

## Voices of 1968

Read *Voices of 1968* to understand how, why, and where deeply rooted activist currents coalesced into a global uprising that changed the world. Filled with a treasure trove of first-hand accounts and raw materials, *Voices of 1968* transports readers to the front lines of local organizations and nationwide movements led by feminists, anti-imperialists, Black Powerites, and the New Left. Here are the transnational threads of hope and possibility desperately needed in an era of neoliberalism.

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This is a direly needed document collection of great value. To the best of my knowledge, this is the most comprehensive such publication on global 1968 in any Western language.

Gerd-Rainer Horn, Institut d'études politiques de Paris, author of *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–76*.

This extraordinary collection brings together the great manifestos, political programs, and other original writings that inspired—and were inspired by—the movements and uprisings of 1968. There are documents here from France, Czechoslovakia, and the United States, of course, but also lesser known writings from Canada, Mexico, and Yugoslavia, among other countries. This volume is indispensable for anyone interested in the global upheavals of that *annus mirabilis*.

Jeff Goodwin, NYU, editor of *The Social Movements Reader*, author of *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*

Here are VOICES from the marvelous year of 1968, as they spoke then. Some speak to projects we still struggle to realise half a century later. If a few are slightly mad, most are empowering, we know them as our own. We are their inheritors.

Colin Barker, Manchester Metropolitan University, editor of *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, author of *Festival of the Oppressed*

The many revolts and uprisings of 1968 have frequently been told through narratives which have depoliticized them. They continue to be recuperated as individualized youth protests which ultimately paved the way for neoliberalism. This valuable collection of original documents and writings reasserts the diverse forms of radicalism and struggles for radical change that animated this iconic year. From Derry's Bogside, to the Black Writers' Congress in Montreal, and to the National Strike Council in Mexico, the texts demonstrate both the reach and impact of the events. This is a much needed book which will be a significant resource for hope and struggle.

David Featherstone, University of Glasgow, author of  
*Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism*

These revolutionary texts, many translated into English for the first time, challenge the whitewashing of this extraordinary year of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, antiracist, feminist, and LGBT struggles.

Françoise Vergès, Chair Global South(s),  
Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris

# Voices of 1968

Documents from the Global North

Edited by Salar Mohandesi,  
Bjarke Skærlund Risager, and Laurence Cox

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# What Was 1968?

*Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager,  
and Laurence Cox*

On January 2, 1968, Fidel Castro ended his speech commemorating the ninth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution by calling for a deepening of the global revolution. “Our country,” he promised, “will carry forward its internationalist policy of solidarity with the revolutionary movement throughout the world without hesitation of any sort.” Looking back to the death of Che Guevara, symbol of internationalist revolution, and looking forward to the struggles that lay ahead, he presciently proclaimed 1968 the “year of the heroic guerrilla.” “Let this year be worthy of its name, worthy of Che’s example in every respect,” he concluded.<sup>1</sup>

That year would surpass his, and indeed everyone’s, expectations. Building on the many struggles already unfolding across the globe, the events of 1968 would push democracy in new directions, overturn social roles, challenge accepted forms of representation, and redefine the very meaning of politics. This cultural, political, and social ferment reached every corner of the globe, with each example inspiring new ones, each movement pushing further than the one before, giving rise to a crescendoing wave of activism in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many felt as if they were living through a kind of revolution.

Why did so many people turn to activism? What did they want? What did they do? Who participated? What challenges did they face? How were these different movements connected to one another? Did they succeed or fail? This book attempts to answer these questions by presenting the voices of those “heroic guerrillas” themselves. *Voices of 1968* is the first international reader of original sources from the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, gathering over 80 documents from a dozen countries, with country surveys, text introductions, and suggestions for further reading. The texts—manifestos, speeches, letters, interviews, posters, flyers, song lyrics, images, and more—capture the energy, diversity, creativity, and limits of a wide range of movements from the time, while highlighting the rich transnational linkages that bound them together.

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1. Fidel Castro, “Speech on the Ninth Anniversary,” Plaza de la Revolución, Havana, Cuba, January 2, 1968, republished at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1968/19680102-1.html>.

## The Long 1968

Regardless of one's political inclinations, when one thinks of the 1960s, or even the 1970s, the year 1968 is often the first that jumps to mind. After all, in dozens of countries some of the most spectacular—in every sense of the word—events of the decade took place in that year. In Vietnam, the Tet Offensive. In Britain, the march on Grosvenor Square. In Jamaica, the Rodney Riots. In the United States, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. In Mexico, the Tlatelolco Massacre. In Tunisia, the protests at the University of Tunis. In France, the May events. In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring. In Senegal, the May student rebellion. We could go on.

But as many scholars have pointed out, a narrow focus on the year 1968 gives us an incomplete picture of the time. 1968 was not necessarily a high point of activism in every country. In fact, in many places, “1968” came years earlier or later—in 1962 in Guatemala, 1967 in Guadeloupe and Hong Kong, 1972 in Madagascar, or 1973 in Thailand. This is true even for those countries that are said to have had a “1968,” like Italy.

Even when 1968 did stand out, the events of those years never emerged spontaneously from a vacuum. These were the culmination of years of thinking, organizing, and fighting. The eye-catching events of the year 1968 were made possible by earlier developments, though of course these varied from country to country. In France, 1968 would not have been possible without the Algerian War; in the United States, the civil rights movement; in Britain, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

By the same token, the events of 1968 did not abruptly end in December of that year. In fact, in many countries, activism not only continued, but escalated. It was after 1968 that radical ideas grew in popularity, protests became common, activists grew more militant, and movements more diverse, tackling issues that had not received as much attention, such as incarceration, settler colonialism, or homophobia.

In this sense, “1968,” if the date is to be used, must be understood as a synecdoche: a part substituting for the whole, or vice versa. To underline the point, many scholars now employ the somewhat paradoxical term: the “long 1968.” Following the most recent scholarship on the period, here we take the term to mean the period of contestation that stretched from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, with 1968 at its center.

## The Global 1960s

1968, Ruth Wilson Gilmore has noted, was “a disorderly year, when revolutionaries around the world made as much trouble as possible in as many

places as possible.”<sup>2</sup> More broadly, the 1960s and 1970s saw marches, occupations, strikes, and even insurrections break out on every habitable continent. Political turmoil was so widespread that one might rightly ask which country did not have a “1968.” Many of these movements consciously looked to one another across borders, exchanging ideas, images, tactics, even goals. Despite enormous national differences, some participants imagined themselves to be a part of the same wave of contestation.

Recent scholarship has belatedly started to reconstruct this astonishing simultaneity of struggle, with the term “Global 1960s” now becoming common. In this respect, understanding 1968 bears similarities to attempts to understand other historical waves of revolutions or social movements: the Atlantic Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, 1848 across Europe, the wave of struggles at the end of the First World War, mid-century resistance to German and Japanese fascism, postwar anti-colonial revolutions, the movements of 1989 or those of 2011 among others. It is more widely agreed *that* such waves happen than *how* we can understand or theorize them, or even *which* cases can be identified as waves and which countries should be included.

It is probably uncontentious, however, to say that all these waves were geographically uneven: they were strongest and most successful in particular global regions, and in particular countries within these—while typically being connected, and watched, far beyond. Part of what a wave such as “1968” means is that ideas developed in the struggles of one country could be picked up in another country, often sooner than they might otherwise have arrived, and sometimes find a ready audience. These same processes also often operated within individual countries, between the “advanced metropolis” and small-town or rural settings and conservative regions. The temporalities of women’s or gay and lesbian struggles, for example, bear witness to this “uneven and combined development.”

One of the challenges in thinking the “Global 1960s” is that in casting the net as widely as possible, it can become very difficult to adequately theorize what were in reality highly heterogeneous events. Movements may have broken out at roughly the same time on every continent, and many of their leaders may have been fully aware of events elsewhere, some even expressing shared aims, but this wave of contestation was not remotely uniform.

Certainly national historical conditions were radically different in the 1960s. The United States, the wealthiest country on the planet, had little in common with Cambodia, where over 80 percent of the population worked as rice farmers. Iran, where a monarch drew on oil revenues to pursue a

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2. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 24.

modernization program from above, was very different from Angola, a Portuguese settler colony in the throes of a national liberation struggle. The People's Republic of China, engulfed as it was by the Cultural Revolution, shared little with Brazil, which fell to military dictatorship in this decade.

As a result of these tremendous differences, the struggles that unfolded in these countries were unsurprisingly also very different. In some places, like West Germany, many young people criticized what they perceived to be an over-industrialized, consumer-saturated economy, a world of abundance, but also one of emptiness and alienation; in South Yemen, by contrast, many people fought to industrialize in the first place. In Vietnam, militants rallied behind the banner of nationalism in their struggle to unite the country; by contrast, in other countries like Britain, many radicals, even those actively supporting the Vietnamese revolution, criticized the very idea of the nation-state. In the United States, some feminists sought to overturn the traditional family, gender roles, and heteronormativity in the 1970s; but in Laos, many women rallied around the family as something to be defended from imperialist violence.

This is not to say there were no links between these struggles, only that they were fundamentally different, and should be approached as such. This sharp diversity makes it difficult to understand what was so global about the 1960s. The more countries one includes in the survey, the more generalized, reductive, and ultimately unhelpful the analysis risks becoming. Too few, and we return to nationally-bounded historiographies that erase the global entirely. To move from description to explanation, analysis, and theorization, one must draw certain boundaries that help explain the global while still taking into account differences in specific contexts.

## The Global North

There is another, and more material, reason for establishing boundaries—the impossibility of complete coverage. This book, to our knowledge the first of its kind, surveys a dozen countries and nine languages. This was a major effort for a three-person international, multilingual, and interdisciplinary editorial team, and no doubt we have our own blind spots. To reach beyond this to 24 countries, to say nothing of the whole world, would have required a doubling of editors, pages, cost, and production time.

For that reason, we have decided to narrow our scope to what is sometimes called the Global North. Of course, such a move is not without its problems. It seems to reorient the discussion back to North America and Western Europe precisely when the newest scholarship is uncovering lesser-known histories in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. To be sure, in limiting our analysis to the Global North, we are not saying this region is

more important than others. Quite the contrary, some of the most transformative changes of the time occurred not in North America or Europe, but in what is today called the Global South. In fact, in this book we argue that it was precisely the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that made possible the radical 1960s in the Global North. Struggles in what was then called the “Third World” generated new ideas, proposed different models, and acted as sources of inspiration.

We do not see the Global North as standing in for the rest of the world, but only as one of many, more or less, coherent, parts of that world. If we have selected the Global North, and not some other conceptual region, it is partly because it is the piece of the puzzle we are most familiar with. Our sincere hope is that others, with greater familiarity with the long 1968 in other parts of the world, will publish their own collections surveying these different pieces.

The concept of the Global North is far from perfect. In mapping patterns onto the globe, it tends to solidify boundaries that are in reality far more porous. There are, for example, countries in the southern hemisphere, like Australia, that would rightly belong in this category, while there are others in the northern hemisphere, such as North Korea, that do not. Moreover, it is well known that the division between North and South is not only traversed by innumerable transnational flows of objects, ideas, and people, but that there are, in a sense, pockets of the Global South in the Global North. The North, in other words, is neither separate, nor homogenous.

Nevertheless, we still find value in the Global North here as a working concept. Despite its limitations, it allows us to group together distinct experiences in a way that makes possible broader theorizations about the long 1968. In spite of their differences, the countries here share similar core features. In general, they are relatively wealthy, even if that wealth is unevenly distributed between and within them. Compared to most countries in the Global South in the 1960s and 1970s, the standard of living in the North was higher, populations were healthier, and infrastructure generally more developed. All the countries boasted comparatively robust consumer societies, even those non-capitalist countries in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, which at the time were collectively known as the “East.” Moreover, these countries all had relatively stable states, most of them exercising considerable international power, at least compared to the majority of states in the Global South. Lastly, although most were products of colonialism, none of these countries were transitioning out of direct colonial rule in the 1960s, something that radically distinguishes them from most other countries experiencing turmoil at this time. As a result of these common structural characteristics, the causes of discontent, the nature of the movements, and their trajectories shared meaningful similarities.

Not only did these countries share analogous conditions, most were ordered within the same international networks of power. American hegemony brought together North America, much of Western Europe, and Japan through a series of dense economic, cultural, political, and above all, military linkages, creating a kind of chain of advanced capitalist countries. In this period, many of those countries tended to trade more with each other than with the Global South. Likewise, Soviet hegemony brought together much of the "East" into its own competing internationalist chain. As a result, developments in one link could more easily reverberate across the entire chain. Furthermore, the Iron Curtain did not completely separate these two competing chains from one another. Indeed, social, economic, cultural, and even political relations between the two not only existed, but were in fact deepening over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s, the U.S.S.R. began importing American grain, East and West Germany drew closer together, and the two superpowers moved toward what would later be called *détente*. Because of these ever-denser linkages, people living in different countries, even those located in rival blocs, became much more aware of developments elsewhere. This, in addition to comparable structural features, helps explain why movements spread so rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s.

Of course, there are always important outliers. Japan, for example, is the only country in Asia included in this book. And yet, despite its distinct history, Japan had much in common with Western Europe: an imperial past, strong economic growth, representative democracy, and a vibrant consumer society that even surpassed some countries in Europe. And it was also, like Western Europe, brought into the same international order by American hegemony.

Mexico also differs in some respects from the other countries documented here. North American, but also squarely in Latin America; wealthy by the standards of the Global South, but not as much as the other countries in the North; sovereign for well over a century, but still subjected to imperialism. Yet here, too, Mexico experienced many of the same patterns of development, from economic growth to urbanization, the generation gap to consumerism, and gave rise to a range of movements that were profoundly similar to those taking shape elsewhere.

Northern Ireland represents another anomaly: the Irish Revolution had produced an independent, post-colonial state in the South while partition of the island left a Protestant, British-identifying majority in the North. The Catholic minority, discriminated against on ethno-religious grounds, saw themselves as under alien rule. The contradictions between membership of the UK (developments in welfare and education) and internal colonial relations within the Northern state would explode dramatically in these years.

Perhaps the two greatest outliers in this collection are Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Neither were capitalist, neither were liberal democracies, and neither of them could be counted as an American ally. Admittedly, the differences here are sharp enough to warrant separate treatment, but there are enough parallels to justify their inclusion in this reader. This is especially true for Yugoslavia, which did not follow the Stalinist model, was not a member of the Warsaw Pact, enjoyed great independence on the international stage, and was the most Western-oriented country in the East. The same postwar trends seen in the other countries took hold here, and the movements of the 1960s shared much in common as well—intellectual ferment, antiwar sentiment, countercultural experimentation, internationalism, critique of capitalism, student revolt, university occupations, and attempted worker–student unity were all core features of Yugoslavia’s 1968.

Czechoslovakia is the most distinct case. A state dominated by a single Communist Party, firmly aligned with the U.S.S.R., attempting to follow the Soviet path to communism. Here, the movement looked quite different, taking the form of a reformist push within the ruling Communist Party. Nevertheless, similarities can still be observed. Before 1948, Czechoslovakia had been culturally, socially, and economically integrated with the rest of Europe. Many Czechoslovak citizens continued to see themselves as such, with some scoffing at the term “Eastern European,” pointing out that Prague was further west than Vienna. Additionally, Czechoslovakia experienced some of the same historical developments as its Western European neighbors, such as consumerism. In fact, in the 1960s there were more television sets per capita in Czechoslovakia than in France. Lastly, the Prague Spring, although different, unfolded in the same conceptual space as other countries in the Global North, and did share some similar elements.

In other words, there are still sharp differences even within this category of the Global North, but they contribute to the larger project of trying to understand the long 1968. Similarities across distinct contexts can allow us to discern the essential from the contingent; but so, too, can differences. This is the strength of historical and comparative analysis.<sup>3</sup>

### Causes of Discontent

The wave of political unrest that rocked the Global North in the late 1960s seemed to come from nowhere. At first glance, the 1960s was a decade of

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3. It goes without saying that even within these parameters there were many other countries that could have been included in this reader, and whose differences could have further enriched this collection. Unfortunately, for pragmatic reasons, it was not possible for us to go beyond a dozen countries in a single volume. Our hope is that they, too, will receive the proper scholarly treatment in years ahead.

relative prosperity, especially when compared to the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s. In North America, Western Europe, Japan, and even Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, standards of living were higher than ever, governments seemed stable, and a sense of optimism filled the air. Why, then, did so many people take to the streets at the same time?

The international context was of decisive importance. The Cold War, decolonization, the rise of new nation-states, and “hot” wars in Latin America, Africa, and Asia created a highly charged atmosphere. The single most important international development was the wave of anti-colonial revolutions that broke out after the Second World War. By the 1950s, much of Asia had won independence. In 1955, the newly independent countries met in Bandung, Indonesia to promote economic, cultural, and social cooperation. Soon after, national liberation movements made headway in Africa. By the early 1960s, dozens of countries across the world were either about to begin, were in the middle of, or were just coming out of revolutions of some kind.

But decolonization did not simply happen “out there,” in the Global South. Decolonization struggles helped shape the political horizons in the Global North—in some cases, like France and later Portugal, they even brought down governments. They radicalized young people in imperialist countries, giving future activists their first experience with politics. Decolonization became a major source of ideas, with the writings of figures like Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, or Võ Nguyên Giáp circulating across the globe. Immigrants from the Global South, especially students, injected a degree of radicalism into domestic movements in the North. Most importantly, struggles abroad served as an incredible source of inspiration, proving that revolutions were still possible, that people could still change the world.

The 1960s saw several revolutions in particular that inspired hope in the possibility of a new world. The Cuban Revolution, which seemed to hold the promise of a fresh path to socialism, distinct from the Soviet model. Young activists across the world looked to the Cuban example, with many traveling to the island to see the revolution firsthand. The Algerian Revolution, which led to independence in 1962, similarly captured the imagination, with Algeria styling itself as a kind of “mecca of revolution.” Lastly, the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in China also seemed to present a new kind of socialist revolution. This perception was made possible in part because few people abroad had any deep familiarity with the events in China, and so could project their desires onto the revolution. But even still, specific ideas, images, and practices from China had great influence abroad. Maoism in particular emerged as a central reference point for activists in numerous countries, from the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, which took to heart Mao Zedong’s call to “serve the people,” to student

radicals in Paris, France, some of whom took up factory jobs to “become one with the people.”

American imperialism was also a decisive factor in radicalizing people across the Global North. The United States emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful country on the planet, and took it upon itself to safeguard capitalism on a global scale, by whatever means necessary. This meant a string of assassinations, coups, and military incursions. The most important of these was the Vietnam War. Across the world, people condemned American aggression. What’s more, antiwar activists often collaborated across borders, creating a new feeling of internationalism. For most people, especially in those capitalist countries formally allied with the United States, the Vietnam War was the central issue of the 1960s. Even in the “East,” state-sanctioned antiwar demonstrations helped radicalize young people who would eventually use the opening to challenge their own governments for failing to live up to their emancipatory visions.

Solidarity with the Vietnamese, and the “Third World” more generally, was especially important for ethnic minorities in the Global North. In Canada, Québécois radicals drew inspiration from anti-imperialist movements abroad. In the United States, Black radicals argued that African Americans constituted an “internal colony” whose struggle for national liberation was an integral part of the anti-colonial revolutions. The Black struggle in turn inspired activists in Northern Ireland, who faced similar kinds of ethnic discrimination and state violence at home. Across territories known as Canada and Greenland, Indigenous peoples would forge “Fourth World” transnational solidarity.

In these years, the countries of the “West” and the “East” faced equally serious domestic crises. The unparalleled economic boom of the postwar period had rested on competing variants of “organized modernity,” in which the—usually national—state took on a central economic role involving more or less formal arrangements with hierarchically organized interest groups, typically employers’ federations and trade unions. The outcome, along with an unprecedented economic boom, was a broadly technocratic distributive politics, in which both direct financial gains and an indirect “social wage”—in education, health, housing, social welfare, and broader economic development—were available in particular to “insider groups” of various kinds.

Despite such unparalleled growth, affluence eluded outsiders. In the United States, African Americans were treated as second class citizens, often the last hired and the first fired. Despite strong welfare states across the Global North, and their lofty rhetoric of progress, poverty persisted, which led some to think twice about the welfare state as the privileged vehicle of emancipation.

Moreover, even those who enjoyed the fruits of the affluent society were often left with a bitter taste in their mouths. While there were more commodities on the shelves for those who could afford them, the economic boom did not give way to personal liberation: its rewards were narrowly redistributive—offering physical and economic security after the Great Depression and Second World War—but excluded questions of power and culture. Thus many people who lived through the 1960s recall everyday life in all these countries as constricting, repetitive, and conformist. Women could not wear jeans, men had to keep their hair short, premarital sex was taboo, students had to dress formally, strict standards governed interpersonal relationships. Many lacked a language to explain why they felt so bad amidst such plenty. But others diagnosed their society as boring, unfree, bereft of all adventure, and created rebellious subcultures in the late 1950s and early 1960s—the Mods, Rockers, Beats, Provos, Situationists, etc.

The rapidly expanding consumer culture played an ambiguous role in this regard. On the one hand, it provided those who were dissatisfied with the stifling mainstream culture the means to express their individuality. On the other hand, it left many others feeling empty. Increasingly, some people, especially the youth, felt the new consumer society was in fact amplifying the conformity of everyday life. Tormented by existential angst, they sought meaning, discovery, fulfilment, a sense of purpose. This feeling was most prevalent in wealthier capitalist countries, but anxiety over consumerism could even be felt in a country like the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Dissatisfaction with the stuffiness of everyday life and concerns about consumerism were matched by disquiet over the political sphere. In most countries in the Global North, people felt the political process was blocked. In the East, a single Communist Party firmly controlled all political life. But variants of authoritarianism took root elsewhere, as single parties, almost always conservative, dominated politics in many countries throughout this period. In France, General Charles de Gaulle, who came to power in a coup of sorts, ruled in a semi-authoritarian manner from 1958 to 1969. In Japan, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party would govern continuously from 1955 to 1993. In Italy, the right-wing Christian Democrats would govern from 1946 to 1994. In Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party held power uninterruptedly from 1929 until 2000. Even when ruling parties were challenged, they sometimes formed coalitions with the opposition in a way that foreclosed outside pressure. In West Germany, for example, in 1966 the ruling Christian Democratic Union simply entered into a Grand Coalition with the Social Democrats, giving them the vast majority of the seats in the legislature. For all the talk of democracy, many of these countries appeared profoundly undemocratic.