

Wed. Sept. 8, 1993

Dear Mr. Lamb:

Enclosed is an article about 1968 by Mike Royko. One of your callers last night asked if you or your guests had read this article; and none of you had, so here it is.

I am enjoying your series on 1968, and I think the whole thing was a good idea.

None of your guests seemed to have thought on any of Mike Royko's ideas of what 1968 gave us.

Keep up the good work. I am a 69 year old C-Span junkie.

Sincerely

Frankfort, Ky 40601

9-4-93 Convention-al wisdom

Here's the real story behind the '68 convention

The radio talk show host said he wanted to do a show about the 25th anniversary of the legendary 1968 Democratic convention.

"The way I see it," he said, "we could talk about the true long-range significance of that convention."

Uh-huh. And that significance — what was it?

"How it led to a new era in American politics — the coming of age politically of the baby boomers, the rock generation. People such as myself.

"And it brought together young blacks and whites in the cause of reforming American politics. In that case, it was their united opposition to the Vietnam War.

"We could talk about that. And how it led to the collapse of the Daley Machine and brought on a reform movement."

Because we were talking by phone, he couldn't see the expression on my face, as if I had taken a big bite of a lemon.

So I thanked him for his invitation, but I had to decline.

Had I been truthful, I would have said he was a self-important jackass who didn't have a clue about the significance of the 1968 convention.

But he isn't alone. In recent days, there's been much strange babbling about that wild week in Chicago. So let's get a few things straight.

First, what that Democratic convention did was bring about the election of Republican Richard Nixon. And with his election came the Watergate scandal, his resignation,

the interim presidency of the unknown Gerald Ford, which led to the opportunity of the equally unknown Jimmy Carter. And that, in turn, opened the White House door for Ronald Reagan, George Bush and now Bill Clinton.

It altered the course of presidential history for the next 25 years.

If the convention had been orderly and boring, as modern conventions had already become, it's likely that Hubert Humphrey, not Nixon, would have been president.

Nixon won because millions of voters saw cops bashing heads, protesters gagging on tear gas, hippies chanting obscenities and Democratic delegates shrieking about being prisoners in Richard J. Daley's police state.

And these voters asked themselves: Do I want to trust the White House to people who let a convention become a weeklong riot? That's leadership? The answer of many was, hell no.

What makes the whole thing so nutty is how easily it could have been avoided.

People forget that the entire city was not under siege from hundreds of thousands of dangerous hippies, yippies and dippies.

When the convention was gathering, only a few thousand war protesters were in town. They really weren't sure what they were going to do except make ridiculous threats.

They gathered in Lincoln Park, about 8 miles from the convention hall on the South Side, 3 miles from the headquarters' hotel.

East of the protesters was Lake Shore Drive and Lake Michigan. If they went that way, they'd be run over by cars or drowned.

Just west waited an army of cops in riot gear.

If they broke through, they'd still be many dangerous miles from

the Amphitheatre. Depending on the route they took, many might have been mugging victims.

So they sat in the park, wondering what to do.

Police moved in after the park curfew. And the brawl was on. Network TV broadcast that first violence, and it served as a recruiting call. Other angry young war protesters came pouring into Chicago, and the game was on.

By week's end, the story of the Democratic convention was not the nomination of Hubert Humphrey, a decent man and well-qualified candidate.

The story was cops battling longhairs on Michigan Avenue. Protesters in trees screaming obscenities.

And, of course, the late Richard J. Daley saying he had defended his city against the invasion of revolutionaries, anarchists, terrorists, maybe assassins. It wasn't true, but what can you say when your police force runs amok?

Now we have the myths:

Myth: The protests led to the end of the Vietnam War. Baloney. The war went on five more years.

Myth: It wrecked Daley's reputation and his machine. Nonsense. Daley was even more popular after the convention because the majority of Chicagoans thought that bashing hippie heads was great sport. The machine came apart years later.

Myth: The protest heightened the political conscience of the baby boomers. Oh, yeah? Then why were they such strong supporters of Ronald Reagan?

But if the now-aging protesters want to boast about something, they can. They helped elect Nixon and shaped the next 25 years of American government.

You want to brag? Be my guest.



MIKE ROYKO

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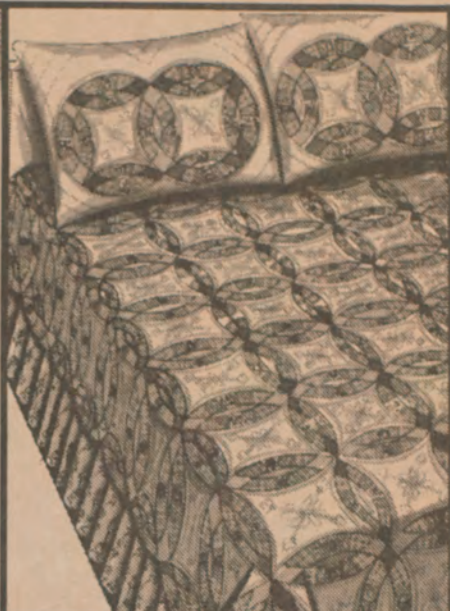
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