

1968: A Global Perspective

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Robert F. Kennedy's Changing Opinion Regarding American Involvement in the Vietnam War

The paper will examine the evolution of Robert F. Kennedy's perspective on the Vietnam War, specifically focusing on his decision to run for president of the United States in 1968. Initially a strong supporter of American involvement in Southeast Asia during his brother's administration, by 1966 Robert Kennedy, now a United States senator, began having serious misgivings about the necessity and morality of the Vietnam War. Throughout 1966 and 1967, Kennedy increased his criticism of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam policies, earning him scorn from the White House. In 1968, with the country deeply in discord over Vietnam and unrest at home, Robert Kennedy declared his intent to challenge Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination that year. However, President Johnson's exit from the race soon after Kennedy's announcement encouraged the senator to expand his campaign's focus to promoting civil rights and combating poverty. The paper will argue that Robert Kennedy significantly changed in his attitude toward Vietnam during his political career, and hoped to build a presidential campaign which would unite the divided country. Comments will be made on Kennedy's tragic death, as well as his legacy for today, especially in regard to the 2008 U.S. presidential election.