

Six Months in 1968: A Drastic Awakening, The MLK and RFK Assassinations. The “Deep State” in the Making

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Fifty years has flown by for many baby boomers.

So much has transpired, and yet, the first six months in 1968 were the foundation of my current political awareness.

I was a freshman in college then, doing my best to survive in a much more demanding scholastic environment. Brooklyn College at that time was a tough school to not only get into, but to stay in. The transition from high school to college, for me, was not easy. Maybe it was the fact that for the first time, academically, the students weren't just 'walked through' the curriculum. Now we had to grasp the assignments that were literally thrown at us by five different instructors. We seemed to be 'left to our own devices' for the first time educationally. Ironically, this was a parallel to how I reacted to what was gnawing at me culturally. Dylan's words were so appropriate (weren't they always?) that "The times they are a changin!"

Here I was, a small fish in a college bowl of over 30,000 students. All I seemed to care about in January '68 was A) to get through the curriculum with passing grades, B) to play for the freshman baseball team, and C) meet girls. As an aside to this story, let me say that a few months earlier I actually decided to join the Marine Reserves as a way to delay this new college drama. Why not? I knew that the Reserves and National Guard were the *last ones* to ever be sent to that *dreaded* place called Vietnam. My neighbor across the street had a new boyfriend who just returned from what he referred to as 'The Nam' and his stories scared the shit out of me! He painted a picture that was 180 degrees from the recruitment commercials and posters floating around. I figured that the Marine Reserves could make a man out of me while keeping me from having to slosh through what many called 'The shit'. After completing the written and medical tests I was given my instructions to report on a Sunday morning for deployment to the Parris Island boot camp. They told me what to pack (not much) and what time to report etc. On the Sunday morning in question my dad was making me breakfast at around 6 AM when the phone rang. It was the recruiting Sergeant. He read from a communiqué from the President of the United States stating that "Effective immediately all new reserve units are hereby cancelled until further notice... Sorry son."

Later in the month of January into early February the Viet Cong began their *Tet offensive* in South Vietnam. They rattled the shit out of our military as they attacked deep inside Saigon and other *supposedly* secure areas. Then Walter Cronkite, America's 'Voice of reason' newscaster (THE most trusted media news figure at that time) gave his famous closing statement saying in effect that the war was unwinnable. Senator Eugene McCarthy, a

Democrat, was running for president in opposition to President Johnson and of course the war. When McCarthy, who had attracted tens of thousands of young people to his campaign, almost defeated Johnson in the New Hampshire Primary, this marked the end of LBJ's reign. Soon after that, Robert Kennedy entered the race as well. Johnson knew that Kennedy would most likely get the nomination from him, so he gave his March 31st famous "I shall not seek or accept the nomination of my party for president..." speech. Things were changing so fast in just a few short months. Well, that was nothing...

In early April Martin Luther King Jr. was in Memphis to support the sanitation strike by the predominately black workers there. He then gave his famous speech that actually *foreshadowed* his murder, by saying that he did not know if HE would make it to the 'Promised Land' with them. Shortly after that, MLK was slain while standing on the balcony of his Memphis motel. The blend of sadness and rage resonated throughout our country *and* most of the world. I was now *just* beginning to open myself up to things outside of my orbit of self interest. What in the hell was going on!?! Within a little over two months, Bobby Kennedy (as we young folks referred to him) was then murdered after winning what many believed was his 'ticket' to the White House, the California Primary. On my FM radio station that morning they played Jackie DeShannon's '*What the world needs now is love*' as I greeted the stifling heat of late spring NYC as somber as ever. Thank goodness that I had read Jim Garrison's Oct '67 Playboy interview on the JFK assassination and was open to the idea of conspiracy theories. I surmised that the two killings, MLK and RFK, had to be connected to what Garrison had been investigating: what we now refer to as 'The Deep State'. My 18 years of *political virginity* had its cherry broken.

Over the years, with some pauses for business, divorce and assorted craziness, I slowly reached the plateau of understanding where I stand now. Again, to reiterate, it was those six months in 1968 that opened my eyes to what I now hold so evident: *We live in a Military Industrial Empire that takes NO prisoners... only ENEMY Combatants!*

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