**Chapter 28: Uncivil Wars: Liberal Crisis and Conservative Rebirth, 1961-1972**

**[[BIG IDEA:** What were liberalism’s social and political achievements in the 1960s, and how did debates over liberal values contribute to conflict at home and reflect tension abroad?]]

The sixties. There may be no decade in American history more laden with meaning and association. Protests, riots, hippies, massive rock concerts, the War in Vietnam, and a generational revolt. It’s all part of the story of this super-charged decade. Even more than forty years later, the association of the sixties with certain images is inescapable.

But how do we cut through this kaleidoscope of images to understand the patterns of historical change that shaped the decade? The place to start is political liberalism, the political ideals inherited from the New Deal in the 1930s and transformed by the Cold War. Many Americans in the 1960s, most of them young, had grown dissatisfied with American liberalism, because they believed it had done too little. African Americans, women, college students, and peace activists saw a society whose faith in progress had not translated into equality and justice. As the decade wore on, and especially as the war in Vietnam expanded, they took to the streets to seek the change they believed the “system,” as so many came to call it, had blocked.

Some of them simply wished to see a more robust and committed liberalism. But others went further, toward radicalism and a belief that the entire structure of society had to change. Still others believed that politics could never be reformed, and they looked to personal, individual solutions. Inspired by music, philosophy and literature, the beat generation of the 1950s, and often by drugs, they created a countervailing set of values known as the counterculture.

But the 1960s was not simply a decade of protest and ferment on the left. Conservatives, in fact, saw a revival of their political philosophy, also led by young people. The presidential campaign of the arch-conservative Barry Goldwater in 1964 embodied this newborn conservatism, as did the widespread popularity of Young American for Freedom, a conservative campus organization that was the largest single college student organization in the country.

The 1960s in America was thus not simply a chaotic revolt, but a renewal of the long-standing battles among left, right, and center in American political history.