

1968: A Fifty-Year Perspective

Moderators: Glenn Swanson & Jay Russell

Wednesdays (9/26 - 12/5 [but not 11/21]) 10:00-12:00
Common Room of Dewey Hall, Smith College

1968 has been described variously as “The Year That Changed Everything,” “The Year that Rocked the World,” and “The Year that Shattered America.” It’s hard to recall any other year during our lifetimes that had a broader spectrum of so many momentous and memorable occurrences. No doubt you remember where you were and what you were doing when LBJ announced he would not run for re-election, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, when Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles and when Richard Nixon was elected the 37th President of the United States.

The seminar will offer members through presentations and discussions the opportunity to remember, reconsider and assess the impacts, then and in the years that followed, of significant events from 1968. Each member will give a presentation (limited to 30 minutes to allow time for questions and discussion) on some aspect of 1968. To the extent possible, presentations will be scheduled in chronological order.

1968 provides a plethora of seminar presentation topics. The war in Vietnam (the siege of Khe Sanh, the Tet Offensive, the iconic photograph of the chief of the South Vietnamese police shooting a suspected Viet Cong officer, the My Lai massacre and the beginning of peace negotiations). The anti-war movement at home. Europe saw the Prague Spring in January (and the Soviet/Warsaw Pact invasion in August) and the student protests in Paris in May. LBJ’s decision not to run for re-election. Student protests about a variety of issues at colleges and universities (including S.C. State, Howard, Duke and Columbia). The Poor People’s Campaign and Resurrection City. Martin Luther King’s assassination and the upheavals it triggered. Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination. The battles for the Democratic and Republican presidential nominations, the Democratic and Republican conventions and the 1968 election (including the third party candidacy of George Wallace). In the realms of popular culture and entertainment: television (the debut of *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In*, *The Mod Squad* and at the other end of the spectrum, *60 Minutes*), the Broadway opening of *Hair*, movies (including *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Graduate*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, and *Barbarella*) and music (The Beatles’s *The White Album*). The moderators will compile a more comprehensive list of potential topics and a selective bibliography for distribution to members of the seminar.

For background reading, the moderators encourage all members of the seminar to read *1968 The Year That Rocked the World* (2004) by Mark Kurlansky, available in paperback and through the C/W MARS library system (54 copies).