

# 1968: Timeline

This timeline focuses on some major events of 1968. When necessary or indicated, contextual background material, or certain subsequent events will be referenced in the text. This brief document cannot hope to touch on all or even most of the important happenings in what was perhaps an uniquely "eventful" year, but focuses especially on events referred to in the text of the interviews. A number of books have been particularly helpful in preparing this timeline, including: [Daniels](#) (1989) especially on events in Paris and Czechoslovakia; [Kaiser](#) (1988) for material on the US counterculture; [Trager](#) (1992) overall; and [Witcover](#) (1997) on US politics. Please refer to the [bibliography](#) for additional reference materials and memoirs by many of the important participants in the events of the year.

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## 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. The charges are the result of actions taken at a protest rally the previous October at the Lincoln Memorial. The four will be convicted and Raskin acquitted on June 14th.

January 10

The 10,000 US airplane is lost over Vietnam.

January 17

President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973) ([an LBJ Library photo](#) by Kevin Smith taken this day) delivers the [State of the Union Address](#).

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 communist country's twelve-mile territorial limit. This crisis would dog the US foreign policy team for 11 months, with the crew of the Pueblo finally gaining freedom on December 22.

January 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 executing a Viet Cong prisoner by American photographer Eddie Adams. The Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph becomes yet another rallying point for anti-war protestors. Despite later claims that the prisoner had been accused of murdering a Saigon police officer and his family, the image seems to call into question everything claimed and assumed about the American allies, the South Vietnamese.

February 2

Richard Nixon, a republican from California, enters the New Hampshire primary and declares his presidential candidacy.

February 4

[Martin Luther King Jr.](#) delivers a sermon at his Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta which will come to be seen as prophetic. His speech contains what amounts to his own eulogy. After his death, he says, "I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody... that I tried to love and serve humanity.. Yes, if you want to, say that I was a drum major for peace... for righteousness."

February 7

International reporters arrive at the embattled city of Ben Tre in South Vietnam. Peter Arnett, then of the Associated Press, writes a dispatch quoting an unnamed US major as saying, "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it." The quote runs nationwide the next day in Arnett's report.

February 18

The US State Department announces the highest US casualty toll of the Vietnam War. The previous week saw 543 Americans killed in action, and 2547 wounded.

February 27

Walter Cronkite reports on his recent trip to Vietnam to view the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in his television special *Who, What, When, Where, Why?* The report is highly critical of US officials and directly contradicts official statements on the progress of the war. After listing Tet and several other current military operations as "draw[s]" and chastising American leaders for their optimism, Cronkite advises negotiation "...not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend

democracy, and did the best they could."

## March

March 12

The New Hampshire primary election brings shocking results. The Eugene McCarthy campaign, benefitting from the work of 2,000 full-time student volunteers and up to 5,000 on the weekends immediately preceding the vote comes within 230 votes of defeating the sitting president Lyndon Johnson. These students, participants in what McCarthy refers to as his "children's crusade" have cut their hair, modified their wardrobes, and become "clean for Gene" to contact the conservative voters in the state.

March 16

Senator Robert Kennedy, former Attorney General and brother of former president John F. Kennedy (1961-63) ends months of debate by [announcing that he will enter](#) the 1968 Presidential race.

March 16 (same day)

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. View the [BBC Special Report](#) on the incident.

March 22

In Czechoslovakia Antonin Novotny resigns the Czech presidency setting off alarm bells in Moscow. The next day leaders of five Warsaw Pact countries meet in Dresden, East Germany to discuss the crisis.

March 28

Martin Luther King Jr. leads a march in Memphis which turns violent. After King himself had been led from the scene one 16 year old black boy 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.

## 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. After an international man-hunt James Earl Ray will be arrested on June 27 in England, and convicted of the murder. Ray died in prison in 1998.

Robert Kennedy, hearing of the murder just before he is to give a speech in Indianapolis, IN, 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 others. Across the country 46 deaths will be blamed on the riots.

April 11

United States Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford calls 24,500 military reserves to action for 2 year commitments, and announces a new troop ceiling of 549,500 American soldiers in Vietnam. The total number of Americans "in country" will peak at some 541,000 in August this year, and decline to 334,000 by 1970.

April 23

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 at Morningside 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 - Hamilton, Low, Fairweather and Mathematics halls, and the Architecture building. It will culminate seven days later when police storm the buildings and violently remove the students and their supporters at the Columbia administration's request.

## 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 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. Over-night the battle will subside, but only after engaging the sympathies of large numbers of French unionists.

May 11

Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr.'s designated successor, and the Southern Christian Leadership Corps are granted a permit for an

encampment on the Mall in Washington, DC. Eventually, despite nearly a solid month of rain, over 2,500 people will eventually occupy Resurrection City. On June 24th the site is raided by police, 124 occupants arrested, and the encampment demolished.

May 13

The actions taken by the students and instructors at the Sorbonne inspires sympathetic strikes throughout France. As many as nine million workers are on strike by May 22. President de Gaulle takes action to shore up governmental power, making strident radio addresses and authorizing large movements of military troops within the country. These shows of force eventually dissipate the French revolutionary furor.

## June

June 3

Andy Warhol is shot in his New York City loft by Valerie Solanis, a struggling actress, and writer.

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 the morning of the fifth 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-Isreali speeches Kennedy had made during the campaign. The forty-two year old Kennedy dies in the early morning of June sixth.

June 8

Robert Kennedy's funeral is held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Senator Edward Kennedy, the youngest brother of John and Robert delivers the eulogy. After the service, the body and 700 guests depart on a special train for the burial at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

June 27

As the ["Prague Spring"](#) continues in Czechoslovakia Ludvik Vaculik releases his manifesto "Two Thousand Words". This essay, criticizing Communist rule in Czechoslovakia and concluding with an overt threat to "foreign forces" trying to control the government of the country was seen as a direct challenge to the Soviet Administration who extended ongoing military exercises in the country, and began planning for their invasion later in the summer.

June 28

A bill adding a 10 percent surcharge to income taxes and reducing government spending is signed by President Johnson. The president effectively admits it has been impossible to provide both "guns and butter."

## July

July 7

Abbie Hoffman's "The Yippies are Going to Chicago" is published in *The Realist*. The yippie movement, formed by Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and Paul Krassner, all committed activists and demonstrators, is characterized by public displays of disorder ranging from disrupting the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange to the destruction of the Clocks at Grand Central Terminal, the main commuter station for workers in New York City. The Yippie's will be in the center of action six weeks later at the Chicago Democratic National Convention, hosting a "Festival of Life" in contrast to what they term the convention's "Festival of Death."

July 24

At the Newport (Rhode Island) Folk Festival singer Arlo Guthrie performs his 20 minute ballad "[Alice's Restaurant](#)" to rave reviews.i

## August

August 8

At their Party convention in Miami Beach the Republicans nominate [Richard Milhouse Nixon](#) to be their presidential candidate. The next day Nixon will appoint Spiro Agnew of Maryland as his running mate. Nixon has been challenged in his campaign by Nelson Rockefeller of New York, and Ronald Reagan of California.

August 20

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 and oppressive "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.

Mayor Daley tried the next day to explain the police action at a press conference. He famously explained: "The policeman isn't there to create disorder, the policeman is there to preserve disorder."

Twenty-eight years later, when the Democrats next held a convention in

Chicago, some police officers still on the force wore t-shirts proclaiming, "We kicked their father's butt in '68 and now it's your turn."

## September

September 1

Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey kicks off his presidential campaign at New York City's Labor Day parade.

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 including 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."

September 29

This date marks the thirtieth anniversary of Neville Chamberlain's Munich agreement ceding Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland to Hitler. This action widely seen as a major contributing factor to the devastation of World War II. The domino theory which underlay so much of American action in Vietnam can be seen as a direct response to the failure of international response to the German dictator.

## 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.

October 3

George Wallace, who has been running an independent campaign for the presidency which has met significant support in the South and the Midwest, names retired Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis E. LeMay to be his running mate. At the press conference, the general is asked about his position on the use of nuclear weapons, and responds: "I think most military men think it's just another weapon in the arsenal... I think there are many times when it would be most efficient to use nuclear weapons. ... I don't believe the world would end if we exploded a nuclear weapon."

October 11

[Apollo 7](#) is launched from Florida for an eleven day journey which will orbit the Earth 163 times.

October 12

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

On the 18th Tommie Smith and John Carlos, US athletes and medalists in the 200-meter dash will further disrupt the games by performing the black power salute during the "Star-Spangled Banner" at their medal ceremony.

October 20

Jacqueline Kennedy is married to Aristotle Onassis, a Greek shipping magnate on the private island of Skorpios.

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 14

National Turn in Your Draft Card Day is observed with rallies and protests on college campuses throughout the country.

November 26

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

## December

December 11

The unemployment rate, at 3.3 percent, is the lowest it has been in fifteen years.

December 12

Robert and Ethel Kennedy's daughter, Rory, their eleventh child is born.

December 21

The launch of [Apollo 8](#) begins the first US mission to orbit the Moon.

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The 1960's were the most turbulent period of social change in our nation's history. At times it felt like the fabric of America was being ripped in several directions. 1962 brought the tensest moment in US history. During the 14 days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's diplomacy prevented the deepest fear of millions: nuclear war. In 1963, the nation lost its innocence when president John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. The Vietnam War divided America. Pegged as war against the spread of communism, many questioned if the cost in American lives was justified. In the 1960's Civil Rights became an issue that could no longer be avoided. The bravery of Rosa Parks gave oppressed Americans hope and Martin Luther King Jr. struggled peacefully for the equality of all races. Tragically, King was assassinated in 1968 and Robert Kennedy who challenged Americans to get up and change their life for the better was assassinated later that year. The sixties came to a triumphant close in 1969 when the US fulfilled JFK's promise and beat the Soviets in the race to land a man on the moon.