

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Andrew E. Masich
President & CEO

The Year That Rocked America



The year 1968 represented a watershed in American history—a turning point for the nation and its people. From assassinations and conflicts, pop culture and free love, civil rights and women's rights, Americans questioned traditional values and authority that sent shockwaves across the country, including right here in Western Pennsylvania.

The year began with the Tet Offensive, the deadliest period of an increasingly divisive and unpopular Vietnam War. Just as baby boomers came of age and started to question their parents' values, international turmoil—including Prague Spring, Paris riots, and student demonstrations in Mexico City—helped to fuel domestic unrest that polarized the nation.


The Beatles released *The White Album* in 1968, *Are You Experienced* rose to the #1 album for Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison became icons for a generation, while Pittsburghers rocked to Tommy James and the Shondells' "Mony Mony" and "Crimson and Clover."

By the late 1960s, more and more Americans owned color televisions. *Star Trek* beamed viewers to different worlds. Hit shows such as *Laugh In* and the nationally syndicated, Pittsburgh-produced *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* provided diversions while Walter Cronkite described the very real horrors of war during the evening news. Vietnam had become "the Living Room War." Movie-goers rushed to see Dustin Hoffman in

The Graduate as the locally made *Night of the Living Dead* terrified viewers during its debut in downtown Pittsburgh at the Fulton Theatre.

When assassins felled Martin Luther King, Jr., and presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy, the Civil Rights Movement took a violent turn. Race riots set cities, including Pittsburgh, ablaze. Protests at the Miss America competition fueled the women's movement and TV viewers saw riots at the Chicago Democratic National Convention. By President Richard Nixon's election in the fall of 1968, the generation gap widened as the counterculture movement expanded.

The year ended with hope for the future, as the Apollo 8 capsule beamed back images of "Earthrise" from the far side of the moon for the first time. Pittsburghers gathered around their television sets to hear astronauts reading from the book of Genesis. This majestic moment helped to briefly calm the chaos that rocked our nation during the previous 12 months.

I invite you to the History Center to come experience it all—for the first time or all over again—as part of our newest exhibition, 1968: *The Year That Rocked America*. 



Preserve Pittsburgh's rich history for generations to come.



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SENATOR JOHN HEINZ

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