

1968 Events

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The year 1968 remains one of the most tumultuous single years in history, marked by historic achievements, shocking assassinations, a much-hated war and a spirit of rebellion that swept through countries all over the world. Occurring at the dawn of the television age, the historic events of 1968 also played out on TV screens across the country, bringing them home in a way that had never been possible before.

PRAGUE SPRING

January 5: In Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek was elected as the first secretary of the country's Communist Party over the Stalinist Antonin Novotny, a victory that marked a brief period of liberalization and reform known as the [Prague Spring](#). But the so-called Prague Spring would be brief, as Soviet armed forces invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia in August, reinstating

hard-line Communist rule, and Dubcek was deposed the following April.

NORTH KOREA

January 23: Some 15 years after the [Korean War](#), the still-tenuous relations between [North Korea](#) and the United States gave way to crisis after North Korea [captured the Navy intelligence vessel USS Pueblo](#) and its crew. U.S. authorities claimed the ship had been in international waters in the Tsushima Strait, but North Korea disagreed, and held the 83 crew members in a POW camp before the two countries could negotiate their release.

TET OFFENSIVE

January 30-31: During the lunar new year (or "Tet"), North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched a coordinated series of attacks against Hue, Saigon and various other key targets in South Vietnam. The [Tet Offensive](#), which surprised U.S. and South Korean forces and caused heavy casualties, would eventually be a turning point in the U.S. involvement in the [Vietnam War](#), as media coverage brought the full horrors of an already unpopular war home to TV screens in 56 million American homes.

February 18: The U.S. State Department announced the highest U.S. casualty toll of the Vietnam War, with 543 Americans killed in action and 2,547 wounded during the previous week.

LBJ BEDEVILED BY VIETNAM

March 12: In the [New Hampshire](#) Democratic presidential primary, [Eugene McCarthy](#) comes within 230 votes of defeating the sitting president, [Lyndon B. Johnson](#). McCarthy had announced his candidacy in November 1967 as the antiwar alternative to Johnson, who was at the time expected to win the Democratic nomination handily. Over the months to come, however, LBJ's administration had become increasingly unpopular, along with growing opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam, student demonstrations and urban unrest.

March 16: After repeatedly denying he would challenge Johnson for the Democratic nomination, Senator [Robert F. Kennedy](#) announced he would enter the presidential race. On the same day (though it would not be revealed until the following year), U.S. ground troops killed more than 500 Vietnamese civilians in the [My Lai massacre](#) in South Vietnam.

March 31: In a televised address to the nation, an increasingly embattled Johnson announced: "I shall not seek and I will not accept the nomination of my party as your president." The following month, Johnson's vice president, [Hubert Humphrey](#), announced his own candidacy, though he was too late to run in the primaries and would have to count on delegate support at the Democratic convention that summer.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ASSASSINATED

April 4: While in Memphis to support striking sanitation workers in that city, the civil rights leader Dr. [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) gave a sermon in which he told listeners: "I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land." The following evening, [Martin Luther King was assassinated](#) while he was standing on the balcony outside his room at a Memphis motel. As news of King's murder sparked rioting in dozens of cities across the country, an international manhunt for his shooter, [James Earl Ray](#), ended in his capture in London. Ray was convicted, and died in prison in 1998.

STUDENTS PROTEST ALL OVER THE WORLD

April 23: Several hundred students gathered on the campus of Columbia University in [New York](#) City to [protest the Vietnam War](#), as well as the university's plan to build a gymnasium on public land in Harlem. For nearly a week, the student protesters occupied several buildings on Columbia's campus. University officials then called in officers from the New York City Police Department, who broke up the demonstration, beating and arresting hundreds of protesters.

May 6: The protests at Columbia exemplified the wave of student activism that swept the globe in 1968, including mass demonstrations in Poland, West Germany, [Mexico](#) City, Paris, Italy and elsewhere. On May 6, known as "Bloody Monday," students and police clashed in Paris' Latin Quarter, resulting in hundreds of injuries. As the [protests continued](#), millions of French workers began striking in sympathy with the students, eventually leading President [Charles de Gaulle](#) to dissolve the National Assembly, call for immediate elections and threaten military intervention.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATED

June 5: On the night of the [California](#) primary (which he won, putting him in reach of securing the Democratic presidential nomination), Robert F. Kennedy was leaving the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after addressing a large crowd of supporters when he was shot by the young Jordanian immigrant [Sirhan Sirhan](#). Born in [Jerusalem](#), Sirhan later said he [assassinated Kennedy](#) out of concern for the Palestinian cause, and had felt betrayed by the senator's support for [Israel](#) during the Six-Day War in 1967.

CHICAGO DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

August 26-29: RFK's assassination left Vice President Humphrey as the most likely Democratic nominee, even though he supported Johnson's unpopular Vietnam War policy. When the [Democratic National Convention](#) opened in August, thousands of students, antiwar activists and other demonstrators—including groups like the Yippies, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the [Black Panthers](#)—poured into [Chicago](#), where they were met with a violent police response called out by Mayor [Richard Daley](#). As TV cameras captured the bloody clashes between police and demonstrators, the chaotic convention ended in Humphrey's nomination as the head of an embattled Democratic Party.

OLYMPIC PROTESTS

October 16: After being awarded gold and bronze medals, respectively, in the 200-meter sprint event in the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, U.S. athletes [Tommye Smith](#) and John Carlos bowed their heads and raised their black-gloved fists in a recognized salute to the Black Power movement during the playing of "[The Star-Spangled Banner](#)." Smith and Carlos were thrown off the U.S. Olympic team, but were seen as heroes in the black community, and their silent protest against racial discrimination lives on as one of the most iconic images in sports history.

NIXON WINS THE WHITE HOUSE

November 5: As the self-proclaimed champion of what he would later dub the “silent majority”—those Americans who rejected the radical, liberal and rebellious spirit of the time—the Republican [Richard Nixon](#) led in the polls for most of the general election season. The race tightened in the last weeks after Johnson halted air attacks on North Vietnam, which benefited Humphrey. But Nixon triumphed on Election Day with a comfortable electoral college lead (despite a razor-thin margin of victory in the popular vote). The third-party candidate [George Wallace](#), a former [Alabama](#) governor, captured 13.5 percent of the popular vote and five southern states.

APOLLO 8 ORBITS THE MOON

December 24: The tumultuous year ended on a positive note, at least, as three astronauts aboard [Apollo 8](#)—[Jim Lovell](#), Bill Anders and Frank Borman—became the first humans to orbit the moon. After speeding up to a record 24,200 mph in order to break free of Earth’s gravitational pull, Apollo 8 circled the moon 10 times that [Christmas](#) Eve, scoring the latest U.S. achievement in its [Space Race](#) with the [Soviet Union](#). Upon emerging from the shadowy dark side of the moon, Lovell famously announced: “Houston, please be informed there is a [Santa Claus](#).”

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