8/19/24; The Chicago DNC everyone wants to forget

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

SCORING IN <BOUNCING ALONG>

NOEL KING (HOST): I’m Noel King at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Union Park is the starting point of this year’s big protest against Israel’s war in Gaza.

*<CLIP> MARCH ON DNC PROTEST*

*Hatem Abudayyeh (Coalition and U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN) National Chair): Make no mistake, Joe Biden can turn off that tap of money and funding immediately. He could do it right now…and that he and Kamala Harris…they are responsible.*

NOEL: This morning, the protest organizers were drawing this comparison to 1968.

*<CLIP> MARCH ON DNC PROTEST*

*Hatem Abudayyeh:*This is the Vietnam war of our generation. In the late sixties, early seventies hundreds of thousands, millions of people were in the streets to stop that war.

NOEL: When the D-N-C was in Chicago in 68 a massive Vietnam War protest spiraled into violence when police attacked protesters. Coming up: will 2024 be a repeat of 1968? Everybody’s asking, so will we.

**[THEME]**

<CLIP> 2024\_Hail to the Chief\_No Tex or year

NOEL: It’s Today, Explained. I’m Noel King with historian, and journalist Rick Perlstein who has spent much of his adult life chronicling American conservatives and examining the role the sixties played in bringing them to power.

RICK PERLSTEIN (HISTORIAN, JOURNALIST, AMERICAN PROSPECT MAGAZINE): Growing up in the 1980s, “Reaganland” was kind of boring for me. And the melodrama of the 60s was absolutely galvanizing. I couldn't believe how every day seemed to bring a new revolution. And so certainly I was fascinated by this idea of these kids sitting out in the streets and getting beaten within an inch of their lives by the cops and the whole pageant.

NOEL: Alright, let’s go back to the summer of ‘68. What was the backdrop to the convention in August of that year?

RICK: The backdrop nationally was that the Democratic Party was divided down the middle on the issue of the Vietnam War.

SCORING IN <Basic Barbara>

*<CLIP> American Citizens Debate The Vietnam War*

*Debater 1: The whole question is, i mean ‘what happens if you do win in North Vietnam? What happens if you win in South Vietnam? What then? You’re faced with the same problem. How are you gonna find a popular government that’s gonna run the place?*

*Debater 2: And have it turn into eventually a communist government? Is that your idea?*

*Debater 1: Well, that doesn’t terrify me quite as much as it seems to terrify other people.*

RICK: Of course, it had been escalated by a Democratic president, Lyndon Johnson, who believed he was continuing the wishes of, you know, the martyred president, John F Kennedy.

*<CLIP> C-SPAN, LBJ 1965*

*Lyndon Baines Johnson: I have today ordered to Vietnam the air mobile division. And certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately.*

RICK: And, you know, a lot of people who are Democrats saw it as part of this great anti-communist crusade, and a lot of people saw it as imperialism that, you know, basically we were interfering in another country's civil war.

*<CLIP> American Citizens Debate The Vietnam War*

*Student: My own personal position is that the war in Vietnam is unjust, unnecessary and immoral. And I feel immoral participating in it.*

RICK: The idea that we had to get out was very, very prevalent on the left wing of the Democratic Party. And Lyndon Johnson decided he wasn't going to run for president.

*<CLIP> C-SPAN, LBJ Announces He Won't Run*

*JOHNSON: I do not believe that I should devote an hour or day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office.*

RICK: So by the time delegates arrived at the convention, Lyndon Johnson's loyal vice president, Hubert Humphrey, was the nominee apparent. And he had kind of been coerced almost into loyally supporting the war, even though he had grave reservations about it.

*<CLIP> Face The Nation*

*Hubert Humphrey: I think that for the Democratic Party and convention to draw up military strategy and tactics is just a little bit beyond what the American people would expect of a political party and beyond its capacity and ability to do. These are matters that must be left up to our Commander in Chief…*

RICK: And the question of whether he would be nominated or Eugene McCarthy would be nominatedwas live in the air. And it looked like Humphrey had it wired but there was kind of a proxy fight in the form of a platform that the Democratic Party go on the record to end the Vietnam War.

*<CLIP> News 5 Cleveland*

*John Gilligan: My feeling is that should he accept it, it would go a long way towards assuring both his nomination and his election. If he should decide to oppose it, oppose the inclusion of a specific peace plan in the Democratic platform I think it would it would conceivably turn it into a real battle royale.*

SCORING OUT

RICK: Of course, at the same time, protesters from all over the country flooded in.

*<CLIP> History Channel*

*Announcer: Members of the Youth International Party, Yippies they called themselves, converged on Chicago. They said they were there to protest the war, poverty, racism, and other social ills. Some of them were also determined to provoke a confrontation, to draw attention from the convention to the streets.*

RICK: There's a separate Chicago context. Several months earlier that spring, there had been terrible riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King.

*<CLIP>CBS News, MLK Death*

*Walter Cronkite: Good evening. Dr. Martin Luther King - the apostle of nonviolence and the civil rights movement has been shot to death in Memphis Tennessee.*

RICK: So there was dread and anticipation, not only within the convention hall, so it seemed for the Democratic Party, and then outside the convention hall, what would happen when the city hosted, very reluctantly, thousands of protesters who were much more radical than the kind of protesters we see now.

*<CLIP> Abbie Hoffman on the 1968 Democratic Convention*

*Hoffman: I think if people stay in the park they'll be treated with respect by the police. In fact they'll be held up as the models of the ideal protesters. Those yippies that march on the amphitheater or go downtown or sit in restaurants or demand their rights they'll be risking their lives. that's right, these cops here are tough they will kill you with a smile. “Shoot to kill Daley.”*

RICK: They would talk about, you know, we want to overthrow society. You know, we want to overthrow capitalism.

<CLIP> Abbie Hoffman speech in 1968

Abbie Hoffman: We are a people. We are all together. We are all under attack! America has decided to devour its youth. We will resist. We will not participate in America’s children for breakfast program. FUCK’EM!

RICK: And here everyone arrives to this city, which is run bythis kind of almost oligarchic mayor, Richard J. Daley, who intended no disorder in his city that he was putting on display for the entire world.

*<CLIP> Villion Films, 1968, Chicago Riots*

*Mayor Daley: they have no right to come into the city and tell us what they’re gonna do. We don’t permit our own people to sleep in the park, so why would we permit anyone from out of the city to sleep in the park? We don’t permit our own people to march at night. So why would we permit a lot people doing snake dances at night?*

NOEL: Disorder came anyway. Tell me two things: What did Daley do to try to prevent disorder. And how did it go so very wrong?

RICK: One of the things he did to try to prevent disorder was to kind of string along these two groups of protesters who wanted to come to the city by not granting them official permission to A) sleep in a park, which was Lincoln Park. And that was the intention of the group who identified themselves as hippies. They were led by a guy named Abbie Hoffman, the guy who had a year before promised to levitate the Pentagon during a protest.

NOEL: <laughs>

SCORING IN <KPM\_KPM\_0263\_02401\_Protest\_Song\_\_B\_\_APM>

*<CLIP> Abbie Hoffman*

*Hoffman: And when it gets about 300 feet in the air, it’s gonna start to vibrate, slowly at first, then a little quicker, and all the evil spirits are gonna pour out.*

RICK: And these were the people who wanted to– they would talk about fornicating in the park. They wanted to have a rock festival. The idea was they represented this new youth identity that was revolutionary and was going to completely overthrow bourgeois propriety. And another group of people wanted to parade to the convention hall, and they were much more kind of conventionally political, but a lot of them were kind of radical revolutionaries and the kind of people who would, you know, hoist flags of the enemy in Vietnam, the Viet Cong.

*<CLIP> Aliens From Spaceship Earth*

*Rennie Davis: We say that if the government of the United States does not stop the war, we intend to stop the government of the United States.*

RICK: And Daley put his foot down and said, these, you know, long haired miscreants aren't going to, you know, get the time of day in our city, which only ratcheted up the tensions, right, and made them even more determined. We'll sleep in the park even if you don't want us to. We'll march to the convention hall even if you don't want us to. We'll put our bodies on the line, in both cases.

*<CLIP> Abbie Hoffman on Yippie Tactics 1968*

*Hoffman: And it'll be like a football game. Cops versus the yippies or the National Guard or whoever and people will be watching that on TV, and they'll say we don't want to watch that boring speech stuff we want to watch the Rose Bowl out there.*

SCORING OUT

NOEL: When did the violence begin?

RICK: Immediately.

<CLIP> NBC Chicago - From the Archives

Anchor: they’re now moving off down balbo street and the crowd is running. And the police are chasing them into Jackson, into Grant Park.

Reporter: there is an odor of tear gas still left in the air here. Tear gas shells have been going off periodically for the last hours.

RICK: So you basically had this kind of enveloping dread, leading up to the last day of convention, even as the debates over the platform are leading to actual violence inside the convention hall.

*<CLIP> CBS 1968 Democratic National Convention*

*Delegate: I’m being manhandled!*

*Dan Rather: What's your name sir? Take your hands off of me!*

*Cronkite: Dan Rather…*

*Rather: Unless you intend to arrest me, don’t push me please.*

*Rather: Walter, as you can see, we got bodily pushed out of the way. This is the kind of thing that’s been going on outside of the hall. This is the first time it’s happened inside of the hall. I’m sorry to be out of breath, somebody belted me in the stomach during that…*

RICK: So you had kind of these miniature civil wars breaking out kind of inside among the, you know, the actual credentialed delegates and outside among protesters and police.

NOEL: What was going on inside the convention and how rowdy did it actually get?

RICK: The most dramatic thing that happened inside the convention hall to increase the tension is that that Thursday night, when students who are denied the right to march to the convention hall sat down right in front of that famous hotel and police just started, you know, wading into the crowd and just bashing people on the head.

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And word got into the convention hall that that was what was happening. They were doing the final vote for, you know, who would get nominated as president. And there was a third candidate who was kind of running almost as kind of like a symbolic run. It was a guy named George McGovern who later won the nomination in 1972, but he was really the most anti-war of all the candidates.

<CLIP> Eugene McCarthy AD

McCarthy: We ought to try to work out a coalition government now. If the South Vietnamese continue to veto it, we ought to put them on notice we’re going to limit our commitment. That we’re going to reduce it.

Right. And he was nominated by a liberal senator from Connecticut named Abraham Ribicoff. And Ribicoff said if George McGovern was the president of the United States.

*<CLIP> Abraham Ribicoff 1968 DNC Convention Speech*

*Ribicoff: We would have to have Gestapo tactics in the streets of Chicago.*

RICK: And when he said that this, you know, kind of corpulent, you know, cigar chomping political boss, Mayor Daley, shouted something that you could not hear. And later, lip readers famously said that he had said something about how Senator Ribicoff was “a no good Jew bastard,” and that was it. You know, the battle was on.

NOEL: Back with Rick Perlstein, in a minute.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: Rick Perlstein, author of “Nixonland” and “Reaganland,” when we left off you said on the Thursday night of the ‘68 convention there was fighting INSIDE the hall. What was going on outside the convention center?

RICK: So Michigan Avenue is the most famous street in Chicago, the Magnificent Mile. On the east side of the street is Grant Park, which is just, you know, kind of gorgeous 19th century Paris-style park. And the marchers massed for their, their march, you know, several miles down from the convention hall. The police are standing in the street in their way. So what they do is that the protesters kind of do a military, flanking maneuver. They walk into the park and try and kind of walk around the policemen – and the policemen kind of chase them back across the street.

*<CLIP> CBS News*

*Cronkite: Vice President Humphry in his 29th floor room got some of the gas – which came up there – he choked and sneezed a bit. And said that it itched, and took a shower, and made a statement saying he was dismayed by the outbreak.*

RICK: And what happens next is, the students sat down, you know, did a sit-in strike, basically blocking the street right in front of the TV cameras and hundreds of white-helmeted Chicago police just methodically started taking their nightsticks and beating these seated protesters.

*<CLIP> CBS News*

*Cronkite: The interesting thing about this is that almost universally the bystanders have been horror stricken apparently by this, by this action of the police.*

RICK: Police wagons lined up and they would, you know, grab young people from this by the scruff of their neck, you know, throw them into police wagons.

*<CLIP> CBS News*

*Cronkite: These are scenes similar to those we saw earlier on videotape of demonstrators being hustled – that’s the kindest word for it – into the police wagons…*

RICK: And then when there were enough for them to be full, they would throw a tear gas canister inside, and then they would smack the door closed. And this was all, you know, on TV. It was on all three channels. And there was this terrible backlash. The majority of the country very much believed that the Chicago police were on the right. The protesters were in the wrong. And that was the very backlash against, you know, the forces of civil rights and anti-war activism and cultural shifts and all that stuff that Richard Nixon was running for president on, as the Republican candidate.

*<CLIP> NIXON AD*

*Nixon: It is time for an honest look at the problem of order in the United States. Dissent is a necessary ingredient of change. But in a system of government that provides for peaceful change, there is no cause that justifies resort to violence. So I pledge to you, we shall have order in the United States.*

NOEL: And so could a person say that Richard Nixon, who ended up winning, ended up winning that year because of the way the events of the 1968 DNC played out in Chicago?

RICK: Yeah, I don't think so. I think the main reason Richard Nixon won was because Hubert Humphrey, who had been kind of manipulated into supporting the Vietnam War that he had grave reservations about - from Lyndon Johnson, who just demanded the most intense obedience and loyalty on the part of his underlings - that he refused to denounce the Vietnam War.

*<CLIP> FACE THE NATION*

*Humphery: American people are not going to stand for any kind of a peace arrangement or any kind of tactical arrangement relating to the peace discussion that leaves our men in south Vietnam at the mercy of the enemy.*

RICK: So I think that was the biggest cause for the Democrats' loss was not you know, that the protests themselves, it was not listening to the protesters. And, the big message that he took to the country in his TV commercials was that the first “civil right” of all Americans, quote unquote, was to be safe in their own homes. So he was campaigning against skyrocketing violent crime rates. He was campaigning with commercials that showed these violent protests and, of course, were blaming the protesters for them. And, generally speaking, that if he was elected president, he would bring law and order to the White House, as opposed to the Democrats who couldn't even control their convention.

NOEL: We decided to do this episode about the ‘68 convention months ago, even before this year's convention seemed exciting, because people kept saying, you know, you keep reading op eds, “Oh, the DNC is in Chicago. 2024 is like 1968.” How much do you believe that to be true? And what is causing people to make that comparison?

RICK: It's so interesting. You know, I know a ton about the 1968 convention. and in my book I kind of document it, hour by hour and sometimes minute by minute. And I'm, of course, you know, fascinated by what will happen in politics in 2024. And, you know, until I started getting these calls from folks like you, it never occurred to me…

NOEL: <laughs>

RICK: …to understand the 2024 convention in my city, Chicago, by going back to what I studied and wrote in 1968. To me, everything from, you know, how presidents get chosen now compared to then, how protests in the street work now compared to then, how politicians respond to protests, how the entire apparatus of law enforcement and security work compared to then, how Chicago works compared to them – are just so different.

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*<CLIP>CBS News Chicago - safety*

*Reporter: Right now the biggest priority on the agenda is the buildout of the DNC security perimeter. Once the perimeter is in place no cars or foot traffic will be allowed inside without proper clearance.*

RICK: You've been to conventions, you know, that like a quarter mile away from the arena, there's going to be iron fences, and you can't get anywhere past those iron fences without, you know, going through metal detectors. And you know, protests themselve, you know, one of the things that made 1968, you know, so shocking and so galvanizing for the public was this was a new thing. People hadn't seen it before. The idea that you could go into a convention and you didn't know whether the presidential candidate was going to be Hubert Humphrey or Eugene McCarthy. You know, maybe there was a glimmer of possibility that that might have happened before the, you know, the Democratic Party lined up behind Kamala Harris. But, you know, part of what the protesters were trying to do was influence how the convention would come out. And after 1968, they completely changed how presidential candidates were chosen. They went to a primary system where they used to have these kind of backroom kind of caucus systems. And finally, you know, no one really cares about these conventions. And, I mean, there's just this is kind of like, you know, they show up for a night on TV and people watch the speeches and, you know, the idea that this could be this kind of cataclysmic, galvanizing event that - don't forget the slogan of the protesters as they were getting beat up. Their chant was, “The whole world is watching.” Right. Well, the whole world won't be watching. So, you know, I'm always saying, you know, history is a process, it's not parallels. We can't have 1968 again because we already had 1968. It completely shaped the politics we have now and the way the Republican Party does business. But because we're that far down the road, a lot of the things that happened in 1968 are inconceivable in 2024. It doesn't mean that interesting and even melodramatic and even possibly violent things might not happen in 2024, but those will happen for 2024 reasons, those won't happen for 1968 reasons.

SCORING OUT

**NOEL: Historian Rick Perlstein. Alright, so the comparison between today and ‘68 ISN’T exactly 1:1. But the ECHOES of that year are certainly alive here in Chicago. In fact two young activists I talked to even mirrored the language, they told me: “the whole world is watching.”**

*<CLIP> MARCH ON DNC PROTEST*

*HUSAM MARAJDA (PROTESTER): You know, the United States is usually on the news everywhere in the world, but, this is a big deal, right? It's a Democratic National Convention, to nominate their presidential candidate. Right. There's a lot of momentum, of course, with the Kamala Harris announcement, you know, to challenge Trump and to defeat Trump. So the the world is, you know, the world, gets all affected by the policies of the United States, right? The world looks to the United States to put a stop to the genocide. People want a stop to this. The United States have derailed it. They've slow it down. Right. We're we're going to achieve a ceasefire. We're going to achieve a cease fire. Ten months of saying the same thing. We don't want that. We don't want no more talks. We want action. You know, it's it's how many more needs need to die for for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris to put an end to this. They can they can put an end this in one phone call.*

NOEL: What these activists are NOT expecting is a repeat of the violence.

*<CLIP> MARCH ON DNC PROTEST*

*NAZEK (PROTESTER): Our marshals have been preparing for this. Our communities keep us safe. We keep each other safe. And we're going to continue to be out here all day, rallying in sight and sound of the DNC, to make the demands heard that we need to end U.S. aid to Israel immediately and that, humanitarian aid needs to go into Gaza, and we are going to continue fighting for the liberation of Palestine until all of historic Palestine is liberated.*

NOEL: That was Husam <hoo-SAHM> Marajda <muh-RUHJ-duh. and Nazek <NAH-zik> Sankari <su=an-KAH-ree> of the U.S. Palestinian Community Network - Chicago chapter.

Today’s show was produced by Hady Mawajdeh, edited by Miranda Kennedy, fact-checked by Laura Bullard, and engineered by Patrick Boyd and Andrea Kristinsdottir. Thanks to Amina al-Sadi in Washington. Im Noel King in Chicago - Today, Explained will be reporting from the DNC all week.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**