

**THE ANTI-VIETNAM WAR PROTEST MOVEMENT AS DEPICTED IN THE FILM
*THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7 (2020)***

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ABSTRACT

Social movements began to emerge during the Enlightenment era in the 18th century. Meanwhile, social movements in America began to expand during the 19th century, with the aim of connecting the voice of citizens to the government. Social movements are one example of political actions that can affect public opinion and policy. It's not a new phenomenon for the Hollywood movie industry to create historical-themed films as a portrayal of social movements in America, one of which is *The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020)*. Unfortunately, many people in America had negative views towards the movement as a result of the riots at the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative method by applying the political process theory by Doug McAdam and the semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. The purpose of this research is to create a new perspective on the anti-Vietnam War movement as a part of historical events based on the representation in the modern film *The Trial of the Chicago 7*.

From the results of this research, it was found that there are three key elements that influenced the anti-Vietnam War movement: political opportunities, organizational strength, and cognitive liberation. In addition, there are three aspects to the portrayal of the anti-Vietnam War movement: portrayal of the characters, disruptive protest tactics, and oppression by the government.

Keyword: The Chicago 7, the anti-Vietnam War movement, Social movement, Political process theory, Semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is a superpower country, both in the past and present. The United States receives this assumption because it has a huge impact on other countries. The United States has a significant lead in the most major indicators of national power (Beckley, 2019) due to its political system, economic style, and popular culture. A simple starting point for any attempt to describe popular culture is to declare that it is simply a culture that is generally favored or well-loved by a large number of people (Storey, 2018, p. 5). Pop culture is significant in American society because it gives us a distinct national culture; it helps to bridge our numerous differences and offers us some commonality in an otherwise diverse society (Los Angeles Public Library, 2014).

America's popular culture has many types, such as song, game, fashion, and film. Film is a form of American popular culture and it has numerous genres. Although genres are sometimes linked to the dominance of US film across the world, national variants of genres are also quite important and frequently have a greater global impact (Bondebjerg, 2015, p. 163). The dominance of American films across the world often inspires the Hollywood industry to represent American history as well. According to Hall, representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people (Hall, 1997, p. 15). The representation of American history, especially social movements, in modern film is an interesting way to learn about history. History as a discipline

involves our understanding of what nations and nationalism are, as well as the intellectual structure of nations themselves (Suny, 1998, p. 569).

Films and television programs, among other forms of media, provide a significant lens for examining the past and have been used to reveal harsh facts, critiques, and a wide range of social commentary (Bales, 2020, p. 5). Film is a medium to which everyone can relate, and historical film is frequently the most accessible means for people to interact with history (Jenkins, 2020, p. 5). History films influence how people view the past, whether they are fact-based or fictitious, realistic or spectacular (Metzger, 2018). Film may also be considered as a tool used by social movements to affect social and political change (Rastagh, 2012).

The social movements represented in American films show how America's impact on other countries, one of which is America's democratic political system. America is a democratic country that has several important democratic indicators: free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and judicial limits on executive authority (Miller & Quealy, 2017). In democratic countries, civil liberties are often seen as granted freedoms against unreasonable or unfair government intervention, such as interference with people's freedom of expression, right to bear weapons, or freedom of religion (Kollman, 2019, p. 109). Freedom of expression includes political participation between citizens. Political participation is defined as actions taken by citizens to affect government conduct (Kollman, 2019, p. 375). As a democratic country, America allows the citizens to participate in politics especially social movements.

Social movements are one form of realization of the political participation of American citizens, especially among young people. Social movements, began to emerge during the Enlightenment era in the eighteenth century (Marti & Biglia, 2014). Meanwhile, social movements in America began to expand in the late 19th century (Gregory, n.d.) with the common intention of connecting the voice of the citizens to the authority of the government. Social movements influence the politics of today's democratic societies (Burcher, 2017). Social movements are disputing the role of political parties as the exclusive intermediary between citizens and governments (Burcher, 2017). Social movements can affect public opinion and policy by capitalizing on concerns about innovation and balance, as well as by adjusting tactics to the institutional background (Almenta & Polletta, 2019). Social movements may and have been implemented in numerous ways and at various levels to reshape society (Clark, 2012, p. 4).

Since social movements are important events in American political history, films are used as one of the media to depict those social movements. It is not a new phenomenon for the Hollywood industry to make historical-themed films as representations of social movements in America. There are many representations of social movements in America's films. *Selma* (2014) tells about the struggle of Martin Luther King Jr. and his friends for 1965 voting rights. *Dolores* (2017) is an American documentary film about the struggle of an activist named Dolores Huerta to fight for racial and labor justice. *Whose Streets* (2017) is an American documentary about the Black Lives Matter movement based on the death of Michael

Brown and the Ferguson uprising. The media may be seen as a channel for public opinion to shape regulations (Bouchra et al., 2020/2021, p. 13). The media's portrayal has been crucial for social movements in spreading messages and gaining support (Stover, 2013, p. 56).

One of the examples of an American social movement film is *The Trial of the Chicago 7* which was released in 2020. This film was released by Aaron Sorkin on the Netflix platform. Aaron Benjamin Sorkin was born on June 9, 1961, in New York, United States, is an American writer, producer, and director who brought keen insight and razor-sharp speech to films, television shows, and plays set in turbulent backstage worlds of politics, law, or entertainment. *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, which is based on historical events and revolves around a group of political activists, was a critical success, and Sorkin was nominated for an Oscar Award for his script.

In *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, the anti-Vietnam War protesters known as the Chicago 7 are depicted as fighting. The Chicago 7 is known before as the Chicago 8, which consists of eight individuals who serve as leaders of various social movements, including Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman as leaders of the Youth International Parties (Yippies), Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis as leaders of the Student for Democratic Society (SDS), David Dellinger as the leader of the Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (the MOBE), Bobby Seale as the leader of Black Panther, Lee Weiner, and John Froines, who were accused of conspiracy, riots, and crossing state lines with the aim of inciting unrest at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Their demonstrations against the government's

announcement that troops would continue to be sent to Vietnam to support South Vietnam against communism:

“I have today ordered to Vietnam the Airmobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. This will make it necessary to increase our active fighting forces by raising the monthly draft call from 17,000 to 35,000.” (Lyndon B. Johnson)

The Chicago 7 started a chain of events that ended in the establishment of the anti-Vietnam war protest movement as a key catalyst for change during a turbulent period in American history. These occurrences occurred as a result of a chain reaction of bad consequences of the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War from 1955 to 1975.

Because of the riotous protests caused by the Chicago 7, American citizens had a variety of views on the anti-Vietnam War movement. The country seems to empathize with the cops more than the demonstrators (Roper, 2016). As a result of a Gallup poll taken in 1968, the great majority of Americans – three-quarters of them, in fact – had a negative view of the protesters, and only one in five had a favorable view (Patterson, 2023). As many as 56% approved of the police reaction to anti-war protests, while 31% did not (Roper, 2016). Despite the Chicago 7’s trial for their mistakes in 1968 at the Democratic National Convention, they suffered legal injustice; however, just 11% of the Americans who were watching concurred, and 81% disagreed with the claim that “the trial was rigged against the defendants and they didn't have a chance from the beginning.” (Roper, 2016).

Based on that public opinion, it is important to discuss the social movement film representation because it portrays certain social movements in the past with the intention of creating a different view of these social movements as part of historical events. Thus, the researcher is going to analyze the portrayal of the Chicago 7 protest movement in the film *The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020)*. This research uses a descriptive-qualitative method to analyze the research questions. The researcher uses a sociological and semiotic approach as well. The data were collected using the documentation technique. This research aims to analyze the elements that influenced the formation of the anti-Vietnam War protest movement as well as the denotative and connotative meaning behind the portrayal of the movement.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative method. Qualitative research may be found in a variety of social scientific fields (for example, sociology, anthropology, political science, or psychology) (Yin, 2016). Since this research is based on the political context, the descriptive-qualitative method is suitable for collecting and analyzing the data. The first step is to collect data in the form of scenes in the film *The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020)* on Netflix platform. Then analyze the first research question using political process theory by Doug McAdam. The next step is to analyze the second research question using semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. The last step is to draw conclusions on the research that has been done.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Elements that Influenced the Formation of The Anti-Vietnam War Movement

1. Political Opportunities



Picture 1.1 David Dellinger led the move



Picture 1.2 The youths filled the streets

David Dellinger, as one of the leaders of the movement, led the mobilization of the youth to carry out demonstrations in accordance with a predetermined agreement to ensure that it continued systematically. The political opportunities created by the anti-Vietnam War movement were not only through demonstrations, but they also utilized public opinion to encourage American hearts to support their social movement.

The media is also used as a medium to spread public awareness about the anti-Vietnam War movement that was carried out in 1968. The media's support through press conferences conducted by Tom Hayden and David Dellinger, the peace mission they are fighting for will easily spread widely until it reaches the government.

2. Organizational Strength

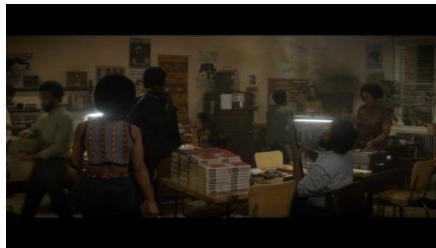
a. Members



Picture a.1 Members of SDS



Picture a.2 Members of Yippies



Picture a.3 Members of Black Panther



Picture a.4 Members of the Chicago 7

The Chicago 7 movement, or commonly referred to as the anti-Vietnam War movement, consists of various organizational groups with various backgrounds. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) is based on a group of college activists with student members. The Youth International Party (Yippies) is a group of young people with a common interest in popular culture, with members who are free spirits and art lovers. Black Panther is described as a black-party association with members of the same race. Meanwhile, the other two members, Lee Weiner and John Froines, have the same concerns as the other members, which is opposing the dissatisfaction and deprivation of other people's right to life in the Vietnam War, so they become members of the movement.

b. Establish Structure of Solidary Incentives



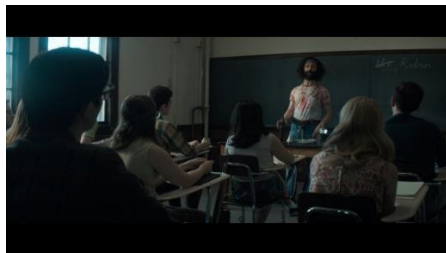
Pict b.1 and b. 2 The reason of the Anti-Vietnam War movement



Pict b.3 The reason of the Anti-Vietnam War movement

Solidarity from activists supporting the anti-Vietnam War movement began when the US government was involved in the war. The war killed many women and children and even damaged several public facilities, such as pagodas and school buildings. In addition, the command from President Lyndon B. Johnson to send youth troops to fight in a war that caused many casualties on the American side strengthened solidarity in this movement.

c. Communication Network



Picture c.1 Communication in class Pict. c.2 Communication by community gathering

Social movement communication networks are formed in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. As seen in picture c.1, communication between members and group leaders is carried out formally in the classroom. Formal communication puts forward a more structured and professional vision and mission for the group. Meanwhile, informal communication networks can be established through community gatherings at specific times and places. These meetings are more relaxed and can be carried out more freely to convey the vision and mission of a social movement group.

d. Leaders



Picture d.1 Leaders of SDS



Picture d.2 Leaders of Yippies



Picture d.3 Leaders of the MOBE



Picture d.4 Leader of Black Panther

The Chicago 7 consisted of the heads of various social movement groups. Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis, the leaders of the SDS group, were in command of the university activist group. Meanwhile, as seen in picture a.2 and c.1, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, leaders of the Yippies group, were in charge of spreading the vision

and mission and galvanizing the free-spirited and art-loving youth to protest in more creative ways. David Dellinger, leader and founder of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, was in charge of mobilizing the movement in a more structured and systematic way. Bobby Seale as the leader of the Black Panther was in charge of mobilizing black people in this movement.

3. Cognitive Liberation



Picture 3.1 and 3.2 Tom and Rennie provoked their group



Picture 3.3 Tom and Rennie provoked their group




Their awareness to join the anti-Vietnam War movement began when Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis held a formal meeting in the campus hall to discuss the atrocities of the American government in its involvement in the Vietnam War. This provocation was not only echoed by Tom and Rennie, but Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin also did the same thing. They conveyed the fact that they were disgusted with

the government's actions in the Vietnam War, where 536,000 young people were sent to become troops in the Vietnam War.

B. Denotative and Connotative Meaning Behind the Portrayal of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement in the Film *The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020)*

1.1 Portrayal of the Characters: Intellectual Youth

Table 1.1.1 Portrayal of Intellectual Youth: Campus Intellectual

Portrayal of Intellectual Youth				
Actions	Analyzing the phenomena more deeply in the organization	Creating strategic models of demonstration	Contributing to the public engagement in the democratization process	Confronting restrictive political systems
Scenes				

1. Denotative and Connotative meaning

Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis, as campus intellectuals, are able to convey their concerns as proof that they are students who are aware of global issues. Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis, spread their ideas based on facts and data to the SDS organization to encourage them to participate in this movement.

In order to fight against the government that has more power, Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis protested with various strategies that were submitted to Stahl, which were finally refused. This scene shows that, as intellectual youth, they prepared good plans so that this movement ran smoothly and peacefully.

Tom Hayden’s action in engaging the public in demonstration implies that, as an intellectual youth, he is able to be a role model for the people who follow him. As an intellectual, he is able to be a good leader, one of which is through the demonstration plan followed by the SDS organization. Tom Hayden’s arrival at a press conference in the media implies that he is confronting the government based on their restrictive system with the demonstration he planned. The use of media in this mission proves that Tom Hayden is an intellectual youth who is really able to see opportunities to achieve goals.

1.2 Portrayal of Characters: Fearlessness in Politics

Table 1.2.1 Portrayal of fearlessness in politics: prioritized in ensuring liberty

Portrayal of Fearlessness in Politics				
Actions	Freedom of speech by spreading ideas and ideologies	Demanding civil rights	Demonstrating for liberties	Criticizing the government
Scenes				

1. Denotative and connotative meaning

The form of fearlessness carried out by the Chicago 7 to eradicate the hypocrisy of the American government is speaking truth to power by spreading ideas about American crimes in the Vietnam War and ideologies of anti-war as well as anti-authoritarianism so that the war must be stopped. They are also not afraid to challenge

the government with demonstrations to stop the war, even though they have to risk facing the government in court and getting suppressed by the authorities. The Chicago 7 with their youthful spirit, defended civil liberties, which included freedom of speech and participation in protest. Abbie Hoffman used this freedom of speech to criticize those who accused the Chicago 7 of conspiring to riot during the protest.

2. Disruptive Protest Tactics

2.1 Civil Disobedience

Table 2.1 Disruptive protest tactics: civil disobedience

Portrayal of their protest tactics				
Actions	Damaging public property	Damaging public facility	Confrontation with authorities	Inciting a riot during the protest
Scenes				


1. Denotative and connotative meaning

The throwing of Molotov bombs targeted at the U.S. Army and Recruiting Center signifies the activists' disappointment and disgust with the government for targeting young people for compulsory participation in the Vietnam War. This participation caused many young people to lose their future and even die on the battlefield. Deflating the tires of Paul Deluca's car, a detective of the Chicago Police Department, was an act of disappointment by Tom towards the police who were involved in the chaos of the demonstration. The tire is a symbol that Tom is an ordinary person who doesn't have

any power to fight the cops. Although Tom was only a student who had no power, he took this action to show his disappointment and disgust with the authorities for oppressing the protesters.

3.1 Oppression from the government: Acts of pushing down

Table 3.1 Oppression by the government: acts of pushing down

Oppression by the Government Towards the Chicago 7				
Actions	Government actions to sent police officers to suppress the movement	Banning demonstration plans	Restriction of gathering places	Police actions against the protesters
Scenes				

1. Denotative and connotative meaning

The first action by the government was to send a large police officers to suppress the anti-Vietnam War protest movement. The movement, which was considered a leftist movement that disrupted the government’s performance and the stability of the country, should be pressured to stop protesting. The police were deployed along with riot squads to Chicago to prevent the movement from expanding and further spreading their anti-war ideology to the public.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research shows that *The Trial of the Chicago 7* is a great film that portrays the anti-Vietnam War movement in modern ways. The anti-Vietnam War was a

well-thought-out movement with the main goal of stopping the American government's involvement in the Vietnam War. Basically, this movement has key elements to support its expansion. In this film, these basic things are well depicted, so it can be considered that the anti-Vietnam War movement is a combination of activists who are really serious about their goals. Moreover, the leaders of each organization are described as intellectual youth who have an important role in planning the strategy of this movement. However, the execution of this protest movement did not go well because, as depicted in the film, they carried out disruptive protest tactics. This is what made this protest movement one of the failed protests that received bad opinions from the public. In addition, this film also depicts how the government's actions in oppressing their movement create a new perspective that not only this movement failed but also because of the undemocratic government.

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