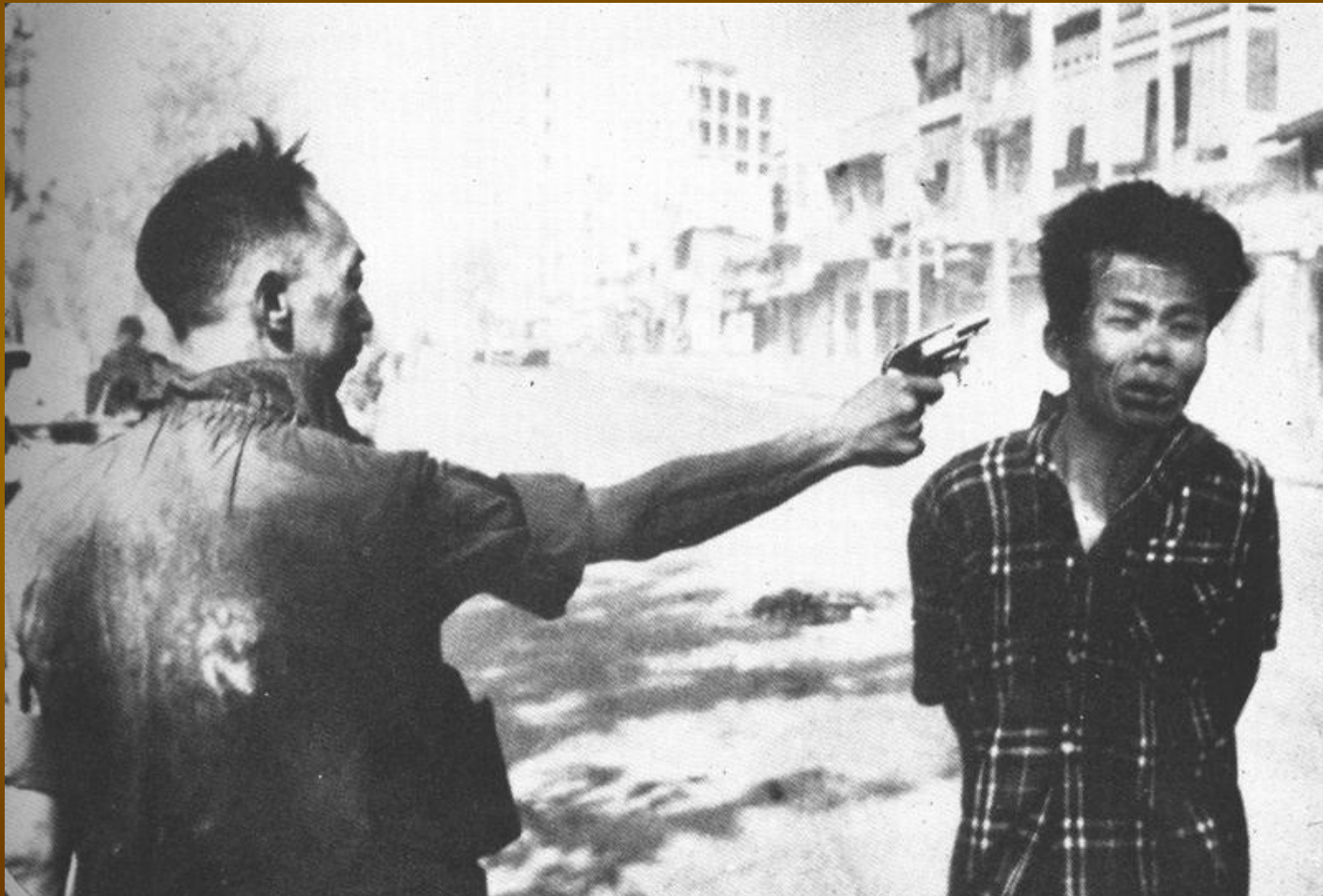




# The Tet Offensive, 1968

The Vietnam War's Turning Point?

# The Tet Offensive: The Eddie Adams Picture



# Background to Tet – January 1968

- 1.) North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo – concern about another front in Asia – (North Koreans had attempted assassination of South Korean leader the previous day) – crew released in December, only Navy ship still held
- 2.) Siege at Khe Sanh – begins January 21 (will last until April 8) – fears of another Dien Binh Phu

# Beginning of the Offensive

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- 1.) Struck 36 of 44 provincial capitals, five of six major cities, 64 district capitals, and 50 hamlets
- 2.) Raid on the US Embassy – got into the compound – lasted about six hours - all 19 killed or severely wounded
- 3.) Also hit Saigon's airport, presidential palace, and military headquarters
- 4.) Most successful attack in Hue – held the city for a month

# Footage from Tet Offensive – CBS News

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- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm3WimttZjc&feature=related>

# Military Assessment of Tet – a defeat for the Communists

- 1.) No collapse of Saigon – South Vietnamese did not welcome them as liberators
- 2.) Losses – may have been as high as 40,000 – the Viet Cong took the brunt of the losses – Hanoi expected to do better

# For the U.S. – A “Costly Victory”

- 1.) US losses more than 1100, ARVN 2300
- 2.) More than 12, 500 civilians killed
- 3.) Devastating Effect on American public opinion – 78 percent of Americans said no progress was being made; 26 percent approved Johnson’s handling of the war
- 4.) Increase in the credibility gap – Tet seemed to show LBJ’s progress offensive was an exaggeration, to some a lie – Kennedy speech

# Tet's Impact on Washington

- 1.) Shock at the White House – divided the staff, Rostow still hawkish, McPherson and others more dovish
- 2.) Military – wanted Johnson to take important decisions – perception of being stretched thin – wanted a reserve call-up
- 3.) Westmoreland – wanted to expand the war into Laos and Cambodia, southern North Vietnam



# Vietnam



# Impact of Tet

- 4.) Military Request for 206,000 more men – half to Vietnam, half to reserve – effort to persuade the president but was more pessimistic in order to persuade
- 5.) Defense Secretary Clark Clifford – ordered a full scale review – influenced by civilian strategists in the Pentagon – pushed for a change in strategy, de-escalation, getting Saigon to do more

# Consideration of a bombing halt

- 1.) Secretary of State Dean Rusk – now pushed for a bombing halt – thought Hanoi damaged by Tet – chance for peace talks
- 2.) Johnson – thought US might now be able to act from strength
- 3.) Uncertainty at the White House reflected in the public mood

# "Atmosphere of Gloom"

- 1.) Robert Kennedy's speech
- 2.) Media reporting on the war – image of chaos and defeat
- 3.) Walter Cronkite - [YouTube - Walter Cronkite Remembers His Tet Offensive Editorial](#)
- 4.) NYTimes story – March 10, 1968 – Westmoreland's request for 206,000 – produced an uproar

# Antiwar momentum

- 1.) Congress – 139 House members call for a review of policy
- 2.) March 12, 1968 - New Hampshire primary – McCarthy almost upsets Johnson
- 3.) March 16, 1968 – Robert Kennedy enters the race [YouTube - Robert Kennedy for President](#)
- 4.) "Gold Crisis" intensifies fears of escalation
- Unknown at the time – March 16, 1968, the My Lai massacre
- 5.) Johnson meets with the Wise Men – they urge de-escalation

# Johnson's withdrawal

- Johnson proposes a bombing halt north of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel
- [YouTube - Lyndon Johnson - Remarks on Decision to not seek Reelection](#)
- [YouTube - Lyndon B. Johnson I Will Not Run Address](#)
- North Vietnam agrees to Peace talks in Paris – immediate problem, Saigon and the NLF

# 1968 – after Tet in Vietnam

- 1.) Military action in Vietnam remains stepped up – offensives in May and August
- 2.) US accelerates Pacification Program and Chieu Hoi program – amnesty to Viet Cong
- 3.) Phoenix Program developed by CIA
- 4.) Expansion in size of South Vietnamese Army

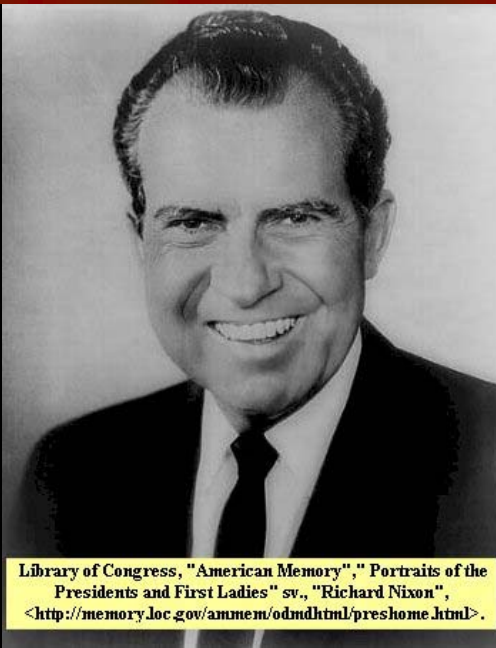
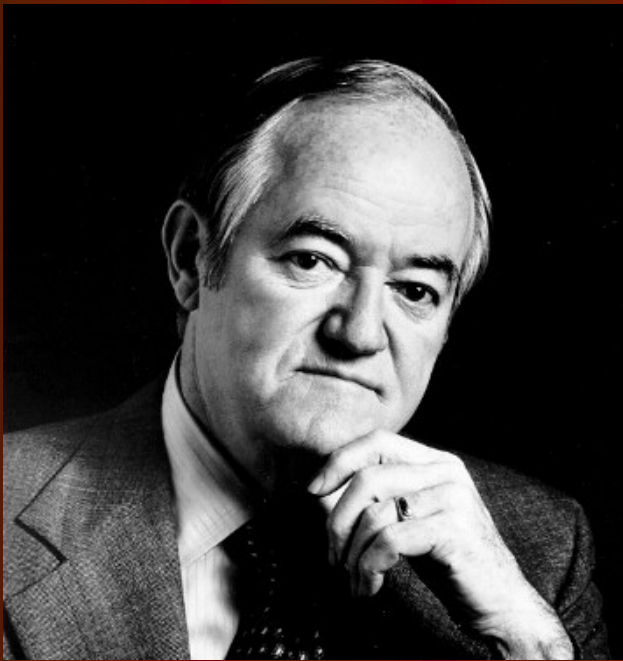
# 1968 – Violence in America

- 1.) Assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, April 1968
- 2.) Assassination of Robert Kennedy in June [YouTube - Robert Kennedy's assassination](#)
- 3.) Chicago Democratic convention – riots and protests [YouTube - 1968 DNC: Democratic nightmare in Chicago](#)



# Humphrey vs. Nixon vs. Wallace

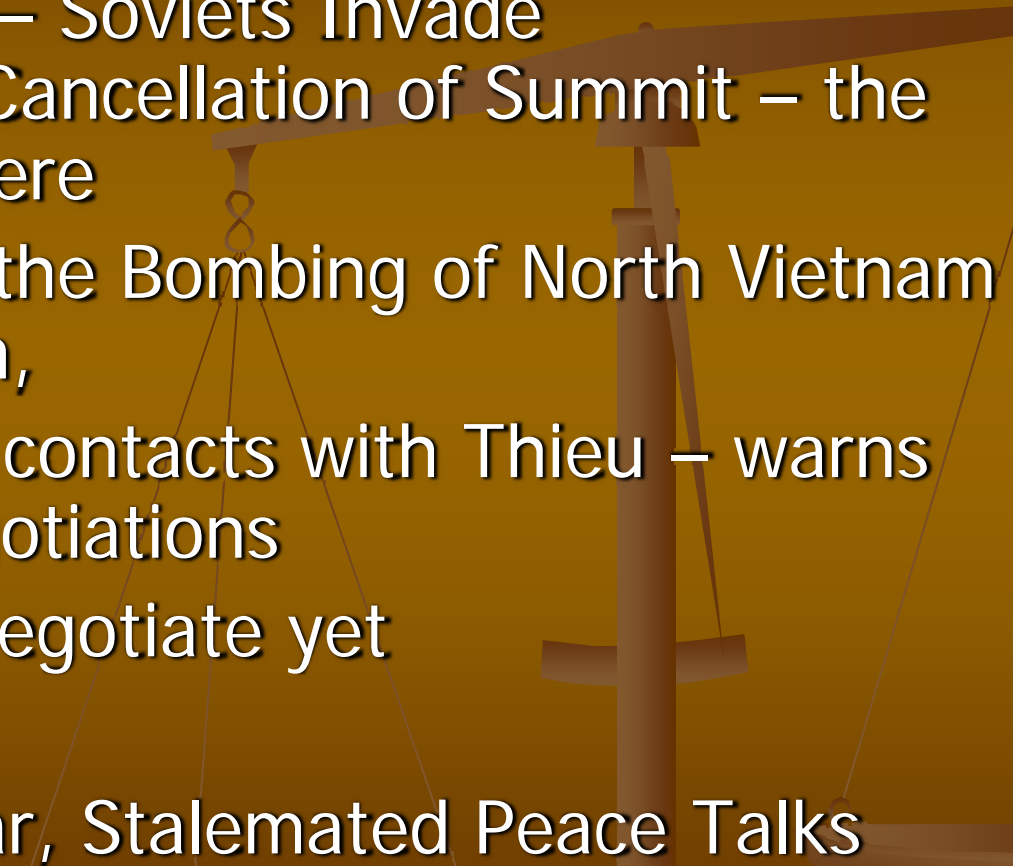
- <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1968>



Library of Congress, "American Memory", "Portraits of the Presidents and First Ladies" sv., "Richard Nixon", <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/odndhtml/preshome.html>>.



# The Bombing Halt

- 1.) Prague Spring – Soviets Invade Czechoslovakia – Cancellation of Summit – the Cold War is still there
  - 2.) Johnson Halts the Bombing of North Vietnam before the election,
  - 3.) Nixon – secret contacts with Thieu – warns him about the negotiations
  - 4.) Saigon won't negotiate yet
  - 5.) Nixon wins
  - 6.) Stalemated War, Stalemated Peace Talks
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# Electoral Map



# Nixon "Bring us together"

