5.1

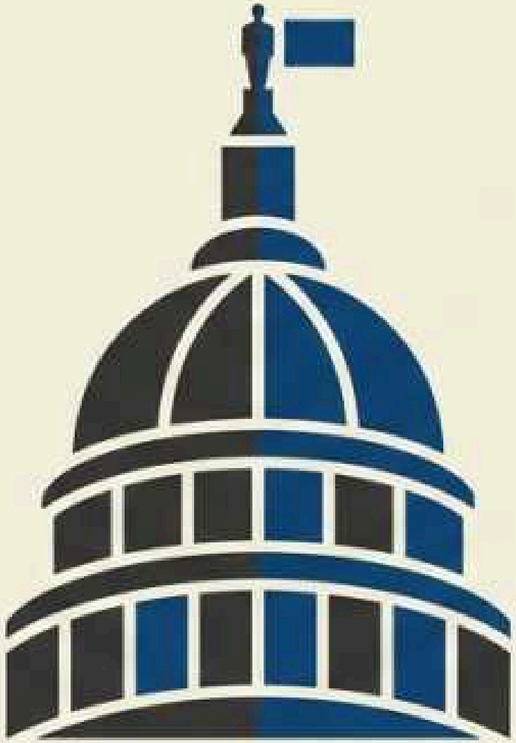
Civil Rights

How did the movement dismantle legal segregation?



The Great Society

What did it try to accomplish?



The Vietnam War

Why did it divide the country?



5.2 Roots of the Movement

NAACP Legal Strategy

- Goal: Overturning segregation on a case-by-case basis.
- Key Legal Architects: Charles Houston & Thurgood Marshall

1948 Desegregation

President Harry Truman issues an executive order desegregating the armed forces.

5.3 The Ruling

May 17, 1954

Brown v. Board of Education

- Unanimous Supreme Court ruling under Chief Justice Earl Warren.
- Segregated public schools are inherently unequal, officially overturning Plessy.
- Subsequent 1955 mandate required desegregation with all deliberate speed (a vague phrase inviting delay).

The Resistance

Massive Resistance

Southern officials actively defied the ruling.

1957: Little Rock, Arkansas

- President Eisenhower deploys federal troops to enforce the admission of nine Black students to Central High School.

5.4

The Spark

1955

The murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi shocked the nation.

381 DAYS

Black residents boycotted the buses, leading to the emergence of a young minister, Martin Luther King, as their leader.

The Action

December 1, 1955

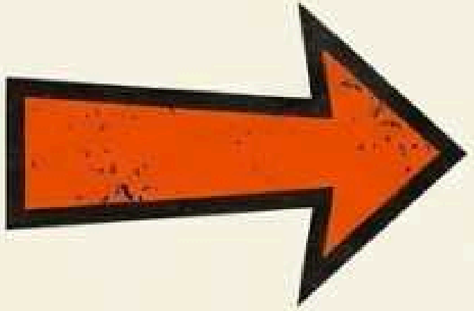
Rosa Parks, a seamstress and longtime activist, arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat.

5.5

Tactics & Organizations Matrix

Sit-ins (Feb 1, 1960)

Four Black college students at a Greensboro, NC lunch counter.

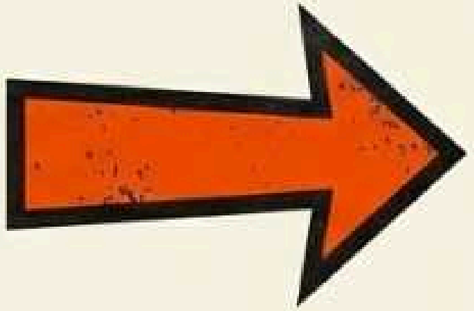


SNCC

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee formed.

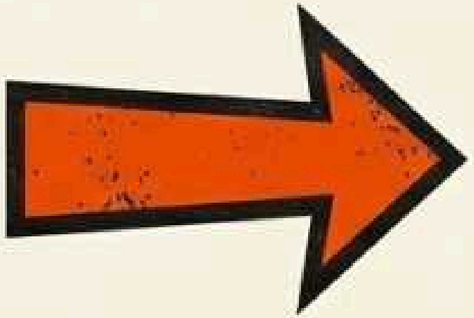
Freedom Rides (1961)

Challenging segregated buses; met with severe mob violence.



Marches (1957 / Spring 1963)

- SCLC founded in 1957.
- 1963 Birmingham campaign: Police deploy dogs and fire hoses on children.



Letter from Birmingham Jail penned by MLK.

5.6

Triumph

August 28, 1963: The March on Washington

250,000

Gathered to hear King's I Have a Dream speech. President John F. Kennedy proposes a landmark civil rights bill.

Tragedy

November 22, 1963: JFK assassinated in Dallas.

His successor, Lyndon Johnson, assumes the presidency and takes up the legislative mantle to press Congress for the bill's passage.

5.7

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Banned discrimination in public accommodations and employment; enforced school school desegregation.

Freedom Summer (1964)

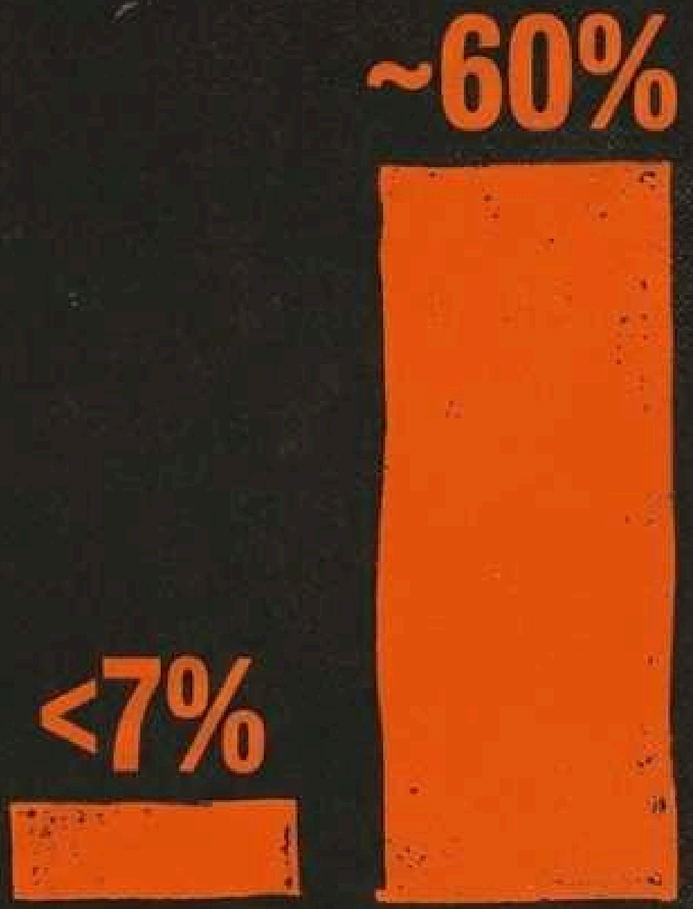
Voter registration in MS where three volunteers were murdered.

Voting Rights Act of 1965

Bloody Sunday (March 1965)

State trooper attacks on marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL.

Mississippi Black Voter Registration



5.8

The Great Society

The largest domestic program since the New Deal.

War on Poverty

Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (includes Head Start).

Health

1965 creation of Medicare and Medicaid.

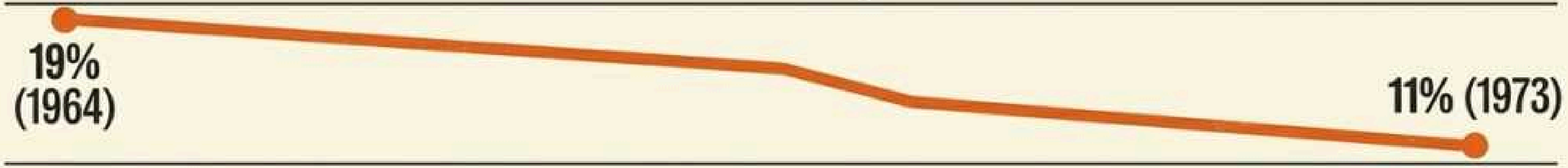
Education

Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

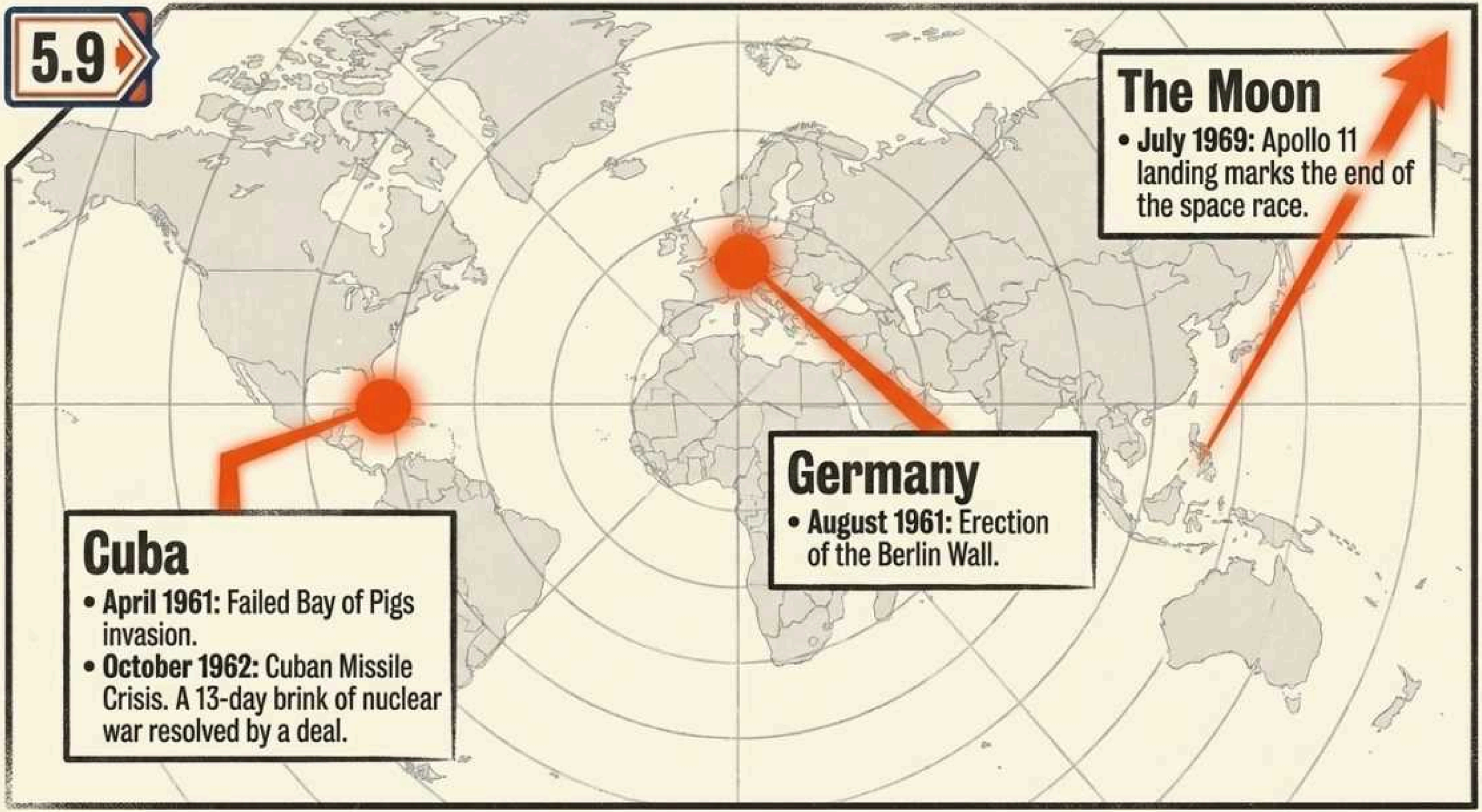
Immigration

Immigration and Nationality Act ended 1920s national-origins quotas.

Official Poverty Rate

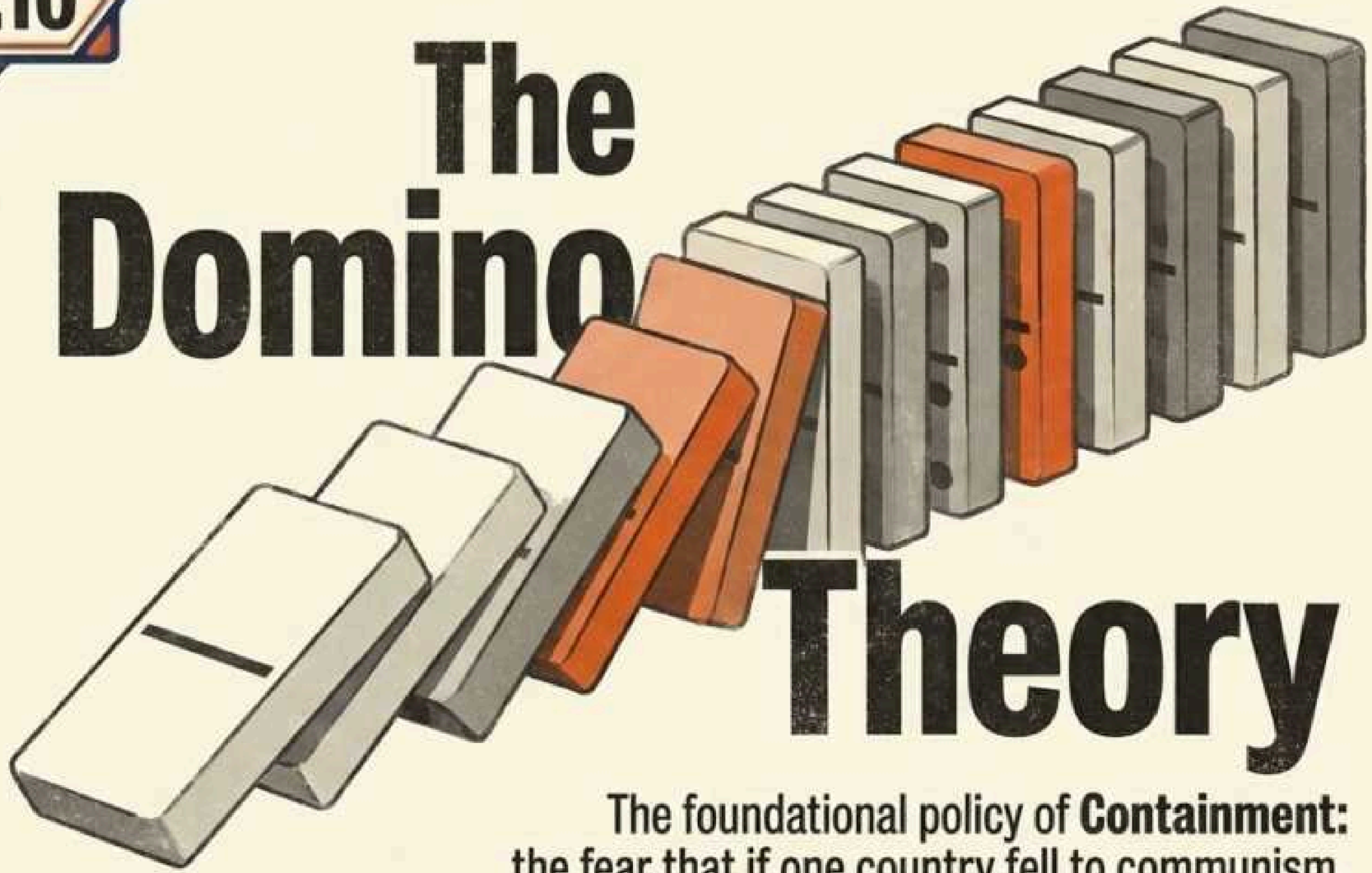


* Historians debate how much credit the programs deserve.


5.9
The Moon
• July 1969: Apollo 11 landing marks the end of the space race.
Germany
• August 1961: Erection of the Berlin Wall.
Cuba
• April 1961: Failed Bay of Pigs invasion.
• October 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis. A 13-day brink of nuclear war resolved by a deal.

5.10

The Domino Theory



The foundational policy of **Containment:** the fear that if one country fell to communism, its neighbors would sequentially follow.

1954

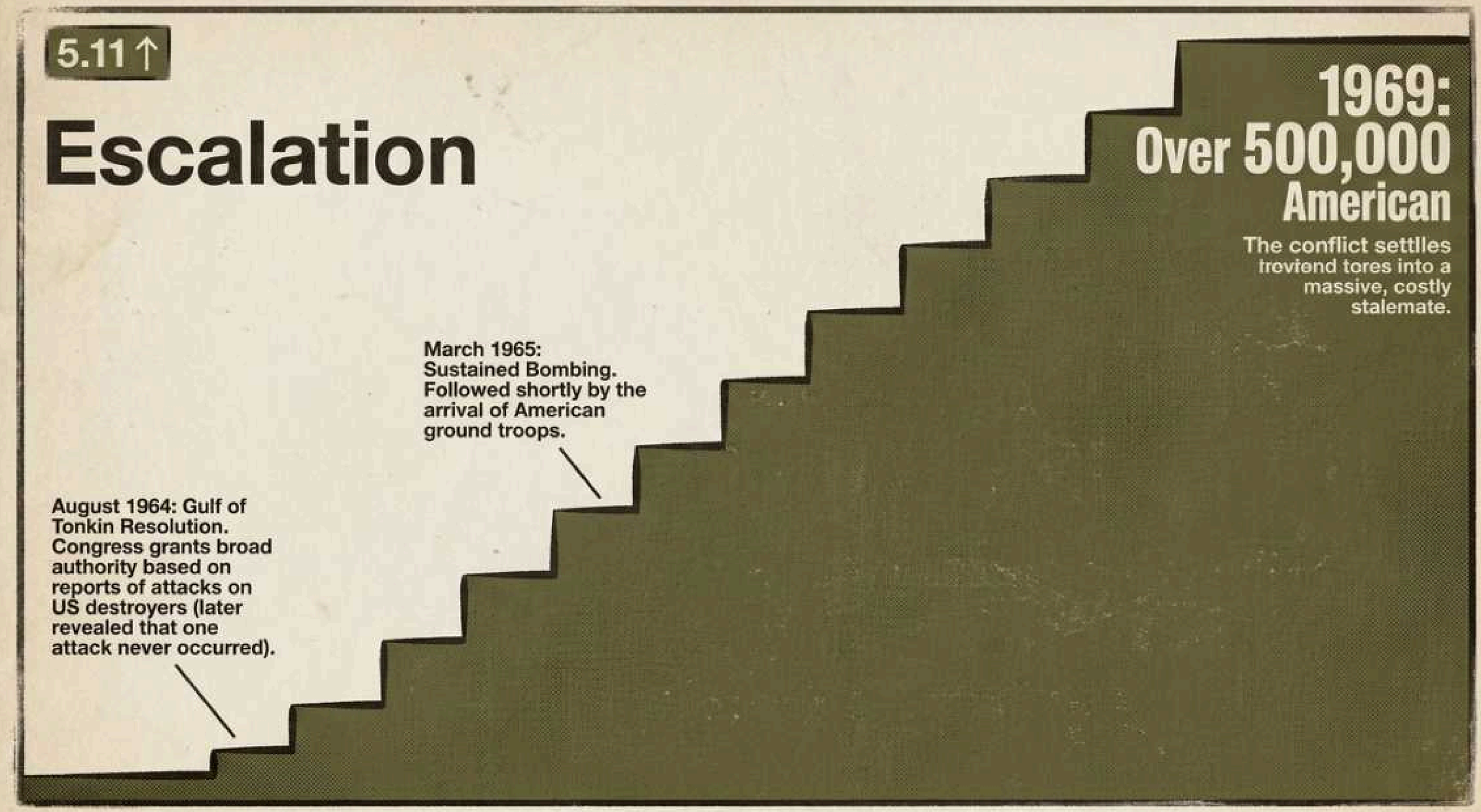
French defeated at Dien Bien Phu. Vietnam is divided; the US backs the government in the south.

1963

16,000 American advisers are stationed in South Vietnam. A coup topples South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem.

5.11↑

Escalation



Signature Index
5.12

The Shocks of 1968

January - March

- Tet Offensive: Massive Communist surprise attack. Though a military defeat for the attackers, it proved the war was far from won.
- March 31: President LBJ announces he will not run again.

April

- April 4: Martin Luther King is assassinated.

June

- June 5: Senator Robert Kennedy is assassinated.

August - November

- Deepening divisions over severe violence at the Democratic convention in Chicago.
- Richard Nixon wins the presidency.

The Antiwar Movement

Drew heavily from students, clergy, and veterans. The military draft made the conflict intimately personal.

May 4, 1970

Kent State University (Ohio).

National Guard troops shoot and kill four students protesting the expansion of the war into Cambodia.

The Administration

Nixon appeals to a silent majority supporting the war, introducing Vietnamization (gradual troop withdrawal).

Signature Index
5.14

January 1973

Paris Peace Accords end the war; last US combat troops leave.

April 30, 1975

Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces.

58,000

Americans dead.

1,000,000+

Vietnamese dead (well over a million).

Signature Index

5.15

1965: Malcolm X Assassinated

- Criticized nonviolence and integration.

Urban Flashpoints

- Riots break out in Watts, Los Angeles (1965) and Newark & Detroit (1967).

1966: Emergence of Black Power

- Younger activists embrace a philosophy stressing pride and self-determination.

The 1968 Kerner Commission Warning

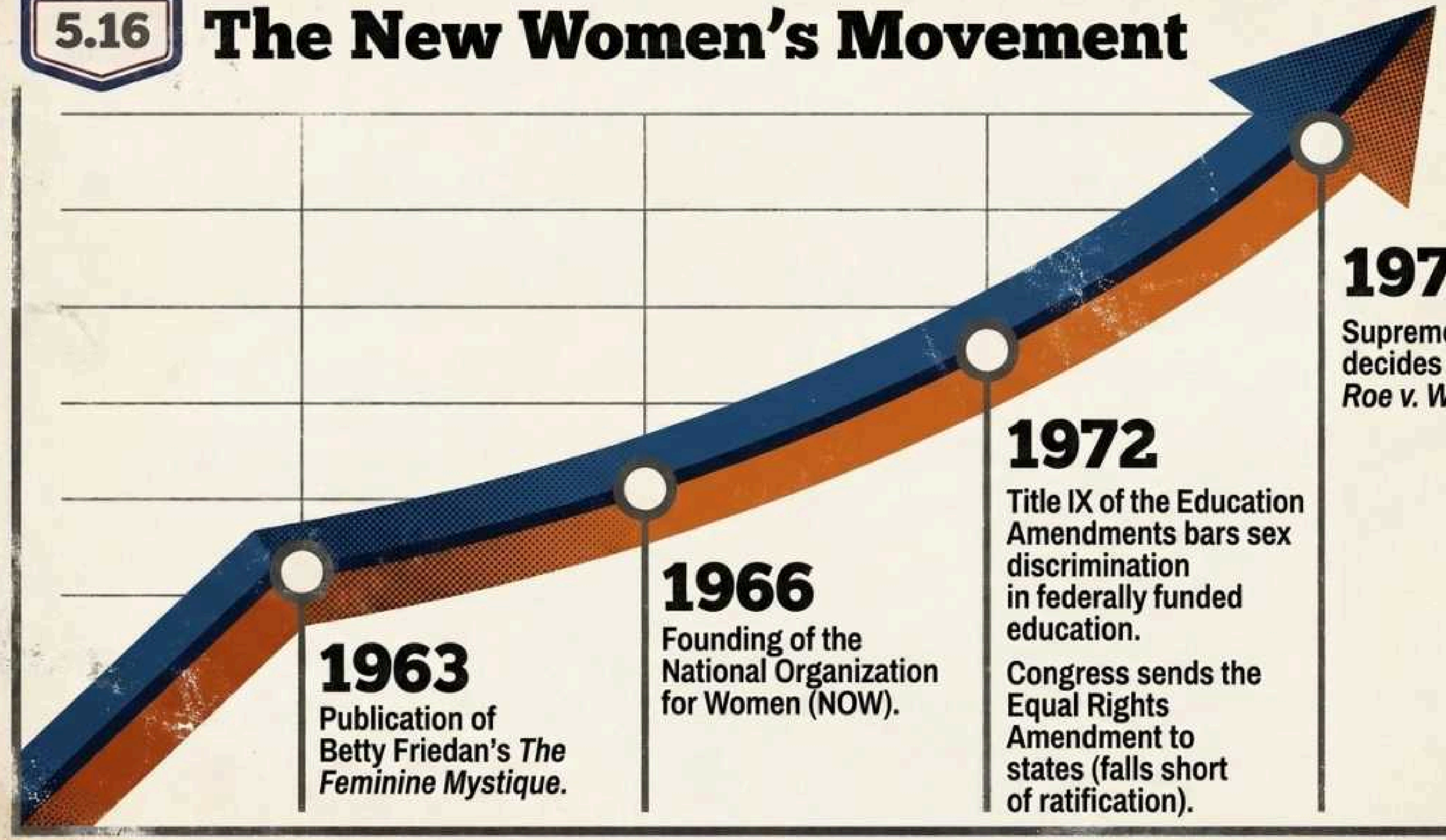
Appointed by LBJ, the commission concluded:

"Moving toward two societies, one Black and one white, separate and unequal."

Signature Index

5.16

The New Women's Movement



1963

Publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique.*

1966

Founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

1972

Title IX of the Education Amendments bars sex discrimination in federally funded education.

Congress sends the Equal Rights Amendment to states (falls short of ratification).

1973

Supreme Court decides *Roe v. Wade.*

Signature Index

5.17

Labor

Cesar Chavez leads the farm workers' union in California.



Native Activism



Occupations of Alcatraz Island (1969) and the village of Wounded Knee (1973).

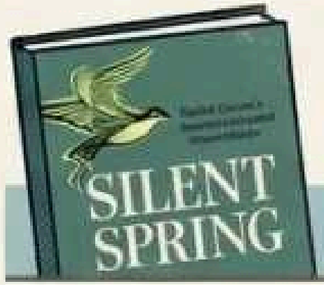


Gay Rights



The Stonewall uprising in New York (June 1969) becomes a potent symbol of the movement.

Environmentalism



Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) helps launch the movement.





First Earth Day in 1970



Creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Signature Index

5.18

The Counterculture & The Conservative Swing

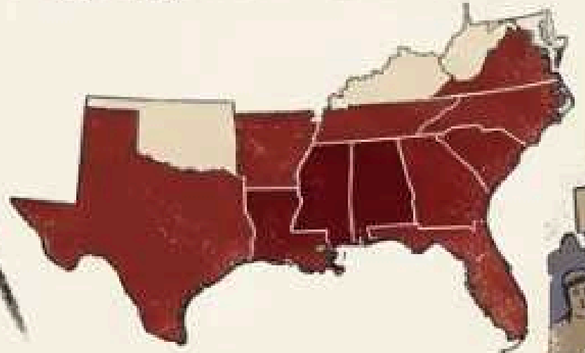
The Counterculture

Symbolized by the 1969 Woodstock music festival, deeply alarming alarming many Americans.



The Conservative Swing

1968: Governor George Wallace of Alabama wins five states running on segregationist themes.





Nixon successfully appeals to white voters who felt left behind by cultural shifts.

Historian's Debate How much does race—as opposed to crime, taxes, and cultural change—explain the dramatic shift of white southerners toward the Republican Party?

Signature Index
5.19

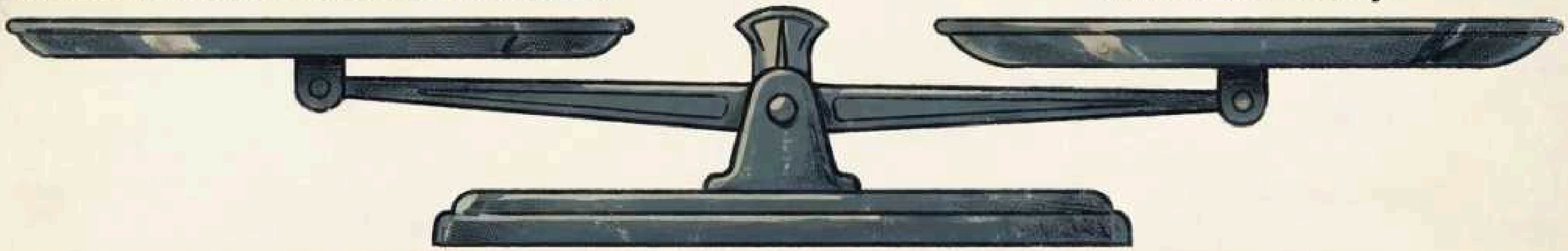
The Larger Picture

Reality 1: Unprecedented Progress

In just over a decade, legal segregation ended, voting rights were secured, and a modern welfare state was extended.

Reality 2: Lingering Shadows

Deep inequality and profound distrust persisted throughout American society.



Ongoing Historical Debates

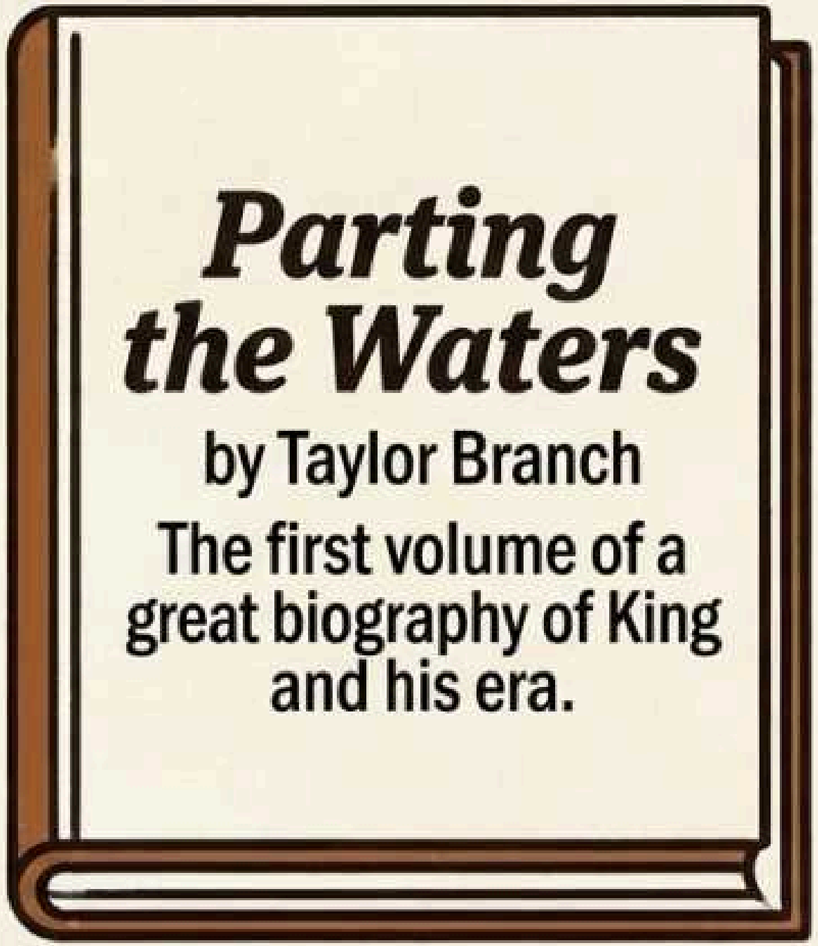
1. The Timeline: Is there a long civil rights movement that began in the 1930s and continued well after the 1960s?

2. The Actors: How much change came from national, top-down leaders versus local, bottom-up, often unnamed activists?

Signature Index

5.20

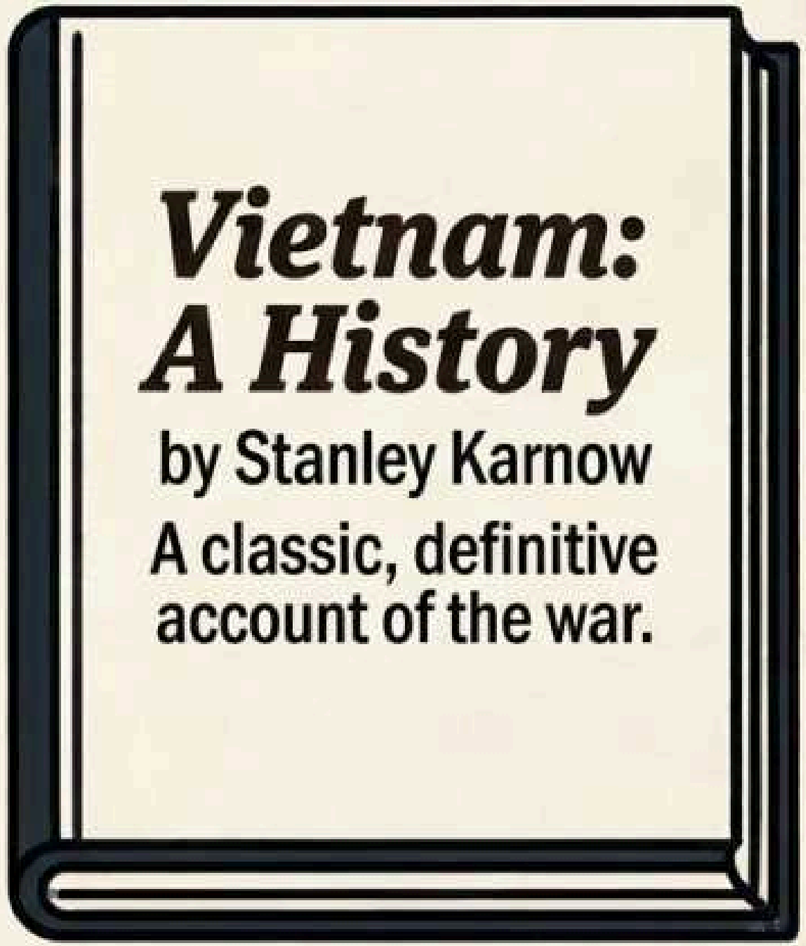
Where can you go next?



Parting the Waters

by Taylor Branch

The first volume of a great biography of King and his era.



Vietnam: A History

by Stanley Karnow

A classic, definitive account of the war.

Next: Lecture 6 – Crises of the Seventies and the Modern Era