Timeline Theatre Company

WEEKEND

by Gore Vidal

directed by Damon Kiely

STUDY GUIDE

prepared by

Becky Perlman, Dramaturg

— STUDY GUIDE —
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1968 Timeline: Year of Dissent

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the Oakland Museum of California

As social unrest rocked the nation, one pivotal year shifted the majority of public opinion against the war for the first time. In January 1968, a massive surprise attack by North Vietnamese troops convinced many Americans that the war was not going to end soon and cast its outcome into question. All at once, large-scale opposition flared against the administration and its policies. Federal troops put down race riots across the country, while other bitter protests erupted on campuses, at both national political conventions, and at public events from beauty pageants to the Olympics. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated. The growing discord, combined with the highest casualties to date in the war, unnerved the country. And in the midst of the chaos, President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection.

January:

- Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia tells U.S. representatives he will not stop American forces from pursuing Vietcong across the Cambodian border.
- Siege of Khe Sanh; U.S. Marine base under siege for 77 days from North Vietnamese/Vietcong mortar attacks.
- North Koreans seize the USS *Pueblo*, a Naval intelligence ship, off the coast of Korea.
- Tet Offensive begins; North Vietnamese and Vietcong simultaneously attack all major South Vietnamese cities and briefly occupy the American embassy in Saigon.
- Battle of Hue begins; house-by-house fighting destroys thousands of homes, inflicting heavy civilian casualties.

February:

- Additional 206,000 U.S. troops requested by General Westmoreland; his request is denied.
- Republic of Vietnam announces call-up of 65,000 additional men for its armed forces; for the first time 18 year-olds in South Vietnam will be subject to the draft.
- Richard Nixon declares his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.
- Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers Union leader, begins his first fast for nonviolence.
- U.S. Gallup poll shows 50% of Americans disapprove of the President's management of the war.
- Troops of the Republic of Vietnam retake the Citadel of the Imperial Palace at Hue.

March:

- Remains of 2000 Hue residents executed by Communists are discovered by South Vietnamese authorities.
- Senator Eugene McCarthy, a peace candidate, is narrowly defeated by President Johnson in the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary.
- General William Westmoreland replaced by General Creighton Abrams as commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam.
- President Lyndon Johnson announces he will not seek re-election; he also initiates a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam.
- Robert Kennedy declares his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination on an anti-war platform.
- President Johnson increases bombing of Laos.
- In the hamlet of My Lai, north of Da Nang, over 300 unarmed Vietnamese civilians are killed by members of Charlie Company, Americal Division.

  Cesar Chavez ends his fast during meeting with Robert Kennedy.

April:

- Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee; riots break out across the country.
- Oakland police and Black Panther shootout results in the death of 18 year-old Bobby Hutton, an early party member.
- Civil Rights Act of 1968 prohibiting racial discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing signed into law.
- 24,500 U.S. military reservists are called to action for two-year commitment. Student Mobilization Committee holds largest student strike against the war; thousands of protesters march in San Francisco and New York.

May:

- U.S. and North Vietnam agree to preliminary peace talks in Paris.
- Bloody Monday in France marks days of violent protest by Parisian students in reaction to a variety of issues including the war in Vietnam.
- Vietcong launch Mini-Tet; rocket and mortar attacks against Saigon and other towns across South Vietnam; U.S. responds with air strikes on North Vietnam.

June:

- Robert Kennedy is fatally shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after winning the California Democratic primary.
- Protests erupt in Berkeley in sympathy with French students and for ethnic studies programs.

July:

- Black Panthers sponsor "Free Huey" Rally in front of the Alameda County Courthouse for release of Party Defense Minister, Huey P. Newton.
- GIs serving time in the stockade at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, take control of the prison from military police.
- Three American POWs are released by Hanoi.

August:

- Ronald Reagan announces his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.
- Richard M. Nixon wins Republican Presidential nomination as anti-war protests erupt at Republican Convention in Miami, Florida.
- Democratic National Convention in Chicago is disrupted by major protest against the war while Hubert H. Humphrey wins Democratic presidential nomination.

September:

- Women's liberation groups protest the Miss America Beauty Pageant in Atlantic City.
- Student riots in Mexico City are subdued by Mexican security forces.
- Huey P. Newton, Black Panther Party Minister of Defense, is convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 2–15 years in federal prison.

October:

- Anti-war protest organized and led by Vietnam veterans is held in San Francisco.
- Violence erupts in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants.
- Summer Olympic games in Mexico City; San Jose State athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists in the black power salute during their medal ceremony to protest the treatment of African Americans.
- Presidio Mutiny in San Francisco; 27 soldiers serving brig time attempt to stage a sit-in protesting prison conditions; all are tried as mutineers.

November:

- Richard Nixon wins the presidential election by 500,000 votes.
- Peace talks begin between the U.S. and North Vietnam in Paris.
- Student riots explode in Berlin and Prague.
- Student strike at San Francisco State begins; students protest against the war and in support of an ethnic studies program.

December:

- Apollo 8 launch begins the first U.S. mission to land on the Moon.
- U.S. troops in Vietnam number 536,000 at the end of the year.
- South Vietnamese forces number approximately 800,000.
- More than 16,000 total U.S. deaths in Vietnam for the year. Estimated 28,000 deaths of South Vietnamese troops for the year.

The Sixties' New Brand of Conservatism and the formation of The Young Americans for Freedom

Excerpted from wikipedia.org

In the 1950s, a new kind of conservatism arose from the ashes of World War II. The new ideology was formulated in large part by the newspaper *Human Events*, the magazine *National Review*, and *National Review*'s editor William F. Buckley, Jr. This brand of conservatism, which would gain popularity in the 1960s, combined a passion for free-market economics with respect for traditional values, a commitment to an "orderly society," and a virulent brand of anti-communism.

The Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) was a conservative youth organization founded in 1960 by *National Review* editor and conservative leader, William F. Buckley. YAF's founding statement of principles, the Sharon Statement, was written on September 11, 1960, by M. Stanton Evans with the assistance of Annette Kirk. Since its founding, YAF continuously identified itself as "conservative." The founders were among those who helped to define the modern meaning of this term in American politics.

In the first four years of its existence, YAF chapters popped up on college campuses across the country, in direct defiance of the formation of prominent liberal anti-war groups like the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). On March 7, 1962, a YAF-sponsored conservative rally filled Madison Square Garden in New York City. In the 1960s, the Republican Party was divided between its conservative wing, led by Barry Goldwater, and its more liberal wing, led by Nelson Rockefeller. YAF members fell squarely on Goldwater's side. However, some members had sympathy with the conservative Southern Democrats known as Dixiecrats, and thus from its inception YAF was deliberately non-partisan. By 1964, YAF was a major force in the campaign to nominate Goldwater, and then after his nomination, to elect him president. Goldwater's massive defeat in the presidential election of 1964 demoralized many members.

However, in spite of Goldwater's loss, the new Conservatives continued to gain new members and political prominence. Leading liberals, including Gore Vidal, publicly denounced Conservative ideals, and many cited YAF as a prime offender. Vidal famously feuded with YAF founder, William F. Buckley, both in print and in person. In 1968, Vidal and Buckley served as the conservative and liberal commentator, respectively, for NBC during the networks' coverage of the Democratic and Republican party conventions and ensuing presidential election. After a series of caustic televised debates and hostile joint appearances on NBC, Vidal and Buckley famously sparred on live television, as their conversation on political issues devolved into personal attacks against each other. For Vidal, Buckley would continue to epitomize everything that was wrong with the American Right for decades to come.

— The Sharon Statement —
The Manifesto of the Conservative group Young Americans for Freedom (founded 1960)

Courtesy of yaf.com

IN THIS TIME of moral and political crises, it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain eternal truths.

WE, as young conservatives believe:

THAT foremost among the transcendent values is the individual's use of his God-given free will, whence derives his right to be free from the restrictions of arbitrary force;

THAT liberty is indivisible, and that political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom;

THAT the purpose of government is to protect those freedoms through the preservation of internal order, the provision of national defense, and the administration of justice;

THAT when government ventures beyond these rightful functions, it accumulates power, which tends to diminish order and liberty;

THAT the Constitution of the United States is the best arrangement yet devised for empowering government to fulfill its proper role, while restraining it from the concentration and abuse of power;

THAT the genius of the Constitution - the division of powers - is summed up in the clause that reserves primacy to the several states, or to the people in those spheres not specifically delegated to the Federal government;

THAT the market economy, allocating resources by the free play of supply and demand, is the single economic system compatible with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government, and that it is at the same time the most productive supplier of human needs;

THAT when government interferes with the work of the market economy, it tends to reduce the moral and physical strength of the nation, that when it takes from one to bestow on another, it diminishes the incentive of the first, the integrity of the second, and the moral autonomy of both;

THAT we will be free only so long as the national sovereignty of the United States is secure; that history shows periods of freedom are rare, and can exist only when free citizens concertedly defend their rights against all enemies…

THAT the forces of international Communism are, at present, the greatest single threat to these liberties;

THAT the United States should stress victory over, rather than coexistence with this menace; and

THAT American foreign policy must be judged by this criterion: does it serve the just interests of the United States?

Fall In To The Gap: Youth Culture in the Sixties

The 1950s was an almost perfect breeding ground for the rebellious spirit that would come to characterize the 1960s. As a result of the post-World War II baby boom, during which the American birth rate skyrocketed after centuries spent in steady decline, there were more young people alive in the '60s than in any other time in American history. Over half of the U.S. population was under thirty in 1962.

Just as significantly, the prosperity and stability of the post-war years lent new strength to the traditional nuclear family, in which father worked and mother tended the home and children. From 1945 to 1955 divorce rates declined, family size increased and couples married in record numbers. The value associated with conformity and traditional values spilled over into many different areas of American life: education, art, mass media and even sexuality. Overall, the '50s were a time of compliance with societal and cultural demands.

The teens and 20-somethings of the '60s naturally rebelled against the restrictive societal and familial values that were instilled in them in the '50s. But because their numbers were so great, the cumulative effect of their youth revolution was bigger, louder and rawer than that of any prior generation. Furthermore, youth-powered insurgencies took many different paths. Today, '60s young people are best remembered as the decade's hippies and flower children — peace-loving anti-war activists and proponents of free love and mind-altering drugs. Though this characterization fit with the identities of many young people of the time, it is a shallow assessment of the real impact legions of young people had on the events of their generation.

Young men fueled the Vietnam War with their (often compulsory) military service. The escalating number of deaths and injuries suffered by their peers galvanized many draft-age men and their female contemporaries to speak out against America's military involvement in Southeast Asia. Organizations like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) protested vehemently against the war, and in the process became a leading voice of the new American left.

Teens and college students were also instrumental participants in the civil rights movement and the burgeoning fight for women's liberation. African-American college students bravely integrated American universities, despite threats of violence and hate-filled opposition. They also waged boycotts and sit-ins, organized and attended rallies, and marched in towns throughout the South. During the so-called "Freedom Summer" of 1964, college students of all colors were instrumental in running voter-registration drives, organizing legs of "Freedom Rides" to the nation's capital, and fighting for racial and gender equality on their own college campuses. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (known as SNCC) was at the forefront, organizing and energizing disparate groups from across the country to participate in these nationwide protests.

A small segment of '60s youth became even further radicalized and politically active. Some members of SDS formed the Weather Underground, an extremist group of leftists who organized riots, bombings and jail breaks in order to subvert the actions

of the U.S. government. The Weather Underground, also known as the Weathermen, were closely allied with the more militant strains of the black liberation movement. Of this group, the Black Panther Party was another similarly radical group.

Founded in Oakland, California in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panthers' original purpose was to protect the beleaguered black neighborhoods of Oakland from pervasive police brutality and advance the cause of black nationalism. However, as the group expanded into a nationally known organization, it moved its focus to socialism, self-defense and social programs designed to aid black communities throughout the country. Still, the group remained well known for their aversion to law enforcement and government officials, their militant political stances, and their willingness to defend their members and their beliefs with physical violence. Both the Weather Underground and the Black Panthers were unique not only in their radical, violent actions, but also in their shared target. Both groups were not concerned with changing the government or its citizens, instead they wanted to dismantle it altogether and start a revolution.

Throughout the 1960s and into the '70s, young people defined the dominant cultural values and pioneered sweeping social and political change. Whether through rebellion against commonly held cultural values, organized resistance to societal wrongs, or extremist activities designed to combat government-powered injustices, young people of the '60s had more power and a louder voice than any other population segment of the era.

— Excerpt from The Port Huron Statement —

The 1962 manifesto of Students for a Democratic Society

(a leading liberal activist group in the 1960s)

The Port Huron Statement is a rebuttal to the Sharon Statement that focuses on the group's mission to halt racial discrimination, poverty and nuclear proliferation. Together, they sum up the growing ideological divide between liberals and conservatives.

We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world; the only one with the atom bomb, the least scarred by modern war, an initiator of the United Nations that we thought would distribute Western influence throughout the world. Freedom and equality for each individual, government of, by, and for the people — these American values we found good principles by which we could live as men. Many of us began maturing in complacency.

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract "others" we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time. We might deliberately ignore, or avoid, or fail to feel all other human problems, but not these two, for these were too immediate and crushing in their impact, too challenging in the demand that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution.

While these and other problems either directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and became our own subjective concerns, we began to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in our surrounding America. The declaration "all men are created equal..." rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South and the big cities of the North. The proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo.

We witnessed, and continue to witness, other paradoxes. With nuclear energy whole cities can easily be powered, yet the dominant nation-states seem more likely to unleash destruction greater than that incurred in all wars of human

history. Although our own technology is destroying old and creating new forms of social organization, men still tolerate meaningless work and idleness. While two-thirds of mankind suffers under nourishment, our own upper classes revel amidst superfluous abundance. Although world population is expected to double in 40 years, the nations still tolerate anarchy as a major principle of international conduct and uncontrolled exploitation governs the sapping of the earth's physical resources. Although mankind desperately needs revolutionary leadership, America rests in national stalemate, its goals ambiguous and tradition-bound instead of informed and clear, its democratic system apathetic and manipulated rather than "of, by, and for the people."

Not only did tarnish appear on our image of American virtue, not only did disillusion occur when the hypocrisy of American ideals was discovered, but we began to sense that what we had originally seen as the American Golden Age was actually the decline of an era. The worldwide outbreak of revolution against colonialism and imperialism, the entrenchment of totalitarian states, the menace of war, overpopulation, international disorder, supertechnology — these trends were testing the tenacity of our own commitment to democracy and freedom and our abilities to visualize their application to a world in upheaval.

Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living. But we are a minority — the vast majority of our people regard the temporary equilibriums of our society and world as eternally functional parts. In this is perhaps the outstanding paradox; we ourselves are imbued with urgency, yet the message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present. Beneath the reassuring tones of the politicians, beneath the common opinion that America will "muddle through," beneath the stagnation of those who have closed their minds to the future, is the pervading feeling that there simply are no alternatives, that our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well. Feeling the press of complexity upon the emptiness of life, people are fearful of the thought that at any moment things might be thrust out of control. They fear change itself, since change might smash whatever invisible framework seems to hold back chaos for them now ….

THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN WOMANHOOD: FEMALE IDENTITY IN THE 1960s

Women were subject to the same maelstrom of social upheaval that rocked almost every element of American culture in the 1960s. At home, at work, in the bedroom and on the protest lines, women gained new freedoms while, paradoxically, they faced new constraints.

Women and Sexuality

The sexual revolution of the '60s brought new attention to the needs and desires of women. Books like *Human Sexual Response*, penned in 1966 by the research team of William Masters and Virginia Johnson, debunked restrictive myths about the limits of female sexuality. Simultaneously, widespread use of the birth-control pill, first made available in 1960, freed women to have sex without worrying about pregnancy.

Some women experimented with the free-love movement, one of the facets of the dominant '60s youth culture. But even those who didn't gradually found less value in once-prominent female virtues like virginity, chastity and sexual submissiveness.

Women and Drugs

Female teens and college students heavily involved in the youth counterculture were exposed to — and many used — a plethora of recreational drugs. But they weren't the only ones to "turn on, tune in, drop out," as LSD guru Timothy Leary famously advised in 1966. While young women experimented with marijuana, hallucinogens and other illicit substances, many of their mothers also were turning to drugs — legally prescribed ones.

In the '60s, amphetamines and tranquilizers were abundantly prescribed for a variety of problems considered common to females, including depression, anxiety, weight loss and appetite suppression, low energy and insomnia. Valium (an antidepressant and anti-anxiety drug), Benzedrine and Dexedrine (amphetamine stimulants) and Nembutal (a form of Phenobarbital, which often was used as a sedative) were especially popular. Some women became hooked on their pills. After the problem elicited media coverage, these highly addictive drugs were ironically dubbed "Mothers' Little Helpers" — and inspired a 1966 song of the same title by the Rolling Stones. For women in the '60s, drugs offered a new venue for experimentation and an easy solution to physical and emotional problems. However, too often the promise of relief was tempered by the negative side effects that accompanied legal and illegal drug use.

Women and Work

As Baby Boom children started leaving home in the 1960s, many mothers — some of whom had worked men's jobs during World War II — returned to the work force alongside younger female professionals. Some were inspired by the feminist books being published, most significantly Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In her landmark publication Friedan argued that women could not find fulfillment in a life solely devoted to home, husband and children.

Regardless of their age, education and work experience, many of these women encountered stiff opposition at their male-dominated offices and work sites. Women had to work harder to get hired, and, once employed, many were passed over for promotions and forced to work for a fraction of the salaries men earned for the same positions.

Women and Social Action

Growing dissatisfaction with working conditions for women, coupled with long-simmering resentment of women's social and economic inequality, propelled many social activists to organize and protest these injustices. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement, a group of activists came together in 1966 to found the National Organization of Women, or NOW.

Dedicated to furthering the causes of women's rights and establishing equal-rights legislation, founders included Betty Friedan and the Rev. Dr. Anna Pauli Murray. Among other issues, NOW works to end violence against women (including domestic abuse and sexual assault) and supports reproductive rights (including the right to a safe and legal abortion) and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Rallying Cries from 60's Feminist Leaders

"Women in this country must become revolutionaries. We must refuse to accept the old, the traditional roles and stereotypes."
— Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to Congress (in 1968) and founder of New York NOW, the organization's first chapter.

"A liberated woman is one who has sex before marriage and a job after."
— Gloria Steinem, leading feminist author and founder of *Ms.* magazine in 1972

"The test for whether or not you can hold a job should not be the arrangement of your chromosomes." — Bella Abzug, U.S. Congresswoman (elected in 1970) and women's rights activist

"A girl should not expect special privileges because of her sex but neither should she adjust to prejudice and discrimination." — Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and the first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW)

— The road to WEEKEND —

Conflicts at home and abroad leading up to the events in the play

1960

November 8: John F. Kennedy narrowly defeats Richard M. Nixon in the U.S. presidential election.

November 14: Amid violent protests, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges becomes the first student to desegregate New Orleans public elementary schools. Americans watch on television.

1961

January 20: President Kennedy is inaugurated as the 35th president. In his inaugural speech, he tells the nation, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

April 17: With the full support and knowledge of the U.S. government, anti-Castro rebels armed with American weapons land near Cuba's Bay of Pigs with plans to take down the Cuban government. The rebels are quickly dispatched by the Cuban military, with many fatalities on both sides.

May 20: Freedom riders arriving in Montgomery, Ala., are abandoned by local police and beaten by white mobs. While speaking at a Montgomery church, Martin Luther King, Jr., and his followers are similarly attacked.

May 25: Kennedy sends hundreds of military "advisers" to train South-Vietnamese troops to fight against the Communist National Liberation Front, led by Ho Chi Minh.

August 25: Amid increasing violence in Vietnam, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announces that 76,500 military reservists have been ordered to active duty.

1962

April 3: All branches of the military, except the National Guard, are integrated.

October: American spy planes on routine reconnaissance missions over Cuba return with photos of Soviet nuclear missiles pointed towards the U.S. After weeks of tense communications and negotiations, Kennedy persuades Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev to remove the weapons in exchange for the U.S.

removal of similar missiles near the Soviet Union and a promise to never attempt to invade Cuba again.

1963

August 28: The March on Washington culminates in King's delivery of his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

June 11: After forcing Alabama governor and segregationist George Wallace to integrate the University of Alabama, Kennedy delivers a televised speech outlining his plan for civil-rights legislation that would later become the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act.

November 22: Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, and Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as president.

1964

January 8: In Johnson's first State of the Union address, he vows to end racial discrimination and poverty domestically while eliminating Communism abroad.

May — June: Civil-rights activism reaches a fever pitch. Amid continued marches, protests and rallies, hundreds of students help southern blacks register to vote. Civil-rights activists are murdered, churches are bombed and set on fire, and hundreds of protesters are arrested and jailed. This period will later be known as "Freedom Summer."

July 2: Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act into law.

November 20: Johnson is elected.

1965

January 20: Johnson is inaugurated. In his inaugural speech, he unveils plans for a Great Society of social equality and economic prosperity.

January 27: Defense Secretary Robert McNamara informs Johnson that limited military involvement in Vietnam is failing and recommends the president either escalate America's commitment or withdraw troops entirely.

May 11: Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act, making it possible for millions of blacks to vote safely for the first time.

June 8: 17,000 protesters attend an anti-war rally at Madison Square Garden in New York.

June 28: Johnson sends 50,000 more troops to Vietnam. The total number of soldiers committed to the war is now 125,000.

1966

January 12: In his State of the Union address, Johnson pledges to keep U.S. troops in Vietnam until Communist aggression is eliminated.

March 25: Simultaneous anti-war protests are staged in eight American cities. With U.S. casualties skyrocketing without significant military gains, millions will protest the war this year.

June – September: Race riots erupt in several U.S. cities during the summer, including Chicago and San Francisco.

October: Huey Newton and Bobby Seale form the Black Panther Party in Oakland, Calif.

1967

February 13: After peace-treaty efforts fail, the U.S. resumes bombing in Vietnam.

March 13: Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) introduces the Equal Rights Amendment, designed to end gender discrimination**.**

June 16: In Loving v. Virginia, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that all state bans on interracial marriage are unconstitutional.

July 23: A city-wide race riot begins in Detroit. It is the worst of the 14 race riots that occur throughout the country this summer.

October 21: More than 50,000 anti-war activists demonstrate at the Lincoln Memorial and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

November 16: The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommends that U.S. involvement in Vietnam be restricted and the conflict brought before the U.N. Security Council for resolution.

December: NOW (The National Organization for Woman) organizes protests in cities across the country, calling for equal rights for women.

1968

January 30: The North Vietnamese launch the Tet Offensive, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides. In the aftermath, polls show that approval of the war and President Johnson are at an all-time low, persuading Johnson to replace the commander of the American forces and refuse requests for more troops.

February 18: 543 American troops are killed in the bloodiest week of the war thus far.

March 31: Faced with overwhelming condemnation from Congress, protesters and voters, Johnson announces in a nationally televised speech that he will begin peace negotiations in Vietnam and that he will not run for re-election.

Gore Vidal sets the fictional events of *Weekend* on a non-existent Friday, Saturday and Sunday directly after Johnson's announcement that he will not seek reelection, but before Martin Luther King, Jr's assassination on April 4. Interestingly, the original draft of the play, as performed at its premiere at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., in February 1968 and on Broadway in March 1968, was written before Johnson's announcement. However, at an undetermined later date, the playwright adjusted the script to include references to Johnson's decision.

Strength and Endurance:
The Civil Rights Movement's Influence on Interracial Marriage

By 1968, the national civil-rights movement had won a series of landmark victories. Civil-rights activists could take pride in the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; the desegregation of public schools; the election of the first black senator, Edward Brooke of Massachusetts in 1966; the appointment of the first black Supreme Court justice, Thurgood Marshall, in 1967; and promising advances in voting rights.

However, these triumphs were accompanied by bloodshed and fear. Blacks continued to suffer widespread discrimination and terrifying acts of violence and intimidation. 1968 became a year of urban riots, as race-related conflicts exploded in cities across the country, including Chicago, Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

Not surprisingly, relationships between people of different races remained taboo in many places in 1968. By summer 1967, laws prohibiting interracial sexual relations and marriage still had not been overturned in 16 states. Until then, individuals found guilty of miscegenation (marrying or having sexual relations with someone of a different race) could face stiff fines, felony convictions and up to 10 years in prison.

In 1958, Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter of Virginia traveled to Washington, D.C., to marry. A few months after their return, they were convicted of violating the state's Racial Integrity Act. They were sentenced to one year in jail, although the sentence was suspended providing they left the state. They moved to Washington, D.C., and in 1963 teamed with the American Civil Liberties Union to overturn the rulings as a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Loving v. Virginia was tried before the U.S. Supreme Court and on June 12, 1967, the justices ruled unanimously that Virginia's law, and all similar laws in other states, were unconstitutional.

Even though mixed-race couples could marry legally by 1968, many found it difficult to protect themselves from the widespread disdain and discrimination that followed their unions. Though no complete records exist of the discriminatory crimes committed against mixed-race couples and families, anecdotal accounts abound. Couples recount being denied housing or being forced out of town under threat of violence. Others recall whispered insults and hostile stares in stores and movie theaters or obscene comments shouted from car windows. Some endured vandalism to their homes and cars, lost their jobs or were blackballed from membership in social and charitable organizations. Some marriages caused deep schisms within families, estranging couples from parents and siblings.

In spite of these adversities, many interracial relationships flourished and endured. Some couples found refuge by relocating to liberal northern cities. Many also found strength by becoming members of accepting church congregations. Unitarian and Presbyterian churches in the U.S. were especially supportive of mixed-race couples; in 1966, both denominations issued statements of support for interracial marriage. In 1967, the more conservative Catholic Church also came out in favor of such relationships, months prior to the Loving v. Virginia decision.

Still, these early gestures of support did little to improve the day-to-day lives of many interracial marriages. Public opinion remained harsh, and the accumulated weight of daily snubs and stares sometimes became unbearable. Yet, those early precedent setters were crucial to the eventual widespread acceptance of mixed-race relationships in the United States.

In 1970, fewer than 2 percent of all American marriages were between people of different races. Today, interracial couples make up almost 10 percent of American marriages. The increase has been accompanied by slow acceptance and appreciation for such couples and their families. June 12, also known as Loving Day, is celebrated as an annual holiday by mixed-race families throughout the country.

Let's Talk Politics:
A Lexicon for Washington Insiders

After decades of political moderation, the American ideological spectrum widened considerably in the early 1960s. A conservative or liberal affiliation started to become an integral part of one's political identity. In addition, the outbreak of the Vietnam War caused politicians and private citizens alike to declare themselves pro-war "hawks" or anti-war "doves," further cementing differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. The political schism that came of age in the '60s has continued to evolve, becoming the contentious partisan divide that characterizes politics today.

Conservatives
In the 1960s, conservatives believed the federal government should be as uninvolved as possible in citizens' daily lives. They tended to favor traditional social values, such as marriage, family, religion, Second Amendment rights and education. They often opposed welfare programs, birth control, abortion, state-sponsored health-care, interracial marriages and women's rights. Most American conservatives favored a traditional reading of the U.S. Constitution and believed in a weak central government and strong states, powerful military resources, lower government spending practices and a lower federal debt.

Liberals
In the 1960s, most liberals believed in a strong central government dedicated to protecting the rights and interests of all citizens. Most liberals supported the government implementation of social welfare programs like Medicare, Head Start and the National Endowment for the Arts. Liberals in the '60s supported individual rights for all and were often active in the civil rights and women's liberation movements. They often opposed the draft and military spending. Many liberals also supported the nascent environmental movement, protested the Vietnam War and worked to support international nuclear disarmament (a key issue during the Cold War).

Hawks
This is the popular '60s-era term for Americans who supported the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War as well as other anti-Communist military actions. It was often used derisively by anti-Vietnam activists.

Doves
This is the popular '60s-era term for Americans opposed to the Vietnam War, as well as for Americans active in the peace movement. It was often used derisively by those who supported the war in Vietnam.

Republicans
In general, Republicans in the 1960s favored a small and weak federal government with more power given to individual states. Fiscally, they tended to be extremely conservative and in favor of lower taxes and less federal spending. In foreign affairs, many Republicans believed in a strong national defense system. However, they often took an isolationist stance when it came to intervening in international events — in the '60s, though, the Cold War and the Vietnam War were exceptions to that general rule. Many Republicans supported the American presence in Vietnam as a measure to prevent the international spread of Communism. Most Republicans were pro-management rather than pro-union. Many also opposed strict environmental standards because of their negative effective on corporate business. Most Republicans were socially conservative. Many didn't support the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Republican politicians in the '60s could depend on the support of the upper-middle class, Protestants, senior citizens and large and small corporations.

Democrats
In the 1960s, Democrats in general favored a powerful federal government that had the ability to implement social-welfare and reform programs on a national level. In addition, they tended to support a higher level of federal spending and more tax increases (especially for the wealthy). Where foreign affairs were concerned, many Democrats disagreed with the Republicans' isolationist stance: They believed that when there was an urgent need for it, America had a duty to intervene with humanitarian aid. Though most Democrats acknowledged the importance of the Cold War, they tended to see disarmament and international negotiations as the solution to mounting tensions, rather than the increased military spending and proactive military efforts favored by many Republicans. However, 60's-era Democrats almost always were pro-union rather than pro-management, and they also tended to support efforts to protect the environment. Most Democrats generally supported the Civil Rights movement and, at least in its final years, opposed the Vietnam War. Democratic politicians in the '60s could depend on the working class, some Southerners, and most Jews, blacks and Catholics for support.

The 1968 Presidential Election

Weekend was partially inspired by the frenzied and contentious presidential nominations of 1968. Set just after President Johnson's March 31 announcement that he would not seek reelection, the play seizes on a remarkable period in U.S. politics.

Johnson's decision to not run for reelection unleashed chaos for the Democratic National Committee as well as its Republican counterpart. The loss of their incumbent candidate's electoral power dealt an unexpected blow to the Democrats: They would have to scramble to find the most competitive new candidate.

Meanwhile, the Republicans were faced with an unexpected boon: Johnson's withdrawal, coupled with a Republican majority in the Senate and a tidal shift in public opinion, could mean victory for the Republican candidate in November.

After Johnson's announcement, the Democratic Party quickly splintered into three factions. Working-class Catholic, black and other minority Democrats largely supported Sen. Robert F. Kennedy of New York. Traditional Democrats, led by labor union leaders and "Machine" bosses like Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley, supported Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Socially liberal and anti-war Democrats rallied behind Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota.

By early June, Humphrey was leading the delegate vote totals, with Kennedy second and McCarthy third. Kennedy won a crucial victory June 5 in the California primary, but heading to a victory celebration in a Los Angeles hotel, he was shot by a Palestinian militant. He died the next day.

In the wake of Kennedy's death, his supporters could not mobilize their support behind one candidate, so they split their votes between Humphrey, McCarthy and latecomer Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota. This split made it easy for Humphrey to gather the delegate votes necessary for nomination.

Meanwhile, George Wallace, the southern segregationist and former Alabama governor, was waging a presidential campaign for the American Independent Party. His candidacy siphoned votes from the mainstream candidates.
In the race for the Republican nomination, Richard M. Nixon quickly became the front-runner. Having run for president in 1960 against John F. Kennedy, losing by only the slimmest of margins, he was a well-known political personality. His most significant competitors were Nelson A. Rockefeller, the governor of New York, and Ronald Reagan, the movie star-turned-governor of California. Neither Rockefeller nor Reagan could mobilize enough delegates to stop Nixon: He won the nomination on the first ballot at the convention.

During the general election campaign, Nixon's promise to end the Vietnam War and his "law-and-order" pledge to halt urban riots and violent protests won support from voters.

In contrast, Humphrey's campaign was seriously hurt by his link to the Johnson administration and the mismanagement of the Vietnam War.

In the end, the election was extremely close. Nixon's narrow lead in California, Illinois and Ohio guaranteed his victory by the smallest of margins, 1 percent of the popular vote.

Who's Who of the 1968 Presidential Election

THE DEMOCRATS

Hubert Humphrey: Vice President Hubert Humphrey quickly gained the support of many mainstream Democrats due to his position in the Johnson administration. Partially due to the splintering of support for other Democratic candidates, Humphrey won the nomination at the convention in Chicago. The events of the notoriously bloody and anarchic convention indelibly stained his campaign. Humphrey also fought unfavorable comparisons with the unpopular president. He was forced to publicly support Johnson's deeply unpopular actions in Vietnam, though privately, he disagreed with almost all of Johnson's war decisions. But by the time Humphrey publicly decried Johnson's tactics it was too late to win new support, and he lost to Republican candidate Richard Nixon.

Eugene McCarthy: Eugene McCarthy, a liberal senator from Minnesota, won the hearts of many young people and peace activists with his anti-war stance. Aware of the national prejudice against the "hippies," "radicals" and "long-hairs" who formed the base of McCarthy's constituency, his staff launched a "Get Clean for Gene" campaign, which encouraged supporters to shave their facial hair and cut their hair to improve McCarthy's public image. In spite of the senator's popularity with the New Left, he failed to win many minority votes and alienated more traditional Democratic voters with his die-hard social liberalism.

Robert F. Kennedy: A scion of the Kennedy clan, Robert Kennedy capitalized on the strong public image he had cultivated as the U.S. attorney general in his brother's administration and as a current New York senator. Popular among union members, the working class and minorities, Kennedy also won new supporters when he announced his anti-war stance. With several important primary victories, Kennedy was rapidly gaining impressive ground in the contentious campaign. While celebrating a win in the California primary at a Los Angeles hotel, he was assassinated by an anti-Zionist Palestinian radical named Sirhan Sirhan. Kennedy's tragic death on June 6 threw his party into further disarray. Political analysts still debate whether the 1968 election would have turned out differently if he had lived.

George McGovern: After Kennedy's death, Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota entered the nomination contest largely due to the urging of Gloria Steinem, the well-known feminist activist. Hoping to win voters formerly committed to Kennedy, the anti-war veteran ended up taking support away from McCarthy. However, those votes were not enough to make McGovern a competitive candidate. Four years later, McGovern would win the Democratic presidential nomination but lose the election to incumbent Richard Nixon.

THE REPUBLICANS

Richard Nixon: The vice president under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon narrowly lost the 1960 presidential campaign to John F. Kennedy. A former U.S. representative and senator for California, Nixon was a canny politician who based his 1968 campaign on an appeal to the so-called Silent Majority of American voters, those exhausted by the chaos and discord of the civil-rights movement and anti-war protests. Promising a speedy, dignified victory in Vietnam, Nixon easily won the Republican nomination, and went on to a heated campaign against Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate. Nixon won the presidency with a mere 1 percent margin of victory in the popular vote.

Nelson Rockefeller: New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller became a popular write-in candidate for president during the primary contests, largely as a result of his firm anti-war stance. Though he won a primary in Massachusetts, he failed to gain widespread national support and made a weak showing at the convention.

Ronald Reagan: California Gov. Ronald Reagan, a former movie star, emerged late in the contest as Nixon's chief rival for the nomination. Although his constituency in California guaranteed him one of many important primary victories, he failed to muster sufficient delegates at the convention. Reagan unsuccessfully ran for president in 1976 but won the White House in 1980 and 1984.

THE AMERICAN INDEPENDENT PARTY

George Wallace: The former Alabama governor and infamous segregationist seized on the rapidly growing partisan divide in 1968 to launch his third-party campaign for president under the auspices of the American Independent party. George Wallace's popularity in the South led to surprising primary victories in the region and 46 Electoral College votes — he carried five Southern states. However, Wallace's controversial social stances were deeply distasteful to many voters, and he failed to gain a national following.

Major Events in Senator MacGruder and Senator Andrews' Political Careers

THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION

1946: In '46, the U.S. still faces post-war inflation and labor strikes as the country returned to a peacetime economy. Texas voters are concerned with their economic woes, and many seek tax relief and economic stimulus. The 1946 elections establish a Republican majority in the House and the Senate. In D.C., President Truman works hard to convince Congress to support the Marshall Plan for rebuilding war-ravaged Europe (which entails lending enormous amounts of U.S. money to European nations). Truman also fights for acceptance of the Truman Doctrine (a foreign policy plan for granting economic and military aid to nations threatened by communism). Many Republicans oppose the Mar shall Plan, in part or total, and support the Truman Doctrine.

1947: As part of American preparations for the quickly-escalating Cold War, the federal government establishes the U.S. Department of Defense and creates the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency. Most Republicans support these measures and consider the spread of communism an imminent threat to American freedom. Truman appoints the first members of the new U.S. Security Council. Congress Republicans clash with Truman over domestic economic issues, including the President's veto of the Taft-Hardley Act, a piece of legislation designed to neuter American labor unions (a big priority for 1940s-1950s Republicans). Republicans also reject President Truman's many proposals for civil-rights reforms.

1948: Congress Republicans largely oppose Truman's plans to curtail military spending, even though the decision is made in an effort to lower taxes. Truman is reelected, beating Republican candidate Thomas Dewey. This is a political and possibly personal blow for Andrews, who stood to gain much from a Republican administration.

1949: Truman begins his second term. The Soviet Union detonates their first atomic bomb, intensifying Cold War fears in the U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy seizes on widespread fear of Communism and growing paranoia to begin a nation-wide witch hunt for American communists and communist sympathizers. The hearings create an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust in Congress, and aggravate an already growing rift between Democrats and Republicans.

1950-1952: The Korean War begins, though war is never officially declared, and the conflict is officially considered a "military action." The war ends with a tenuous agreement between South and North Korea, after the death of 30,000 Americans. Truman is blamed for his inept and chaotic management of the armed forces, and his approval ratings dip. Truman's so-called "containment plan" calls for the U.S. to also support France in France's

efforts to halt a communist uprising in French-controlled Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh. The first U.S. troops enter Vietnam as "military advisors," in an important stepping stone to the Vietnam War.

THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

1953: General Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected. He had previously served as Commander of the Allied Forces during WWII and the first head of NATO, created in 1951.

1954: Eisenhower supports the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, which rules "separate but equal" schooling for different races to be unconstitutional. He is forced to send the National Guard to enforce desegregation efforts across the South. Many socially conservative Republicans are against this decision.

1956: Eisenhower is reelected in a landslide. The Soviet Union continues to stockpile weapons. Eisenhower passes the landmark Federal Highway Act, designed to create evacuation routes from major U.S. cities in case of imminent Communist attack.

1956: As a so-called "dynamic conservative," Eisenhower continues to expand many of the New Deal-era social welfare programs. He also establishes the first Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. These efforts are generally not supported by more socially and fiscally conservative Republicans.

THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

1960: John F. Kennedy is elected president in a close victory over Republican candidate and vice-president under Eisenhower, Richard Nixon.

1961: Kennedy allows an Eisenhower-era plan to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist government in nearby Cuba. The so-called "Bay of Pigs" invasion by CIA-trained, anti-communist Cuban rebels is disastrous, largely due to the disorganized efforts of U.S. forces sent to support the rebels. The incident convinces Castro that another attack is imminent, and his administration seeks support from sister-nation, the Soviet Union. Also in '61, Kennedy lends support to the emerging U.S. space program and supports its efforts to beat the Soviets in the unofficial "space race."

1962: American spy planes return to the U.S. with photos of Soviet-owned nuclear missiles being built in Cuba (an ally of the Soviet Union). With the threat of nuclear war hanging over the U.S., Kennedy negotiates with Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev to remove the missiles from Cuba. After an incredibly tense week of negotiations, Krushchev agrees — in exchange for the U.S. removal of American missiles from Turkey and a promise from Kennedy to stop any further plans for a U.S. invasion of Cuba. This is the closest America has ever been to triggering world-wide nuclear war.

1962-1963: Kennedy works to suppress and contain Communist insurgents in Latin America and Puerto Rico. He establishes the Peace Corps. Under Kennedy's direction, the U.S. army sends 16,000 military advisors and special forces troops to aid the shaky South Vietnamese government in Vietnam.

1963: The South Vietnamese government is overthrown by Ho Chi Minh's communist forces and the South Vietnamese president is assassinated.

Also in 1963, Kennedy visits a divided Berlin to decry communism and deliver his famous, "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech.

Kennedy pushes for and signs a multi-nation nuclear weapon test ban. In the summer of '63, Kennedy finally intervenes in the mostly grass-roots national civil-rights movement. After forcing notorious Alabama governor George Wallace to allow the desegregation of the University of Alabama, Kennedy delivers a televised speech outlining his plan for the civil rights legislation that would eventually become the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

In November of 1963, Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas.

THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

1963: The day of Kennedy's death, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn-in as President.

1964: The National Republic Convention and National Democratic Convention are held. Lyndon B. Johnson wins the presidential election against Republican Barry Goldwater.

In conjunction with the intensified actions of the Civil-Rights Movement, Johnson pushes the Civil Rights Act through Congress, establishing sweeping reforms that outlaw racial segregation.

1965: Johnson passes a second piece of civil-rights legislation, the Voting Rights Act, making it possible for millions of blacks to vote safely and without harassment for the first time.

1966: U.S. casualties in the Vietnam skyrocket without any significant military gains. Millions protest the war, and Johnson's approval ratings reach a new low. Riots in U.S. urban centers are sparked by race-related unrest.

1967: Johnson backlash continues to spread.

1968: The bloody Tet Offensive marks a turning point in public support for the war. Faced with overwhelming condemnation from Congress, protesters, and voters, Johnson announces that he does not plan to run for reelection. His decision, and the damage his actions have wrought on the reputation of the Democratic party, make Republican victory in the '68 presidential elections a tantalizingly probable outcome. Republicans scramble to find an ideal candidate.

Understanding Gore Vidal

Gore Vidal can only be described with the old-fashioned term "man of letters," even though his body of work is resolutely contemporary. As an essayist, novelist, critic, political writer and playwright, he has served as an indefatigable chronicler of American culture for more than 60 years.

Eugene Vidal was born in 1925 to a wealthy and socially prominent New York family. His father, Eugene Luther Vidal, was an Army pilot and co-founder of three American airlines. His mother, Nina S. Gore, was a socialite and Broadway actress. His parents divorced in 1935.

Vidal was raised in Washington, D.C., where he became close to his maternal grandfather, Thomas Gore, a Democratic senator from Oklahoma. Their time together influenced him immensely: Sen. Gore's staunch support of American isolationism and critical stance on imperialism later became bedrocks of Vidal's political philosophy. Uncomfortable with the name Eugene since childhood, Vidal took Gore as his first name while a teenager, largely in honor of his grandfather.

Vidal graduated from Exeter Academy in 1943. With World War II raging, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves. He served in the Aleutian Islands as first mate on an Army freight ship. His three years of service (1943-1946) became the basis for his first novel, *Williwaw*.

A second novel, *The City and the Pillar*, sparked his first public controversy. The 1948 book's shockingly candid depiction of gay life in New York outraged many, but the ensuing publicity only served to expose his writing to a wider audience.

More creative opportunities followed. He began writing for television and films in the early '50s, while simultaneously penning pulp mysteries under the pseudonym Edgar Box and and working as a literary critic. Vidal's embrace of both high and low culture would become one of his trademarks.

Vidal's success in television propelled him into live theater. After completing the successful teleplay for *Visit to a Small Planet* in 1955, he was asked to adapt it for Broadway. He followed that with the 1960 political satire *The Best Man*, a knowing, witty critique of modern political corruption that has become Vidal's best-loved play. Also in 1960, incensed by America's involvement in Vietnam, Vidal made an unsuccessful run for the U.S. Senate.

In 1962, Vidal published his first collection of essays, *Rocking the Boat*. The anthology, which brought together his book reviews and pieces of a far more political bent, cemented his reputation as an incisive commentator on American life and culture. He published three novels in the 1960s: *Julian* (1964), *Washington, D.C.* (1967) and *Myra Breckenridge* (1968).

In 1968 Vidal was hired as a political commentator on the year's Republican and Democratic national conventions. As the representative of the political left, he was pitted against his public nemesis, William F. Buckley, *The National Review* editor and die-hard conservative. Their on-air debates quickly devolved into a chaos that mirrored the political and social upheaval surrounding them.

Vidal's close observation of the presidential nominating process during his commentator stint partially inspired him to write his second comic play focusing on American politics, *Weekend* (1968).

In the 1970s, '80s and '90s, Vidal continued writing prolifically. Further collections of his essays were joined by the novels *Burr* (1973), *Myron* (1974), *Kalki* (1978), *Duluth* (1983), *Live from Golgotha* (1992), and *The Smithsonian Institution* (1998), among others. He won the National Book Award for *United States*, his 1993 collection of essays.

In more recent years, Vidal captured public interest with his published correspondence with the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, as well as his harsh attacks on the George W. Bush administration following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. He continues to write essays for periodicals, including *The Nation*, and published *Point to Point Navigation: A Memoir* in 2006. He remains a writer, speaker and a media commentator.

Gore Vidal: Political Playwright

Gore Vidal is celebrated as a master of many literary forms, chief among them the essay and the novel. However, many readers are unaware of his significant body of theatrical work. Even those who do know Vidal as a playwright are usually only familiar with his greatest theatrical hit, the political comedy *The Best Man.* He penned two other political plays in the tumultuous years between 1960 and 1972: *Weekend* and *An Evening with Richard Nixon*.

The Best Man, which Vidal wrote in 1960, had a long, successful run on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre from March 31, 1960, through July 8, 1961. A darkly comic satire on the American political process, the play takes a behind-the-scenes look at the maneuverings and manipulations that are so integral to any political convention. Vidal pits two ideologically opposed candidates — the Adlai Stevenson-like William Russell and the Lyndon Johnson-Richard Nixon hybrid Joseph Cantwell —against each other in a fevered bid for their party's presidential nomination. The play was revived on Broadway during the 2000 presidential election and met with renewed critical and popular acclaim.

Always consumed by political issues, Vidal would revisit similar themes of corruption and deception in his two other plays centered around American politics.

Vidal completed *Weekend* in 1968 and set it during the political turbulence of that year. It focuses on yet another bid for a presidential candidacy. This time, the hopeful is a distinguished senator, Charles MacGruder, who is forced to juggle his political ambitions with family conflicts and the threat of public scandal. *Weekend* is a scathing indictment of political power grabs, but the play's satirical scope extends to skewering the senator's family as well.

Vidal sets the fictional events of *Weekend* on a non-existent Friday, Saturday and Sunday directly after Lyndon Johnson's March 31 announcement that he would not seek reelection, but before Martin Luther King, Jr's assassination on April 4. Interestingly, the original draft of the play was written before Johnson's announcement. However, at an undetermined later date, the playwright adjusted the script to include references to Johnson's decision.

The play ran at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., February 19 through March 2, 1968. It premiered to an assortment of D.C. natives and Capital Hill politicos, many of whom loved the play. In spite of a dour critical response, tickets became a hot commodity during its short run.

Weekend did not fare as well when it moved to Broadway, starting March 13, 1968. The play closed on March 30 after only 22 performances and largely negative reviews. Vidal later speculated that the popularity of the 1967 film

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, with its uncannily similar plotline, played a part in reducing public appetite for the play in New York. Vidal did not return to the theater for another four years.

In 1972, he crafted a bitter theatrical attack titled *An Evening with Richard Nixon*. Its Broadway run was a very brief 13 performances, from April 30 through May 13, 1972. The play is a sprawling historical satire: The characters include Nixon, George Washington, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Adlai Stevenson, Spiro Agnew, Gloria Steinem, Harry S. Truman, Hubert H. Humphrey and Nikita Khrushchev. The play's dialogue is a strange collage of the characters' political speeches, interviews and published writings, smashed together with original content created by Vidal. The overall effect was discomfiting to most audiences, but the play marked an exciting period of theatrical experimentation for Vidal. Written two years prior to President Nixon's resignation, the play's indictment of Nixon for his political crimes was eerily prescient.

Not all Vidal's plays focused on politics. Other theatrical works include *Visit to a Small Planet*, a zany science-fiction comedy; *Romulus*, a historical drama about the last days of the eponymous co-founder of Rome; and even a never-produced Civil War drama, *The Long March to the Sea*.

But it is Vidal's trio of political plays that are arguably the most compelling of his theatrical output. They all display the trenchant wit and biting satire he uses to such penetrating effect in his other writings and are fascinating records of his political concerns during the turbulent '60s.

[Editor's Note] This is a very recent interview with Gore Vidal from *The New York Times'* Sunday Magazine that seems to capture his trademark crankiness, sharp wit, and indomitable love of provocation. Read on to see why it caused a bit of a stir once it was published.

— *The New York Times*, June 15, 2008 — Questions for Gore Vidal

Literary Lion: Interview by Deborah Solomon

Q: At the age of 82, you will be publishing your new collection of essays this week, which seems likely to confirm your reputation as one of America's last public intellectuals. Why do you think that critics have traditionally praised your essays more than your fiction, which includes *Burr, Myra Breckinridge* and 20 other novels? That's because they don't know how to read. I can't name three first-rate literary critics in the United States . I'm told there are a few hidden away at universities, but they don't print them in *The New York Times*.

Are you saying your novels have been critically neglected? I don't even read most reviews, unless there is a potential lawsuit on view. I've never had much attention paid by critics — nor has anybody else in the United States of America, as Mr. Obama likes to call it.

And what about Mr. McCain? Disaster. Who started this rumor that he was a war hero? Where does that come from, aside from himself? About his suffering in the prison war camp?

Everyone knows he was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. That's what he tells us.

Why would you doubt him? He's a graduate of Annapolis. I know a lot of the Annapolis breed. Remember, I'm West Point, where I was born. My father went there.

So what does that have to do with the U.S. Naval Academy down in Annapolis? The service universities keep track of each other, that's all. They have views about each other. And they are very aware of social class and eventually money, since they usually marry it.

How, exactly, is your cousin Al Gore related to you? They keep explaining it to me, and I keep forgetting.

What about your grandfather, Thomas Gore of Oklahoma? He invented the whole state. It was Indian territory. There was no state until Senator Gore.

In 1968, during the Nixon-Humphrey race, you became the voice of liberalism in a series of televised debates with William Buckley. Any plans to be a pundit at the coming presidential conventions? No.

How did you feel when you heard that Buckley died this year? I thought hell is bound to be a livelier place, as he joins forever those whom he served in life, applauding their prejudices and fanning their hatred.

You live in California, where last month the State Supreme Court overturned the ban on same-sex marriage. As someone who lived with a male companion for 50-plus years, do you see this as a victory for equality? People would ask, How could you live with someone for so long without any problems of any kind? I said, There was no sex.

Were you chaste during those years? Chased by whom?

Are you a supporter of gay marriage? I know nothing about it. I don't follow that.

Why doesn't it interest you? The same reason heterosexual marriage doesn't seem to interest me.

If we look at the situation apart from you — It's my interview, so we've got to stay with me.

Have you ever considered leaving the United States permanently? No, it's my subject.

Do you read a lot of contemporary fiction these days? Like everyone else, no, I don't.

Anyone in the 20th century you might have a kind word about? Yes, I liked Italo Calvino, and I thought he was the greatest writer of my time.

Your new collection includes an essay in which you note, "Calvino does what very few writers can do: he describes imaginary worlds with the most extraordinary precision and beauty." What about American novelists? Can't think of one. Norman Mailer**?** Oh, dear, we're not going to go into pluses and minuses now. Philip Roth**?** Ditto.

I admire Roth. He never became complacent. He had no reason to. He's a good comic writer.

What do you think is your own best novel? I don't answer questions like that. Ever. And you ought not to ask them.

Well, it was a great pleasure talking to you. I doubt that.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, CONDENSED AND EDITED BY ***DEBORAH SOLOMON***

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

Gore Vidal's play, *Weekend*, touches on many of the same themes and plot devices as a movie that made its debut shortly after the plays' premiere, Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Vidal ascribed the play's failure to attract audiences on Broadway after a successful run in D.C. to New Yorkers' familiarity with the similar movie.

The movie concerns Joanna "Joey" Drayton, a young white American woman (Katharine Houghton) who has had a whirlwind romance with Dr. Prentice (Sidney Poitier), an African American she met while on a holiday in Hawaii. Prentice plans to fly to New York later that night then on to an assignment in Switzerland. Joanna plans to join him there soon to be married even though she has only known him for a very short period of time. The plot is centered on Joanna's return to her liberal upper class American home in San Francisco, bringing her new fiancé to dinner to meet her parents (Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn), and the reaction of family and friends.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner won the Academy Award for Original Screenplay for screenwriter William Rose. (Katharine Hepburn also won the Academy Award for Best Actress.) The 1967 groundbreaking story dealt with the controversial subject of interracial marriage, which had been illegal historically in most of the United States, and was still illegal in 17 Southern U.S. states until June 12 of that year. Although legalized throughout the U.S. following the Supreme Court decision in Loving v. Virginia, the topic was still taboo in many areas.

According to director Stanley Kramer, he and Rose intentionally debunked ethnic stereotypes; the young doctor, a typical role for the young Sidney Poitier, was purposely created idealistically perfect so that the only possible objection to his marrying Joanna would be his race, or the fact she only met him 10 days earlier. Therefore, he has graduated from a top school, begun innovative medical initiatives in Africa, refused to have premarital sex with his fiancée despite her willingness, and leaves money on his future father-in-law's desk in payment for a long distance phone call he has made.

Criticism was more positive than negative, with most critics praising the elegant, understated performances. The film also attempted to touch upon black-on-black racism, as when both the doctor's father and the household cook Matilda 'Tillie' Binks, played by Isabel Sanford in a small but memorable role, take the young man to task for his perceived presumption.

The original version of this film that played in theaters in 1967 contained the sarcastic one-liner "The Reverend Martin Luther King!", issued by the sassy black maid Tillie in response to the question, "Guess who's coming to dinner?", which is the key line of dialogue from which the film got its title. However, after the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, this

line was removed from the film, so by August 1968, almost all theater showings of this film had this line omitted. As early as 1969, the line was restored to many but not most prints, and the line was preserved in the VHS and DVD versions of the film as well.

—*Partially excerpted from IMDB.com*

Glossary of Unfamiliar Terms

Adams, Henry: Adams was a late-19th Century author and historian. In 1868, Adams settled in Washington, D.C., where he worked as a journalist exposing political corruption. From 1870 to 1877 Adams taught history at Harvard. Then he returned to Washington to continue work as a historian. Adams erected a memorial sculpture in Rock Creek Cemetery after the death of his wife, Clove.

Adler, Alfred: In collaboration with Sigmund Freud and a small group of Freud's colleagues, Alfred Adler was among the co-founders of the psychoanalytic movement. He was the first major figure to break away from psychoanalysis to form an independent school of psychotherapy and personality theory. Psychoanalysis became a very fashionable pursuit among certain circles during the '50's and '60's.

Afro-American Society: Though no organization of that named existed in California in '68, the Society is probably a composite of several prominent African-American cultural and political organizations that were in full force by the late sixties, including: the NAACP, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), etc.

Arlington County: Arlington is an urban county of about 203,000 residents in the Commonwealth of Virginia, in the U.S., directly across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.

Harry Belafonte, Jr.: Belafonte is an American musician, actor and social activist. One of the most successful Jamaican musicians in history, he was dubbed the "King of Calypso" for popularizing the Caribbean musical style in the 1950s. Belafonte is perhaps best known for singing the "Banana Boat Song", with its signature lyric "Day-O". Throughout his career, he has been an advocate for civil rights and humanitarian causes. In recent years he has been a vocal critic of the policies of the Bush Administration.

Bicarbonate of Soda: Baking soda, used as an antacid to relieve heartburn (which can be brought on by emotional stress).

"Bobby" a.k.a. Robert Kennedy: A candidate for the 1968 Democratic Party Presidential nomination, Kennedy previously served as Attorney General under Johnson, and as New York Senator. He announced his candidacy for President in early 1968, and was considered a viable contender for the nomination until his murder in June of the same year.

Border States: The states of West Virginia, Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland are called border states. Politically, their residents tend to be divided between Republicans and Democrats, and their regional affiliations are similarly split between the South and the North.

Brooke, Edward William: Brooke was the first African American to be elected to the United States Senate as a Republican representing Massachusetts,. He would remain the only person of African heritage sent to the Senate until Democrat Carol Moseley Braun was elected in 1993. Recently, Barbara Walters named Brooke as one of her 1960s-era lovers in her autobiography.

General Claypoole: General Claypoole is not an actual historical figure from the Vietnam era. However, a "Lieutenant General Claypoole" also appears in Gore Vidal's 1958 satirical play, *Visits to a Small Planet.*

Cow Palace: A large indoor arena in San Francisco that hosted the 1964 Republican National Convention.

Daughters of the American Revolution: A women's organization devoted to educational and patriotic causes that is also somewhat infamous for rigidly conservative social and political stances. Famously, the D.A.R. banned renowned African-American soprano, Marian Anderson, from singing at the D.A.R.-controlled Constitution Hall in D.C in 1932, to great public outcry.

The Democratic National Committee: The governing body of the American Democratic party.

Dexamil: A popular 60s-era prescription "diet-pill" composed almost entirely of amphetamine. One of the "Mothers' Little Helpers" Mick Jagger sang about in a song of the same title.

Dogwood: A flowering tree that produces white or pink blooms.

***Ebony* magazine:** a monthly magazine for African-Americans published since 1945. *Ebony's* early issues often featured celebrities and pop culture figures on its covers, and would have been considered somewhat déclassé by upper-class African-Americans. Yet the magazine was also celebrated by many African-Americans for its optimistic, up-to-the-minute coverage of specifically African-American issues and personalities.

Eisenhower, Dwight David: Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allies during WWII and two-term U.S. president of the United States (1953-1961). Ostensibly, Eisenhower (founder of the "Dynamic Conservatism" school) is calling at the end of the play to pledge his candidate endorsement to Charles.

Engels: The German social scientist and philosopher who developed communist theory in concert with Karl Marx.

The Ford Foundation: A charitable foundation incorporated in Michigan and based in New York City created to fund programs that promote democracy, reduce poverty, promote international understanding and advance human achievement. Since it was chartered in 1936 by Edsel Ford, Henry Ford and two Ford Motor Company executives, the Ford Foundation has operated as an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. Throughout the 1950s, the foundation provided a series of arts and humanities fellowships that supported the work of figures like Josef Albers, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, E. E. Cummings, Flannery O'Connor, Jacob Lawrence, Robert Lowell and Margaret Mead.

Fullbright, James Wilson: Fulbright was a member of the United States Senate representing Arkansas. A Southern Democrat and a staunch multi-lateralist, he supported racial segregation, supported the creation of the United Nations and opposed the House Un-American Activities Committee. He is remembered today for his efforts to establish an international exchange program, which thereafter bore his name, the Fulbright Fellowships.

Geneva Convention(s): The common term for a group of treaties that established international humanitarian standards, especially in times of war. Among other liberties, the Geneva Conventions guarantees medical treatment, food, and shelter to prisoners of war, wounded members of the military, and civilians in war zones.

Goldwater, Barry: Goldwater was a five-term United States Senator from Arizona (1953–1965, 1969–87) and the Republican Party's nominee for President in the 1964 election. He was a Major General in the U.S. Air Force Reserves. He was also referred to as "Mr. Conservative". The United States presidential election of 1964 was one of the most lopsided presidential elections in United States history. Johnson successfully painted Goldwater of Arizona as a right-wing legislator who wanted to abolish the social welfare programs created in the 1930s. Goldwater lost to Johnson in a landslide.

"Goldwater and Miller:" Bill Miller was Barry Goldwater's running mate in the 1964 presidential election. The Republican nominees lost the '64 election to Democrat Lyndon Johnson.

Hegel: A German philosopher who heavily influenced Marx and Engel's conception of communism.

Humphrey, Hubert: Vice-President under LBJ, Humphrey won the 1968 Democratic Party presidential nomination, but narrowly lost in the general election to Richard Nixon.

Humus: Rich, fertile soil prized in gardening circles. (Not to be confused with the delicious chickpea spread prized in gustatory circles).

Impetuous: Hot-headed, hasty, forcefully energetic.

Jane Wyman and *Johnny Belinda:* A well-known movie actress of the 194s and 1950s, Wyman won an Oscar for her performance in the dramatic film *Johnny Belinda* as a deaf-mute who kills her rapist and is exonerated for the crime.

Hoover, J. Edgar: Hoover was the ultra-conservative, racist and xenophobic founder of the FBI and its director for 48 years (over the span of eight presidential administrations) until his death in 1972. Hoover's notorious abuses of power first began to come to light in the early 1960s, and he was very unpopular among the American Left by 1968. Among other offenses, he illegally investigated people and groups because of their political beliefs, fanatically tracked those he suspected of "communist tendencies," and burglarized private and government offices and homes.

The Kremlin: A complex in the heart of Moscow that includes several cathedrals, the President of Russia's palace, Red Square and Alexander Garden. It is the symbolic center of Russia and the Russian government.

"The latch string always hangs outside:" A colloquial expression akin to "Our door is always open." (A latch string was used to secure the front door of a log cabin.)

"Let nothing so become us as our fall.": Though this isn't a direct Biblical quote, but it may be an allusion to the original fall from grace and expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve.

Levi-Strauss, Claude: Claude Levi-Strauss was a French anthropologist who originated the philosophy/theory of structuralism. Levi-Strauss was widely popular in Western Europe and America in the 60s and 70s. Structuralism was applied to anthropology, math and science, and literature. Briefly, Structuralists believe that all the disparate elements of their field of study are part of one interrelated whole.

Marx: Along with Engel, Karl Marx was the political theorist, economist and philosopher who gave birth to communist theory.

Mimeograph machine (or mimeo): A mimeo machine, or stencil duplicator, was the predecessor of the electronic photostatic copier. Mimeos were used in offices to create duplicates of paper documents. Many could be operated without electricity (employing a hand crank to pass paper through a stencil drum). Mimeo copies were often printed with purple ink and had a characteristic "inky" odor.

Miscegenation: The formal term for the mixing of racial groups in any form, including: marriage, co-habitation, procreation or sexual relations between people of two different races or ethnically defined groups. Historically, the term has been used in the context of laws banning interracial sexual relations and marriage. Even in 1968, the term had a very negative connotation and was mostly used by those opposed to interracial relations.

Open Housing: At the urging of President Lyndon Johnson, Congress passed the federal Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968) in April 1968 to outlaw discrimination in the rental or purchase of homes and a broad range of other housing-related transactions, such as advertising, mortgage lending, homeowner's insurance and zoning.

Picayune: Of little importance, trifling, petty.

Rock Creek Park: A public park in Washington D.C., regarded as the D.C. equivalent to New York City's Central Park (and twice its size).

Rockefeller, Nelson A.: Nelson A. Rockefeller was the Governor of New York from 1959-1973, scion of the famous Rockefeller family, and unsuccessful candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1968, 1964 and 1960.

Saccharine: Sugar substitute.

The Sorbonne: The French term for France's elite school of higher education in Paris (also known as the University of Paris). In 1968, the Sorbonne was generally regarded as the French equivalent to other great ancient European universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge.

Saint Theresa: A Carmelite Nun and Catholic reformer, she is generally regarded as one of the mothers of the modern Catholic church.

Spengler, Oswald: Oswald Spengler was a 20th Century German philosopher and historian most famous for his book *The Declines of the West* which postulates the theory that all civilizations rise and decline in a cyclical cycle. Spengler also predicted that class conflict would eventually be supplanted by racial conflict.

Toynbee: Arnold J.: Toynbee was a British historian whose 12-volume analysis of the rise and fall of civilizations, *A Study of History*, 1934-1961, was based on concepts of the universal rhythms of rise, flowering and decline, and examined history from a global perspective.

Wallace, George: George Wallace served as governor of Alabama during the early '60s. An ardent segregationist, Wallace tirelessly opposed the desegregation of public schools and other civil-rights legislation. President Kennedy was forced to call in the National Guard to desegregate the University of Alabama in the face of Wallace's fierce refusal to permit black students to enter the campus. In 1968, Wallace ran as a third-party candidate for president.

Wallace, Henry Agard: Wallace was the 33rd Vice President of the United States (1941–45), the 11th Secretary of Agriculture (1933–40), and the 10th Secretary of Commerce (1945–46). In the 1948 presidential election, Wallace was the nominee of the Progressive Party. Wallace left his editorship position in 1948 to make an unsuccessful run as a Progressive Party candidate in the 1948 U.S. presidential election. His platform advocated an end to segregation, full voting rights for blacks, and universal government health insurance.

Waters, Ethel: Waters was an African-American blues and jazz vocalist and actor. She frequently performed jazz, big band, rock and roll and pop music, on the Broadway stage and in concerts, although she began her career in the 1920s singing blues. Her best-known recording was her version of the spiritual, "His Eye is on the Sparrow", and she was the second African American ever nominated for an Academy Award.

Wellesley: Wellesley College is an elite women's liberal arts college located in Wellesley, Masschusetts. One of the "Seven Sisters" schools, the college was known in 1968 for being academically rigorous and highly selective. The school graduated many prominent female activists, politicians, writers, lawyers and critics.

White Plains: White Plains, New York was a very large and prosperous suburb of New York City in 1968. White Plains in '68 was similar to Chicago suburbs of today like Lake Forest, Winnekta or Glencoe.

You get a little drunk an' you land in jail: A lyric from the song, "'Ol Man River," from the musical *Showboat.* The musical features a biracial married couple, Julie and Steve, who flee the showboat after they're threatened with arrest for "miscegenation."

— Resource Guide —

Learning more about the world of *Weekend*

BOOKS

Anderson, Terry H. *The Sixties.* Longman, 2006.
— Thorough overview of the social, cultural and political events of the era.

Charters, Ann, ed. *The Portable Sixties Reader.* Penguin, 2002.
— Many excellent primary source documents including: manifestos, essays, interview transcripts and political speech texts.

Eppridge, Bill. *A Time it Was: Bobby Kennedy in the Sixties.* Abrams, 2008.
— A portrait Robert Kennedy that delves into the political conflicts and partisan divide of the sixties.

Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage.* Bantam Books, 1993.
— Excellent coverage of political protests, civil rights actions, urban riots, the birth of black militarism, and the violent toll of sixties activism.

Gould, Lewis L. *1968: The Election That Changed America (American Ways Series).* New York, Ivan R. Dee, 1993.
— This is a transfixing account of the close race for the presidency in 1968 that also explores the election's impact on politics today.

Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest.* New York, Balantine Books: 1993.
— This modern classic painstakingly traces the disastrous route that led America into the Vietnam War. Its author — historian, journalist and former Vietnam correspondent Halberstam — places blame on the shoulders of the out-of-touch government and military officials (the "best and brightest" of the book's ironic title) in power during the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

Isserman, Maurice and Michael Kazin. *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960's.* Oxford University Press, 2003.
— Another great look at the civil strife that so often erupted into violence during the sixties.

Kaiser, Charles. *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation.* Grove Press: 1997.
— A detailed and highly readable history of 1968.

Kurlansky, Mark. *1968: The Year that Rocked the World.* Random House, 2005.
— A sprawling history of 1968, with special focus on international events (including discord and protests in France, Mexico and Czechoslovakia).

Lytle, Mark Hamilton. *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon.* Oxford University Press, 2006.

Miller, Timothy. *The Hippies and American Values.* University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Perlstein, Rick. *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. Scribner, 2008.
— A very recently published look at the social factors that propelled Nixon into the presidency, with a focus on his 1968 campaign.

White, Theodore H.. *The Making of the President: 1960.* New York, Atheneum, 1962.

White, Theodore H.. *The Making of the President: 1964.* New York, Atheneum, 1965.

White, Theodore H.. *The Making of the President, 1968.* New York: Atheneum, 1969.
— This book and its two predecessors are detailed insider accounts of the presidential campaigns of the '60s. Together, the three books are essential reading for anyone interested in politics of the era.

Unger, Debi, and Arthur Unger ed. *The Times Were a Changin': The Sixties Reader*. Three Rivers Press.
— Another anthology of primary resources from the '60s, this volume prefaces each document with insightful essays by the historian and journalist pair of editors.

VIDEO AND FILM RESOURCES

1968 with Tom Brokaw. The History Channel: Aired 2007, DVD release 2008.
— A documentary of the year in which *Weekend* takes place. The film is full of interviews, period footage and still images. Narrated and produced by Tom Brokaw.

The Best Man. An adaptation of Gore Vidal's play of the same name. Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner. Released in 1964.
— A faithful film adaptation of Vidal's first political play, *The Best Man* is a satire about two sparring candidates for their party's presidential nomination starring Henry Fonda.

The Graduate. Directed by Mike Nichols. Released in 1967.
— A chronicle of an alienated young man who becomes embroiled in affairs with a mother and her daughter. The movie was released a year prior to *Weekend*'s premiere and depicts the growing schism between generations with deadly wit and insight. The soundtrack (by Simon and Garfunkel) and production design immediately immerses the viewer in the sights and sounds of the '60s.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. Directed by Stanley Kramer. Released in 1968.
— This feature film was released in the same year as *Weekend*'s premiere and covers some of the same narrative and thematic territory. It stars Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy.

The LBJ Tapes. Released in 2005.
— President Johnson secretly taped almost all the telephone conversations he conducted during his years in the Oval Office. This documentary, in two parts, details Johnson's preoccupation with Robert Kennedy, his anguished decisions about the Vietnam War, the FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King, and Johnson's worries about his waning popularity with American voters. An astonishingly candid and unguarded look at LBJ.

LBJ: The American Experience.
— Part of the PBS *American Experience* series, this installment documents the political career of former president Lyndon B. Johnson, with a special focus on Johnson's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War years, and his decision to refrain from running for reelection in 1968.

Mr. Conservative: Goldwater on Goldwater. Directed by Julie Anderson, 2006.
— This documentary is a portrait of 1964 presidential candidate and former Arizona senator, Barry Goldwater. An interesting look at the beginning of contemporary partisan politics and the concerns and values of Republican members of Congress in the sixties.

The U.S vs. John Lennon. Directed by David Leaf. Released in 2006.
— Director David Leaf delves into John Lennon's anti-war activism and the American government's futile attempts to undermine his actions. This film provides a nice look at the many divergent social forces at work in the '60s, the growing generation gap, and the mendacity of government officials.

Two Days in October: American Experience. Aired in 2005 on PBS.
— Another installment in the PBS series, *Two Days in October* looks back at a devastating massacre of 61 American soldiers in October 1967 that occurred in the same time frame as a violent protest at the University of Wisconsin. An excellent comparison of two very different moments in the '60's. Based on the book *They Marched into Sunlight* by David Maraniss.

Vietnam War with Walter Cronkite. Released in 2003.
— A look back at the Vietnam War through the eyes of newscasters who covered it for American audiences. This film examines the war's impact on American civilians and features excerpts from news reports of the era.

ONLINE RESOURCES

To view all online resources used by the *Weekend* production team and cast, please visit the *Weekend* de.lici.ous page at delicious.com. The production's page includes a large selection of multimedia online resources including interviews, video documentaries, movie excerpts, period public service announcements and educational films, music and primary resources.

http://delicious.com/WeekendDramaturgy

— Questions for Discussion —

HISTORY

1. Senator Andrews and Senator MacGruder are both fictional characters created by Gore Vidal. Do you think Vidal was influenced by the personalities and opinions of any contemporary politicians of 1968 when he wrote *Weekend*? Of the major 1968 Republican presidential candidates, who do you think Senator MacGruder most resembles? Do the two senators remind you of any contemporary politicians?
2. Why is it so significant that *Weekend* takes place directly after President Lyndon B. Johnson's announcement of his plans to not seek reelection? How does the president's decision affect characters in the play?
3. What important event of the Vietnam War took place in the end of January, 1968? How did it influence the events of the play? (Hint: How did the event change public opinion?)
4. How do Louise and Wilson's personalities and values reflect the changing role of women in 1968?
5. How did the 1968 campaign for Republican presidential nomination as depicted in *Weekend* differ from the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. (Hint: How soon did John McCain become the presumptive Republican candidate?)
6. Why would a marriage between characters like Beany and Louise be controversial in 1968?
7. What significant historical event of early April, 1968 is not mentioned in *Weekend?* (Hint: It is the assassination of an influential American leader) How you think the inclusion of this event would change the tone or plot of the play?
8. How do the actions and opinions of Beany and Louise reflect the growing generation gap of the 1960s?
9. Special Student Activity: Find a family member or friend who was alive and living in the United States during 1968. Create a list of questions about their memories of 1968 and the sixties, then conduct an oral history interview. Remember to ask lots of questions that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," and try to solicit lots of details. After your interview is over, compile your notes into a report or newspaper-style article.

CHARACTERS

10. Every character in *Weekend* actively tries to deceive others in order to achieve their goals. Who do you think is the most successful? Why do you think the characters all use deception?

11. Servants, like Roger in *Weekend*, are often important characters in theatre, going all the way back to the ancient Greeks. Make a list of other servant characters in dramatic literature, and the way they are pivotal to the plot of their play. To get you started: Moliere's Scapin (from the play of the same name), Goldoni's eponymous Servant of Two Masters (from the play of the same name), Shakespeare's Feste and Malvolio (*Twelfth Night)* and Fool (*King Lear)*. How does Roger compare to some of the servants on your list? Were you surprised by his actions as the play unfurled? Why or why not?

12. How does Senator MacGruder make, to use a popular activist slogan of *Weekend*'s era, "the personal political?" That is, how does he use his skills as a politician to manage his personal life and interact with his family?

13. Which character in *Weekend* did you find most sympathetic or compelling? Why do you think you were drawn to this person?

14. How are Louise's parents different from Beany's parents? How are the Hamptons and the MacGruder's similar?

15. Who do you think is the most politically and socially conservative character in the play? How is that character treated by other characters? How is that character treated by the playwright? Is that character respected or ridiculed?

16. Special Student Activity: Imagine the characters of *Weekend* all keep diaries. Choose your favorite person from the play and write a diary entry in their voice. Choose a date for your entry. It can be during the events of the play or immediately before or after.

THEMES

17. Do you think playwright Gore Vidal is idealistic or cynical about the state of American politics? Why?

18. How does race influence the events of the play? Do you think Louise's race is as shocking today as it was for audiences in 1968?

19. Find other pieces Gore Vidal wrote during the sixties (these could be essays, reviews, or novels). How do these works from the same era of *Weekend* deal with ideas and themes similar to those found in the play?

20. Money is a thorny subject in this play. How do different characters in the play feel about wealth? How does money motivate the characters?

21. How do the social and political issues of this play (an unpopular war, race, interracial relationships, political ethics, etc) compare to important social and political issues of 2008? Do you think *Weekend* is still relevant to today's audiences? Why or why not?

22. Special Student Activity: *Weekend*'s playwright, Gore Vidal, included a preface in the published text of the 1968 play inviting future directors to update the play's events as they saw fit. Timeline Theatre Company didn't take Mr. Vidal up on his offer, but what if you did? What parts of the play would you change and why? Would characters stay the same? How would you adapt the play to focus on contemporary political and social events? Write a one-page summary of your 2008 version of *Weekend* and choose one scene from the play to rewrite in total.