1960s Political Crises and Social Unrest

1960  U-2 Incident undermines US-Soviet diplomacy and deepens the Cold War.

1961  Soviets further escalate Cold War tensions by building the “Berlin Wall” separating East and West Berlin; anyone trying to escape from East to West Berlin shot on sight by East German and Soviet soldiers on guard.

1962  The Cuban Missile Crisis brings US and Soviet Russia to the brink of nuclear war.

1963  Police dog attacks on black civil rights protestors and deadly Klan-organized bombing of black church in Birmingham, AL, bring civil rights unrest to a peak.

1964  The Beatles arrive in the US and galvanize America’s youth, igniting the “British Invasion” and the re-emergence of rock and roll music as social and cultural force.

Civil rights legislation passes in US Congress: “public accommodations” and schools now to be integrated.

1965  Escalation of the Vietnam War by the Johnson administration; protests against the war begin.

Voting Right Act passed by Congress; Southern states are now under supervised mandate to allow voting rights to minorities.

1965-1968:  Urban riots every summer in major US cities; Vietnam War protests become more widespread, especially on college campuses.


1968:  Spring “Tet Offensive” by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong insurgents in South Vietnam proves that there is no “light at the end of the tunnel” in Vietnam; President Johnson realizes the futility of the Vietnam effort and decides not to run for re-election.

April 4: Martin Luther King murdered in Memphis, TN; massive urban riots ensue.

June 5: Senator Robert Kennedy, leading Democratic anti-war candidate, murdered in Los Angeles, CA, minutes after claiming victory in the California Democratic primary.

July: Thousands of youthful protestors, angry about Vice President Hubert Humphrey, a Vietnam War supporter, being nominated for President, are attacked with tear gas and hundreds of baton-wielding police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

June 1: Bruce Nims graduates from Fort Mill High School.