

Introduction

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Fifty years ago, the globe was shaken by a series of events—student mobilizations, workers’ strikes, urban riots, police repression, coup d’états, political assassinations, and others—that threatened the status quo in countries and cities in both the capitalist and socialist worlds. Inspired by a diverse set of ideals, doctrines, and goals, 1968 put in question established notions about social hierarchies; the exercise of authority and power; the place of the state in the regulation of social life, gender, and generational roles; and ultimately the future of human societies. The meaning and legacy of 1968 have been disputed almost from the very beginning: Were the events of that year revolutionary? Were they intended to foster social justice and egalitarianism? Did they have a clear and realistic sense of purpose and means? Or were they just transitory expressions of dissatisfaction that were eventually subsumed by capitalism or suppressed by authoritarian forms of socialism?

In Latin America, 1968 was a year full of consequential and, in some cases, far-reaching episodes: the mobilization of students in Mexico and the massacre of Tlatelolco, the nationalist military coup in Peru, the Medellín Catholic Bishop Conference, and the intensification of military repression in Argentina, Brazil, and other countries, to name but a few. The recent death of Che Guevara and the movement toward a more rigid form of socialism in Cuba were also part of those changes, as was the imprint of literary and cultural phenomena such as the *boom* of the Latin American novel (*Cien años de soledad* had been published in 1967 and Mario Vargas Llosa had won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize that same year) or the “canción protesta” movement, whose first international meeting also took place in 1967 in Cuba.

To discuss and assess the meaning and legacy of 1968 in Latin America, our colleague Chuck Walker invited a group of scholars to participate in a Presidential Session at the LASA Congress in Barcelona earlier this year. Under the title “1968: 50 Years Later,” Diana Sorensen, Carlos Illades, Carlos Aguirre, and Gerald Martin presented papers, followed by incisive comments by Victoria Langland. This dossier includes revised versions of the four presentations.

I would like to thank Chuck, Victoria, and the authors of these essays for helping make this dossier possible. //