

1968

was a year of exceptional political and social unrest and transformation. It saw waves of political protest across the globe — in Brazil, Czechoslovakia, France, Mexico, Northern Ireland, Poland, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, and the U.S. — sparked variously by calls for civil rights, economic, social, and racial justice, and an end to authoritarianism, colonial exploitation, and the war in Vietnam.

The current exhibit draws on holdings in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library to provide glimpses into this tumultuous year from the vantage point of two key cities: Paris and Berkeley. The exhibit offers a selection of protest posters and flyers from the Philippe Zoummeroff Collection of May 1968 (Paris) and the Leon F. Litwack and Emery Douglas collections (Berkeley). The exhibit follows last spring's course *1968 @ 50: Architecture, Art, and Cultures of Resistance around the Globe* taught by Craig Buckley (History of Art), Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen (Architecture), and Kevin Repp (Beinecke). We offer it in conjunction with the Whitney's Humanities/Humanity workshops *1968 and the Languages and Legacies of Liberation* led by Rüdiger Campe (German), Michael Denning (American Studies), Moira Fradinger (Comparative Literature), and John MacKay (Slavic Languages and Literatures).

The Whitney Humanities Center is particularly grateful to Kevin Repp and the staff of the Beinecke for their help in assembling this exhibition.

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Political Protest 1968: Paris and Berkeley



On view Wednesday, September 19
to Wednesday, December 12, 2018



A 1968 Timeline

Largely Political

JANUARY

January 5

Dr. Benjamin Spock; William Sloan Coffin, the chaplain of Yale University; novelist Mitchell Goodman; Michael Ferber, a graduate student at Harvard; and Marcus Raskin, a peace activist, are indicted on charges of conspiracy to encourage violations of the draft laws by a grand jury in Boston.

In Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek is elected as the first secretary of the country's Communist Party over the Stalinist Antonin Novotny, a victory that marks a brief period of liberalization and reform known as the Prague Spring.

January 23

North Korean patrol boats capture the USS Pueblo, a US Navy intelligence-gathering vessel, and its 83-man crew on charges of violating the country's 12-mile territorial limit. This crisis will dog the US foreign policy team for 11 months, with the crew of the Pueblo finally gaining freedom on December 22.

January 30-31

At half past midnight on Wednesday morning, the North Vietnamese launch the Tet offensive at Nha Trang. Nearly 70,000 North Vietnamese troops will take part in this broad action, taking the battle from the jungles to the cities. The offensive will carry on for weeks and is seen as a major turning point for the American attitude toward the war. At 2:45 that morning the US embassy in Saigon is invaded and held until 9:15AM.

FEBRUARY

February 1

During police actions following the first day of the Tet offensive, General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, a South Vietnamese security official, is captured on film by American photographer Eddie Adams executing a Viet Cong prisoner. The Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph becomes yet another rallying point for antiwar protesters.

February 8

At South Carolina State three black students are killed in a confrontation with highway patrolmen in Orangeburg, during a civil rights protest against a whites-only bowling alley. Nearly 50 are injured in the ensuing “Orangeburg Massacre” during confrontations with the National Guard.

February 29

President Johnson’s National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Kerner Commission) warns that racism is causing America to move “toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

MARCH

March 2

The Poor People’s March on Washington, envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a means of dramatizing the plight of the poor of all races, gets under way.

March 8-15

In Warsaw, Poland, university students protest against policies of the Communist regime. A boycott of classes spreads from the city of Krakow to Warsaw. The government arrests ten students and sentences them to prison on charges of hooliganism and insulting the police. Tens of thousands of Poles clash with policemen in front of Communist Party headquarters and at the statue of the national poet Adam Mickiewicz.

March 12

In the New Hampshire primary election, Senator Eugene McCarthy comes within 230 votes of defeating the sitting president, Lyndon Johnson.

March 16

Senator Robert Kennedy ends months of debate by announcing that he will enter the 1968 Presidential race.

Although it will not become public knowledge for more than a year, US ground troops from Charlie Company rampage through the hamlet of My Lai, killing more than 500 Vietnamese civilians, from infants to the elderly. The massacre continues for three hours until three American fliers intervene, positioning their helicopter between the troops and the fleeing Vietnamese and eventually carrying a handful of wounded to safety.

March 28

Martin Luther King Jr. leads a march in Memphis, which turns violent. After King himself is led from the scene, a 16-year-old black youth is killed, 60 people are injured, and over 150 arrested.

March 31

President Lyndon Johnson delivers his Address to the Nation Announcing Steps to Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not to Seek Reelection. The speech announces the first in a series of limitations on US bombing, promising to halt these activities above the 20th parallel.

In Poland the government closes eight departments at Warsaw University, expels 34 students, and suspends 11.

APRIL

April 4

Martin Luther King Jr. spends the day at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis working and meeting with local leaders on plans for his Poor People’s March on Washington to take place late in the month. At 6PM, as he greets the car and friends in the courtyard, King is shot with one round from a 30.06 rifle. He will be declared dead just an hour later at St. Joseph’s Hospital.

Robert Kennedy, hearing of the murder just before he is to give a speech in Indianapolis, delivers a powerful extemporaneous eulogy in which he pleads with the audience “to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.”

The King assassination sparks rioting in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Newark, Washington, D.C., and many other cities. Across the country, 46 deaths will be blamed on the riots.

April 11

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The act prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, physical handicap, or family status.

April 23-30

A rally and occupation of the Low administrative office building at Columbia University, planned to protest the university’s participation in the Institute for Defense Analysis, is scuttled by conservative students and university security officers. The demonstrators march to the site of a proposed new gymnasium atorningside Heights to stage a protest in support of neighbors who use the site for recreation. The action eventually results in the occupation of five buildings and culminates seven days later when police storm the buildings and violently remove the students and their supporters at the Columbia administration’s request.

The protests at Columbia exemplify the wave of student activism sweeping the globe in 1968, including mass demonstrations in Poland, West Germany, Mexico City, Paris, Italy, and elsewhere.

MAY

May 3

The US and North Vietnamese delegations agree to begin peace talks in Paris later this month. The formal talks will begin on May 10.

May 4

At the University of Paris—the Sorbonne—police are called in to end student rioting. Five hundred are arrested.

May 6

In France, “Bloody Monday” marks one of the most violent days of the Parisian student revolt. Five thousand students march through the Latin Quarter with support from the student union and the instructors’ union. Reports of the ensuing riot conflict; either the police charge unprovoked or demonstrators harass them with thrown stones. The fighting is intense, with rioters setting up barricades and the police attacking with gas grenades. Overnight the battle will subside, but only after engaging the sympathies of large numbers of French unionists.

May 11

Thousands of students fight again in the streets in the Latin Quarter. They erect more than 60 barricades.

May 13

The actions taken by the students and instructors at the Sorbonne inspire sympathetic strikes throughout France. Labor unions turn their factory yards into fairgrounds in support of the student uprising. Jean Paul Sartre and 121 other intellectuals sign a statement asserting “the right to disobedience,” and Sartre speaks approvingly of student barricades.

May 15

Two thousand workers occupy the aircraft construction plant of Sud-Aviation at Nantes, and hold the plant manager and his principal aides prisoner.

May 20

In France, millions more workers occupy factories, mines, and offices. As many as nine million workers are on strike by May 22. President de Gaulle takes action to shore up governmental power, making radio addresses and authorizing large movements of military troops within the country. These shows of force eventually dissipate the French revolutionary furor.

May 23

In southwestern France, dissident farmers have formed command squads to disrupt highway traffic to protest government agriculture policies.

In Belgium, students occupy the Free University of Brussels and say they will remain until their demands for changes in curriculum, teaching methods, examinations, and the structure of the university are met.

May 25

In Paris, a student demonstration that started peacefully the day before turns into the most violent and widespread battle with the police since the student revolt began more than two weeks earlier.

May 26

France’s striking workers gain a 35 percent increase in minimum wages.

JUNE

June 4-5

On the night of the California Primary, Robert Kennedy addresses a large crowd of supporters at the Ambassador Hotel in San Francisco. He has won victories in California and South Dakota and is confident that his campaign will go on to unite the many factions stressing the country. As he leaves the stage, at 12:13AM on June 5, Kennedy is shot by Sirhan Sirhan, a 24-year-old Jordanian living in Los Angeles. The motive for the shooting is apparently anger at several pro-Israeli speeches Kennedy made during the campaign. The 42-year-old Kennedy dies in the early morning of June 6.

AUGUST

August 20-21

The Soviet Union invades Czechoslovakia with over 200,000 Warsaw Pact troops, putting an end to the “Prague Spring” and beginning a period of enforced “normalization.”

August 26

Mayor Richard Daley opens the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. While the convention moves haltingly toward nominating Hubert Humphrey for President, the city’s police attempt to enforce an 11 o’clock curfew. On that Monday night, demonstrations are widespread but generally peaceful. The next two days, however, bring increasing tension and violence to the situation.

August 28

By most accounts, on Wednesday evening, Chicago police take action against crowds of demonstrators without provocation. The police beat some marchers unconscious and send at least 100 to emergency rooms while arresting 175.

SEPTEMBER

September 7

Women’s Liberation groups, joined by members of New York NOW, target the Miss America Beauty Contest in Atlantic City. The protest includes theatrical demonstrations such as ritual disposal of traditional female roles into the “freedom ashcan.” While nothing is actually set on fire, one organizer’s comment—quoted in the New York Times the next day—that the protesters “wouldn’t do anything dangerous, just a symbolic bra-burning,” lives on in the derogatory term “bra-burning feminist.”

OCTOBER

October 2

Police and military troops in Mexico City react violently to a student-led protest in Tlatelolco Square. Hundreds of the demonstrators are killed or injured.

Student unrest has plagued Mexico City since the summer. Discontented students want those responsible for police brutality dismissed from government. The government of Luis Echeverría uses the army and police, tanks and armored cars, and live ammunition to crush the demonstration. The government will count 4 dead and 20 wounded. Most sources will report between 200 and 300 deaths. A study will conclude that the demonstrators were unarmed. In 2006 Echeverría will be charged with genocide and placed under house arrest.

October 12

The Summer Olympic Games open in Mexico City. The games are boycotted by 32 African nations in protest of South Africa’s participation.

October 18

Tommye Smith and John Carlos, US athletes and medalists in the 200-meter dash, give the black power salute during the “Star-Spangled Banner” at their medal ceremony.

October 31

President Johnson announces a total halt to US bombing in North Vietnam.

NOVEMBER

November 5

Election Day. The results of the popular vote are 31,770,000 for Nixon, 43.4 percent of the total; 31,270,000, or 42.7 percent, for Humphrey; 9,906,000, or 13.5 percent, for Wallace; and 0.4 percent for other candidates.

November 6

At San Francisco State University, on the one-year anniversary of the Gator incident, the Black Students’ Union and the Third World Liberation Front issue a list of 10 “nonnegotiable” demands and call for a one-day strike. The strike lasts 167 days.

November 14

National Turn in Your Draft Card Day is observed with rallies and protests on college campuses throughout the country as the Vietnam death toll approaches 30,000 and US troop strength in Vietnam reaches its peak of 550,000.

November 26

After delaying for months, the South Vietnamese government agrees to join in the Paris peace talks.

DECEMBER

December 11

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is created by Dr. George Habash, founder of the pan-Arab nationalist movement.

December 21

The launch of Apollo 8 begins the first US mission to orbit the moon.

December 24

The three Apollo 8 astronauts (James A. Lovell, William Anders, and Frank Borman), orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve television broadcast. The first pictures of an earth-rise over the moon are seen as the crew of Apollo 8 orbits.

