

Chicago as Host: Same City, Different Era '68 Players Look Back, Ahead

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The whole world will be watching the 1996 Democratic Convention in Chicago, but it'll probably be an afternoon tea compared with the one here in 1968.

Back then, Dan Rather broadcast the news from the convention floor while being punched. Indignant CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite ripped the assailants as "thugs" but politely added, "if I may be permitted to say so."

Long-haired anti-war demonstrators staged rampages or heartfelt protests, depending on your point of view. And police beat them up.

Even Hugh Hefner, venturing from the Playboy Mansion, got swatted.

Beat poet Allen Ginsberg chanted "om" to calm the multitudes.

And now, the news that Chicago is hosting another convention is creating waves of nostalgia among those who were in the heat of it, or who watched its images, aghast, on television.

They say this convention will be dull, dull, dull compared with 1968. Many say they'll miss political prankster Abbie Hoffman, who committed suicide in 1989.

Not the current Mayor Daley, however.

"We have enough characters," he said.

Here are some condensed reactions to the upcoming convention and a look at what it means for Chicago and its image.

Bill Ayers, an associate professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, protested at the '68 convention. The former Weather Underground activist also spent 11 years as a fugitive after the Days of Rage disturbances in 1969:

"It's kind of a riot" he says with a laugh about the upcoming convention.

"I don't think people think of Chicago as the site of the ('68) convention. Chicago is still held up as the city of broad shoulders, even though the shoulders are slumping precipitously right now. When I travel and say Chicago, people say, 'Ah, Michael Jordan.'

"You can find irony in it. To me it's not surprising that there's going to be a Democratic convention here. It's one of the great four or five convention cities. In a sense, they had to get over it.

"I'm planning to demonstrate. If they invade Haiti, you can count on it."

Eleanor Clift, Newsweek White House correspondent and McLaughlin Group commentator, watched the '68 convention on TV as a "girl Friday" in Newsweek's Atlanta bureau:

"I would imagine the city will acquit itself beautifully. When the Democrats decided to go to New York in 1992 there was

some trepidation that the crime in the city would become the focus and some conventioners would be mugged, have their wallets stolen, and somehow it would reflect badly on the Democrats as a permissive party. They had a cop every 10 feet, and I'm a New Yorker, and I felt a surge of pride the city was able to handle this. It's a wonderful psychological deliverance for a city that handles it well."

Mayor Richard M. Daley:

"This is a convention that deals with economic development, so we're very happy with it. We have a good image. The World Cup, I think, was amazing. . . . Visitors . . . expected something different - watching the old movies - and it's completely different."

Will the convention provide collective closure to the events of '68?

"No, that's all part of history. You had Vietnam, the assassination of President (John F.) Kennedy, assassination of Martin Luther King, assassination of Bobby Kennedy, whole Vietnam crisis. No, I don't think you ever change history."

As for criticism that his father, the late Mayor (Richard J.) Daley, was heavy-handed with protesters, Daley responded: "He got re-elected."

Bernardine Dohrn, director of the Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University's legal clinic, went underground for 11 years after the Days of Rage protests. Authorities called her the "most militant" of the Weathermen; she surrendered in 1980 and served seven months in jail. She is married to **Ayers**:

News of the convention "made me miss Abbie (Hoffman). We need him. I miss him very often, but when there's a news event, even Rwanda - which is too overwhelming - he was more brilliant than anyone else at getting at the heart of the matter and saying something pithy and dramatizing it so it wasn't just words."

Tom Foran, former U.S. attorney who prosecuted the Chicago Seven protesters:

"I think that there was a perception that a lot of people approved of what the rioters did in 1968. No one did. I mean, a very, very tiny percentage thought that there was any justifiable actions by those rioters. The overwhelming majority of the people of Chicago thought that the actions against the rioters were totally justified.

"The media . . . took about 20 minutes out of 20 hours of TV and put it together to make it look terrible, and it was an obvious attempt to give Chicago and the democratic process a black eye.

"The '60s were a strange time anyway. Everybody knows that. All that rioting was primarily led by a group of people, they were a strange bunch. Drug users. A lot of them were into this whole anti-authority, free use of drugs, the sexual revolution. It was a goofy time.

"Mayor Daley, the old mayor, was a great guy and he loved Chicago and he loved the Democratic Party, and he got the worst kind of misjudgment, his actions and his intentions, that ever was done, dirty pool.

"I indicted eight policemen. Nobody ever mentions that. Eight for beating people, for excessive force."

Tom Hayden, one of the Chicago Seven later married Jane Fonda. He is now a state senator in California and recently lost a bid for the Democratic nomination for governor:

"There's a thought out there Chicago has been excluded from a convention because of '68. I don't know how to prove it because many cities are competitive. I guess the thinking goes like this: If we go to Chicago, will it make the media run endless scenes of '68, or will it be during the (Dan) Rostenkowski trial, what if, what if, what if.

"We have to continue the course of reform, which seems to me the corruption of the democratic process by big money and lobbying. I would expect to be at the convention as a delegate working on behalf of a party platform to achieve reforms in the campaign finance system."

William Kunstler, Chicago Seven defense attorney, is currently using an unhinged-by-racism defense for accused Long Island Railroad shooter Colin Ferguson:

"I think it (1968) sullied Mayor Richard (J.) Daley's reputation, a reputation of a vicious and unprincipled man who was determined, virtually, to maim and kill people in order to keep protests from occurring in that city.

"I imagine there's going to be many protests. (President Clinton) is renegeing on lots of promises.

"I hope that the son (the current Mayor Daley) understands what the father never learned. The fundamental purpose of the Bill of Rights - the right to protest - and that the First Amendment is the most important amendment. That's why it's first in the Bill of Rights."

Kurt Loder, MTV correspondent, watched the '68 convention on TV while living in Europe:

"For those who may still harbor a grudge I think it will be demonstrated Chicago is not run by thugs and hack politicians and I'm sure they can pull it off. These are different times. I mean, what are people protesting about these days?"

Bernard Shaw, a CNN anchorman and Chicago native, covered the '68 convention:

"The only way to expunge that image of the battle of Michigan Avenue is to put on a convention that's completely opposite. The 1996 convention will be so different from the 1968 convention because of time, because of reality. You don't have a Vietnam War. You don't have generational clashes in the street. It's a different era.

"Voters are very sophisticated people, and a lot of them realize what happened on Michigan Avenue in 1968 could have happened in any other city. Daley was the beneficiary of intelligence gathered by the FBI and other agencies which indicated it was going to be rough in Chicago.

"What I think would be very rich in symbolism and comedy would be for incumbent mayor Richard M. Daley to hand former Connecticut Sen. Abe Ribicoff an olive branch and shake hands with him from the podium and wave to the crowd in the hall as fellow Democrats. It would be a great TV moment, but it would be great for the party."

U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.), former Black Panther leader:

It's "too early to tell if it will change Chicago's image"

because he is working on minority contract demands. "I think the city is still struggling with the image of being racially segregated."

"It is not our priority to recast the image" of '68 "at the sole expense of quality of life of the citizens of the city."

Studs Terkel, Pulitzer prize-winning author and WFMT radio raconteur, got tear-gassed during the '68 clashes:

"It'll be a dull afternoon tea event. This makes me long for '68. I have a sense of nostalgia developing. I want Abbie Hoffman around and Dick Gregory as well as Himself (Richard J. Daley) and we have ourselves theater.

"Himself was so dumb. If he had said `stick around' and gave them (protesters) coffee, it would have killed the whole thing."

Bobby Seale, Black Panther co-founder, is working on a film based on his Panthers book *Seize the Time*. He's also written *Barbequeing With Bobby* and is featured in the latest Ben and Jerry's print ad, fist raised, pitching ice cream. Seale is the community liaison for Temple University's African-American studies department:

"I think Mayor (Richard J.) Daley did more to the city's image than anything. The most destructive action was Mayor Daley ordering his police out to beat up the demonstrators. It became a police riot. That's what destroyed the image of the City of Chicago.

"I wound up in Chicago telling the people if the fascists are going to murder and kill us then we have a right to defend ourselves. I didn't say we had a right to violence, and the next thing I know, eight or nine months later, I'm put on trial for conspiracy.

"I would like to see Bill Clinton being renominated. I like Bill Clinton and I like Al Gore. These guys are positive. That's about the best we're going to get right now. There's only so much you can do within the system."

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