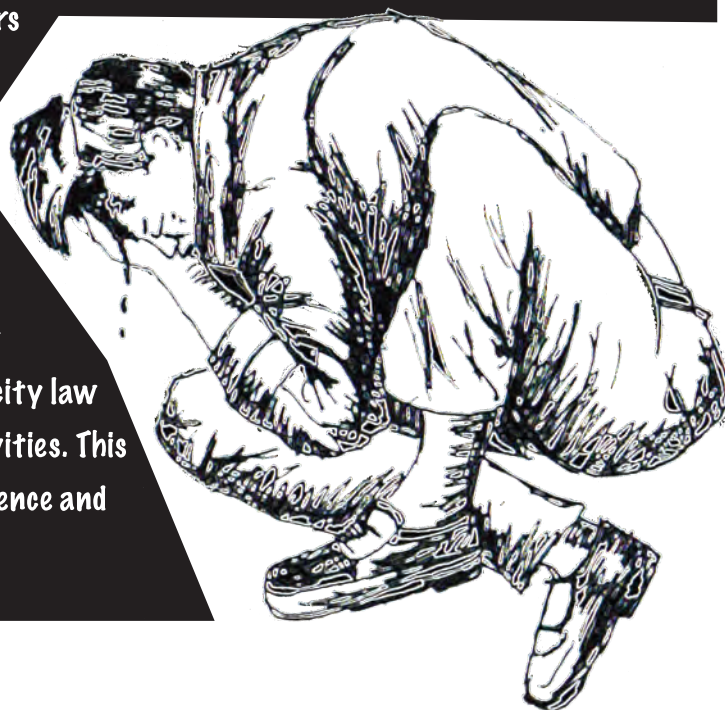
The Yippies

In 1967, a group of young people established themselves as the Youth International Party (YIP). The members who were called YIPPIES had revolutionary aims and sought to create a movement that would advocate for radical change in the United States. YIP, headed by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, was an outgrowth of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) but soon became independent. Hoffman described the objectives of YIP as:

1. The blending of pot and politics grass leaves movement – a cross-fertilization of the hippie and New Left philosophy.
2. A connecting link that would tie as much as the underground as was willing into some gigantic national get-together.
3. The development of a model for an alternative society.
4. The need to make some statement, especially in revolutionary action-theater terms, about LBJ, the Democratic Party, electoral politics, and the state of the nation (cited in *Rights in Conflict*, p.22).

YIPPIES relied on humor and street theater to convey their demands. Members of the YIPPIES including Allen Ginsberg and many others played a role in planning and carrying out the protest events and gatherings in Chicago. Critics suggest that the role of the YIPPIES in planning Convention protests has been overblown and to be sure they seemed to be more successful at garnering media attention than in successfully mobilizing people. Regardless, they did plan a "Festival of Life" which they hoped would contrast with what they termed the "Convention of Death." They wanted to attract famous musicians and thousands of other participants to Chicago but the city refused to issue a permit for the "Festival of Life." Frank Kush, who interviewed retired police officers for his book *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic Convention*, suggests that the YIPPIES were considered to be "longhairs" by the cops. Longhair was slang for a hippie. As YIPPIES became the central face of dissent in Chicago, it arguably made it easy for police officers to create an "us versus them" confrontational climate.

The police zeroed in on anyone who looked like "longhairs" and targeted them as threats to public safety. YIP as well as MOBE applied for multiple permits to organize, camp, and rally at various central locations around Chicago and all their requests were denied. Thus, whenever these groups gathered, they were seen to be in violation of city law and ordinance and therefore seen as engaging in illegal activities. This gave the police force a pretext to act against them with violence and impunity.





WELCOME TO CHICAGO 1968

On the Friday before Convention week, 6,000 National Guardsmen gathered to practice riot-control drills. Additionally, 100 soldiers in Ford Hood, Texas were ordered to Chicago to assist with crowd control. All of the soldiers refused to deploy. For their insubordination, 43 soldiers were arrested— all African American. The sheer number of forces lined up to take action against potential dissidents and demonstrators set a climate of confrontation even before the Convention got underway.

Monday, August 26

As early as August 18, National Mobilization (MOBE) members were training demonstrators in knowing their legal rights, how to lead nonviolent demonstrations and techniques to be used in the event of a confrontation with police. Protest leaders also decided that when asked, they would voluntarily leave the occupied parks.

As more protestors began to arrive in Chicago, amassing in large numbers in Lincoln Park and Grant Park, the police presence became larger and more visible. 300-400 protestors gathered in Lincoln Park Monday night. Abbie Hoffman told a group, "We're not here to fight anybody. If we are told to leave, then leave."

At about 9 p.m., the group left the park in an evening march, headed south on Clark Street. As police attempted to disperse the crowd, many were injured, including innocent bystanders. Walker's report describes one such account: A man and a woman, walking on LaSalle Street parallel to the march, said they saw 15 to 20 policemen with swinging clubs charge west into the marchers at Division Street. The pair crossed Division behind the police charge and then went up an alley toward Wells. They approached six policemen in the alley, one of whom asked the man where he had come from. The man, his voice breaking, twice said: "The street." A policeman grabbed him by the shirt, slammed him against the wall, and said: "Then why is your heart beating so fast?" Then, the man says, "he took the club, hit me once in the groin, hit me in the face with his fist once. I went down and covered my head with my hands and they ordered me to get out of there. As I turned to go I was hit several times on the body by him and several other policemen."



Additionally, several media personnel from Newsweek, the Chicago Sun-Times, CBS and NBC were also victims of police abuse while attempting to report and photograph the treatment of protestors. These reports are also documented in Walker's report:

Jeff Lowenthal and Marv Kupfer (Newsweek)

Photographer Jeff Lowenthal took pictures of the action. He said he heard the police say, "Get the cameras" and "Beat the press." He believes his efforts attracted police to him. He was struck on the arms and shoulder while attempting to show police his press identification.

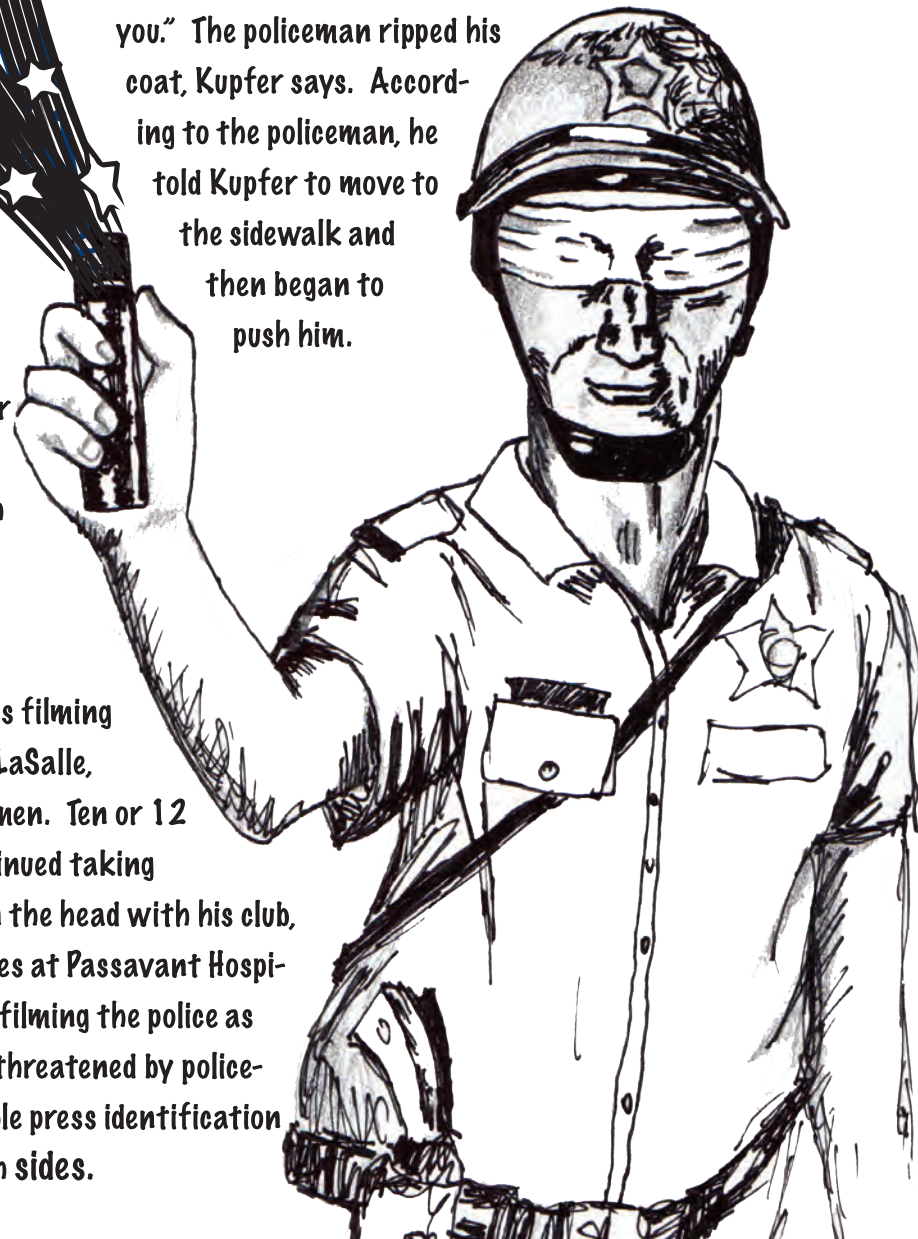
Reporter Marv Kupfer witnessed the Lowenthal incident. Kupfer was wearing Newsweek credentials (blue helmet, hotel and press credentials around his neck), when a policeman grabbed him by his lapels. Kupfer states that the policeman held onto him, saying, "Get out of here or I'll kill you." The policeman ripped his coat, Kupfer says. According to the policeman, he told Kupfer to move to the sidewalk and then began to push him.

Robert Black (Sun-Times)

At 9:30 p.m., Sun-Times photographer Robert Black was also on Division Street, between Clark and LaSalle. He was dressed conservatively, and wore a press armband and a helmet labeled Sun-Times. A witness says Black was taking pictures of a demonstrator being beaten by police near a squad car when a policeman noticed him. The officer walked over to him and struck him twice with his nightstick.

Delos Hall (CBS-TV)

At about 10:30 p.m., CBS-TV cameraman Delos Hall was filming the demonstrators on Division Street near Wells and LaSalle, shooting without artificial lights, behind three policemen. Ten or 12 other policemen ran up to Hall from behind as he continued taking pictures of the demonstrators. One officer hit Hall on the head with his club, opening a scalp wound. (It later required seven stitches at Passavant Hospital). Hall fell to one knee, but then got up to continue filming the police as they charged the demonstrators. He was jostled and threatened by policemen, but was not hit again. Hall was wearing no visible press identification but his movie camera was labeled "CBS NEWS" on both sides.



A summary of the clearing of Clark Street was described by one observer:

The demonstrators were forced out onto Clark Street and once again a traffic jam developed. Cars were stopped, the horns began to honk, people couldn't move, people got gassed inside their cars, people got stoned inside their cars, police were the objects of stones, and taunts, mostly taunts. As you must understand, most of the taunting of the police was verbal. There were stones thrown of course, but for the most part it was verbal. But there were stones being thrown and of course the police were responding with tear gas and clubs and every time they could get near enough to a demonstrator they hit him. But again you had this police problem within—this really turned into a police problem. They pushed everybody out of the park, but this night there were a lot more people in the park than there had been during the previous night and Clark Street was just full of people and in addition was now full of gas because the police were using gas on a much larger scale this night. So the police were faced with the task, which took them about an hour or so, of hitting people over the head and gassing them enough to get them out of Clark, which they did.

At 11:00, a patrol car circled the park, announcing from its loudspeaker that it was curfew and those in the park needed to leave. Most did—several hundred people—but hundreds remained. Meanwhile, three busloads of officers waited five blocks north of the crowd, in anticipation of further confrontation. Protestors created a barricade with picnic tables and garbage cans, in case of police action, and in response officers drove a single squad car into the barricade. The final clearing of the park occurred around 12:30 a.m., when Task Force officers threw four canisters of tear gas and four smoke bombs toward the crowd. As people tried to leave the park, officers decided to throw those near the South Pond into the water. One account in the Walker report illustrates:

A young man and his girlfriend were both grabbed by officers. He screamed, "We're going, we're going," but they threw him into the pond. The officers grabbed the girl, knocked her to the ground, dragged her along the embankment and hit her with their batons on her head, arms, back and legs. The boy tried to scramble up the embankment to her, but police shoved him back into the water at least twice. He finally

got to her and tried to pull her in the water, away from police. He was clubbed on the head five or six times. An officer shouted, "Let's get the fucking bastards!" but the boy pulled her in the water and the police left. The girl required seven stitches in her head. Two ministers attempting to act as a buffer at the pond were shoved away. One of them was struck in the back. Both of them were ordered to "run you bastards, run."

By the end of the night, 24 people had been treated for injuries, most of which were lacerations.



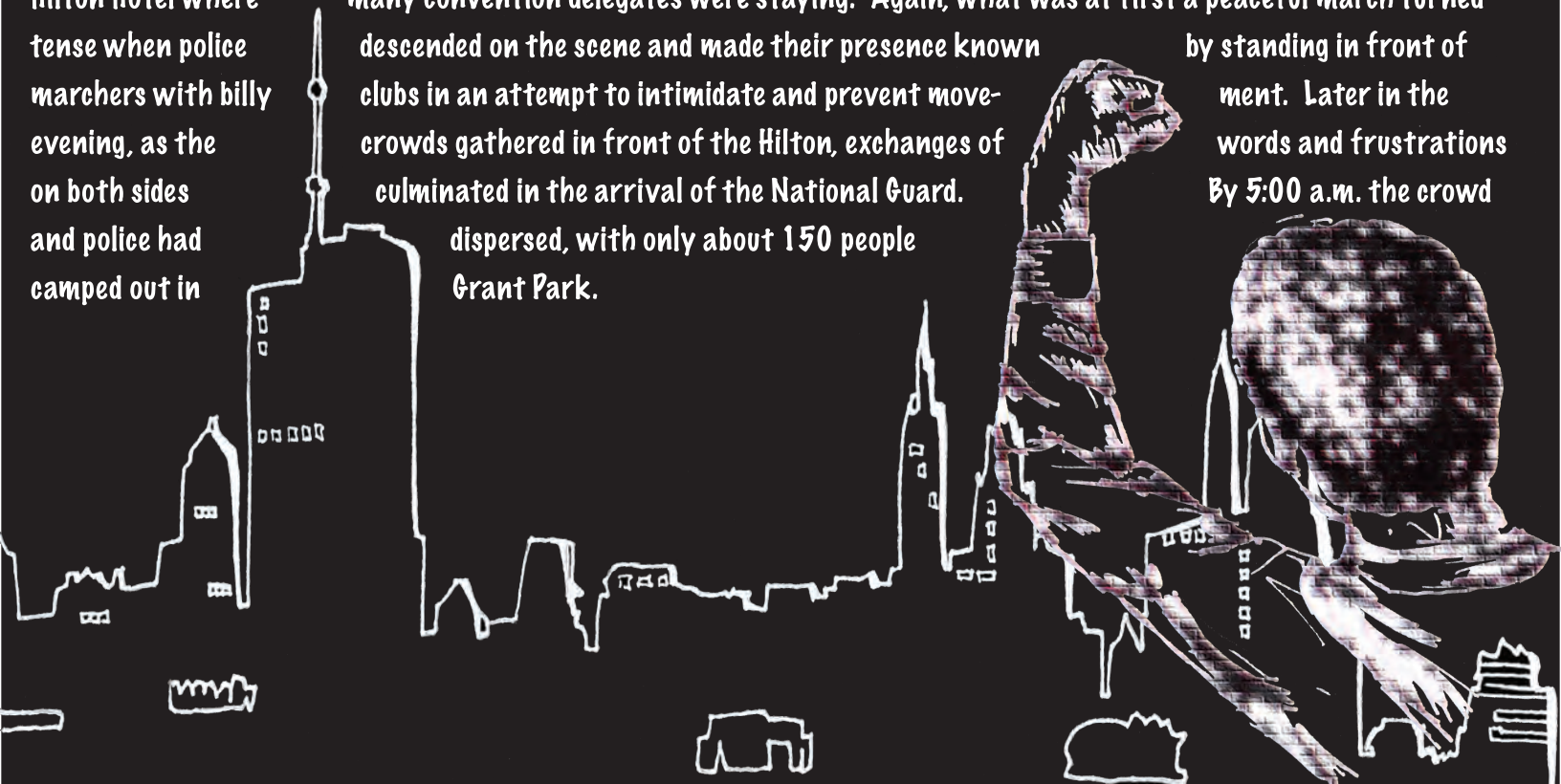
TUESDAY, AUGUST 27

In the early afternoon, an emergency meeting attended by about 50 clergymen and community residents was held at the Church of the Three Crosses. The group wanted to find a way to ensure that peaceful demonstrators could sleep in the public parks. They issued a statement that read in part: "The best interests of the community would be served by the withdrawal of massive police forces from Lincoln Park and the surrounding community." An instructor at the McCormick Theological Seminary who attended the meeting explained the group's position in support of the right of peaceful assembly: "If they [the police] want to gas us, people of Chicago will realize that it isn't just kids, but respectable people flipping in. We're going to celebrate freedom and peace for this community, for Chicago, for Vietnam."

Later that evening, the committee held a vigil to dramatize its peaceful purpose in Lincoln Park, but individuals were met with immediate police resistance. Demonstrators were instructed to sit down, lock arms and remain calm in the face of any provocation. Many were ready with handkerchiefs and surgical masks to protect themselves from anticipated tear gassing. One attorney, who was a bystander near the event, described it as follows:

"Wearing my suit and having an all-American crew cut, I was wholly accepted behind police lines in their staging area prior to their movement on the groups in the park. Other strangers, not so attired, were ordered away. I believe I may have been taken as some official. For approximately one and one-half hours I stood next to various groups of policemen who were waiting for their orders and listened to their many unguarded and extemporaneous discussions. There seemed to be almost without exception, an attitude or mentality of impatience about 'getting started' and it was the normal thing for policemen to talk about how anxious they were to crack some heads. As I wandered from group to group, those who were saying anything seemed obsessed with getting a 'Commie' or 'Hippies' and what they would do to them. I am sure that there were many policemen who did not feel this way, but they were not talking or protesting what their fellow officers were saying. What I am trying to say is that there was almost a circus air about the hoped-for opportunities to show the protestors what they thought of them."

Later in the evening, many groups of demonstrators converged in a march toward Grant Park, across the street from the Hilton Hotel where many convention delegates were staying. Again, what was at first a peaceful march turned tense when police descended on the scene and made their presence known by standing in front of marchers with billy clubs in an attempt to intimidate and prevent movement. Later in the evening, as the crowds gathered in front of the Hilton, exchanges of words and frustrations culminated in the arrival of the National Guard. By 5:00 a.m. the crowd dispersed, with only about 150 people camped out in Grant Park.



WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28

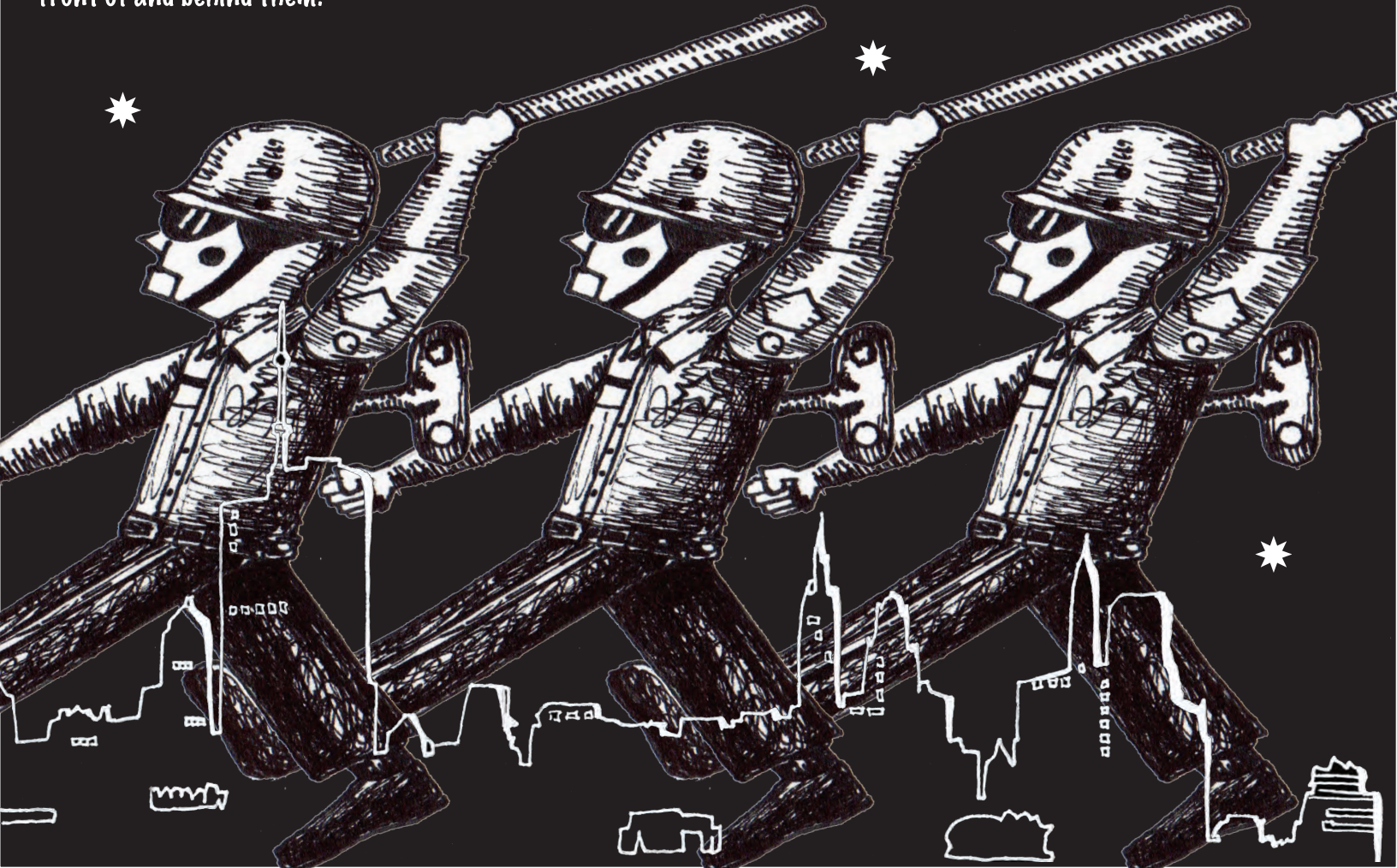


Wednesday marked the culmination of the violence of Convention week. The events of the previous days, coupled with the frustrations and tensions among police and protestors, resulted in a chain of events that resulted in injuries to more than 100 people, with many more treated by onsite medics who were part of the Medical Committee for Human Rights. The day began with an antiwar rally in Grant Park convened by MOBE and attended by between 10,000 to 15,000 protestors. In preparation, 600 police officers surrounded the park while National Guardsmen positioned themselves on the roofs of the nearby field house and museums.

During one of the speeches at the rally, a demonstrator climbed up the flagpole to the left of the bandshell and began lowering it to half-mast. Three officers grabbed the young man, removed him from the flagpole and arrested him. The flag was then lowered by another group and replaced with a red or perhaps blood-spattered shirt. This was the impetus for great incitement of the crowd's already simmering frustrations. As protestors tried to prevent other arrests from occurring by throwing objects at police and shouting, more law enforcement officials descended on the crowd. Police officers were met by a line of MOBE marshals standing together in solidarity across from them, arms linked. The police pushed through the human chain and charged the crowd. An excerpt from the Walker report describes the series of violent events that took place within a span of less than 20 minutes:



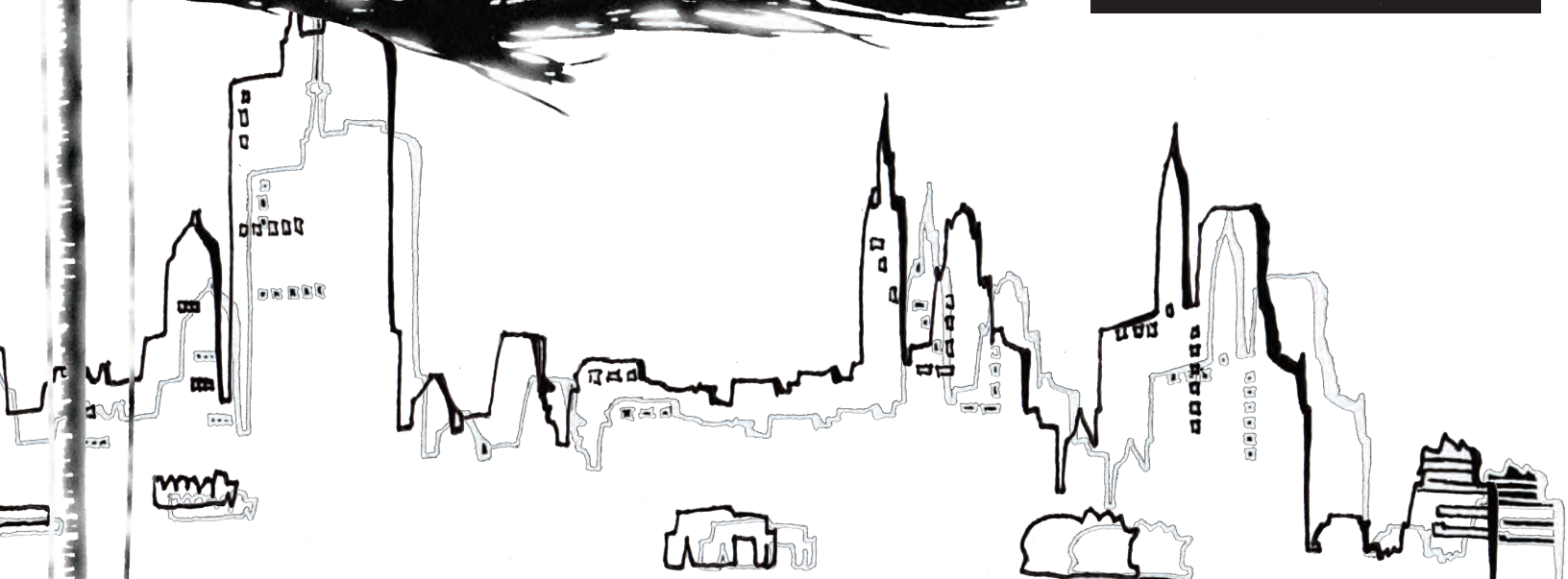
"At first, according to the statement given by a correspondent from the St. Louis paper, 'the police stepped forward in unison, jabbing in an upward motion with their nightsticks with each step and [looking] like a well-drilled marching unit...Suddenly they stopped in unison and began flailing with their clubs in all directions...People scattered...Some went down, screaming and cursing and moaning. I saw a number of women...literally run over. In the wink of an eye, the police appeared to have lost all control.' As the police moved into the crowd, benches were piled in front of and behind them."





After the rally, a march to the Amphitheatre was announced and joined by 6,000 protestors. Because protestors did not have a permit, however, they were not allowed to move forward. Negotiations were attempted to no avail. Protestors found a route to Michigan Avenue over the Jackson bridge after discovering that the Balbo and Congress Avenue bridges were blocked by National Guard troops holding .30 caliber machine guns. When the crowd moved north to the Conrad Hilton, demonstrators and bystanders were beaten, clubbed, maced, tear gassed and arrested. Though not the most violent of encounters during the convention, this approximately seventeen-minute conflict was viewed nationwide by those watching convention coverage, including the

delegates giving speeches inside the Amphitheatre. Demonstrators chanted "The world is watching," and indeed it was. After this melee, 500 antiwar delegates marched from the Amphitheatre to the Hilton and many joined over 4,000 protestors in Grant Park, where they were allowed to stay the night.

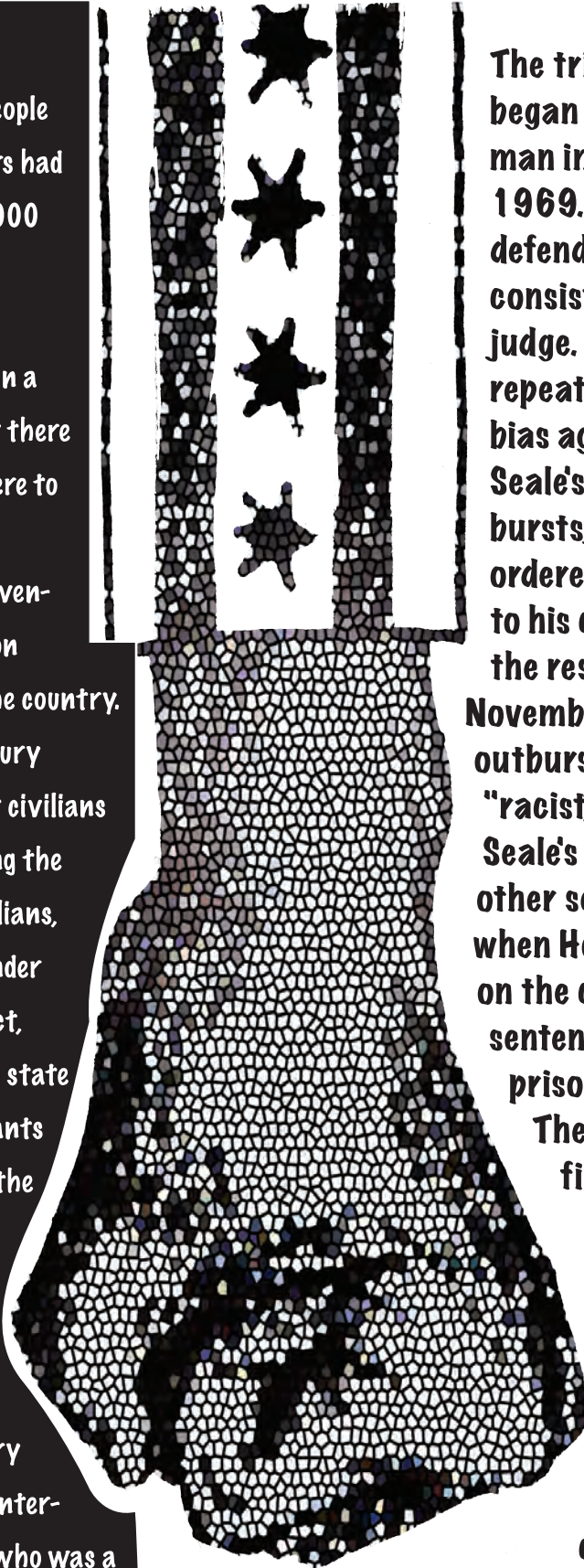


CONCLUSION

At the close of the convention, 668 people had been arrested, 111 demonstrators had been treated at hospitals, and over 1,000 individuals had received treatment by medics on the scene.

On September 9, Mayor Daley stated in a slip of the tongue, "The policeman isn't there to create disorder, the policeman is there to preserve disorder." His statement was profoundly ironic. The Democratic Convention of 1968 pulled the curtain back on police brutality for the majority of the country.

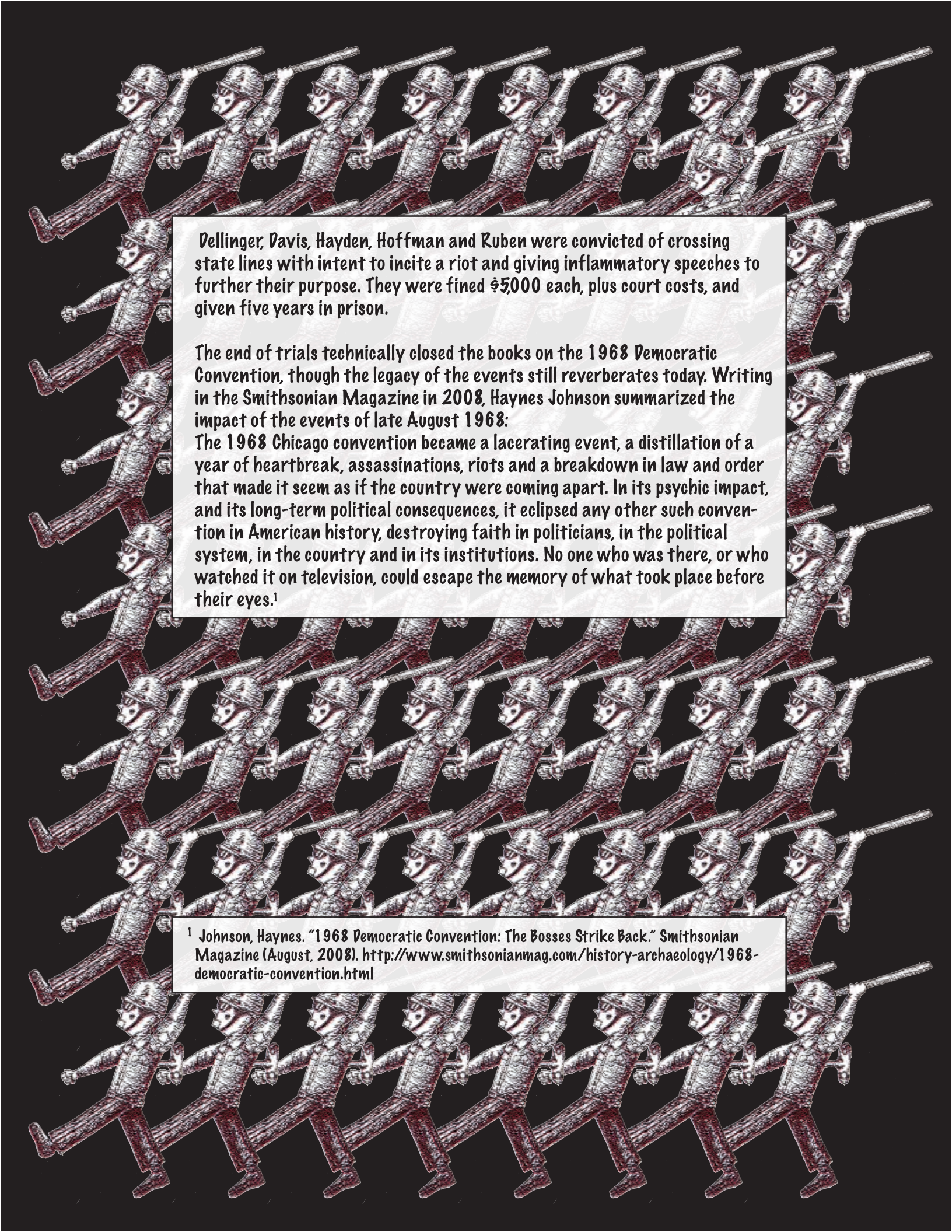
On March 20, 1969, a Chicago grand jury indicted eight police officers and eight civilians in connection with the disorders during the Democratic Convention. The eight civilians, called the "Chicago 8," were charged under provisions of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, which made it a federal crime to cross state lines to incite a riot. The eight defendants included: David Dellinger, chairman of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, Rennie Davis and Tom Hayden who were members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin who were leaders of the Youth International Party (YIPPIES), Lee Weiner who was a research assistant at Northwestern University, John Froines who was a professor at the University of Oregon and Bobby Seale who was a founder of the Black Panthers.



The trial of the "Chicago 8" began before Judge Julius Hoffman in Chicago on September 24, 1969. It was a major circus. The defendants were disruptive and consistently talked back to the judge. The defense attorneys repeatedly accused the judge of bias against them. Because of Seale's repeated courtroom outbursts, Judge Hoffman had ordered him gagged and chained to his chair on October 29. When the restraints were removed on November 3, Seale resumed his outbursts, calling Hoffman a "racist," a "fascist" and a "pig." Seale's trial was severed from the other seven on November 5, 1969, when Hoffman declared a mistrial on the conspiracy charges and sentenced him to four years in prison for contempt.

The now "Chicago 7" case finally went to the jury on February 14, 1970. The next day Judge Hoffman convicted all 7 defendants, along with defense attorneys William Kunstler and Leonard Weinglass, of contempt of court. Kunstler had told the judge the trial was a "legal lynching" for which Judge Hoffman was "wholly responsible." The jury returned its verdicts on February 18, 1970. Froines and Weiner were acquitted.





Dellinger, Davis, Hayden, Hoffman and Ruben were convicted of crossing state lines with intent to incite a riot and giving inflammatory speeches to further their purpose. They were fined \$5,000 each, plus court costs, and given five years in prison.

The end of trials technically closed the books on the 1968 Democratic Convention, though the legacy of the events still reverberates today. Writing in the *Smithsonian Magazine* in 2008, Haynes Johnson summarized the impact of the events of late August 1968:

The 1968 Chicago convention became a lacerating event, a distillation of a year of heartbreak, assassinations, riots and a breakdown in law and order that made it seem as if the country were coming apart. In its psychic impact, and its long-term political consequences, it eclipsed any other such convention in American history, destroying faith in politicians, in the political system, in the country and in its institutions. No one who was there, or who watched it on television, could escape the memory of what took place before their eyes.¹

¹ Johnson, Haynes. "1968 Democratic Convention: The Bosses Strike Back." *Smithsonian Magazine* (August, 2008). <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/1968-democratic-convention.html>

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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

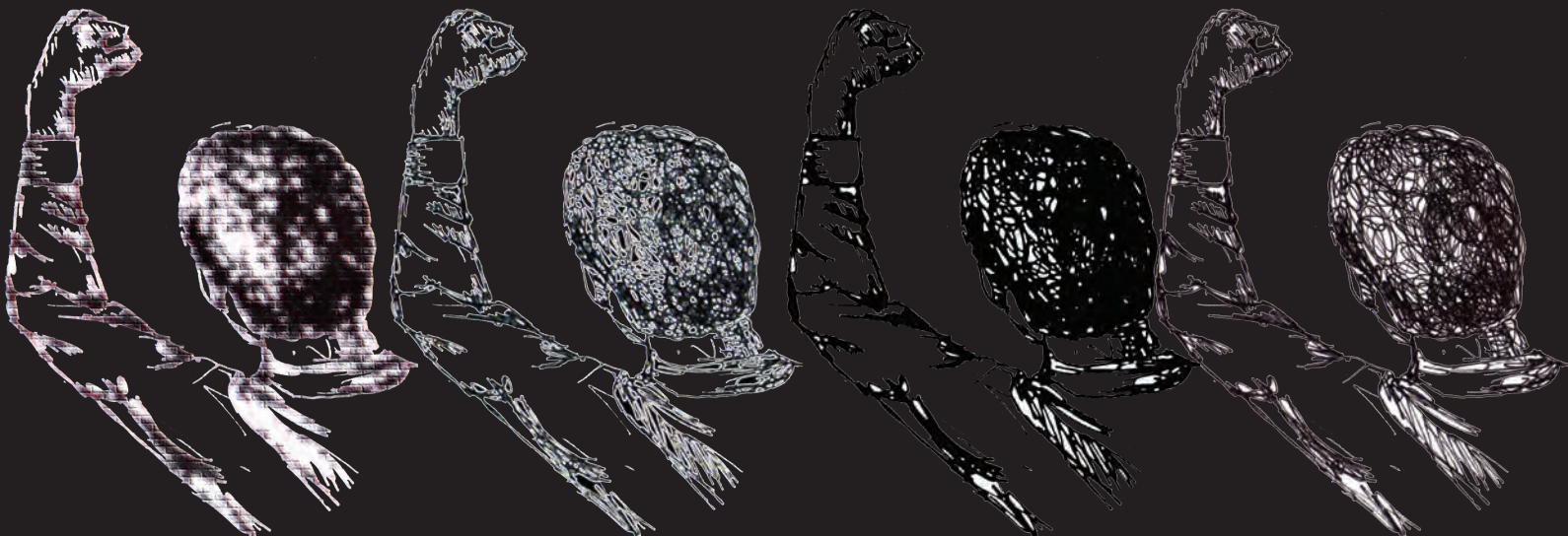
Books

- Rights in Conflict, by Daniel Walker
- Chicago, '68, by David Farber
- The Whole World Was Watching: The Streets of Chicago: 1968, by Tom Hayden
- Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, by Frank Kusch
- No One Was Killed: Documentation & Meditation : Convention Week, Chicago—August 1968, by John Schultz

Videos

- Summer '68 and Yippie by Newsreel (political filmmaking collective in the '60s)
- Chicago Convention Challenge by Third World Newsreel
- Medium Cool (1969): cinema verité from Chicago, 1968
- Conventions: The Land Around Us (1970)

**The website <http://chicago68.com> has an extensive list of resources and related websites as well.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you believe the police engaged in such extreme preparation and action for the Democratic Convention? What were they worried about?
2. What steps could have been taken in advance of Convention Week in terms of police/demonstrator communication that could have prevented the confrontations that ultimately occurred?
3. What do you think was in the minds of the individual police officers involved in the events? Why do you think they acted as they did?
4. Discuss the implications that "mob mentality" had during the events of Convention Week from the perspective of both the police and the protestors. If either side had been outnumbered, how might events have been different?
5. What are the lasting effects of the 1968 Democratic Convention?

