

**Turning Point '68**  
**From Tet to Chicago, Paris to D.C.,**  
**Hesiod to *Works & Days***

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February 2, 1968

In the dark of the moon, in flying snow, in the dead of winter  
war spreading, families dying, the world in danger,  
I walk the rocky hillside, sowing clover.

--Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Hand Book* (1970)

Senseless ones, they know neither how much more is only half of all.  
Nor how good living is on only mallow and asphodel.  
The holy ones have hidden away the life of humans.

--Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 40-42 (my trans.)

I used to have a dream, and perhaps I will be able to dream that dream again. It's not necessarily Wendell Berry's agricultural dream, though I respect his life-long advocacy of an American return to neo-Jeffersonian democracy and of eco-agrarian and socio-political reform. Berry's *Farming: A Hand Book* strives to do for contemporary American society what Hesiod's ancient classic *Works and Days* once sought to do for a strife-torn, Iron Age, Hellenic society: finding, conserving, and relishing those patterns of familial and social relations and those rhythms of work and respect for nature and culture that heal the unnatural torments of greed, hatred, economic sadism and political domination.

"In the dark of the moon," Berry's poet-farmer labors to sow seed to tame a hillside with clover for his spring and summer livestock. The same "dark of the moon" marked the Spring Festival – the Tet Nguyen Dan—of the Vietnamese lunar calendar in 1968, a holiday declared for January 30 to February 1, 1968. The Tet Offensive of the long, dark night of the 30<sup>th</sup> into the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 1968 took the South Vietnamese and American armies by surprise. The

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ferocity of the fighting spread the length and breadth of South Vietnam and lasted well into March in places such as Hue and Khe Sanh. Wendell Berry's second line encapsulates in three brief phrases the sense of disaster and jeopardy registered, but the date of his poem indicates that he is very likely responding to the horrifying image of one Vietnamese partisan executing another on February 1, 1968, an image reproduced in hundreds of newspapers worldwide on February 2, 1968.



Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes Nguyen Van Lem 1 Feb 1968-1

The 17-second film clip of the execution was played repeatedly on televised newscasts and made a huge impression on me as a 16-year-old student, midway through the 11<sup>th</sup> year of my formal education and embroiled in tense school and family debates about the morality of the war being prosecuted in Vietnam. Berry registers the fraught contrast between the unnatural destruction of war and the natural rhythms of nature and human cultivation that go on, that persist, in the darkness of the moon, a time both of warfare and of new lunar and agricultural beginnings. Berry marks the nightmare of the Tet Offensive and reminds us of the sort of beginnings that natural cycles and good human work always already provide.

But can and will the cultural politics of Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Berry's *Farming: A Hand Book* suffice in a world which fifty years ago as now sees Hellenic fraternal equality and Jeffersonian agrarian

democracy as polite yet dated political ideals to hold in a world fueled by intensely competing and mutually destructive economic, political and religious ideologies? This question, perhaps now best seen in retrospect, frames a lot of the personal turmoil and debates I recollect from that year of my own personal ‘turning point’—the calendar year 1968.

Ten years on from 1968, I co-founded and named the journal *Works and Days* with a collective of six graduate students (three men and three women) at the State University of New York, Buffalo. The next year we published our first issue in Spring 1979, using a borrowed handpress, a sheet guillotine, and a hand-operated binding apparatus. The words of Hesiod (brashly in ancient Greek and in modern English) adorned a statement of intent, a manifesto of cultural and political bravado:

We borrow the title for our journal from the pragmatic and earth-bound classic of Hesiod. In many respects, Hesiod’s poem was probably the first work in ‘Western Literature’ to emphasize the social and historical consequences and responsibilities of the actions of human individuals. We would like to recall and re-emphasize Hesiod’s concern and perhaps too his exhortative and instructive tones in addressing his wayward brother and the selfish ‘barons’ of this world. It is worthy of note, however, that Hesiod’s *Works and Days* is all-too-often dismissed as a matter-of-fact handbook on the basics of arable farming and overseas marketing as well as an almanac of the days of the month and year which are best suited for carrying out various activities. Yet noticing certain striking themes, uses of tone and autobiographical elements can recover for our own time this exemplary case of an archaic genre – that is, of wisdom or didactic literature. For instance, as a rhapsode who apparently committed his own song to writing, Hesiod also broke with Homeric and rhapsodic convention by including a fair amount of personal and familial information in structural and thematic ways. This indicates cognizance of the ways self, society and history shape one another.

Hesiod addresses and exhorts Perses – a real or perhaps a fictionalized and generalized ‘brother’ – to desist from his selfishness and collusion with the ‘kings’ and ‘barons’ of Boetia in central Greece. Perses, through bribery, has stolen the far greater share of his brother’s inheritance; and Hesiod chastises him for such self-interested appropriation of the livelihood of his own kin and for his collusion in unjust uses of authority and law in order to carry out this expropriation. Hesiod’s exhor-

tation modulates tone persuasively through rhetorical uses of myth, parable, allegory, proverb, autobiography and threats of anger from on high. Quite imperatively it summons the prodigal brother to participate once again in an ethic of familial and communal reciprocity rather than reproduce the violent social relations made possible by the new 'age of iron.' It is truly a well-crafted sermon, and one which shows very well that the discourse of the disenfranchised knows intimately the 'authoritative' and 'lawful' dissimulations directed against it. Once Hesiod turns to his catalogue of works and of the days for them, it is to be assumed either that Perses accedes to the justness of his brother's case and now needs advice on how to work the land or that the life of humans persists despite the idleness and unresponsive desires which unjustly seek to expropriate it. (Editors, i-ii)

"The Work of Discourse in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," my essay for the re-launch of *Works and Days* at Eastern Illinois University under the editorship of David Downing in Spring 1984, took up this 1979 manifesto and reworked and expanded it at some length in order to suit the needs of a much-expanded 'Editorial Policy,' supported by an editorial board of ten young academics, an advisory board of eight senior scholars, a managing editor (Beth Kalikoff), and myself as associate editor. The rest is still history in the making, as *Works and Days* celebrates 40 and seems still fortuitously and productively counting its works and years.

However, I need to return to 50 years ago and pick up the 'crux,' the crossing juncture of my narrative, my 'turning point' and the year 1968. There are a handful of threads or strands that interweave to construct this narrative, and I will take up each one of these five threads separately before trying to plait them together.

First of all, the Vietnam War—"the war U.S. officials were forever telling correspondents was about to end" (Kurlansky 8)—casts a shadow across all of 1968, casts an unsettling pall over the fifty years of American political life and 'culture wars' that follow, as well as marks out the year of my 'turning point.' Let me dwell for the moment on January, February, and March 1968 through some personal recollections. News of the Tet Offensive of late January burst onto TV screens and newspaper headlines and into schoolrooms and family kitchens with the sort of shock with which it apparently was planned in concealed tunnels and farm huts a world away from the U.S.A.<sup>1</sup>

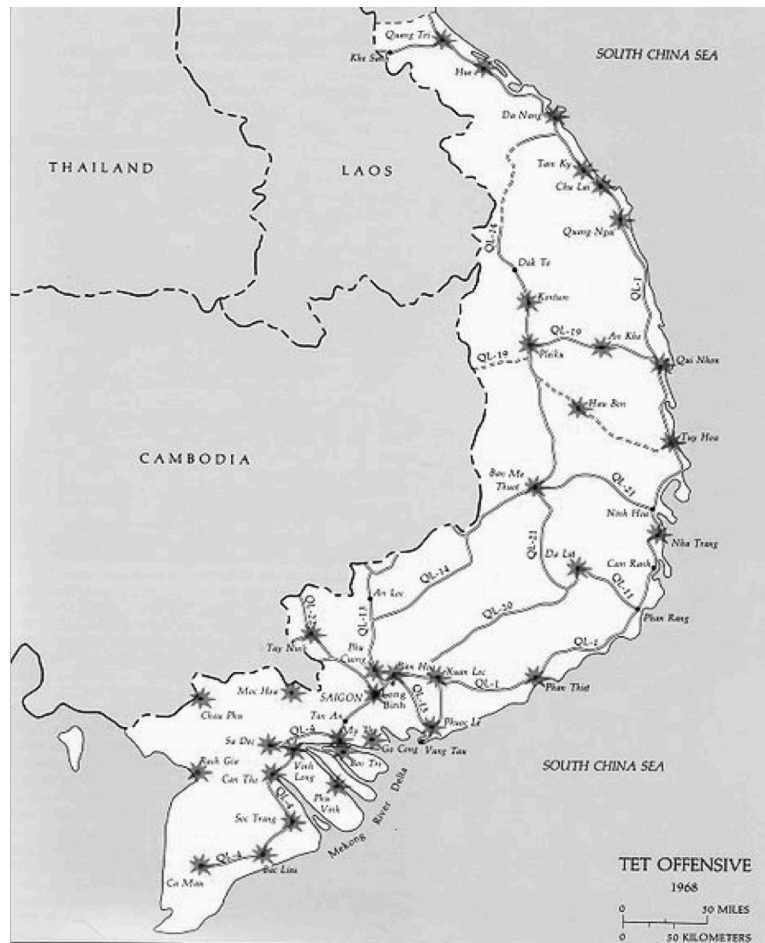


Illustration 2: The Tet Offensive

The results were dazzling. Today we are accustomed to war appearing instantly on TV, but this was new in 1968. War had never been brought to living rooms so quickly. Today the military has become much more experienced and adept at controlling media. But in the Tet Offensive, the images brought into living rooms were of U.S. Armed Forces in shambles, looking panicked, being killed (Kurlansky 52).

And such images and issues fueled debate at my home and in my school. History classes were for me particularly memorable, highly charged and argumentative. Mr. Fred McCashland was our extremely well-groomed and very highly opinionated teacher of world and

American history; he was a strong supporter of Senator Barry Goldwater ('AU H<sub>2</sub>O' in 1964!), an exponent of the John Birch Society, and a William Buckley fanatic. It's no exaggeration to say that he exhibited the sort of aggressive ideological 'conservatism' that Sean Hannity and Fox News would have little trouble applauding in 2018. We were lectured on the unquestionable benefits of 'free market economics' at every opportunity; and when Pedro—the fairly privileged son of comfortably well-to-do Cuban exiles—was a member of our class for a few months, he was easily cajoled into seconding the importance of a staunch anti-communist stance against all forms of communitarian and socialist economics—Fidel Castro's Cuba and Ho Chi Minh's PRV most notably among them. No middle ground. No pragmatism. No common sense. No social justice. No history of unions or of working class efforts and ideals allowed. FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society were alike derided, and civil rights struggles at home and abroad were queried and all too often viciously impuned. Yet my good friend Michael Crosby (now a civil and human rights lawyer in San Diego), myself, and a few other even more timid students—as the so-called 'liberals' in the class—tried to counter with Hesiodic common sense what was nothing less than illiberal indoctrination.

The Vietnam War (or the Second Indochina War, to give its proper title in a global context of colonial and imperial wars) was a recurrent topic of discussion and disagreement in history class, with the U.S. government's rhetoric of 'pacification,' 'de-escalation,' 'escalation,' 'light at the end of the tunnel' being teased and probed. Then in Winter '68, the Tet Offensive and its glaring, world-wide exposure of the horrors and unplumbed abyss of political and military 'stalemate' stunned us, shocked us, unsettled us. I still recall CBS anchor Walter Cronkite's sad, but-all-so-telling phrase 'mired in stalemate' as summary judgment in February 1968 of the daily slaughter and political hypocrisy of official propaganda regarding the ongoing Tet Offensive (See Kurlansky 57-63 and Lawrence 115). The debate of 'the hawks' ('escalation' and even 'the nuclear option') and 'the doves' ('de-escalation' and 'peace') raged in our classroom, not just on the TV. My friend Michael was courageous enough to take on Fred McCashland directly, young dove to hovering hawk, so to speak, while I recall my principal dissenting strategy tended to be essays (on American wars) and dissertation topic (political failures and the fall of the Roman empire, of all things). Reading and researching actual

history tended to question the dubious assumptions made by ideologues, I found; though you still had the problem of the ideologue who posed—as well-groomed and tailored as any Buckleyite dandy in the late '60s was willing to strut in Indianapolis—as our professed teacher of history. Mr. McCashland's ideological insouciance in the face of the manifest immorality of the Vietnam War made an indelible impression on me. Later in my reading and education, Hesiod's words of advice, caution and social analysis to his brother Perses regarding the destructive illusions of the kings and barons of Iron Age Greece would resonate with the murderous actions of modern robber barons and the kings of international finance capitalism and rigged market monopolies. The farmers, greengrocers, nurses, midwives, carpenters, plumbers, and tutors of history and social justice—the real 'free marketeers' and 'workers of the world'—stood little chance against such craven criminals, whether in Southeast Asia or North America.

Yes, we discussed and debated the words and actions of President Lyndon Baines Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and General William Westmoreland, U.S. Commander in Vietnam, regarding whether hundreds of thousands of additional troops and even atomic weaponry would be committed to the conflict. Alistair Cooke's 1,000<sup>th</sup> letter from America, dated March 24, 1968, reviewing the effects of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee's two-day grilling of Secretary of State Dean Rusk over the present and the future of America's undeclared war in Vietnam, best captures the vexed predicament of early 1968 in American social and political circles. Cooke writes:

I wish that this 1,000<sup>th</sup> Letter from America could be about the spring or American children, or any one of the many amiable things we've talked about down the years [March 24, 1946 to March 24, 1968]. But it must be about the thing that bewilders the American people like nothing else in all these 1,000 weeks. (Cooke 18)

That bewildering development was an increasingly pitched debate between 'hawks' and 'doves' that was aired not merely in my history classroom but in partially televised hearings of a major Senate committee which dramatized clearly that America's most powerful military and political leaders had absolutely no idea what was happening or likely to happen in an increasingly costly and abysmal foreign intervention:



A hundred books and 1,000 editorial writers have recited and disputed the political origins of the war and enlarged on the human tragedy of its conduct. What matters or will come to matter to most people, I think, is not any new balance we can strike in the old argument but the realisation that America, which has never lost a war, is not invincible; and the very late discovery that an elephant can trumpet and shake the earth but not the self-possession of the ants who hold it. (Cooke 18)

The American ‘elephant’ with the immense might of its air, land, and naval forces ‘can trumpet and shake the earth,’ of course, and could do so for years to come; yet the historical and political irony was and would be ‘the ants,’ who lost so heavily in terms of soldiers and civilians in the Tet Offensive, would not lose their ‘self-possession’ and their will to win their own self-autonomy and choice of social and political formations in their own land. Alistair Cooke was right on the day and for decades to come, I think. And the following week, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, President Johnson announced, in “a landmark speech about the war,” a call “to move immediately toward peace through negotiations” and shockingly declared that “he would neither seek nor accept the Democratic nomination for president later that year” (Lawrence 129-30). The ‘doves’ and ‘de-escalation’ seemed to have won the upper hand for the moment in late March 1968, but I recall the tensely mixed mood and anxious sense of foreboding that attended this utterly unexpected presidential act of political ‘*mea culpa*’ and public self-sacrifice. It set the stage for power struggles not just in Democratic Party politics, but opened the access doors and wings of American political theatre to all sorts of murderous machinations.

Of course, there had been major urban riots and shocking American death tolls during the summer of 1967, especially in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, Newark, and Tampa. On July 29, 1967 President Johnson had commissioned Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois to head up a fact-finding National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, and that commission published its detailed and explosive report in March 1968. The Black Lives Matter movement of the last few years still sadly, tragically, and strongly echoes the findings of Kerner’s cross-partisan, comprehensive report on ‘the basic causes’ of urban American riots from LA/Watts in 1965 to Atlanta and Detroit in 1967—namely, “the most bitter fruits of white racial attitudes” in America (*Report* 203). Kerner’s commission



detailed and examined eight ‘basic causes’ of racially motivated violence in the U.S. in the 1960s:

- 1 Pervasive discrimination and segregation.
- 2 Black migration and white exodus.
- 3 Black ghettos.
- 4 Frustrated hopes.
- 5 Legitimation of violence, due to ‘white terrorism’ against civil rights workers.
- 6 Powerlessness, due to perceived ‘whiteness’ of the ‘power structure’.
- 7 Incitement and encouragement of violence, via ‘Black Power’ militants.
- 8 The Police, as public embodiment of ‘white power, white racism and white repression’ (Report 203-6)

Governor Otto Kerner’s report on ‘a nation, divided’ found no evidence of conspiracies, organized either internally or externally (*Report* 201-2). In other words, the problem of America’s racially-motivated violence was fully and completely a domestic issue: it was occasioned solely by partisans of the U.S. (yes, ‘us’) directing violence against other fellows citizens of the U.S. (yes, ‘us’) due to long-standing, unresolved, social and historical issues regarding civil rights and “300 hundred years of racial prejudice” (*Report* 206-36). “White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II,” Kerner’s report declared in the most emphatic of fact-based judgments (*Report* 203). Afro-American civil-rights struggles, though ongoing, nevertheless reached a ‘turning point’ in the spring of 1968 publicly and personally. Illinois Governor Otto Kerner’s devastatingly honest, historically circumspect report in March and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 make Black American civil unrest and civil-rights struggles the second major thread in my recollections and remarks.

Moreover, regarding this second major strand, I think it’s crucial to recall the publication and impact of Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* in early 1968. Indeed, “1968 was the best year Eldridge Cleaver had,” according to Mark Kurlansky (111). *Soul on Ice* (in other words, *a black man in prison*) was and still is a powerfully written series of essays by Cleaver from Folsom Prison, California as well as during a post-prison stint as a staff writer for *Ramparts* magazine. He wrote about his early life, including witty and probing reflections on his Catholicism (30-39), his eclectic schooling and convictions for theft and for

rape, and his earlier imprisonments in Soledad State Prison and San Quentin; yet he turns toward a later version of himself who emerges from his contemplative period ‘on ice’: “I was very familiar with the Eldridge who came to prison, but that Eldridge no longer exists” (16). His remarks on civil disorder, especially the Watts riots in 1965 (26-7), and the range of Afro-American leaders’ response to civil disorder and the civil-rights struggle cut across the entire volume. However, Cleaver’s highly perceptive essay, “The Black Man’s Stake in Vietnam” (121-27), not only brings together my two initial threads of political thought regarding 1968, but points to a deep, underlying, socio-political problem that the events of 1968 dredged up for all to see, whether willing, able or not: “The American racial problem can no longer be spoken of or solved in isolation. The relationship between genocide in Vietnam and the smiles of the white man toward black Americans is a direct relationship” (Cleaver 123). Cleaver argues for “a structural relationship between these two areas of conflict” (121) by demonstrating historically and politically the strategies and effects of long-standing “white-supremacy-oriented” racism (122) and its pronounced linkage to colonialism and imperialism.<sup>2</sup> The hap- penstance of the publication of *Soul on Ice* “at almost the exact moment as the Kerner Report on racial violence . . . confirmed its findings,” as Mark Kurlansky (111) and a contemporaneous *New York Times* review both underscore.

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1968 stunned, frightened, frustrated, and shocked almost everyone across the U.S., except hardened racists, I think it’s fair to say. James Earl Ray—‘a white supremacist’—was captured and convicted of King’s murder; but well placed observers, researchers, and commentators still note the hugely destructive force of white racism and supremacist attitudes in America fifty years on from King’s death (Lynch 3). In my hometown of Indianapolis that same day in 1968, Robert Kennedy was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination and the right to replace President Johnson at the top of the Democratic Party ‘ticket.’ Kennedy’s impromptu, calming speech in a park in one of the central ghettos of the city the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> of April helped convince my fellow citizens not to riot as a way to vent their frustration, anger, and shocking sense of powerless at the loss of a crucial civil-rights leader. My brother Kevin and two of his friends stole time away from school to attend Kennedy’s earlier rally that day and were rewarded with expulsion the following day,

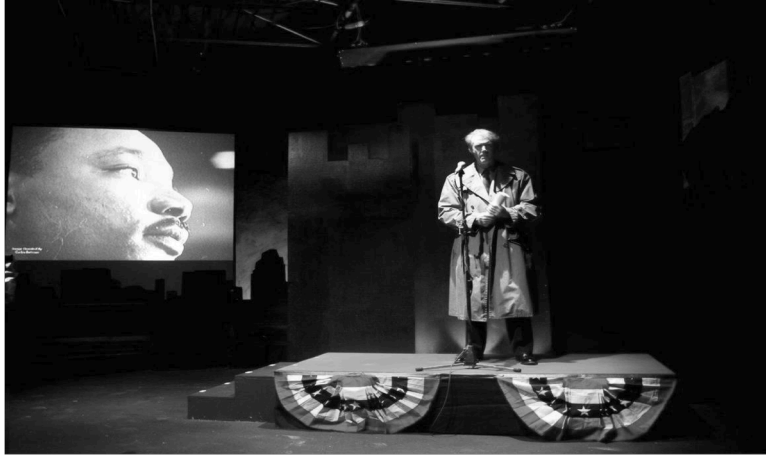


Illustration 3: Kevin Caraher in “RFK Remembered”

given their transgression. Kevin’s later successful one-man play, “RFK Remembered” (see illustration 3), was produced and performed for the Indiana Historical Society in October 2004 and revived for two additional runs, including this anniversary year.

The events of 1968 form the core of the second and final act of Kevin’s play, including Kennedy’s utterly powerful ‘Statement on Violence’ delivered in the spot now known as Martin Luther King Memorial Park, between East 17<sup>th</sup> and East 21<sup>st</sup> Streets, in what I used to call NapTown. Not far from this park, I tutored English and Math for Afro-American youngsters on Saturday mornings for two years running, September 1967 to June 1969, at St. Rita’s Primary School (E 17<sup>th</sup> & Dr Brown Ave) as part of the ‘community outreach’ of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary at my own school (Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School), where I’m slightly embarrassed to say—certainly fifty years on—I was Prefect of Sodality for 1968-69. The weekend incentives involved coaching and playing basketball in the school gymnasium, after an hour or two of tutoring, and then off to McDonald’s or Burger King (BK) or Dairy Queen (DQ) or International House of Pancakes (IHOP) for lunch. The kids loved it and would return Saturday morning after Saturday morning. Also, I got to experience my first efforts at teaching as well as get to know my hometown and its motley array of neighborhoods and social ghettos rather well, largely because I chose to walk or use public buses. I particularly recall tutoring Brian Beard, an extremely bright and strongly motivated fellow, who later won academic scholarships and was a star

basketball player for Brebeuf Prep and Indiana University. We didn't cancel our weekly sessions in April 1968. It was important that black and white youth and teenagers continued working and socializing together, as well as be seen in BK, DQ, and IHOP carrying on as usual, normal, collaborative, and supportive Americans, even in the wake of MLK's tragic loss.

I started university (Wabash College: 750 students and 75 fulltime teaching and research staff) in August 1969 and joined in the accelerating anti-Vietnam-War protests and movement, including attending the massive 'moratoria' in Washington, D.C. in October and November '69, where we honored the names of dead young soldiers while demanding an end to the immoral slaughter of Americans and Vietnamese alike. I remember walking the streets of Crawfordsville, Indiana with my friend Darrel Finch, a pre-medicine student from Macon, Georgia calling door-to-door trying to explain and publicize why students at our college had gone on strike along with more than 300 colleges and universities across the U.S. in the wake of the Kent State Massacre on the 4th of May 1970. Some people listened to us; others disapproved or shouted 'nigger and nigger-lover.' I recall feeling helpless, when Darrel broke down once, in the face of such an insult shouted at us from a passing car. The stunning rightness of Eldridge Cleaver's essays—as well as Joel Kovel's analyses of white racism (see endnote 2)—hit home personally and have stayed with me for five decades now. Insults were hurled at both of us, but Darrel's distraught pain and abject powerlessness as a targeted Afro-American was shocking and horribly unsettling to witness: I could do nothing to comfort and dispel the effects of such a sordid attack on his very right to be. Darrel is no longer alive, but his friends remember his talents, skills, good humor and absolutely beautiful humanity so well.

It's also worth remembering George Lipsky, my politics and political history tutor during my first year at Wabash College; George couldn't have been more different than Fred McCashland, at least in my eyes. I studied political theory and history of politics with George over the course of my first year, exploring key writings from Aristotle's *Politics* through Locke, Paine, Jefferson, Marx, Schumpeter, Popper, and others. George was appalled at the policies and conduct of President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger in 1969 and 1970, though the indications were few, restrained, coded, and largely confined to Saturday morning lectures and office tutorials, when few

students were present. After the Kent State Massacre and our majority vote to take the college on strike in May 1970, George lent members of the student organizing committee his office to prepare publicity flyers and to hold small, key strategy meetings. He entrusted his door keys to me (just a ‘freshman’) and to a well-spoken, high-performing Politics major in his senior year but willing to delay his final exams, if not graduation. We worked the deathless yet noisy Gestetner mimeograph machine, producing inky-blue hands as well as publicity updates for our fellow strikers and informational flyers for faculty and community who we felt deserved explanations about why we felt it necessary to strike. There was also a student spy on campus who tailed us regularly and tried to be clever with his camera behind pillars and trees but was always letting his paymasters down; he was re-assigned to another campus the following year. The following year also saw the foundation of Wabash College’s Malcolm X Center in the very heart of Indiana, a state that had been dominated by the KKK in the 1920s, largely under the leadership of Grand Dragon D. C. Stevenson. I also note Wabash’s current Class of 2019: a cohort commencing studies forty years after the formal end of the Vietnam War in 1975 includes five Vietnamese and two Cambodian students in a freshman class of 200. There are also two dozen or so Afro-American students, and students from several other countries in Asia, Africa and South America. I worry what many of them might still encounter on the streets of Crawsfordville in 2018, given the megalomaniac Celebrity Demagogue still sitting in the Oval Office in D.C. However, my old university college offers small beacons of light that still foster the state’s once strong, socially progressive, pre-World War I and post-New Deal past.

I now turn to examine a third thread in my narrative about the ‘turning point’ that 1968 can be said to embrace. My remarks concerning student activism in the course of the last two paragraphs could be said to anticipate this development, but in many respects the ‘evenements’ of May and June 1968 in Nanterre and Paris, France where the ones which set the model, if not the international standard, of purposeful student activism. French educational and political authorities had been battling low-level student unrest at the University of Nanterre, in a suburb of Paris, for a number of weeks. The authorities’ high-handed and dismissive tactics swelled the ranks of the protesters and precipitated the closure of the university, “an extraordinary decision that shifted the action from an obscure suburb to the

heart of Paris” at the same moment that “the city was glutted with international news media trying to cover the Vietnam peace talks” which were grudgingly commencing by arguing about the number of doors and the shape of the table in the anticipated negotiation chambers (Kurlansky 222). Nanterre students joined in with those at the Sorbonne, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (‘Dany le Rouge’ or red-haired ‘Danny the Red’) and various other student leaders led a massive protest from the Latin Quarter, from the early days of May 1968 until the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. The Parisian authorities “closed the Sorbonne for the first time in its seven-hundred-year history” (Kurlansky 223). Hundreds of students were arrested, but the old French Left, including the Socialists and the Communists, refused to support them. The protesting students did win the active support of Jean-Paul Sartre, “giving them a mature, calm, and respected voice at critical junctures” such that seventy-eight-year-old French President Charles de Gaulle refused to detain the august philosopher, “saying, ‘One doesn’t arrest Voltaire.’” (Kurlansky 223). Perhaps by chance, perhaps through serendipity, yet clearly in the name of ‘solidarity,’ various workers’ unions went on strike on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May for higher pay, better working hours and more control over working conditions—issues that echoed student demands concerning living and learning conditions in France’s over-crowded, poorly funded and centrally controlled universities. Indeed, the students had put out a highly vocal call for solidarity, clearly sounded out in the key slogan: “Usines Universités Union” (Factories, Universities, Union). Thus, to many, it seemed workers and students were united against the forces of French social control, while throngs of international media were in Paris to witness initial attempts to negotiate an end to a renewed colonial and imperial war in Indochina that the U.S. had inherited, so to speak, from defeated French Gaullists of the late 1940s and early 1950s. What a moment, what a turning point, what “Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven!”—to echo Wordsworth recollecting his own youth in France in the very early 1790s in *The Prelude*.

Though students and student groups at Columbia and UC Berkeley and the like took note of the French ‘evenements’ of May and June 1968, many others in the U.S. saw it as a foreign curiosity, a French problem, and a strange eruption from abroad. There was generally little understanding and informed discussion of these French events in the U.S., in my view, and Mr. McCashland—the history

teacher—was utterly dismissive of them. The nature and the origins of these events, moreover, were markedly different and massively less destructive than the ongoing, attention-getting, highly suspicious, Maoist Cultural Revolution led by The Gang of Four in the PRC (1965-69). The student uprising in May 1968 caught both the right-wing Gaullist government and the various French factions of Socialists, Marxists and Communists by surprise. It was not sponsored by any established or power-seeking party. I was fascinated because students initiated and led the events, staffed barricades, and sought no loss of life during the entire, tense, political affair. The students were able to mobilize not only themselves but a huge, frustrated, French labor force into a mass movement of ten million people in a matter of weeks (Marlowe 6). Murray Bookchin's analysis from July 1968 resonates here: "The prevailing reality of French life was taken by the young people for what it is – shabby, ugly, egotistical, hypocritical and spiritually annihilating. This single fact – the revolt of the young – is the most damning evidence of the system's inability to prevail on its own terms" (Bookchin 256).

Indeed, Bookchin notes: "A festive atmosphere prevailed throughout most of the May-June days, an awakening of solidarity, of mutual aid, indeed of a selfhood and self-expression that had not been seen in Paris since the Commune" (250). Yes, the Communards of the early 1870s may well be the best foreshadowing of what was underway in 1968: "May 1968 was about something more than class opposition: it was a broad-based contestation of technocratic and bureaucratic models of social control" (Unwin 44). Moreover, the Grenelle Accords which brought the strikes to an end by the 17<sup>th</sup> of June "raised the minimum wage by 35 percent, gave significant pay rises to civil servants, and lowered the retirement age" and promised university reform (Marlowe 6). French historian Philippe Artières records: "May 1968 ushered in a new way of life. The rights of whole categories of people who had been ignored were eventually recognised. Immigrant laborers, homosexuals, women" (Marlowe 6).

And Daniel Cohn-Bendit ('Dany le Rouge') was and perhaps still is the focal leader and vocal spokesperson for these 'evenements' of fifty years past.

Cohn-Bendit is currently a French Green Party MEP (Member, European Parliament, Strasbourg) and turned down an offer from President Emmanuel Macron as French Minister of the Environment in late August 2018. He's an outspoken MEP, following years as a



progressive school-teacher in Switzerland. In a contribution to *The New York Review of Books* in May 2018, Cohn-Bendit underscores the importance of 1968 as a significant social revolution in France, yet is quick to note the ‘evenements’ were “‘far more American in origin than the Europeans cared to admit’ given the Vietnam protests and the African-American civil rights movement” of the 1960s (Ferriter 14). At a stroke the first three threads of my narrative of 1968 as a ‘turning point’ are knit together by one of the year’s key actors. Progressives saw and still see issues of civil, humanitarian, and social rights are themselves threaded together and are mutually reinforcing. Reactionary agents and entrenched forces often attack and jeopardize the whole fabric of civil and social rights and livelihoods across the board in the interests of their own self-aggrandizement. Hesiod saw this situation many centuries ago and diagnosed the need to persuade his brother Perses to abandon the deceitful ways of the barons and kings of Iron Age Greece and to join in and get to work alongside the honest, just, and fair of their homeland for the rest of his days. *Works and Days* it is: a wisdom book and a road map for the ages, if you read and know how to read well.

Cohn-Bendit produced his own road map, with the help of his brother Gabriel. Their co-authored manual *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* was published in French and English soon after the events of May and June 1968. For the most part, this book is an enlightened critique of the role of the curricula in higher education and the modern university. It also mounts a case and a plea for the ‘democratization’ of universities and the collective determination of the curricula, seeking a significant and cooperative role for students in this democratizing project. The brothers espouse anarcho-socialist ideals, liberal social conditions and aspirations toward a classless society of the future. Their analyses of the problems and paradoxes of the modern university—especially the “internally inconsistent” imperatives of economic and theoretical, industrial and educational, managerial and research-operative agendas (Cohn-Bendit 41-8)—have been echoed and recycled by many and more recent analysts of the corporate woes of both state-funded and private-elitist universities in the U.S. The brothers offer some sound advice and seven solid principles for 1968, 2018, and for the future works and days of humanity:

Students must not fear to make themselves heard and instead of searching for leaders where none can be found, boldly proclaim their principles—principles that are valid for all industrial societies, and for all the oppressed of our time.

These principles are:

- To take collective responsibility for one's own affairs, that is, self-government;
- To destroy all hierarchies which merely serve to paralyse the initiative of groups and individuals;
- To make all those in whom any authority is vested permanently responsible to the people;
- To spread information and ideas throughout the movement;
- To put an end to the division of labor and of knowledge, which only serves to isolate people one from the others;
- To open the university to all who are at present excluded;
- To defend maximum political and intellectual freedom as a basic democratic right. (Cohn-Bendit 90)

Theodore Roszak's *The Dissenting Academy*, first published in 1968, makes a similar analysis and plea for the reform of American universities, both state-sponsored and private. Roszak notes the origins of modern, research-oriented universities in the Enlightenment and the enlightened and liberal ideals of democratizing *philosophes*—including Voltaire and Jefferson—but that the democratizing impulses of the modern university frequently are compromised and constrained by social and authoritarian forces:

It is also true that for all of its original impact on American democracy, the tradition I speak of has never found much of a home in our universities. Only now and again at some one school or department or in the life of an individual academic—a Richard T. Ely, a Thorstein Veblen, a John Dewey, a C. Wright Mills—can it be said to have flourished. Thomas Jefferson's plans for the University of Virginia typically followed the philosophe's by envi-

sioning a school that exercised an independent criticism of “Church and State” which opposed education because of its capacity to “unmask their usurpation, and monopolies of honors, wealth, and power” and which “fear every change, as endangering the comforts they now hold.” But Jefferson’s influence on education was limited. Eventually his notions of nonsectarian institutions of higher learning and instruction in practical knowledge were developed in the nineteenth century by the great state universities, but his ideal of the university as a center of dissenting criticism never particularly appealed to the forces of church, state, or corporate wealth which were to dominate the funding of higher education. (Roszak “Complacencies” 99-100)

Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit sought to bring Voltaire’s as well as Jefferson’s ‘ideal of the university as a center of dissenting criticism’ back into democratic alignment with the university’s role as a center of learning, education and practical knowledge. It’s a noble, fair, just, and enlightened ideal, then and now.

At my college, we did strive to do our bit. Such ideas and ideals were actively discussed and debated from Autumn 1969 onward—especially in politics, history, philosophy, religion, and literature classes. Even biology tutorials and cramming sessions infrequently reflected such debate. In the autumn of 1970 a group of six students, along with one of our tutors, founded the Indiana Peace and Freedom Party (IPFP). The PFP of California was one of our pretexts, as well as ‘Dany le Rouge’ and the French student activists of 1968. Dr. Finlay Campbell, assistant professor of English and Afro-American Studies and the first director of the Malcom X Centre, was one of only two members of the group old enough to stand for election, much less of voting age (then, 21). We met and founded the party in an apartment, directly opposite the main gates of the college, once inhabited by Ezra Pound in 1906-7, during his ill-fated year teaching Romance languages and literatures at my *alma mater*. That apartment no longer exists, but its front door was preserved and transported in the late 1970s to the entrance of the women’s room in Center Hall, with a memorial plaque mounted on the inside of the door (or so I’m reliably informed). My recollection is that Finlay Campbell—the last inhabitant of Pound’s old flat—did contest three elections, including running twice (November 1970 and 1972) for Congress in the 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Indiana as well as standing for Governor of the State. I’m pleased to say there were one or two very strong third-place finishes (“Show”) during these campaigns, but the

point was to take a stand and make the new party's views known democratically. We stood on a strong platform of civil rights, socialist, and progressivist legislative reform, as well as pro-peace talks with regard to the ongoing debacle in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Finlay Campbell later became a speech-writer for the Reverend Jesse Jackson's national campaigns during the 1980s. Unfortunately the IPFP did not survive the 1970s, but I recollect it fondly as a crucial public and personal learning experience about how politics can work, especially from 'the grassroots,' in a multicultural, nonsectarian, democratic U.S.

Which brings me onto declaring my fourth strand or thread in the 'turning point' year that was 1968. Many popular accounts of the events of the summer of 1968—especially August 1968—rightly stress the revolutionary events in Prague and the former 'Soviet satellite' of Czechoslovakia and the events of Afro-American athletes and Mexican students at the Mexico Olympics (Kurlansky 287-305, 326-44). For me, an often overlooked, yet no less important set of events were those focused on a wee parcel of land and a few handfuls of people in Northern Ireland/ North of Ireland/ 'Norn Iron'/ The Six Counties/ Ulster. Such a small neck of the woods, yet it has more contested names and labels (including 'Westeros,' 'Winterfell' and 'King's Landing,' if you follow *Game of Thrones*) than some of the most populated countries of the world. And, of course, 1968—especially August 1968—proved a pivotal 'turning point' in the history and politics of Northern Ireland. The Irish historian Diarmid Ferriter has noted Northern Ireland seldom gets a look-in when the epoch-making events of 1968 are discussed, but Northern Irish "demands for equality kicked off seriously in May 1968 with the protests of the Derry Housing Action Committee, which then joined forces with the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association" (Ferriter 14). The American civil rights struggle was a strong model for both the DHAC and NICRA in organizing and in challenging long-standing housing discrimination against Catholics in Protestant-dominated Ulster, and the French student protesters provided a strong role-model for hundreds of Queen's University Belfast students to join in with the protests and actions of DHAC and NICRA.

The first hugely significant march involving 2000 delegates from all three movements was staged on August 24, 1968 in County Tyrone with a cross-country march from Coalisland on the shores of Lough Neagh to Dungannon, the county seat of Tyrone. The march was in

sympathy with the nearby sit-in by Austin Currie, MP for East Tyrone (1964-72) in the UK Parliament's House of Commons. In June 1968 Currie:

... squatted in a council house in Caledon village to highlight the injustice of its allocation to the young secretary of a local Unionist candidate, when large Catholic families, living in squalor, had been repeatedly refused council housing. The media attention focused on the events at Caledon provided the impetus for the public marches which came to mark the civil-rights campaign and which started symbolically in Dungannon that August. This after all was 1968. The demand for 'civil rights' was mobilising vast crowds from Czechoslovakia to Mississippi. (Elliott 412-3)

According to Bernadette Devlin, one of the Queen's Belfast students on the march: "It was an event. It was the first civil-rights demonstration Northern Ireland had ever seen, and we all jogged along happily, eating oranges and smoking cigarettes, and people came out of their houses to join the fun" (Devlin 98).<sup>3</sup>

However, the march was halted by the police who refused to let the marchers into the center of Dungannon; the protesters staged a sit-in, sang songs (including "We Shall Overcome"), and managed to avoid violence (Devlin 98-101; Elliott 413). However, the next march set for the City of Derry on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October was a different matter. It was banned by the authorities and a Loyalist counter-march authorized instead (Elliott 413). The Derry civil-rights march swelled numbers under such provocation: "Here there was no carnival atmosphere and these weren't people who had come out for the fun of something new. These were men who had no work, these were the real men of no property. Their grievances were genuine, and the more the police stopped them from marching, the more bitter they became" (Devlin 104). It produced a police riot, along the lines of heavy-handed police attacks on non-violent, civil-rights marchers in Alabama and Mississippi and elsewhere in the U.S. By all reasonable accounts, "the police over-reacted, batoning and beating the unarmed demonstrators and spraying powerful water-cannon even over innocent bystanders, producing 'vivid examples of police brutality'" (Elliott 413). As Bernadette Devlin, a participant in the march, records:

I was standing almost paralyzed, watching the expressions on the faces of the police. Arms and legs were flying everywhere, but what horrified me was the evil delight the police were showing as they beat people

down, then beat them again to prevent them from getting up, then trailed them up and threw them on for somebody else to give them a thrashing. It was as though they had been waiting to do it for fifty years. (Devlin 105)

Sectarian divisions run deep in Northern Ireland, and the ferocity of police violence on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1968 reflects the forceful projection of disorder in order to preserve at all costs the defense of that sectarian, divisive ordering of the social status quo. Fifty years of civil disorder and institutional prejudice, ever since the partition of the two Irelands in 1921, was being directly challenged by the Derry marchers. Northern Ireland's own version of 'Jim Crow Laws' and 'Jim Crow' sectarianism, gerrymandering and discrimination were being directly questioned. "Huge numbers became politicized overnight" (Elliott 314).

Autumn and early winter 1968 in Northern Ireland saw extremely tense developments, including stand-offs between civil rights protesters and Paisleyites in Belfast, yet also some significant signs of change and potential accommodation in the local government under the leadership of Terence O'Neill (Elliott 413-4). The third major civil rights march was scheduled for the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1969 and was to be the longest and most ambitious to date: a walk by Queen's Belfast students from Belfast to Derry in order to keep pressure on the government to deliver on its recent promises.

About eighty students set off from the City Hall in Belfast to march to Derry on the morning of 1 January 1969. The Government did not think the march sufficiently dangerous to ban. But all along the way it was harassed by loyalists, and at Burntollet Bridge outside Derry it was subjected to an orchestrated and bloody attack, in which, as subsequent inquiries proved, off-duty B Specials [auxiliary, paramilitary, 'home guard'] took a prominent part and the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary, the police] seemed more in sympathy with the attackers than the victims. Attacks continued when they arrived in Derry and the RUC rampaged through Catholic areas in the city. As violence increased, moderates retreated into their traditional corners. (Elliott 414-5)

The Burntollet Bridge Ambush resonates through contemporary Northern Irish history, politics, and culture. For some, it was a step, a march, too far for the students and the civil rights movement (See Elliott 413-5). For others, it marked the absolutely horrifying depth of resistance to change and progress on the part of hateful,

deeply-entrenched, sectarian interests.<sup>4</sup> For many, it marked the battle-lines being drawn-up for the latest round of 'The Troubles, 1969-1998. For me, witnessing the televised coverage by American networks of the three marches, especially the horrendous footage of the Burntollet Bridge Ambush, spoke deeply that the Northern Irish and the Afro-American civil-rights struggles were absolutely kindred in nature, body, and soul. I had heard the Reverend Ian Paisley (an honorary graduate of Bob Jones University, SC) speaking on a number of occasions in the mid and late 1960s on Wonderful Bible Radio Indiana (WBRI) about the need to preach 'Bible-believing Protestantism' and also to raise funds to support the work of the UVF and the UDA, two Loyalist paramilitary organizations, in Ulster (he refused to say 'Northern Ireland'). He was never cautioned or arrested for the latter, highly suspicious activities, as far as I'm aware. However, his ideological insouciance regarding preaching and raising funds for his causes in the U.S. made a huge impression upon me as a teenager. Then he and his thugs staged the Burntollett Bridge Ambush. Perhaps there is precedence for such sectarian action in some Old Testament chronicles, read poorly, but I could never see a precedent for such foul deeds in the New Testament. (And, I was awarded the Mills Prize in the Bible at my own college in Indiana in 1972, I might add in my defense!)

The Burntollet Bridge Ambush and its ramifications tended to draw or push young Northern Irish activists toward more violent forms of resistance. The same temptation could be found among Afro-American civil-rights activists, especially in the face of police attacks and institutional racism. Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panthers in California, indeed, are themselves examples of the latter. In this regard, I do remember my friend James Petersen from Brebeuf. He and I and a rather tedious classmate—who typically boasted how much Budweiser he could drink at the weekend or how far he could get his hand up the skirt of a Ladywood student—took driving lessons together for several weeks in 1968 with one of the football coaches. James would say nothing but drive with incredible focus, until he drove straight off the road at one sharp corner during one of the lessons and nearly killed all four of us. He was fascinated with Eldridge Cleaver and Che Guevara and read their books on the school bus, though he was always quiet during the raging debates in Fred McCashland's classes. He was the classic, studious listener, I thought; and he wrote exquisite poetry and prose, largely modeled



on Baudelaire, Rimbaud and some surrealists. James got perfect scores of 800 each on the two major components of his SATs in early 1969 and decided to attend Indiana University to study “poetry and chemistry,” as he put it. However, perhaps not unlike Rimbaud, he got caught up in gun-running activities in support of Bangladeshi insurgents fighting against the then-established East Pakistan government. He was arrested and executed in 1972. I was shocked, yet have often thought that the years 1968-1972 have been a threshold or a doorway for many of my generation—in the U.S., Ireland, and elsewhere—who find it a struggle to remain committed to non-violent practices and courses of resistance or who hear the Sirens’ song, the tempting call, to violence as the only way forward.

The perception that the official forces of order often embody the real and active forces of disorder, moreover, leads into my fifth and final narrative thread. The assassination of Robert Kennedy after his resounding victory in the California Democratic Presidential Primary Election of June 5, 1968 opened the run to the White House and the fate of the Vietnam War, and much else, to so many unsettling vagaries and to the forces of reaction. The American Presidential campaign from June to November 1968 seemed like a steady descent from high tragedy to painful farce, and retrospectively its theatrical rhythms seem to mark out many American Presidential campaigns over the last fifty years. The Republican National Convention met in Miami Beach on the 5<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> of August and chose ‘Tricky Dicky’ to have another go, after his electoral disaster of 1960 and very public retreat of 1962. Even though lots of people, Republican as well as Democrat, deplored the rebirth of a ‘new Nixon’ with his ‘Southern Strategy,’ there he was with Spiro Agnew as his running mate and Senator Strom Thurmond as a highly vocal supporter. The “new Nixon” meant that his allegiance to the rhetoric of “fiscal conservatism,” to the enhancement of “the military-industrial complex” and to “red hat yet no red flag” patriotism was to be strongly allied with reactionary social politics that made sectarians and racists comfortable (See Kurlansky 358-65). JFK’s ‘New Frontier’ and Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ were to be rolled back, if not abandoned. Nixon’s ‘Southern Strategy’ was basically the same formula used by Reagan-Bush in the 1980 and 1984 elections, by Bush-Cheney in 2000 and 2004, and with shocking turpitude by Trump-Pence in 2016. The Democratic National Convention met in Chicago from the 26<sup>th</sup> through the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1968 and chose Vice President Hubert

Humphrey to succeed Lyndon Johnson. The DNC and the Yippies' 'Festival of Life' in Grant Park produced a televisual farce which culminated in a "police riot" – the phrase used in the official Walker Commission Report (Kurlansky 368)—on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1968. Fortunately no one was killed, but Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley's Freudian slip of the tongue—that is to say, "the policeman is here to preserve disorder"—revealed the thoroughly bankrupt, backroom, "boiler-room" nature of the so-called democratic and public proceedings (See Kurlansky 269-86). Or as Mike Royko, columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, with an ironic nod toward Churchillian rhetoric, cleverly phrased it: "Never before had so many feared so much from so few" (Kurlansky 276).

My friend Michael Crosby was one the 'few' to attend the 'Festival of Life' and the protests against the DNC confirmation of Hubert Humphrey as Democratic Presidential candidate in late August 1968. Michael went to Chicago and returned to NapTown beaten up in the name of Mayor Daley's attempt 'to preserve disorder.' I remember arguing with Michael about tactics and candidates, but I've always admired him for his commitment and willingness to put his own body on the line.<sup>5</sup> Neither Humphrey nor Nixon was the leader the moment required. Through the autumn of 1968, there was a sense of frontiers, new or not, lost. Nixon's win in early November spelt the resurrection of a deadly politics, not just a dead career. For some, it may be difficult to recall just what a sense of disaster Nixon's presidential victory incurred. Indeed, Nixon-Agnew winning in 1968 was as if John McCain and Sarah Palin had won on 4 November 2008, rather than Barack Obama and Joe Biden. Obama-Biden renewed American socio-political frontiers; and they tried to clean up the mess of Bush-Cheney's imperial adventures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, as well as tried to cope with the causes and consequences of the deregulated Wall Street financial meltdown of September and October 2008. Trump and Pence in 2016 felt eerily like the ghastly corpses of Nixon and Agnew blundering into the White House from the charnelhouse of dead and decaying ideologues and ideologies.

Autumn 1968 saw me committing to student activism, though of a wholly non-violent stripe. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr, Finlay Campbell, Jesse Jackson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Rosa Parks, Thomas Moore of Dublin, Isaac Butt of Glenfinn, John Hume of Derry, Charles Stewart Parnell, James Joyce, George

Bernard Shaw, even the Jesus of Nazareth glimpsed in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark—to construct a list, a just jury of twelve and a spare—all favored and fostered non-violent resistance to acts of social injustice and civil inequities. Thankfully, the list could go on. 1968 was a personal ‘turning point’ for me: towards student activism but also to non-violent, intellectually and historically informed activism. I became editor of my school newspaper, *The Arrow*, in 1968, with Michael Crosby as my sports editor and James Petersen as one of the two authors of the back page feature, “The Surrealist Enquirer.” We had great fun with the paper in 1968-69, greatly increasing its reporting remit, enlarging its format and number of pages, and injecting good writing and good humor into every corner. And we didn’t back down on tough, difficult, and controversial issues, even when summoned into the principal’s office for cautioning. It was gratifying to see new issues devoured immediately by readers at the school and elsewhere. Good, accessible, humorous writing gains audiences—it’s a lesson as old as Horace’s *Ars Poetica*—and activists and activism need to learn this simple lesson again and again. I became a student organizer my first year at university college, 1969-70, stayed religiously away from dope and drugs, and helped found a progressive political party in the autumn of 1970. Sober, solid organizational skills are essential to get good ideas out of heads and into streets, assemblies, discussions, debates and collective action.

And so it was and is with the journal *Works and Days*. From the outset and over the course of forty years, the journal has examined those structural relationships between areas of pitched cultural and social conflict that I’ve described above in connection with the first four threads of my narrative. *Works and Days* has explored persistently, consistently, and in-depth the very real structural relationships between social and historical conflicts staged across institutional crises, colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and so on as these issues are reflected, embodied, or dramatized in literary and cultural texts and events. It has entailed listening to and heeding ignored, forgotten, or overlooked voices; and it has consistently shown commitment to facts, to truth and to social justice and social solidarity. *Works and Days*, the journal, I would maintain, has also kept solidarity with the socio-historical dimensions and the social wisdom of Hesiod’s remarkable poem from more than two and a half millennia ago. Or so I believe. I believe too that this now middle-aged journal has many years to run; and I hope and trust it will continue to exemplify the

sound principles of its foundations and forty years of solid, exemplary practices.

My own social and political ‘principles’ can be summarized in another list:

- 1 Greed is not good, despite ‘The Wolf of Wall Street,’ despite the brilliant red braces and winsome rhetoric of Gordon Gekko, the cinematic devil’s spawn of Reaganomics and Thatcherite City of London speculators. Reciprocity feels as good as sharing a meal.
- 2 Hatred is a poor strategy, the resort of clapped-out ideologies and desperate ideologues. Hatred is the first refuge of a political scoundrel.
- 3 Economic sadism, regardless of the ideology that strives to justify its purported socio-economic necessity (‘slavery,’ ‘colonialism,’ ‘imperialism,’ ‘free market,’ ‘market economics,’ ‘casino capitalism,’ ‘national socialism,’ ‘neo-Darwinism,’ etc.), is not simply morally and ethically wrong but also economically and politically counter-productive for everyone, even so-called elites, in the long run. Economy is Ecology, managed well.
- 4 Democratic socialism is probably as good as it gets. Study Aristotle’s *Politics*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, and writings of George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, especially the latter’s *Men Like Gods* and *The Shape of Things to Come*. Study the successful, often highly prosperous social economies of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway in Europe; of Canada, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Vermont in the Americas; and of Kerala State (India) and Vietnam in Asia. There’s a lot to learn from these theories and practices, these proven works of humans and the days and seasons for them.
- 5 Listen to others, especially if they are well-informed ‘underdogs’ in a socio-political game stacked against them. They will be your allies in the future.

Now that I have carried on for three paragraphs as though I could speak like a latter-day Hesiod about works and the days for them, I’ll turn toward my conclusion. Mark Kurlansky has reminded us that “one of the great lessons of 1968 was that when people try to change the world, other people who feel a vested interest in keeping the world the way it is will stop at nothing to silence them” (380). Yes, action provokes reaction, and progressive activism that demands a reconsideration of ‘the status quo’ will often draw blindly violent

resistance to change. Fintan O'Toole has made much the same point about the 'turning point' of 1968: "The left won all the battles of imagery, of propaganda, of style. But the right won almost all the battles for power. Fifty years on, the events of 1968 remain deeply influential—but not always in ways that the young radicals who drove them would have recognized or celebrated" (O'Toole 6).

Yes, 'Tricky Dick' Nixon was elected and his 'Southern Strategy' swung disgracefully into action; Charles de Gaulle was re-elected President of France in June 1968 with an increased majority in the Assembly; the 'Prague Spring' was crushed by Soviet tanks in August 1968.

The counter-revolution of 1968 went on to gather force until it came into its own with the victories of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in 1979 and 1980. The would-be revolution, meanwhile, largely failed to take power because it could not reconcile itself with social democracy and electoral politics. Its energies did not merely dissipate, however; they flowed off into separate channels: ecological awareness, gay rights, feminism, even New Age escapism. In the aftershocks, the left altered consciousness but the right completed the assault on social democracy with much more thoroughness and brutality. (O'Toole 6)

There is a lot of sense and some truth in this analysis: witness Nixon and Kissinger's support for the overthrow of a duly-elected social democracy in Chile on September 11, 1973. However, 'the young radicals' of 1968 were primarily seeking social justice and civil rights for fellow citizens, an end to an unjust war in Indochina, and the right to be heard in conjunction with their education and curricula. The 'would-be revolution' has been and will continue to be a slow, developmental, re-educational series of 'evenements'—including "ecological awareness, gay rights, feminism," and myriad similar, crucial reconstructions and re-alignments of the human experience and social condition. Thatcherite 'casino capitalism' and unregulated 'Reaganomics' imploded over the course of the summer and autumn of 2008, and well-regulated social democracy on the Scandinavian model has proven it's the best alternative. Look at the way in which Iceland dealt with its twenty or so reckless 'Thatcherite' investment bankers who had imperiled its economy and time-honored democracy in 2008! Lock them up for proven crimes against the democratic state and its citizens and have their equally reckless, greedy stakeholders pay the bill! Iceland has not suffered the ten-years-long crime of

austerity that has gutted social services and education in Britain, Ireland (North and South), and the U.S. Iceland is a model of practice for social democracy. Let's listen and learn.

And Vietnam too, it would seem. When Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the People's Republic of Vietnam (PRV), following the ouster of Japanese troops from his homeland and the U.S. defeat of the Empire of Japan in August 1945, he began by invoking words of Thomas Jefferson from the American Declaration of Independence of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1776.

Ho began not by proclaiming the establishment of his new government. That came only in the closing sentences. Rather, he started by quoting the American Declaration of Independence. "All men are created equal," Ho Chi Minh stated [in Vietnamese]. "They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Lawrence 27).

One of the many 'ants' of the world was speaking to his fellow 'ants' and to the French and American 'elephant,' to borrow Alistair Cooke's memorable words and social metaphors.<sup>6</sup> The PRV was invoking and proclaiming the model of social democracy upon which the U.S. was and still is founded but one that too many Americans chose and still choose to ignore. Vietnamese, French and Americans 'are created equal' and all societies of aspiring social democrats possess 'certain unalienable Rights'—the civil rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The French government in the 1940s and 1950s and the American government in the 1960s and 1970s paid little heed to these noble words. Yet the 'ants' did heed them and persisted in their resolute and untiring ways, including delivering the massive shock of the Tet Offensive in 1968. In 2018, however, the Vietnamese pursue the social betterment of themselves and trade freely and productively with France, the U.S. and much of the world. They produce splendid commodities, such as my Converse All-Star High-Tops, for instance, manufactured in Vietnam since 2003 and sold in the U.S. with a military dogtag-like emblem attached to the laces. Sneakers and not body-bags—with deceased soldiers' dogtag IDs attached—are sent home to the U.S. from Vietnam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such commerce seems a welcome by-product of the pitched struggles over social justice and civil rights in 1968—a 'turning point' public, personal, and profoundly influential in ways we're still discovering.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a well-balanced, circumspect, historical survey of the preliminary manoeuvres, the two-month struggle and the aftermath of The Tet Offensive of 1968, see Mark Atwood Lawrence's account in chapter 6 of *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*, especially pages 115-36.

<sup>2</sup>Joel Kovel's brilliant social and psychological analysis, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, was published two years after Cleaver's provocative series of essays on the effects of white racism on the impoverished Afro-American ghettos of the U.S., as well as his reflections on the Vietnam War. Kovel writes in direct response to Otto Kerner's Report of March 1968 (292) and produces an ambitious and probing analysis of the history, psychohistory and psychological and historical effects of white racism, an analysis largely indebted to the thought of Sigmund Freud, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and Frantz Fanon (64-5, 135-8, 249-89). It's a study that echoes many themes of Cleaver, but not his polemics, and strongly underscores the findings of Otto Kerner's federally commissioned report on the manifest linkage of white racism and American civil disorder.

<sup>3</sup>Devlin's detailed, contemporary, eye-witness report on the August march is rather fascinating and provides a socialist analysis of the limitations of sectarian issues within the politics of various Northern Irish movements and reactionary forces. See especially pages 97-102.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Bernadette Devlin's shocking eye-witness account of the entire march, ongoing skirmishes with violent Paisleyites, and the devastating and well-orchestrated Burntollet Bridge attack on the 4th of January against non-violent, song-singing marchers (139-62).

<sup>5</sup>It's useful to note this crucial watershed moment: 'Where did you stand on Chicago? It became another one of those 1968 divides. You were either on the side of Daley and the police, who were severely criticized even by the Walker Report, or you were on the side of the demonstrators, the hippies, the Yippies, the antiwar movement, the [Senator Eugene] McCarthy workers' (Kurlansky 284-5).

<sup>6</sup>One of the most clever and most insightful fictional depictions of Ho Chi Minh theatrically underscores my point here. Nicole Kelby depicts the young Ho—then called Nguyen Sinh Cung—working as a dishwasher and then as a chosen trainee chef for the famous Auguste Escoffier at the Carlton Hotel, Haymarket in Westminster in the closing years of the latter chef's distinguished career (Kelby 323-5). The two chefs, young and old, discuss recycling discarded food and leftovers to the poor, correct French terminology for sports writing as well as precision pastry making. Kelby has the young Vietnamese chef resign his four-year-long post when the French overthrow Emperor Duy Tan of Vietnam in 1916: "It is time, my friend," he said. "Adieu, mon ami." He kissed me on both cheeks. "I hope that someday my people will call me 'Ho Chi Minh,' 'Bringer of Light.'" (Kelby 324).



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