

## ACTIVITY 3

# First-Hand Accounts and Excerpts

### United States

You can read Mark Rudd's letter at the following Columbia University website as a scanned reproduction of the publication "Up Against the Wall," which reprinted Rudd's letter.

<https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/1968/item/5524>

*Note: If the link has changed, or does not work, try using search terms such as "Mark Rudd, Grayson Kirk, Newspaper, Up Against the Wall, Vol III, no. 1, Columbia University, etc."*

### France

**Source 1:** Janet Flanner was an American journalist who lived in Paris. Her *Paris Journal* (see "Resources and Further Reading") in two volumes covered 1944-65 and 1965-77. Flanner, who sent many missives back to the U.S. magazine the New Yorker, captured the mood of May 1968 in Paris, with observations such as "...with their indomitable anger and energy, the students had started building barricades throughout the Latin Quarter....They dug up the cube-shaped paving blocks...piled them as ammunition and protection...and...added...cars." Flanner described the students as "young Davids," armed only with trash can lids, comparing them to the "...mature, burly C.R.S. men" with "enormous shields of medieval size." Flanner paints a picture of the Latin Quarter after a night of fighting as like "...a historic battleground, visited by tourists with cameras."

**Source 2:** If you search the Internet, you will find many websites dedicated to the student protests of 1968 in France. There are great sites showing images of the many posters art students designed, printed, and placed prominently around Paris. There are also many testimonials and books on the subject. Historian Ronald Fraser and a group of colleagues compiled an oral history based on interviews with people who participated in protest movements in various countries, including France, in 1968. Quotes from Fraser's book, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, will get students in the mindset of young Parisians. For instance, Fraser quotes René Bourrigaud, a student at the École Supérieure d'Agriculture, Angers, whose reflections highlight students' newfound sense of participation and collaboration, which was in direct contrast to the non-collaborative educational experience in France at the time. She said: "My most vivid memory of May '68? The new-found ability for everyone to speak—to speak of anything with anyone. In that month of talking during May you learnt more than in the whole of your five years of studying."

Emotions were running high among youth, who felt strongly that the educational system and society itself needed to change. When the movement took shape, dissatisfied students, including Nelly Finkielsztejn, student at Nanterre University outside of Paris, were exhilarated and bold. *“The unthinkable happened! The strikes were like a flame,”* Finkielsztejn said, *“...like everything we’d been saying at Nanterre...Fuck this immutable society that refuses to consider the misery, poverty, inequality and injustice it creates, that divides people according to their origins and skills!”*

Henri Weber, who was at the Sorbonne in 1968, demonstrates how events were formative for the youth activists: *“It’s a moment I shall never forget. People were building up the cobblestones into barricades because they wanted—many of them for the first time—to throw themselves into a collective, spontaneous activity. People were releasing all their repressed feelings, expressing them in a festive spirit. Thousands felt the need to communicate with each other, to love one another. That night has forever made me optimistic about history. Having lived through it, I can’t ever say, ‘It will never happen...”*

## Czechoslovakia

Excerpts from *The Czech Black Book: An eyewitness, documented account of the invasion of Czechoslovakia*. (See “Resources and Further Reading.”)

These excerpts include two leaflets found during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and a street scene as printed in a local newspaper.

**Excerpt 1. p. 50:** From a leaflet seen Wednesday August 21, 1968

“Charles University, loyal to the traditions of humanism, science, progress, and the truth, protests categorically against the action of the five friendly governments of the Warsaw Pact, which violated the principles governing the relations between socialist countries, as well as the fundamental norms of international law.

“Science and humanity can flourish only when freedom, independence, state sovereignty, and peace reign. Charles University supports with all its strength the representatives of our state power and of the Communist party who in the post-January period began creating the conditions for the peaceful and successful development of our socialist state. Therefore, it demands the immediate withdrawal of occupation forces from the territory of our state.”

**Excerpt 2. p. 51:** From a leaflet seen Wednesday August 21, 1968, originally in German, from the University in Prague

“We, the former students who on November 17, 1939, were dragged off to Nazi concentration camps, solemnly declare that we firmly and loyally support our President, Army General Ludvik Svoboda, the Chairman of the National Assembly, Josef Smrkovsky, the legal Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic headed by Oldrich Cernik, and the Action Program of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and of its Central Committee headed by First Secretary Alexander Dubcek.

“We therefore ask the people of the whole world for support, and we turn particularly to former inmates of Nazi concentration camps and to students of the world with the following appeal: Prevent the second occupation of Czechoslovakia!”

## Mexico

Listen or read the radio broadcast or transcript of “Mexico’s 1968 Massacre: What Really Happened?”

*Note: If the link provided does not work, or has changed, try searching on terms such as “radio diaries, or “1968 radio diaries”*

<http://www.radiodiaries.org/mexico-68-a-movement-a-massacre-and-the-40-year-search-for-the-truth>

### Radio Transcript

Produced by Joe Richman and Anayansi Diaz-Cortes of Radio Diaries

<http://www.radiodiaries.org/mexico-68-a-movement-a-massacre-and-the-40-year-search-for-the-truth>

Mexico '68: A Movement, a Massacre, and the 40-Year Search for the Truth

NPR HOST: Eight years ago today, a new president was inaugurated in Mexico who promised to usher in a new era of democracy and openness. Vicente Fox’s Election in 2000 ended 70 years of one-party rule by the PRI. It also cracked open the door to a dark corner of Mexico’s past: the massacre of university students in Mexico City in 1968.

A student movement ignited in the summer of that year, challenging the authoritarian government. But the movement was short lived, lasting less than three months. The reasons why remained buried until recently.

Today, producers Joe Richman and Anayansi Diaz-Cortes of Radio Diaries bring us an audio history of Mexico 1968 and a 40-year search for the truth.

*(MONTAGE OF IDS)*

My name is Marcellino Perelló Vals. I was a leader of the '68 student movement in Mexico.

Well, my name is Marta Acevedo, and I was twenty-eight years old in 1968.

My name is Miguel Breseda. I was seventeen.

My name is...Sergio Aguayo...Jorge Castañeda...Marcela Fernandez Violante...  
Mario Nuñez Mariel...

My name is David Huerta, and I was just one among many other students in the student movement

Marcellino Perelló: To understand Mexico, we are obliged to understand what occurred in '68.

*(MUSIC FADES)*

ARCHIVAL: Mexico City, the capital of the Republic of Mexico is a modern, bustling metropolis with a population of nearly six million...

JORGE CASTAÑEDA, HISTORIAN: In 1968, economically speaking, these were very good times for Mexico. Jobs were being created, opportunities were being generated. Mainly in the city, but just about everywhere in the country. So, this was a time of peace and prosperity. Things were going very well.

ARCHIVAL (SPANISH): Enclavado en la bella zona residencial al sur de la ciudad, muy cerca de la glorieta Rivera....

ELISA RAMIREZ, STUDENT: We were so civilized, so Americanized. And we had the Olympic Games.

NEWS REPORT: This is downtown Mexico City. The streets are jammed with traffic, sidewalks packed with people. For the government, the Olympics are the opportunity to show the world that Mexico is no longer a small and backward nation.

JORGE CASTAÑEDA: The first time, a sporting event like the Olympics is held in an underdeveloped or developing country. This was the debutante ball. This was Mexico's entry onto the world scene.

ALEJANDRO ALVAREZ BEJAR, STUDENT: The government was talking of the Mexican miracle. Even though in the reality of those days, things were not as happy as they appeared.

ARCHIVAL: Mexico's President Díaz-Ordaz is one of Mexico's most successful leaders.

DAVID HUERTA, STUDENT: Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was president of Mexico from 1964 to 1970. He was very authoritarian

PRESIDENT GUSTAVO DIAZ ORDAZ , ARCHIVAL: Señores miembros del Senado...

SERGIO AGUAYO, HISTORIAN: In the Sixties, we were still a country where the government controlled everything. Presidents were the equivalent of monarchs. I mean, it was forbidden to demonstrate in the center of Mexico City, in the heartland of the country. You could not go and express you dissent.

JORGE CASTAÑEDA: This was a president who wanted at all cost to keep control out of principle. He believed that he had to protect the country's stability against everybody and, in particular, against longhaired, bearded, mini-skirted, bell-bottomed-trouserred students who represented everything that he was against.

*(MUSIC)*

DAVID HUERTA: We were urban middle class; low middle class bunch of young people. Many of us were wearing very long hair and listening to loud music like rock and roll.

SERGIO AGUAYO: It was, in a symbolic way, the clash of a new Mexico and an old Mexico.

*(MUSIC FADES)*

ANTONIO AZUELA, STUDENT: You have a middle class with eyes closed and a group of students saying, "This was not a democracy. And this is not working."

*(MUSIC: INSTRUMENTAL)*

MARCELA FERNANDEZ DE VIOLANTE, STUDENT: And so we were together, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. We had these big, big meetings

at the campus... crowded, crowded. And people singing, “Que Vivan los Estudiantes...ta-ri-ra-ra-ra-ra.”

(MUSIC: “QUE VIVAN LOS ESTUDIANTES”)

MARCELA FERNANDEZ DE VIOLANTE: We were very young, very naive. But for the first time, you had this notion that this country was going to be changed by the power of our convictions.

MIGUEL BRESEDA, STUDENT: You would get in a bus and give a speech and inform the people because newspaper wouldn't publish anything. And people would give you money; they would congratulate you and they would say, “We are with you young people...”

DAVID HUERTA: There was this sense of excitement and adventure. And the problem was growing steadily day after day. It sort of entered into the fabric of Mexico City. What we were seeing was a waking society.

(CHANTING)

MARTA ACEVEDO, STUDENT: Then, the 27th of August came. And I think it was the highest moment of the movement.

(CHANTING: ¡VIVA EL MOVIMIENTO ESTUANDITIL!)

SERGIO AGUAYO, HISTORIAN: Never before in the history of Mexico, half a million people went out to the street to protest, to challenge the authority of the president. And numbers in history and politics matter. I mean, if ten people protest, well that's dissent. When half a million people protest, then that's the beginning of social revolution.

(CHANTING)

MARCELINO PERELLO, STUDENT LEADER: We were asking for the president to go out and to speak to us. En donde está, POM POM, el ocicón, POM POM. Que no lo vemos, POM POM, en el balcón, POM POM.

(MUSIC & CHANTING)

MIGUEL BRESEDA: The Zócalo, the main square, was lit with burning tires. There was dancing, guitars. A little bottle of tequila there and over there.

MARCELINO PERELLO: It was unforgettable. We were dreamers. And we were very happy.

*(MUSIC FADES)*

MIGUEL BRESEDA: So we are there. And the doors of the Palace open and the soldiers come out and they stand in front of us and say, “Señores se les ha permitido hacer su manifestación y se les solicita que abandonen la plaza. You have been allowed to make your demonstration, now you have to leave.” And I remember the whistles and yelling and all of that. And, “We are not leaving!” Holding arms all of us and saying, “We’re not moving.” And they take out their bayonets, and put them in their rifles and they start walking towards us.

MARIO NUÑEZ MARIEL, STUDENT: And you can hear when the army walks with the bayonets, it’s a noise you will never forget

*(MAKES SOUNDS OF STEPS).*

DAVID HUERTA: I remember that some of the students decided that we had weapons in our pockets. Big twenty-cent coins that were made of copper. Very huge coins, and heavy. Some of the students threw those coins against the soldiers. And you know what happened? The soldiers stopped to pick up those coins. It was not really that much money, twenty-cents. But for them, it was. I mean, the soldiers, our enemies, were the same age as us. If you take the uniform out of a soldier, what you discover behind is a poor, young peasant. In a way, weren’t we fighting for them? Sort of an eye-opener.

NEWS REPORT: Good evening. In Mexico City today, the agitation among the students against what they choose to call, government repression, is far from over.

*(FADES)*

MARTA ACEVEDO: We felt that there should be a dialogue and that the president had to come to terms with the things that were happening.

DAVID HUERTA: We didn’t want to overthrow the government. We want some changes. It was really reasonable. It was nothing to be afraid of. After this huge demonstration, we felt sure that they could not say no to our demands. And the answer, on the part of the government was issued on the presidential speech on September the first.

PRESIDENT GUSTAVO DIAZ ORDAZ, ARCHIVAL: Hemos sido tolerantes hasta excesos criticables, pero todo tiene un límite.

TRANSLATOR: We have been tolerant, but everything has a limit and we can no longer allow the laws to be broken as they have been in the eyes of the world.

DAVID HUERTA, STUDENT: After that, in September, things became really messy.

NEWS REPORT: Mexico City resembles an armed camp tonight, with thousands of troops and police on guard against rebellious students.

DAVID HUERTA: It was like the occupation of a country, of a student's country.

NEWS REPORT: You hear the tear gas. Thousands of students scattering now as the police fire tear gas at them.

JORGE CASTAÑEDA: It's no big deal to have tear gas shot at you, once it's happened. But the first time, it's terrible. You see these guys, you know, shooting these things at you. And then they explode and you can't breathe and you cough and you start crying. It's terrible. Second time it's not so terrible anymore.

MARCELINO PERELLO: The confrontation with the police and with the army scared us, of course. But it was a kind of game.

NEWS REPORT: And it's all over. In about a minute. That whole crowd of nearly two thousand students and other people, dispersed. This is Kenneth Gale in Mexico City.

ELISA RAMIREZ: By that time, they had the jails so filled up with everybody. I mean there were dozens of people a day in jail.

DAVID HUERTA: The confrontation in the streets was getting worse and worse. Of course, there was a deadline. In ten more days, the Olympic Games were about to begin.

SERGIO AGUAYO: And the tragedy was in the making because the students didn't retreat and the government was not going to surrender, an inch.

DAVID HUERTA: We didn't know exactly what the state was capable of. And then, on October 2nd, it became awfully clear.



NEWS REPORT: Students in Mexico City began a new protest march this afternoon. They are demanding the immediate release of other students jailed after rioting earlier this year.

DAVID HUERTA: On the morning of October 2nd, 1968, there was this gathering in the afternoon at Tlatelolco Square. Between four thousand and five thousand people. Nothing like the crowds in August.

MIGUEL BRESEDA: The movement was dwindling a little bit. And people were starting to talk about “let’s go back to school.” It had been too long already. You know, a long, long movement.

GUILLERMO PALACIOS, STUDENT: I was in the middle of the plaza. And suddenly we hear somebody say, “The army is coming in.” And we look back and there was all these infantry troops.

DAVID HUERTA: They started to advance towards the crowd, and at some point we heard some shots. We didn’t know where they came from. And seconds later—how do you say in English?—all hell broke loose.

*(ARCHIVAL: SHOTS)*

DAVID HUERTA: Somebody said, “These are not real bullets. These are only blanks, don’t be scared don’t be scared.” But they were not blanks.

NEWS REPORT: The troops have moved in. It started off as a peaceful demonstration. The army was circling this plaza called The Plaza of the Three Cultures. They were holding a peaceful rally but now the troops have come in. You can hear what it sounds like.

*(ARCHIVAL: SHOTS)*

The army is here and they’re firing. They’re letting go with just about everything they have. The other troops have swept across the plaza.

DAVID HUERTA: I have never heard anything like that in my life.

GUILLERMO PALACIOS: The shooting was so strong that we had to stop and just lay down on the floor.

DAVID HUERTA: I saw at least two or three people fall, and blood.

NEWS REPORT: Here they come now. Here comes the tank. It's an armored assault carrier coming right toward us. It's moving into position, aiming its guns toward the plaza right now.

*(ARCHIVAL: SOUNDS OF TANK)*

MARGARITA SUZAN, STUDENT: I couldn't believe what was happening.

ROLANDO CORDERA, STUDENT: Shooting after shooting. And then, suddenly, the shooting stopped.

MARGARITA SUZAN: I stepped over blood, and then I start to run.

NEWS REPORT: It's night now in Mexico City. And these are the sounds of night in Mexico. Bert Quint, CBS News, Mexico City.

ALEJANDRO ALVAREZ BEJAR: People was really scared, terrified. And nobody wanted to speak about that. So, if you had someone who died there, just keep it silent and don't say anything.

ELISA RAMIREZ: I never went back to the university. I never went back to that group. I completely cut from everything, from then on.

PRESIDENT GUSTAVO DIAZ ORDAZ, ARCHIVAL (OLYMPICS INAUGURATION): De mil novecientos sesenta y ocho, declaro inaugurados los Juegos Olímpicos de México.

*(CHEERING)*

NEWS REPORT: The Mexican president officially declares open the Games of 1968.

DAVID HUERTA: The thing was, the population in Mexico, they wanted to look the other way. And in a sense that was what happened to Mexican society.

DAVID HUERTA: It was like trying to erase history. For many, many years—thirty, forty years—we didn't know exactly what had happened, what they did to us. There was a movement, there was a massacre, and there was a forty-year search for truth. And after some years, well, the truth started to appear.

NEWS REPORT: July 3, 2000. This morning's Mexican newspaper headlines proclaimed simply, "Fox wins!" A day many Mexicans thought they would never see. The ruling party, the PRI, toppled from power.

*(CHANTING: ;QUE VIVA VICENTE, EL NUEVO PRESIDENTE!)*

NEWS REPORT: Mexicans have high expectations for their new president, and now his biggest challenge is how not to let them down.

DENISE DRESSER, RESEARCHER: Well, when Vicente Fox was elected president of Mexico in the year 2000. One of his campaign promises had to do with a real in-depth investigation of crimes of the past.

My name is Denise Dresser, and I was a member of the committee that helped to investigate what had happened during the student massacre of 1968. And that's when we discovered, you know, kilometers and kilometers of files.

*(SOUNDS OF FILES)*

KATE DOYLE, RESEARCHER: My name is Kate Doyle, and I am a senior analyst at the National Security Archive in Washington. And I have been researching the events on October 2nd 1968 in Mexico City for more than a decade.

Here are dozens of file cabinets with declassified intelligence reports, Mexican documents, CIA cables. We know a lot, but there is so much that we still don't know. But let's pull out...

*(SOUNDS OF FILES)*

One of the key chronicles of what happened is footage that was apparently shot by the military and retained secretly for many years of the day of the massacre, and how it unfolded.

*(SOUND OF FILM FOOTAGE)*

And so, we're looking at thousands of students gathered. The tanks pulling up and around the plaza. This is one of the apartment buildings overlooking the plaza. And woop, you just saw a flash there, a flash of the gunfire, there it was again. This film helps show the flash of the gun from the apartment window and the soldiers reacting. Those early shots are what set off the massacre.

*(SOUND OF FILM FOOTAGE)*

SERGIO AGUAYO: The official truth was: There was a skirmish between students and the police. The students fired, the police and the army responded, and a few people were killed. Period. That was the official history.

*(SOUND OF FILM FOOTAGE FADES)*

JORGE CASTAÑEDA: Now, what happened? We know that when the shooting begins, the first fellow who was shot was General Hernández Toledo, who was leading the army troops that entered the square. He was the first guy to quote unquote fall. So we know that the first shots were not fired by the army against the students, but by somebody against the leader of the army troops. That we know. And we know that the bullet trajectory was an up to down trajectory.

KATE DOYLE: There were security and intelligence agents, dressed in civilian clothing posted in those buildings, each wearing a white glove on his left hand.

JORGE CASTAÑEDA: They were officers from a different part of the army. They were identified by wearing a white glove on their left hand. And that's how they knew who they were.

They were instructed to shoot down at the troops that were posted around the square. Why? To have the troops think that there were student snipers shooting at the troops, and so the troops shot back at the students.

SERGIO AGUAYO: That was the logic. I mean they were going to simulate an attack on the part of the students and therefore the government would have the perfect excuse to crackdown and from that moment onward, everything would be normal.

KATE DOYLE: We still have no idea how many people died that day and who they were. In the hours after the shootout, once the bodies had been removed, groups of cleaning people were sent into the square with brooms and buckets of water, literally, to sweep the evidence away. The blood was very quickly washed off of the plaza floor.

And so you had these wildly varying accounts that anywhere from two hundred to two thousand people had died at Tlatelolco. And that gives you a sense of the dimensions of this mystery.

DENISE DRESSER: Forty years after 1968, there has never been a truth commission; the perpetrators have never really been called into account; former presidents have refused to speak. So there's been this non-spoken pact to leave things as they were.

There will come a point in which people like me will move on to other things, and people who lost family members that day will die, and perhaps we will never know the truth.

SERGIO AGUAYO: And that's why we are still fighting the same battles of 1968. It is one of those rare moments that went beyond a group of students challenging a paranoid president. What was being fought was something more fundamental: the power to control the truth.

*(MUSIC: MERCEDES SOSA, "QUE VIVAN LOS ESTUDIANTES")*

Produced by Joe Richman and Anayansi Diaz-Cortes of Radio Diaries

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