New York Post

Ending the '60s

By PETE HAMILL

WASHINGTON.

Finally, on a cold bright Sunday morning, with the streets cleared of refuse and tear gas canisters, and the khaki jeeps returned to the armories, and the bitter smell of tear gas replaced again by burning leaves, the Capitol of the Republic became its old implacable self again. The great stone piles of the government buildings were quiet. Men watched football on a thousand TV sets. In isolated areas, the police were settling some last small arguments with their invaders, but to them the process was now one of fumigation rather than combat. It was over. All of it.

And it is unlikely that we shall see anything like it again. We will never see anything like that Saturday morning when we walked through the cold morning air along Constitution Av., with streams of children on all sides of us, heading for the Mall of the Capitol building, thousands of them, with sweet clear faces, carrying their ponchos, duffle bags and youth, seven or eight deep on both sides of the streets, coming like tributaries from some secret source heading for a wild and terrible basin. They had come from everywhere, to shout out for life. You could look at them only once and know that they were not what was wrong with America.

We will never see them again precisely like this: spreading out across the Mall, their peers marshaling them with precision and manners, while in the distance flags billowed in the breeze, red and black, like the emblems of some giant Arab army in those old movies about holy wars. They moved among each other without hostility, free in some strange way from the impacted resentments of my generation. They held signs that said, "Thank you, Mr. Nixon, for bringing us together," and "Fighting for peace is like balling for chastity," and some of them shivered under the hard blue sky, and others shared their peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and others bobbed in a morning dance. We have always been a country devoid of gorgeous splendor, but on this Saturday they were to provide it all.

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Eugene McCarthy's voice was echoing out of the speakers' stand, charged with his peculiarly moving brand of airy emotion, saying that "no one knows what the 'silent majority' in America thinks. If there is such a silent majority, it is a challenge to American democracy. On an issue as grave as Vietnam the majority should not be silent after four years of growing military involvement . . . 52,000 Western Union telegrams and a telephone poll do not establish what the silent majority believes."

They roared for McCarthy, and then followed quietly when the parade moved out to the already familiar cadence of muffled drums. It was 10:27, and an initial contingent went forward like slow and deliberate blocking backs to clear Constitution Av., and behind them came the drums, and the men bearing the 12 coffins which contained the names of the war dead. As they marched, streams of children continued to file down the side streets heading for the end of the march. They waved at each other in some random mood of brotherhood, as if already understanding the sense of loss they would carry with them at the end of the day.

The government had made a wall of Washington buses against any mass assault on the back doors of the White House, but the marchers ignored them and kept moving, turning finally onto the great open greensward of the Mall at the foot of the Washington Monument. They came to the brow of a hill, and below us we could see the cluster of makeshift tents and platforms that would be the center of the day.

How to explain that afternoon? Details: Richie Havens singing with fierce passion about freedom; the earth, wet from the rains of the night before, turning to hard mud, and reporters clustering around hot coffee urns in a plastic tent; Peter Yarrow running the stage, and the shrill contempt-filled voices of women radicals; Paul O'Dwyer on the speakers' platform with his white hair riffling in the breeze; photographers swaying on a platform. And all the while the hill at the base of the Monument filling up, like a multi-colored carpet, blotting out the green in every direction, and freshly arrived reporters telling that they were now spreading out behind the Monument, beyond our vision.

Nobody knew how many were there, neither the reporters nor the police; it could have been a half-million; it could have been more. At some point I climbed up on the steel pipe structure which held the great sound system, to look; I had never seen so many people in one place in my life, not even when Lyndon Johnson's Asian clients were assembling entire nations, during one of his public relations marches through the Orient.

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I remember this: David Dellinger, a middle-aged man who should know better, shouting hoarsely into the microphone, encouraging children to go to the Justice Dept. later, where they were certain to be tear-gassed, arrested or worse. At his side were Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, the stand-up comics of the boy revolutionaries; Rubin, great non-conformist that he is, displayed the wig he wears to disguise the dread short haircut he received in prison. You could tell by looking at them that when the gas went off they would not be breathing it.

I remember the boy revolutionaries crowding around the press entrance near the stage, with their flags billowing, and the rumors that they would storm the stage when George McGovern spoke, to strike down the vicious liberal enemy; the young marshals, arms locked together, holding them back; while the scent of incense drifted everywhere, and someone who had been at both places came over to say that it was two Woodstocks. Timothy Leary, his tanned face ravaged and lined, dressed in buckskin and white ducks, like some Southern California version of Dorian Gray. Dick Gregory told Agnew jokes, and Phil Hutchins of SNCC drove off thousands with one of those endless globs of bleary leftist rhetoric about the Third World. But there were to be two superb moments which everyone there would carry forever.

The first came when Pete Seeger started to sing "All we are saying is give peace a chance." It started slowly, and then Mitch Miller was there, waving his arms to lead the crowd, and Mary Travers was beside them, and the song came chanting down, the first chant Americans have ever sung in such numbers, the crowd swaying to the music, like a rippling carpet, and Seeger saying: "Are you listening, Nixon? Are you listening, Agnew? Are you listening in the Pentagon?" and the music going on, for eight and a half minutes, everyone in the place locked into it. I ran into a tough saloon fighter I know who had tears in his eyes, who kept saying: "I've never seen anything like it. Never."

The other moment was also musical, as it had to be. Words don't mean much to a lot of these kids, and the dreary words of the rigid left must mean even less, like some odd form of static. The second moment came late in the day, when the grease was showing at the base of the Monument, and hundreds were already on the way to the Justice Dept. to receive their gassing for the likes of David Dellinger. The cast of "Hair" assembled on stage with beautiful Melba Moore singing out across that clamorous field, all about the age of Aquarius and then about letting the sunshine in. And the kids really joined in this one, while the stage became jammed, and someone let out a flock of doves. One dove skimmed over the crowd in a kind of salute and winged its way past them and past the Washington Monument and out into the cold city which had forced all of them to assemble here.

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That last chorus said it all: Young kids, open and free about so many things, joined together, some of them swaying joyfully on each other's backs, a girl in a glossy black raincoat with her hands joined to other marshals and her head turned to watch the stage. Others crying, they were there to say farewell to the 1960s, a desperate and bloody era, one that had begun with John Kennedy standing in weather like this telling them that the torch had passed to a new generation, and now, looking out at them, you remembered that when Kennedy was inaugurated most of them were only 10. The new generation was us; Thank God we had done better.

So they had grown up with Richard Speck coming in the night window with his knife and Charles Whitman climbing to his tower; they had watched the limousine pass the Texas Book Depository a hundred times on TV, and seen Oswald's contorted face, and remembered clearly how Robert Kennedy had moved through the crowds of California, and what Gene McCarthy had done in New Hampshire; they knew about that, and about Woodstock, and what the cops had done in the night in Chicago, and the way the fires had burned in Watts, and Newark and Cleveland and Washington; they knew that Martin Luther King was dead and Eldridge Cleaver was in Algeria, and that 12,000 miles from where they stood on the damp American earth, singing about hope, Americans were being slaughtered over abstractions.

At 5:52, on Nov. 15, the last chorus ended and the sixties were over. They had begun in hope, and ended with Richard Nixon in the White House and Spiro Agnew threatening other Americans with "separation," and when the crowd drifted away, there was no feeling left except remorse and loss and waste. The country had failed those children, and you could promise them nothing any more except dark and fearful future.

The Washington Post

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1969

No

The effort by this administration to characterize the weekend demonstration as (a) small, (b) violent, and (c) treacherous will not succeed because it is demonstrably untrue. If citizens had had the opportunity to witness the weekend on television, they would know it to be untrue; as it is, they will have to ask those who were there—either kids or cops, no matter. For sheer balderdash it would be difficult to exceed Herbert G. Klein's estimate: "Had it not been for the highly effective work of the Washington police, of the National Guard . . . for the reserve forces of the Defense Department and the complete cooperation of all elements of the government . . . and the work of the Justice Department . . . the damage to Washington (Saturday night and the night before) would have been far greater than . . . the . . . riots after the death of Martin Luther King."

That statement is inaccurate on every count save the first—the enormously effective and professional performance of the Washington police department. Not necessarily in order of importance, thanks should be tendered to (a) the marchers, (b) the volunteer marshals, (c) the police and Chief Wilson, (d) the Mobe leaders, (e) Mayor Washington, and (f) the scores of organizations, churches and others, and individuals who went out of their way to exhibit what the mayor called "neighborliness."

What this administration, and the Attorney General in particular, does not seem capable of grasping is the simple truth that if the demonstrators had wanted serious violence they had the numbers to create it. Does anyone seriously believe that Washington's undermanned police force could contain 5,000 or 50,000 or 150,000 demonstrators bent on violence? The answer is No, and the demonstrators didn't want trouble. The fringe groups—Weatherman, crazies—did want trouble, and got it. To the Attorney General, this is evidence that the Mobe lost control and broke its nonviolent pledges. Is it reasonable to hold the Mobe leaders (and, by implication, all those thousands who marched) responsible for the actions of 50 or 200 or 500 people? No, it is not. The Mobe does not control Weatherman—and that is not an apology, it is a fact. There is evidence now that Weatherman demanded $20,000 from the Mobe as the price for peace; the Mobe refused, and the wild ones marched on the Saigon embassy. What there is now is a split between the antiwar moderates and the extremists; it is a serious split, but if John Mitchell tries hard enough he can probably heal it. He is one of the few men in the country who can.

"I do not believe that—over-all—the gathering here can be characterized as peaceful," was the way the Attorney General put it. He places in evidence the fact that at the "major confrontation" at Dupont Circle "20 persons were arrested." If the arrest of 20 people then, less than 300 people overall out of a crowd of a quarter of a million, constitutes a "major confrontation" engineered by the leaders of that crowd—then, what we may have here is a failure of communication.

These men—Mitchell, Klein and others who have had a hand in making policy in this matter—are not dumb or weak but small, men who somehow naturally see themselves as beleaguered adversaries. It seems clear from their statements, and from the accounts of participants at the command post in the Municipal Center over the weekend, that the Nixon administration was less interested in trying to keep the march peaceful than in trying to make it seem less large and more violent than it really was, and in trying to scare the daylights out of that putative Silent Majority at the same time.

So yesterday, as is the fashion with this administration, we had the qualifying statement from the White House press secretary, Ron Ziegler. Yes, it was a pretty large crowd; yes, it was, when you think about it, fairly peaceful. More moderate, more generous, more truthful than the other statements—but there is no reason to think that what Ziegler says is what the President thinks. On Saturday and Sunday, the President by his own account was preoccupied with the football games. It was a fine afternoon for watching football, he is quoted as saying on Saturday, and for sheer piquancy, we have not heard the likes of that since Marie Antoinette.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1969

In The Nation: Missing the Point of the Mobe

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, Nov. 17—Attorney General Mitchell told the nation Sunday that the gathering of a quarter-million Americans in Washington to demonstrate against the war had not been peaceful enough. On another network, Herbert G. Klein, the Administration's director of communications, insisted that the majority of the people support the President, no matter how big the turnout was.

The facts are that:

—The kind of violence Mr. Mitchell and the Justice Department said in advance that they expected was never remotely in evidence. A magnificent performance by the Washington police and the Mobilization marshals, a jovial and generous spirit in the immense crowd, the nature of the occasion, perhaps even the clear but cold weather, kept the violence to a minimum. The incidents that did occur were clearly the work of fringe groups.

—Nobody ever claimed that the size of the turnout would be an accurate guide as to how many people do or do not support Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policies. It was a much bigger gathering than the Administration wanted and it might well be asked whether Herb Klein or anybody else believes he could get 250,000 people together anywhere in this country to march in support of Richard Nixon and the present pace of his peacemaking. But the real point is simply that the Mobe showed once again that a huge and dynamic segment of the population wants that pace speeded up, and sharply.

The Hard Fact

That is the fact that confronts Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Klein after the Mobe. That is the fact that they tried to diminish on television. That is the fact that Mr. Nixon, behind the wall of parked buses that surrounded the White House, tried to ignore by tuning in the Purdue-Ohio State game (not that he could have found any of those unfair Eastern liberal networks televising perhaps the largest crowd ever seen in America, and certainly in Washington; where were they?).

But this hard fact will not go away. The protest movement is not a fringe group of violent extremists. It is not a small and unreasonable minority. It is a serious, sizable, sustained element of American politics that, while it may or may not be a majority, certainly is not silent. It is active, growing, determined and here to stay.

Nevertheless, the reactions of Mr. Klein and the Attorney General, which may be taken for that of the President, suggest not only that Mr. Nixon is standing firm on his approach to Vietnam, which was to be expected; they suggest also that the Administration will persist in trying to discredit and deny the importance of the opposition to that approach. Like King Canute and Lyndon Johnson, it will try to command the waves to cease.

But if the President continues to make policy on the pretense that the protest movement is not serious, he will be basing that policy on an unreality.

No Time for Delusion

Take, for instance, the empty debater's argument that a President cannot make decisions under the pressures of a street mob; of course he can't, but no one expected Mr. Nixon to take a look out the window on Saturday, then call Hanoi. What he might be expected to do is to stop deluding himself that there is enough unity in this country to permit, without serious political and social disruption, the long, dubious process of "Vietnamization."

The Administration also asserts that peace demonstrations encourage Hanoi to hold out. But not only does the evidence suggest that Hanoi—certainly the N.L.F.—will hold out anyway; surely it is unrealistic for Mr. Nixon to expect the peace movement, with its origins and experience, to swallow its moral objections to the war and its political doubts about his policies so that he can move unhurriedly toward a faraway and ill-defined end. It is the most frightening of his difficulties that so many Americans no longer trust their leaders that much.

The point the Nixon Administration seems to miss, as its predecessor did, is that the main cost of the war is in America itself—the alienation of the young as well as more and more of their elders from a political system that appears ineffective and a Government that seems unresponsive—and it is far too great for any interest that might conceivably be pursued in Vietnam. That Mr. Nixon cannot see this is why he could not see the mobilization for what it was.