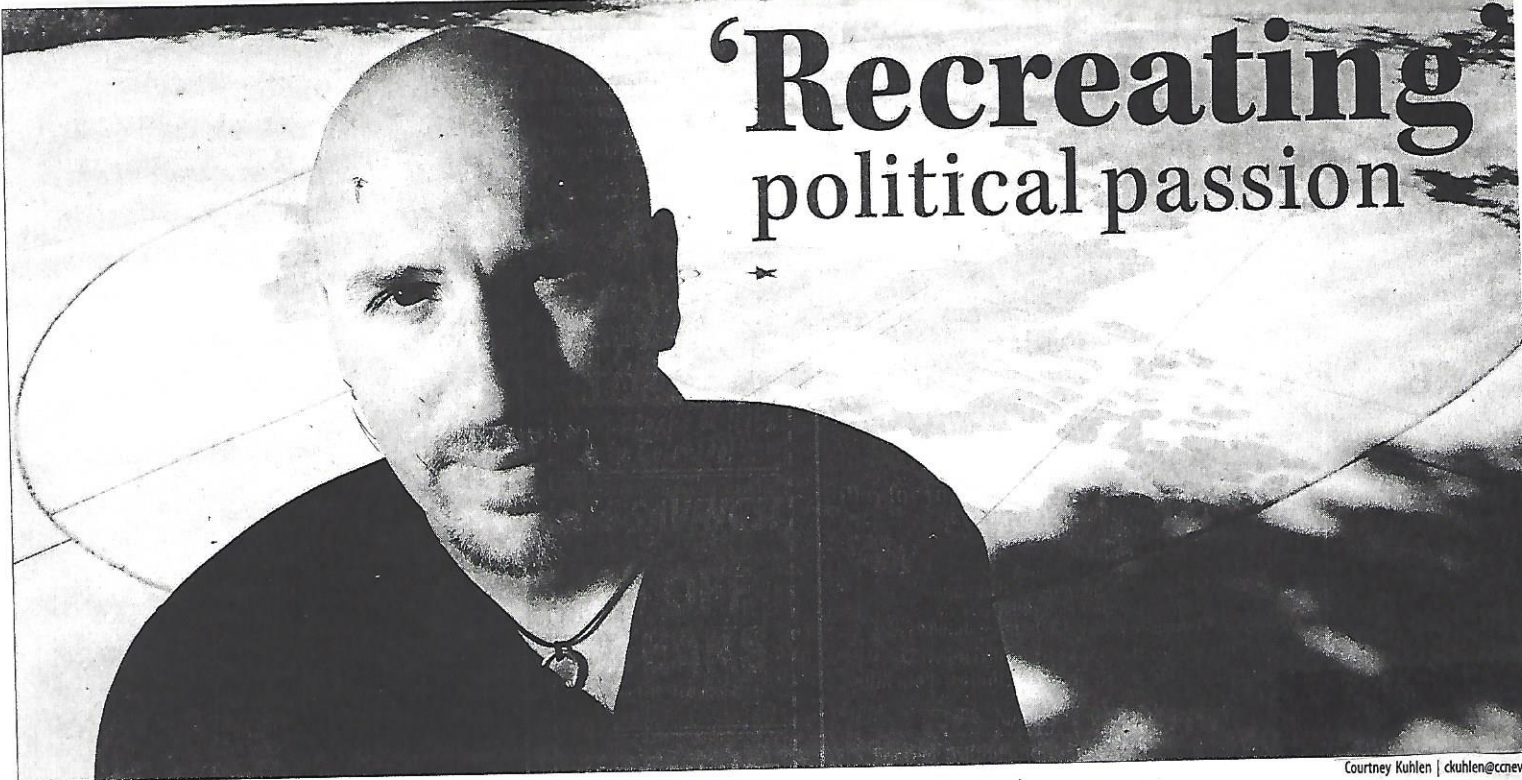


# 'Recreating' political passion



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The whole world will be watching as South Metro resident Glenn Spagnuolo ventures to 'Recreate '68' at the upcoming Democratic National Convention in Denver.

## South Metro resident Glenn Spagnuolo set to lead DNC protest

By Peter Jones  
Staff Writer

The whole world was watching — but not Glen Spagnuolo.

The 37-year-old activist was not yet a gleam in his mother's eye when thousands of war protesters converged at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and became a nightly staple of network television news.

Still, the co-founder of Recreate '68 speaks with the authority of a veteran demonstrator when he describes his group's mission to revive the passions that shaped one of the most tumultuous years in American history.

"We want to recreate the spirit that existed — that people could actually make a change," Spagnuolo said, explaining his organization's evocative name. "I don't think we could ever be as media savvy as Abbie Hoffman, but I think we need to learn from history."

Although for many, 1968 is inextricably linked to images of violent clashes between police and protesters, the events in Chicago were only part of the story. The riots were symbolic of larger conflicts that had already sent an incumbent president into political retreat and had fostered public skepticism about the Vietnam War.

Opposition to the war would reach its political apex in 1968. Peace activists — angered by President Johnson's escalation of the conflict — took to the streets and parks of the Windy City when the

party looked poised to back Vice President Hubert Humphrey over peace candidate Sen. Eugene McCarthy.

To Spagnuolo, a self-professed history buff, the parallels between 1968 and 2008 are noteworthy. He cites what he sees as Democratic complacency about the Iraq war and the recently nuanced rhetoric of Sen. Barack Obama as examples.

"In 1968, you had a Democratic Party that was refusing to stop an illegal war and was criminalizing dissent. In 2008, you have a Democratic Party that voted to continue the Iraq war and the Patriot Act," he said.

But according to Spagnuolo, one of the most important dynamics of 1968 has yet to resurface four decades later — and he says that's where his group and its controversial directive comes in.

"In 1968, there were mass movements. Young people felt like they could actually change their government. Now, people have gotten so apathetic that they'd rather sit home and watch 'American Idol,'" he said.

When Denver was tapped as the site for the 2008 Democratic convention, Spagnuolo and 11 other Denver-area activists sought to reinvigorate the body politic by founding Recreate '68 as a logistical protest coordinator for the four-day event.

Spagnuolo says he has received death threats as a result of his activities and his challenge to protest rules set forth by the Secret Service and the City of Denver. He

lives in the South Metro suburbs, but asked that his specific community not be identified in this article.

According to the Recreate '68 co-founder, his organization's critics and government officials have yet to accept the role of dissent as a historic and crucial component of the American system.

"The protests in the streets are just as integral to the political process as what happens on the floor inside the convention," he said. "If you are inviting the convention, you are inviting the protests that come with it."

### Won't get fooled again

By the end of the 1968 Democratic convention, Chicago hospitals reported having treated 111 demonstrators injured during about 670 disturbances. On-the-street medical teams estimated that they had helped more than 1,000 injured protesters. Nearly 200 police officers were hurt during the melee.

Although Spagnuolo is looking to recreate the kind of activism associated with the late 1960s, he says he is anything but nostalgic for the violent confrontations that erupted between demonstrators and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's police force.

"We knew that Recreate '68 was a provocative name, but we were very clear that we didn't call ourselves Recreate Chicago '68," the activist said. "But we are not going to shy away from that either. Because what happened in Chicago — and this is according to the Walker Report — was a police riot."

Rights in Conflict, commonly called the Walker Report, was the federal government's official inquiry into the Chicago riots. After reviewing 20,000 pages of witness statements and 180 hours of film, the commission concluded that overzealous police were largely responsible for the violence.

Despite Recreate '68's inevitable associations with the infamous Chicago convention, Spagnuolo has no regrets about the name — especially in consideration of today's media.

"Almost immediately, we got national attention," he said. "I've been involved in other campaigns where it took us months to get any attention at all. But the second we threw on a provocative name on a press release, the next day I was on CNN talking to Wolf Blitzer."

Recreate '68's convention-week itinerary is slated to include daily marches and demonstrations near the Pepsi Center and at other locations around central Denver.

The protests will be in conjunction with a Festival of Democracy, which will incorporate local and national music acts, street theater, teach-ins, a free medical clinic and free food.

According to Spagnuolo, each day of protest will focus on a different theme — from the Iraq war to immigration to environmental issues — as a way to solidify the various messages and unite disparate contingencies.

"We have commitments from the immigrant communities who normally don't come out for the anti-war

stuff to come out," he said. "And the anti-war folks, in return, are going to be supporting immigration. It's made a strong solidarity movement."

### The dos and don'ts

On Aug. 7, the American Civil Liberties Union announced it would not appeal a federal judge's ruling that upholds the City of Denver's security plans for protests during the DNC.

Protest groups had called the planned 47,000-square-foot fenced demonstration zone on the far west end of the Pepsi Center parking lot a "freedom cage" that will segregate demonstrators from Democratic delegates.

"No American should be put inside of a cage and told that's where they're free," Spagnuolo said.

Marches to the convention

will be forced to stop short of the arena, according to plans approved by the city and the Secret Service.

In the face of defeat in the courtroom, Spagnuolo has said he expects to be arrested when his group attempts to march directly into the Pepsi Center in protest.

"We are going to file our appeal in the street," he proclaimed after federal Judge Marcia Krieger announced her decision.

Meanwhile, Denver and some suburbs, including Englewood and unincorporated Arapahoe County, have passed ordinances to limit what protesters can bring to demonstrations. Other South Metro cities, including Little-

# Spagnuolo: Protester expects to be arrested, to file appeal in the street

ton and Centennial, have rejected the proposed ordinances as overly restrictive.

The generally prohibited items include gas masks, signs on large wooden sticks, hard metal and projectile launchers, including squirt guns, which law enforcement officials say can be used to direct urine or other noxious liquids at police officers.

Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson has been among the chief proponents of the ordinances, which he says are designed to protect officers and the public from unruly demonstrators without compromising free speech.

"We don't have any information that would cause us to believe that we're going to have any significant problems in Arapahoe County, but I would be remiss if I didn't plan for the public safety," Robinson said.

Spagnuolo calls the ordinances an "embarrassment" and says Recreate '68 has no intention of organizing protests in Robinson's jurisdiction or any other suburban community.

"This is just another way to make us look like criminals, instead of community members expressing our Constitutional rights," he said. "I'm not bringing a water gun, anyway."

Although the activist says he will carry a gas mask as protection as he marches to the Pepsi Center, he promises nonviolence on the part of protesters.

"Violence is a fool's game," he said. "All it does is destroy the message."

## Recreating change?

According to historians and political science experts, convention protesters can expect a mixed bag when it comes to the fruits of their labors manifesting in public policy or in the positions of candidates.

In the case of the 1968 convention, the widely covered protests weakened Hu-

bert Humphrey, who left Chicago at 20 percentage points behind Republican Richard Nixon.

Although the protests did not hasten the end of the Vietnam War, they did make other contributions, according to Ken Bickers, a political science professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Much of the Chicago protests focused on the way the party establishment chose Humphrey over Eugene McCarthy, who had the support of anti-war groups.

Bickers, an expert on the period, says prior to 1972, Democratic candidates were paraded through optional nonbinding primaries, but the nominees were essentially chosen by party leaders. After the Chicago conflict, the McGovern-Frazier Commission recommended the primary-caucus system now in use for selecting nominees.

"What was going on in the convention hall in Chicago was the nomination of a candidate who had not participated in any of the primaries or caucuses," Bickers said. "The bigger impact of the

protests was on the Democratic Party nominating rules."

Given the Chicago protesters' inability to alter Humphrey's positions or end the war in volatile 1968, Bickers is skeptical that Recreate '68 can live up to the implicit prophecy implied by the group's name.

"Protests associated with national conventions have become so commonplace, it's hard for protesters to break through the normal background," he said. "Part of it may also be whether the protesters can get past the idea of the protest being about the time and place they want to protest."

Spagnuolo, for one, is undeterred. He sees Obama, the presumed Democratic nominee, as a work in progress — and one who may need encouragement from protesters to move leftward.

"Barack Obama says he's the candidate of change," the activist said with a smile. "We look at him and say, he's the candidate we can change."

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Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson convinced the Arapahoe County Board of Commissioners to ban large squirt guns, gas masks and other items at the upcoming protests, but the Centennial City Council rejected the proposed ordinance. 'Recreate '68' calls the proposals an 'embarrassment.'

## 15 minutes with Bobby Seale

Chicago 8 defendant says 1968 won't be recreated in Denver

By Peter Jones  
Staff Writer

If 1968 can be re-created, Bobby Seale was one of the chief architects the first time around.

The Black Panthers founder and former Denver radio talk show host was one of the original Chicago 8 conspiracy defendants in the aftermath of riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

The 8 became 7 when a mistrial resulted in Seale's case being separated from that of Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Longmont resident Rennie Davis and the other four defendants.

After repeatedly demanding the right to serve as his own attorney, Seale was famously bound and gagged in the courtroom and sentenced to four years in prison for contempt of court. The sentence was later reversed and Seale never was convicted of any convention-related charges.

Colorado Community



Courtesy Photo

Bobby Seale, left, and Huey Newton were founding members of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

Newspapers recently asked Seale for his thoughts on the upcoming DNC in Denver and local efforts to "recreate" 1968 in the Mile High City.

CCN: When you heard that an organization called Recreate '68 had formed to organize demonstrations at the 2008 Democratic National Convention, what was your reaction?

Seale: We were protesting a war in Vietnam, and here we are today in an unnecessary war and the Democratic

National Convention is here yet again. But in order to recreate 1968, we'd have to have the undercover FBI agents and others who helped provoke confrontation with the demonstrators. That's in the court record.

CCN: Do you see real parallels between 1968 and 2008?

Seale: Well, today, unlike 1968, we have the Black Congressional Caucus and other little caucus groups that have coalesced together, who literally want that war ended. In 1968, you had the draft. You don't have the draft anymore.

My son is in Iraq, by the way. He thinks the war should have never happened to begin with, but he's not as passionate as I was in my day.

CCN: What effect do you think 1960s protests had on public policy, if any?

Seale: Nixon's policy was to repress us. But when I was chained, shackled and gagged in the damn courtroom, I think that weighed a lot on how people started

looking at the real situation.

CCN: Do you think the 2008 demonstrations can make any difference in terms of the war or Barack Obama's positions?

Seale: No, I don't think the demonstrations are going to amount to that. Chicago was a totally different dynamic in 1968. They're not going to re-create any such thing. I just don't see it.

Maybe I'm outside the loop.

CCN: Are you an Obama supporter?

Seale: Oh, yeah.

In the mid-1960s, throughout the whole United States of America, there were less than 80 duly elected black politicians — city councils, county supervisors, everything. Barack Obama is symbolic of the very things I fought for and organized for and went for and organized for and went for jail for two years without bail. Martin Luther King died for that.

If we want to criticize the man because he's not progressive enough, then he comes under the same rules as everyone else. Maybe a better strategy for Recreate '68 is to help him get elected first.

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