

Upheaval and CHANGE



My parents gave me conflicting advice. They expected me to be either a neurosurgeon or a nuclear physicist when I grew up. But, they explained that . . . men would always do things better. . . . So, with this background, I found myself [on a college campus that] was a hotbed of antiwar and civil rights demonstrations and feminism. I would listen . . . then visit my parents and have my newly forming ideas shot down. It was a rather uncomfortable year, but also a glorious, formative year.

—Joyce Denn



Turbulent social forces were a turning point for many who came of age in 1968. War and political divide sparked upheaval in the streets and at family dinner tables. Writer James Baldwin pointed to the “bloody catalogue of [racial] oppression” in the United States as people rebelled and cities burned. The modern women’s movement swept the country. A fight against oppression gave birth to the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minneapolis.

Five years after John Kennedy’s death, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy stood for peace and were assassinated. It is the unsettled nature of the debate about damage done or victories won that makes the 1960s and its witnesses so compelling.



Hippie bus, photo courtesy Lisa Law

Joyce Denn, about 1968

Clerical position advertisements



Social change was occurring everywhere; society was in turmoil. . . . For me, I was challenging my [religious] faith. . . . I quit going to church. Suddenly, solid, traditional values of the 1940s and 1950s were denounced. As a young, formidable person, I was confused. Society was steering itself towards liberalism, free speech, drugs, and loose sex. Traditional values, taught to me by my parents, stayed with me, but I was conflicted. What should I do? I wanted so hard to follow society, but traditional values pulled me back the other way.

—Greg Fangel

I was coming out of my freshman Greek and Roman Literature class at UW-Madison, a huge line of police in riot gear stormed an adjacent building, beating students, shooting off tear gas. . . . This is America, land of freedom, land where its citizens are allowed to speak their minds, land of respect for all races, creeds, and colors. . . . I was handed a new set of eyes. I was no longer an innocent bystander of the American experience. . . . I only hope future generations continue to question.

—Miguel Senty



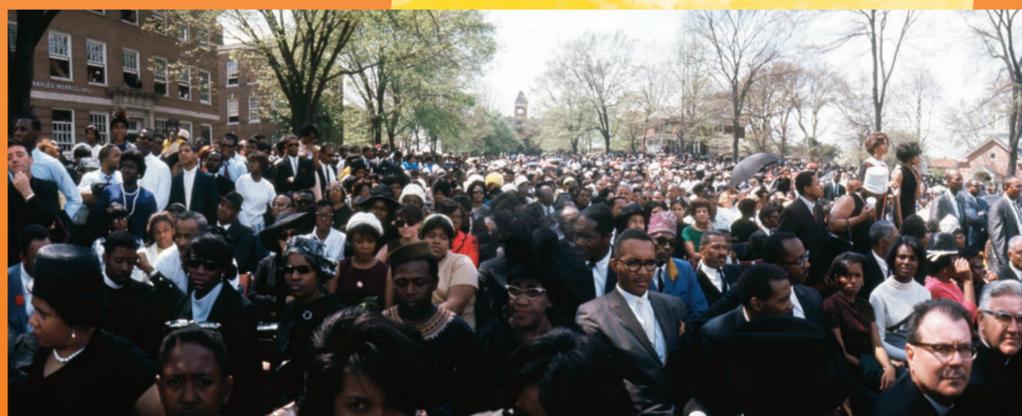
Aftermath of Martin Luther King’s assassination, April 4 and 5, 1968, Chicago History Museum

Somewhere along the [trip to Chicago’s Orchestra Hall] our choir director came onto the bus and said that Martin Luther King had been shot. . . . We were a bunch of white kids from lily-white Moorhead, and for most of us, our experience of race was what we saw on television or read in the paper. . . . That night we spent the evening in a mostly darkened top-floor dining room watching the riot fires burn. . . . Even as we looked out the windows of the bus as we left Chicago, what was happening didn’t seem relevant. What I can see in retrospect was the profound effect the turbulence of those times had on my perspective and the world around me.

—Anne Sladky



Aftermath of Martin Luther King’s assassination, April 4 and 5, 1968, Chicago History Museum



THE 1968 GENERATION