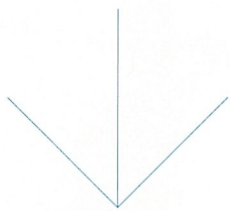


1968 Revisited

A new Minnesota History Center exhibit takes a fresh look at a pivotal year in the nation's history.

by morgan halaska



"In 1968, the world cracked open," says Brian Horrigan, lead developer of "The 1968 Exhibit," the Minnesota History Center's newest multimedia display. "The amazing thing was, people sensed they were living through a transformational time."

The 5,000-square-foot exhibit, produced in partnership with the Atlanta History Center, the Chicago History Museum and the Oakland Museum of California, is a chronological account of the infamous year—one that was rife with angst, violence and upheaval stemming from the Vietnam War, the Democratic National Convention and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

The complexity of the year's events—especially with regard to how they affected day-to-day life—has been overshadowed by what Horrigan

calls "psychedelic look-backs," the romanticized nostalgia and "wild and crazy '60s" myths we often see in modern dramatizations of the era.

Television, at that time a relatively new medium, acted both as a tie to social and cultural revolutions occurring outside of Middle America's doors and as a way to escape them. Through physical artifacts, interactive activities and video clips (we loved the Minnesota-made short film on the seminal West Bank music scene), "1968" explores how everyday people saw images from the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement in the comfort of their living rooms, but also kicked back to watch variety shows like *Laugh-In*.

The exhibit shows obvious symbols of the time—Janis Joplin's feather boa, the iconic Huey helicopter made famous in *Apocalypse Now*, a full-size replica of the Apollo 8 command module—but imbues them with fresh context and lessons, ultimately causing viewers to question what they really know about the late '60s.

"The people at the anti-war marches weren't all unwashed hippies," says Horrigan, who was fresh out of high school at the time. "You could be politically active and against the war, and look like something out of *Mad Men*." He contends that, even in 1968, the



idea of the hippie was already becoming a cliché.

Of course, it wouldn't be a '60s exhibit without hippies—or the sexual revolution, racial tension and the second wave of feminism. But "1968" goes beyond perfunctory name-checking of pivotal moments. Objects like Barbie dolls and birth control pills are included to represent the "LeClair Affair" (in which a Barnard College student was punished for living with her boyfriend against school policy), as well as relics from Tommie Smith and John Carlos's controversial Black Power salute at the Summer Olympic Games and a Miss America pageant protest that culminated in female activists dressing a sheep in a prize ribbon.

Overall, "1968" argues that chronicling individual struggles—not just big events—is necessary to understand what happened then and what is happening now.

"People in the 1960s were searching for identity," Horrigan explains. "Baby boomers were seeking to separate themselves from the

Pop Quiz

Think you know your 1968 history? Guess which of these momentous events happened that year.

- A.** The Phillip Morris Company's "You've Come a Long Way" cigarette ad campaign launches.
- B.** Hubert H. Humphrey dies.
- C.** Aretha Franklin is featured on the cover of *TIME*.
- D.** John Wayne produces, directs and stars in *The Green Berets*.
- E.** A riot at Attica Prison in New York results in the death of 10 hostages and 29 inmates.
- F.** *Hair* makes its Broadway debut and becomes a pop-culture phenomenon.



earlier generation and to create a new society. They were confronted with the question of what it meant to be human: When does life begin and what does it mean to be alive?"

Horrigan cites the lack of dialogue between generations in the '60s as inspiration for one of the exhibition's missions: to facilitate conversation between the people who lived through the decade and younger people experiencing similar upheaval now. "It was a risk of youth—thinking you know everything and not talking to older generations," Horrigan says. +



"The 1968 Exhibit" runs 10/14 to 2/20/12, with an opening party on 10/13. The Minnesota History Center is also hosting a range of supplementary events including a "1968 Scary Movie Night," walking tours and a family tie-dye workshop. Follow the 1968 blog, updated regularly by Horrigan himself, at the1968exhibit.org.

Answers: A (July 22, 1968), C (June 28, 1968), D, F (April 29, 1968)