

# H-Diplo

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*Diplomatic History* 34:3 (June 2010).

**Melvin Small, “Bring the Boys Home Now! Antiwar Activism and Withdrawal from Vietnam—  
and Iraq.”** *Diplomatic History* 34:3 (June 2010): 543-554.

**Chester Pach, “Our Worst Enemy Seems to Be the Press”: TV News, the Nixon  
Administration, and U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Vietnam, 1969-1973.”** *Diplomatic History*  
34:3 (June 2010): 555-565.

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Author’s Response by **Melvin Small**, Distinguished Professor History Emeritus, Wayne State  
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I’d like to thank Ralph Levering for his interesting comments, many of which I remember discussing with him over lunch at the Miller Center conference. I will deal, again, with a few of them here.

First, he is less enthusiastic about the relative success or effectiveness of the antiwar movement than I am. Yes, it did not stop the war but, as I have argued elsewhere: it caused Johnson’s end-of-the-tunnel public-relations campaign in November 1968 that led to popular disillusionment when the Tet Offensive occurred; the October 1969 Moratorium contributed to Nixon’s decision not to retaliate when the North Vietnamese rejected his ultimatum with the November 1 deadline; and since Johnson and Nixon thought that Hanoi took the movement into account when it made *its* policies, then it affected Washington’s policies. More important, perhaps, the existence of a movement and close to an antiwar majority in Congress, affected by that movement, made it difficult for Nixon to escalate, especially after the Cambodian invasion in the spring of 1970.

Second, he is correct in noting that Humphrey ultimately appeared (and was) more dovish than Nixon during the 1968 campaign. However, the media had contributed to the myth that the Republican contender had a “secret plan” to end the war. Nixon declared

in early October, “Those who have had a chance for four years and could not produce peace should not be given another chance.”

If I were a voter, perhaps an independent, and the war in Vietnam was one of my major concerns, I could conclude that fall that both candidates had promised to end the war, and at least Nixon was not associated with a failed policy. Thus, my vote might be determined by domestic issues such as “law and order” or the economy. No doubt, many liberals who voted for Humphrey denied him their contributions and, even more important for a Democrat during those pre-Goldman Sachs and internet days, the foot soldiers needed to do the groundwork work of a campaign. Like Levering, I too am convinced now, which was not the case for me in 1968, that Humphrey, prodded by a Democratic Congress would have gotten us out of Vietnam quicker than did Nixon and that any peace he could have achieved in 1970 or 1971 would have been as imperfect the decent-interval peace Nixon achieved in 1973.

Last, and here is where I really take issue with Levering, he blames the radicals in the antiwar movement for creating “Chicago” and thus leaving the Democratic Party in a shambles and many voters with a strong distaste for a party that allegedly harbored such violent nihilists, anarchists, socialists, and communists. As we now know thanks to official and scholarly investigations, most of the violence originated with and was committed by the out-of-control Chicago police force in a “police riot,” sometimes abetted by *agents provocateurs* in the antiwar van. Mayor Richard Daley publicly claimed that what Americans saw on television, images of the police beating unarmed young people, was a product of liberal journalism. He had little to worry about. When polled a few days later, a majority of Americans reported that they saw young people beating the police and even if sometimes the police appeared to be too exuberant, the lawless radicals deserved it.

And where was Humphrey while this was going on and when Senator Abraham Ribicoff, no wild radical, was denouncing the Daley machine from the convention podium, only to be shouted down by city employees in the galleries? And where was he after the McCarthy convention office was raided by the police, for no legitimate reason, and scores of young campaign workers were bludgeoned?

To be sure, McCarthy and his followers sat on their hands during much of the campaign. But to me, that seems like an understandable response, if obviously shortsighted. Nevertheless, rather than blame them for the close election loss, I would blame the Nixon campaign for its “treason” or clear violation of the Logan Act on the eve of the election. After Johnson’s announcement in late October that he had a deal to open talks with the Vietnamese communists, Humphrey rose in the polls to the point where he had reached a within-the-margin-of-error or a too-close-to call position. But when Nixon’s operatives urged the South Vietnamese to go public with their rejection of the deal, something they might have done anyway, Humphrey began to recede in the polls two days before the election.

Finally, rather than blame the radicals who were violent in action or rhetoric or extreme in appearance or behavior for losing the election, I blame the media that concentrated their attention on the most telegenic of public protestors, who generally did not reflect the politics or demeanor of most demonstrators. Although the amorphous antiwar leadership decried their colleagues' tactics and the resultant bad publicity, they prided themselves on permitting everyone his or her say, occasionally pleading with such groups as the "Dykes on Bikes" to take a position further back along the parade route. But they were never able to convince fellow antiwarriors that carrying posters with photos of Fidel, or Ho, or Mao was counterproductive.

**Melvin Small** is Distinguished Professor History Emeritus at Wayne State University. Among his books on the Vietnam War are *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (1988), which won SHAFR's Kuehl prize, *Covering Dissent* (1994), *Antiwarriors* (1999), and *At the Water's Edge* (2005). He is currently editing *A Companion to Richard Nixon*.

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