2010

Protests in the Sixties

Kellie C. Sorey

Dennis Gregory
Old Dominion University

Original Publication Citation

Sorey, K. C., & Gregory, D. (2010). Protests in the sixties. *College Student Affairs Journal, 28*(2), 184-206.

Protests in the Sixties

Kellie Crawford Sorey, Dennis Gregory

The imminent philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (1905). The protests that occurred on American campuses in the 1960s may lend support for that statement. This article will describe major events of the protest movement during this period, describe the societal and institutional contexts within which these protests occurred, and will hopefully encourage student affairs professionals to examine the emerging student activism of today to avoid the mistakes of the past. Many of today's senior administrators and faculty were college students during the protest era. These authors suggest that these professionals recall these events, examine how the events developed, and understand how today's students may again use protests as a means of developing power and to achieve their goals. This knowledge must then be passed on to emerging student affairs professionals.

> Before then, college students nationwide who opposed the war were holding rallies and teach-ins, and committing acts of civil disobedience. And they are not just from Berkeley and Ann Arbor or other campuses the nation has come to recognize as liberal bastions. The anti-war movement is stirring the passions of high schools, community colleges, public flagships and private research universities and those institutions in between. (Marklein, 2003, D 1)

The lines above could have been quoted from almost any national newspaper in 1968. They do, however, come from the March 25, 2003, edition of *USA Today*. Today's college students seem more and more likely to follow in the footsteps of their "boomer" parents. The increase in "college activism has been gaining momentum since the mid-1990s, and leaders of some student groups are hopeful that the passions aroused both in favor and against Bush's policies will draw even more young activists" (Marklein, 2003, D 1).

The protest movement of today is certainly different from that of the 1960s in that student support for the troops fighting in the war with Iraq was equally as vocal as the vocal protest of those opposed to the war (Mangan, 2003). September 11, 2001, which may become the defining moment for the "millennial" generation, has certainly had an impact. Mangan (2003) wrote:

> Banging on drums, chanting antiwar slogans, and blocking city intersections, students around the country who oppose the war in Iraq marked the beginning of the bombing with rallies, class

> walkouts, and faculty-led teach-ins. On some campuses the antiwar protesters clashed with those who supported the war. (Mangan, 2003, A6)

A great deal has been written in the recent past about who today's students are and how the students attending American campuses think, look, and act (Day & Hurtado, 2000; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Levine & Cureton, 1998). In his book *Bowling Alone,* Putnam (2000) vividly described how American society, and by implication today's college students, are becoming more isolated. As a result, Putnam explained that social systems are breaking down. This information is critical to higher education faculty and staff —particularly student affairs professionals. Understanding who our "clients and customers" are, to use TQM terms (Cornesky & McCool, 1992), is obviously important.

Several authors, including Levine (1981) and Rhatigan (2000), discuss the importance of history to the student affairs profession. This article will describe events that occurred during a critical period in American higher education and will emphasize the profound impact these events had upon higher education, and particularly on student affairs. The authors posit that the impact of the protest movements of the 1960s is still being felt today. The death of *in loco parentis*, the evolution of both contractual and constitutional approaches to working with students, the involvement of the federal government in implementing an agenda of civil rights and liberties, and a change in the legal philosophy of institutional liability for student behavior came at least partially from this period.

This article will assist those working in higher education, particularly student affairs professionals, in reflecting on the past to better understand and anticipate the future. In light of today's student population, increased activism, and the interaction of the social systems, this article will also assist them in understanding how current student activism may impact their profession.

Prologue

A stunned America observed with disbelief and horror the unfolding of a new phenomenon on America's college campuses in the mid- to late 1960s. The increasingly disruptive and violent protests, which had grown from the more peaceful movements of earlier days could no longer be ignored or forgotten by the general population of the U. S. Shortly after two violent protests in 1970, President Richard M. Nixon established a Commission (hereafter referred to as

the "Scranton Commission") to study the nature and causes of this radical movement. Student protests were gaining national attention.

The remainder of this article will trace the development and prevalence of disorderly and violent student protests on college campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reasons for these protests, such as the new student culture emerging on college and university campuses; the critical societal issues during this decade; and the role and response of the American university, will be explored. Society's changing perception of higher education and its students during this period will also be stressed because these views, as will be discussed, may have fueled the growth and volatility of these protests. Particular emphasis on Berkeley's Free Speech Movement and the Kent State tragedy will be provided.

A Historical Perspective of Student Protests

Student unrest in America did not begin in the 1960s. Its inception can be traced back to the early 19th century. During the early 1800s, inhabited public buildings at Harvard were blown up and Yale students celebrated Christmas by breaking windows of college buildings (Bledstein, 1976). In 1836 at the University of Virginia, a group of students refused to surrender their guns to University faculty. A riot soon followed with students participating in random shootings and attacks on professors' homes (Bledstein, 1976). Furthermore, a student stabbed the president of Oakland College in Mississippi to death, and the president and a professor at the University of Georgia were stoned (Rudolph, 1990). Also according to Rudolph:

> Between 1800 and 1875 students were in rebellion on at least one occasion at Miami University, Amherst, Brown, University of South Carolina, Williams, Georgetown, University of North Carolina, Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Lafayette, Bowdoin, City College of New York, Dickinson and DePauw. (p. 98)

These disturbances were usually in rebellion against the inadequate living conditions, terrible food, rigid rules, and the Puritan religious values that characterized colleges of the time (*Report*, 1970). Discontent during that early period was largely apolitical. This began to change, however, in early 20th century with the emergence of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS)—the first radical political movement at America's institutions (*Report*, 1970). Campus protests in the 1920s and 1930s focused on political issues with strikes against the war, protests against the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), attacks

on America's foreign policy (*Report*, 1970), immigration, and free speech (Lucas, 1994).

Students who entered college in the late 1940s and 1950s were very different from the cohorts that entered during the period of the 1920s and 1930s. They were also different from those who entered in the 1960s and early 1970s. As Lucas (1994) asserts, students who entered after World War II—many of whom were war veterans—had little time for social involvement on college campuses. Their primary goal was to obtain a degree and gain employment. The students of the fifties, referred to often as the "silent generation," entered college passively. They feared any challenge to the status quo and believed that the government and college administrators possessed unlimited power (Kaplan, 1998). This characterization is very different from that used to describe students who entered college during the 1960s. During the 1960s students and society underwent phenomenal transition. Both students and society as a whole began to expect more of their colleges, of their government and of their society.

Although student unrest can be traced back as early as these examples illustrate, it was during the 1960s when campus protests riveted the nation. Scalmer (2000) attributes this national awareness, and in effect collective action, to the technological advances that made it possible for the world to participate through such media as radio, newspaper, and television. Lucas (1994) asserts that the "highly sensationalized accounts of each new incident...[were] further fanning the flames of discontent" (p. 259). Isserman and Kazin (2000) noted that nearly 90 percent of Americans had televisions by the end of the 1950s. Outsiders could now get involved by observing the shaping of a new culture. As the Scranton Commission described, although the public was "outraged by violence on American campuses," the outrage was "often intensified by a more general revulsion against the distinctive dress, life style, behavior, or speech adopted by some young people" (*Report,* 1970, p. 40). Moreover, "some segments of the public [had also] become increasingly disenchanted with student protests of all kinds—and even with higher education itself" (*Report*, 1970, p. 41).

Scalmer (2000) asserts that until 1960, the International Student Conference forbade debate and action on non-campus issues. Affiliated student organizations, according to Scalmer, were restricted by this limitation. Once these restrictions were lifted, "university students in the industrialized world began to act with a new political confidence" (Scalmer, p. 493). The disorder and violence that characterized the '60's protests, along with the increased opportunities for national exposure through the media, simultaneously contributed to the notoriety of this new movement.

Major Issues of the 1960s

During the early years of the 1960s, most protests were in the form of non-violent marches, sit-ins, and picketing. Issues at hand were freedom of political speech and action, civil rights, nuclear testing, compulsory ROTC, the draft, and the Vietnam War (Phillips, 1985). Referring to students who participated during the early 1960s, Skolnick (1969) wrote "students who participated in these activities saw them primarily as moral responses to *specific* issues, yet some began to perceive *general* political implications" (pp. 88-89). The characteristics of the movements in the early 1960s were different from those that portrayed it at the end of the decade. When the decade began, "American students were either apolitical or dedicated to working peacefully for change within the existing system" (*Report,* 1970, pp. 18-19). By the middle of the decade, tactical shifts began to occur. Non-violent demonstrations were replaced by disruptive and often violent revolts during the latter part of the decade.

Much of the earlier protest that brought violent responses came as part of the civil rights movement. According to Oppenheimer (1984), the Southern Regional Council reported in September 1961 that approximately 3,600 students and their supporters had been arrested since the civil rights movement's inception in February 1960. Hundreds of students and other protesters were gassed, beaten, attacked by police dogs, or had burning cigars or ammonia thrown on them as they sat at lunch counters (Oppenheimer, 1984). One account reported that 388 people participating in a demonstration in Orangeburg, South Carolina, were arrested, placed in a stockade, and sprayed with water during freezing temperatures (Oppenheimer, p. 50). During the 1965 Watts riot, 1,072 people were injured and 34 people were killed (Judis, 1998, p. 24).

The Scranton Commission reported that some Americans "openly applauded police violence against students, arguing that they had only themselves to blame if they were killed by police during disruptive or violent protests. Such public attitudes clearly encouraged violent responses by civil authorities" (*Report,* 1970, p. 44). While students were perceived to have provoked the majority of the violent responses, this same report indicates that student deaths were more common than were the deaths of their adversaries. Law enforcement officials were often the adversaries, and even the "moderate" students were propelled to intervene as they observed their peers being brutalized and killed by the police (*Report,* 1970, chap. 1). Judis (1998) wrote:

> The seeming contradiction between U.S. intervention [in the Vietnam War] and American ideals, [Lyndon] Johnson's dishonesty and betrayal [of his campaign promise not to send Americans to Vietnam], and the rising list of casualties on both sides of the war inspired a growing rage against Johnson and the government. The antiwar movement split into a moderate wing that sought a negotiated withdrawal and a violent pro-North Vietnamese wing that threatened to "bring the war home." (p. 24)

Regardless of whether the growth and intensity of the 1960s protests was real or a mere perception, it is no doubt that these events had many in America on the defensive. Violent crime increased 156 % over the decade, and by the end of the decade, 44% of college students thought violence was sometimes justified to change society. Of the general public, 14% said that violence could sometimes be justified (Roberts, 1993).

While much of the student protest occurred on the campuses of the United States, this protest spilled out, often after students were disciplined for their on campus behavior, into American courts. A case resulting from the civil rights movement, *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961), is credited with beginning the demise of the legal theory of *in loco parentis* which had been formally in place since at least the beginning of the 20th century. In *Healy v. James* (1972), a case that began in the late 1960s, the Supreme Court acknowledged the freedom of association rights of a local chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Central Connecticut State College despite the advocacy by the national organization for violent disruption of university activities. The local organization condoned such activities but had no record of involving themselves in them.

According to Bickel and Brechner (1978):

> The law developed so quickly in this area that many college and university administrators found themselves in court prior to the time that they could reasonably identify the legal problems involved in regulating student conduct and adjust their rules and regulations to bring them into compliance. Moreover, even when the procedures were adjusted to provide for clarity in regulatory codes and for due process in procedural aspects of student discipline, many individual students and student organizations continued to challenge the authority of the college or university to regulate student conduct. (p. 8)

Gregory (1987) noted:

> Student activism with regard to procedural safeguards in disciplinary cases was not the only direction marked by cases launched during the 1960s. Students began to press issues related to a number of First Amendment concerns including freedom of speech, press and association, some of which ultimately reached the Supreme Court and had major impact on higher education. In addition, students challenged search and seizure regulations of colleges and universities and more recently have begun to raise issues of educational malpractice . . . (p. 4, citations omitted).

The Emergence of the "Counterculture"

Families of students entering universities in the 1960s had experienced years of economic stability under Eisenhower (Kaplan, 1998). The wages of the manufacturing worker, according to Isserman and Kazin (2000), had doubled since World War II and the economy was on an upsurge. As reported by Judis (1998), the United States economy experienced the longest consecutive boom from February 1961 to September 1969 with an economy that grew by 4.5% each year (p. 26). Having grown up in a middle-class culture, most students entering college had no fears about the future or about gaining employment (Thomas & Kunen, 1986). They were raised to think about their quality of life rather than the "iron law of wages" (Judis, p. 22). Leisure and consumption were now important to society (Judis).

College students of the 1960s and early 1970s were the first generation to grow up watching television (Isserman & Kazin, 2000). Television was such a large part of this generation's culture that Thomas and Kunen (1986) refer to the television set as the students' "surrogate parent" (p. 23). Parents were perceived to play a less significant role in the daily lives of their children.

The advancing industrialism during this time may also have contributed to the changing relationship between adults and children. It weakened traditional adult controls and youth were spending an increasing amount of time together and away from their parents (*Report,* 1970). Society, which before had taught young people to adhere to the values of the adult social system, was taking a more liberal approach. Many students entering college in the 1960s grew up in homes where parents were often guided by Dr. Benjamin Spock's child-rearing techniques, which encouraged children to test the waters (Thomas & Kunen, 1986). Isserman and Kazin (2000) point out that:

> Surrounded by one's peers and largely free from the responsibility of career, family, and mortgage, young people could experiment with their minds and bodies in ways that usually shocked and enraged older people raised amid the constricted horizons of the Great Depression and World War II. (p. 150)

Having grown up in this environment, where parents were becoming more liberal, the fear of challenging the status quo was diminished or erased, and American citizens expected more from their institutions. As a result, youth grew to be activists who expected and demanded more from America.

The Scranton Commission suggested that the lessening of Cold War tensions was a factor as well (*Report,* 1970). TheComission contended that with this decreased tension, "students felt less obliged to defend Western democracy and more free to take a critical look at their own society" (p. 21). Upon doing this, many did not like what they saw. Thomas and Kunen (1986) echo this as they write, "In reaction to parental values deemed empty and materialistic, a flamboyant and vocal minority known as the Woodstock generation preached rock music, free love and heightened consciousness. Mostly they celebrated youth" (p. 23).

Students perceived that as America "was becoming highly automated [and] was capable of producing great abundance...archaic political and economic arrangements were preventing America from enjoying its fruits" (Judis, 1998, p. 21). Similarly, Miller (2000) asserted that students related issues to what they believed universities should be. As an extension of this ideal, they began to relate issues to what they expected America to be. College students, now appearing in large numbers, could make an impression—and perhaps even predominate—in world affairs (Skolnick, 1969).

While they began to expect more, many students believed the responses from colleges and society were too slow or simply not sufficient. As situations worsened in society, such as the escalation of the Vietnam War, the ghetto riots, and the assassinations of key leaders, protests became more disruptive and violent (Judis, 1998, p. 24). As discussed earlier, some (e.g., Judis, 1998; *Report*, 1970) contend that this violence was actually a response to the violence that was inflicted on student protestors in even the most peaceful of protests. The backlash from the American public only inflamed protesters. Students also learned quickly that the media provided better coverage when protests were intense (Lucas, 1994).

Although some (e.g., Gerlach, 1997; Kaplan, 1998; Thomas & Kunen, 1986) described the 1960s generation as self-absorbed, the Scranton Commission disagreed. Instead, it contended that students did not act wholly out of self-interest, but rather on principle and ideology. Given that few college students were drafted and White students participated in the civil rights movement, these activists were engaged in issues that did not directly impact them. While many outsiders viewed this counterculture in a negative light, Judis (1998) believes this generation was a product of what American capitalism had encouraged and enabled. Judis writes:

> The origins of the counterculture lay at the interstices of this new American culture of leisure and consumption that business helped to promote. The counterculture was a product of the new culture at the same time as it represented a critique of and a counter to it. (p. 22)

Anti-Racism and Civil Rights

The beginning of student involvement in what has commonly been referred to as "the movement" commenced on February 1, 1960, when four African American male students at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College went into the Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina, for lunch and were refused service. The next day, when joined by 23 fellow students, they were again refused service. By the week's end, the group grew to include White women from nearby Bennett College and the sit-in filled all the seats (Isserman & Kazin, 2000). In less than two weeks, non-violent sit-ins had spread to other areas of North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida (Oppenheimer, 1984). Students of all races were participating. Within two months, students in northern states were also engaged with an estimated 50,000 persons participating across the United States (Oppenheimer, p. 50). The civil rights movement was initiated because of despair over racial injustice.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a small group of student activists, formed in 1960. Although all White and predominantly from middle-class backgrounds, members recognized the problems of racism and committed themselves to the civil rights movement (Isserman & Kazin, 2000). Estimates of their size vary, but by the late 1960s, the group reported to have over 100,000 members (Hunt, 1999). By this time, the issues addressed by the SDS had grown well beyond the civil rights movement.

Other groups, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), began to emerge and join in the protest movement. Although the

groups may have formed to work on differing issues, they relied heavily on each other and learned that greater effectiveness could be achieved through combined efforts (Phillips, 1985). SDS, viewing America as the enemy, publicly announced that by 1969, it would be the "vanguard of a violent revolution *against* the United States" (Judis, 1998, p. 24).

In the early 1960s the majority of civil rights protests occurred off-campus and were non-violent, with the exception of violence perpetrated against protestors by police and onlookers. Student protesters were from all races and backgrounds. During the summer of 1964 this changed. Urban riots in Harlem, Rochester, and Watts sharply divided the more conservative White students from Black and White militants who considered the riots as legitimate rebellions (*Report,* 1970). Riots such as these are thought to have been triggered by Black perceptions of unequal treatment, particularly by White police offers, as well as the failure of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to expand the non-violent struggle for civil rights beyond the South (Judis, 1998).

Stokely Carmichael, a civil rights activist, led those who no longer had faith in the non-violent protests to take control of the SNCC (Isserman & Kazin, 2000). He also expelled White students from the organization (*Report,* 1970). Militant actions became customary, particularly after the assassination of Dr. King in 1968 (Judis, 1998). Additionally, protests by militant groups began to occur on campus property and were often directed against the universities (*Report,* 1970). Black student activists claimed that the university "had helped to perpetuate black oppression through its admissions policies, its 'white-oriented' curriculum, and its overwhelmingly white teaching staff" (*Report,* 1970, p. 33).

Civil Liberties and the Berkeley Free Speech Movement

As discussed in the preceding section, the summer of 1964 was a time of significant change for the civil rights movement. In this same year, activism at the University of California at Berkeley profoundly shaped the broader student movement. The Scranton Commission notes:

> The events…defined an authentic political invention—a new and complex mixture of issues, tactics, emotions, and setting—that became the prototype for student protest throughout the decade…. [and] altered the character of American student activism in a fundamental way. (*Report,* 1970, pp. 22, 24)

The Berkeley revolt is significant in that it involved three essential issues: civil rights, civil liberties (particularly the protection of free speech), and the right to organize and conduct political activity on college campuses.
Berkeley students had traditionally conducted political activities, such as soliciting funds and members, on a 26-foot strip of land at the entrance to the campus that they thought was owned by the City of Berkeley. During the summer of 1964, the University administration announced that the strip of land was university property. The administration also re-imposed an old policy that prohibited political groups from conducting political activity on campus property (Lipset & Wolin, 1965).

Lipset & Wolin (1965) report that a student protest movement organized on that piece of land almost immediately, the Free Speech Movement (FSM), and the reform of university rules and regulations affecting political activity on campus were demanded. Eight students were suspended for violation of the university's prohibition against campus political activity (*Report,* 1970). On October 1, 1964, campus police arrested a non-student activist for trespassing. When the police attempted to remove the arrested individual from campus in a car, 600 students spontaneously staged a sit-in and prevented the car from moving (Lipset & Altbach, 1967). During hour 32 of this sit-in, the university announced it would not press charges (*Report,* 1970). After university hearings, the administration announced it would allow six of the eight students who had been suspended to return to school. Although the students achieved some victory, the prohibition against campus political activity had not been resolved. There was much more for the FSM to accomplish.

Upon their return from Thanksgiving break in 1964, leaders of the FSM organized a two-day sit-in at the administration building to defend their right to organize on campus (*Report,* 1970). Governor Edmund G. Brown halted this protest by calling in the police. Hundreds of arrests were made and charges of police brutality surfaced (Lipset & Wolin, 1965). This made matters much more difficult. Support for the FSM's goals grew dramatically. Before police intervention, approximately 2,500 students supported the FSM (*Report,* 1970). Police intervention backfired. FSM's meetings and rallies began to attract crowds as large as 7,000 (Lipset & Wolin, 1965).

The semester-long dispute drew involvement from members of the state legislature, the governor, alumni, and the faculty (Lipset & Wolin, 1965). The university was in such a crisis that classes and other academic activities were cancelled (*Report,* 1970). Eventually, in January 1965, the FSM achieved its main goal. The university liberalized its restrictions on political activities.

Phillips (1985) writes that the Berkeley revolt "revealed to much of the American public, including administrators, faculty, students, and the mass media, some of the potentials of student protest actions (pp. 147-148)." Explaining this potential, DuBose (1967) writes:

> Student activists across the nation were shown by the Berkeley blow-up that they could organize, protest, rally, sit-in, and strike—and get results. After all, the Berkeley activists had accomplished what they had intended. They had won faculty support, and were thus transformed from marginal disruptors [*sic*] of the university into legitimate spokesmen for the entire academic community. And this means student power. (p. 2)

The media's attention to this event was also significant. The louder the students were, the more attention they received. Another outcome of the Berkeley revolt was that students began to see the campus as a place where social issues could be protested. They also realized the significance of issues other than civil rights. In the *Task Force Report Submitted to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*, Skolnick (1969) wrote:

> Student activists, before the Free Speech Movement, had viewed campus issues as trivial compared to the civil rights struggle. The only way for white students to display their commitment to social change, to put themselves "on the line," was to move off the campus. The Free Speech Movement showed how the campus itself might become a front line. Students now saw that what happens on campus could really matter politically, and that a local campus uprising could have national and international importance. (p. 93)

When students came to view the campus as an avenue for describing their political ideas, the American higher education institution began to be scrutinized by the students, the faculty, and the public. This was the final, but enduring, effect of the Berkeley revolt.

University as "Another System"

Described by Lipset and Altbach (1967), Berkeley became the "locomotive behind which many toy trains were hooked by the press, frightening deans and college presidents" (p. 202). After the Berkeley incident, students began to relate issues to what they thought a university should be—"a center for moral and independent thinking" (Miller, 2000, p. 7). Studies of students conducted during the 1960s found that although students were not essentially disgruntled

about the education they were receiving, the majority disapproved of their schools as moral institutions (*Report,* 1970). The Scranton Commission attributes this lack of moral authority to the expansion and professionalization that the university underwent after World War II. By 1960, 3.6 million students were attending college—more than double the number that had attended 20 years earlier (Isserman & Kazin, 2000). Discontent with what they perceived as moral defects in the nation, students in the 1960s began to take notice of the moral defects they perceived in higher education as well.

The university did not adapt well to this new youth culture that challenged the status quo. Students began to voice their concerns about racial inequalities, and the university's interference with academic freedom, the First Amendment, and the free exchange of ideas (*Report,* 1970, p. 13). Other protests concerned student governance issues, the university's participation in government defense contracts, and the presence of military recruiters on campus (Lucas, 1994, p. 258). Students denounced the growing focus of research and the seeming loss of interest in teaching that was occurring at campuses (*Report,* 1970). They also called for the teaching of socially relevant material (Lucas, 1994).

As indicated above, protests were developing at college campuses across America and the institutions themselves were often the targets of these protests. For example, when Columbia University proposed the relocation of African American residents from a ghetto area on university-owned property near the edge of campus in 1968 in order to build a gymnasium, Black students seized the administration building and violence escalated (Lucas, p. 258).

The majority of administrators managing campuses during the 1950s and 1960s came from educated families with an upper middle-class or rich background (Kaplan, 1998). Students did not trust them, and perceived them to be hypocritical (Kaplan). Students viewed these leaders as an arm of the larger system, which they could not and did not trust. Kaplan explains:

> Just as adolescents test their parents to find limits, the youth of the sixties tested their leaders and found them empty.... students wanted leaders they could respect.... but most university administrators were repeatedly tested by students and were exposed for what they were. (p. 313)

Lipset and Altbach (1967) viewed many college leaders during this time—particularly administrators—as weak. Lipset and Altbach (1967) assert that administrators, often criticized by faculty for their lack of leadership abilities, were selected for their positions "for their ability to get along, rather than for their scholarly eminence or leadership qualities" (p. 211).

Edward J. Bloustein, the president of Rutgers Universities during this time, described the dynamics between students and campus administrators during the 1960s in *The University and the Counterculture* (1972). Bloustein wrote:

> Too many of our academic leaders have mistaken the true nature of student revolt. They are confused because at different times it appears to be addressed to one or another of different, relatively insignificant, or, even when not significant, relatively isolated, facets of college life. First it is free speech on campus, then it is visitation hours in student rooms, then admissions and scholarships for black students, then recruitment of students by war industries, then the building of a gymnasium in an urban slum, then the contract relationship between the university and a defense research corporation. The connection between these seemingly isolated forays is that they all represent a testing of the academic decision process; they all go to challenge the legitimacy of the constitutional apparatus of the college or university. Student activists have chosen to throw the gauntlet down...on issues which test the academic hierarchy. (p. 59)

Students at this time were testing the university, and often concluded that the university had failed. Particularly at large, pubic universities, students believed their institutions to be "depersonalized" (Lipset & Altbach, 1967, p. 213). They also began to view the university as "just another system" that they deplored.

The students had an overwhelming feeling that the university, like other American institutions, was not listening to them. Americans as a whole were expecting and even demanding more from their government such as clean air and water and a safe workplace (Judis, 1998). Students, having grown up with similar expectations, were also demanding more. However, the growing professionalization of higher education institutions made it difficult for the American college to respond. Universities during this time had to accommodate a huge increase in the number of students. At the same time, they were facing increasing demands from government and business, and faculty who were research-hungry (*Report,* 1970, p. 76). Carl Davidson, a leader of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), declared in 1967 that radical students had come to understand "the impossibility of freedom in the university so long as it remained tied to the interests of America's corporate and military elite" (Isserman & Kazin, 2000, p. 172).

The Scranton Commission asserted that the deadly combination of major social and political issues with university issues made it increasingly difficult for

campus administrators to respond in any effective way (*Report,* 1970). Skolnick (1969) quotes Morris B. Abram, former president of Brandeis University, as describing the response to campus disruptions as a "herculean task" (p. 120). Universities would respond with strict and punitive measures, and then later lift them. The lack of communication between students and administrators, particularly at large campuses, further exacerbated the problems (Skolnick). An erosion of a clear mission in American higher education and a lack of organization were also offered as shortcomings of the university during this time (*Report*).

The university was finding it increasingly difficult to satisfy any of its constituencies including its students, faculty, government, or business. With what Skolnick (1969) refers to as the "fragmentation of interests" (p. 119) within the university—that is different and competing values and interests between administrators, faculty, and students—schools were particularly vulnerable in making good decisions. American universities, having become more national in focus, no longer represented a community of shared values (Skolnick). Instead, according to Skolnick, it had "become deeply involved in the larger political community without conscious direction and occasionally without intent, and without careful consideration of the problematic character of its enlarged commitments" (p. 112). Kaplan (1998) wrote that the most striking disturbance in the 1960s was when universities politicized themselves by taking a stance on the Vietnam War (p. 313).

The Vietnam War and the Kent State Tragedy

The Vietnam War received the most intense and sustaining student focus, particularly in 1965 when the United States began bombing North Vietnam (Lucas, 1994). Students believed the war to be morally wrong and were opposed to all policies and practices that seemingly supported the war, including the draft, military research and the ROTC (*Report,* 1970). At a time when students were twice as likely to go to college as their parents, were idealistic and assertive, and had never before been "quite so noisily self-conscious," (Thomas & Kunen, 1986, p. 22) their expectations were diminishing from the social and economic shocks they experienced from the war. Judis (1998) asserts that students viewed America's involvement in the war as a reflection of "the priorities of American capitalism and its power elite" (p. 24). Facing a greater loss of faith in the system, the war was interpreted by radical students as "a 'logical' outcome of the American political system" (*Report,* 1970, p. 31). As discussed earlier, the university was perceived to be a part of the larger "system" and thus, became the target of much antiwar protest.

In 1965, the federal government announced that it would defer college students from the growing draft calls on the basis of academic standing. College activists, particularly the SDS, were seeking connections between the university and the war. Some were using illegal means to do so (*Report,* 1970). In 1967, the SDS revealed that Michigan State University was conducting research that served to fund a CIA operation in Southeast Asia (*Report,* 1970, p. 32). Similar accusations, often true, were also highlighted. Activists spoke against student aid programs that were tied to defense spending and harassed campus military recruiters. As the war escalated, Michigan State and other universities were increasingly denounced for their involvement with the defense establishment and their participation in a corrupt national system. Kaplan (1998) empathizes with these students and poses the question: "Is it any wonder that the generation of the sixties was disabled when faculty and administration could not distinguish between an educational institution and a political one?" (pp. 313-314). Protests and strikes grew more abundant and violent when President Nixon announced the U.S. invasion of Cambodia on April 31, 1970.

Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States in 1968. It is believed by many that his promise to end the Vietnam War was a major reason for his victory (Lewis & Hensley, 1998). Believing that the war was winding down, antiwar protests were also diminishing. President Nixon's announcement in April 1970 "resuscitated a staggering anti-war movement" and propelled "the most violent wave of disorders in the history of the nation's campuses" (Semas, 1970, p. A31). A national campus strike, called almost immediately by several students and faculty members at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, mobilized more than 200 campuses to strike within a few days (Semas, 1970).

Kent State University, a state-supported school located in the business district of Kent, Ohio, had been relatively tranquil prior to May 1970 (*Report,* 1970). About 500 protesters attended an antiwar rally, led by less than half a dozen graduate students, on May 1, 1970 (Gordon, 1990). Although a copy of the U.S. Constitution was buried, it was a relatively peaceful demonstration (Bills, 1988). It was so peaceful that Kent State President, Robert I. White, left town to go on a previously scheduled trip (Bills, 1988).

During the evening, an unorganized riot broke out in downtown Kent. Windows were smashed, stores were looted, and bonfires were set in the street (Gordon, 1990). At 12:30 a.m., Kent Mayor Leroy Satrom declared a state of emergency and imposed an immediate citywide curfew (Bills, 1988). On May 2, during the early morning hours, he also requested assistance from the National Guard after conferring with the governor's office (Gordon). Later that evening, a second antiwar rally was held on campus. A crowd reportedly of 500 to 1,000

attended and eventually succeeded at burning down the campus Army ROTC building. Firemen arrived and were unable to extinguish the fire because demonstrators prevented their attempts. According to the Scranton Commission: "Members of the mob...slashed and stabbed the hose with pocket knives, an ice pick, and a machete. They threw rocks at the firemen, who then withdrew" (*Report,* 1970, p. 249). The Portage County Sheriff's Department arrived to assist, and dispersed the crowd by firing tear gas (Gordon).

Heading downtown, the crowd reportedly set an archery shed on fire and destroyed other city property (Gordon, 1990). Later that evening, the crowd reached Kent's main intersection where the National Guard, who forced them back toward the campus, met them. Except for a few minor altercations, the students returned to their apartments or residence halls.

On May 3, local and state government officials made threats. For example, Kent Police Chief Roy Thompson warned:

> I'll be right behind with the National Guard to give our full support—anything that is necessary. Like Ohio law says, use any force that is necessary, *even to the point of shooting.* We do not want to get into that, but the law says we can if necessary. (Gordon, 1990, p. 25)

With the National Guard stationed on the Kent State campus, the afternoon was fairly quiet. Bills (1988) reports that although a state of civil emergency was interpreted by law enforcement officials to mean that all demonstrations and rallies were banned, this was not communicated to the students. That evening the students held another rally. Again, the Guard used tear gas to disperse the crowd Gordon).

The crowd finally went to the main gate of campus and staged a sit-in. A student issued a list of what Gordon (1990) defines as "non-negotiable demands" that included stopping the Vietnam War, abolishing the University's ROTC program, removing the National Guard from campus, reducing tuition, meeting all future demands of the Black Union Students, and lifting the town curfew (pp. 25-26). When a National Guardsman announced that the earlier imposed curfew of 1:00 a.m. would be moved to 11:00 p.m., the students became hostile. It was reported that some students began cursing and throwing rocks at the Guard and police. In response, the Guard used tear gas and stabbed students with bayonets (Gordon).

Bills (1988) offered a description of the events that occurred on Monday, May 4, 1970. President White, who had returned to campus, issued a statement that the National Guard would remain on campus indefinitely because the events had "taken these decisions out of University hands" (Bills, 1988, p. 16). At noon, approximately 2,000 students convened on the University Commons to hold another rally. University patrolman Harold Rice used a bullhorn to order the students to disassemble. Most accounts report that few students heard this order. After tear gas had again been fired, the guardsmen moved toward the crowd with their weapons "locked and loaded" (Bills, 1988, p. 16).

Within 10 minutes, the National Guard was firing ammunition. They fired 61 rounds of ammunition in 13 seconds. Four students were killed and 9 were wounded. Allison Krause and Jeffrey Miller, rally participants, were killed. Sandra Scheuer, another casualty, was innocently walking to class when killed. An ROTC student, William Schroeder, was also killed (Bills, 1988). By court order, the university was closed that day and was to remain closed for the remainder of the spring quarter (Bills, 1988). President White stated, "Everyone without exception is horror-struck at the tragedy of the last few hours" (Semas, 1970, p. A31).

The Kent State tragedy and the issue of Cambodia affected campuses across the country. Bailey (1999) reports that classes were cancelled for the remainder of the year at more than 500 campuses nationwide. Arson and violence at American universities were widespread. Students at the University of Wisconsin set several fires, including two in ROTC buildings, while chanting "Remember Kent" (Semas, 1970). A total of 37 ROTC buildings were torched across American campuses, and two more students died during a protest at Jackson State University in Mississippi (Hayman, 2000).

The Scranton Commission found that the Ohio National Guard had overreacted at Kent State. In 1973, a grand jury indicted the Ohio National Guard on civil rights violations, but a judge later dismissed the case. In January 1980, an out-of-court settlement was reached, and the state of Ohio paid a total of $675,000 to the victimized students and the parents of the deceased (Lewis & Hensley, 1998). In addition to the financial settlement, a statement signed by 28 defendants was also required in which members of the Ohio National Guard expressed regret over the event (Lewis & Hensley, 1998). A Gallup poll conducted in the aftermath of the event showed that most Americans supported the guardsmen's actions (Hayman, 2000). As many (e.g., Hunt, 1999; Phillips, 1985) note, the Kent State tragedy marked the end of the 1960s.

The events of the 1960s were not forgotten as the decade came to an end. Several writers have emphasized the importance of this tumultuous decade. Lewis and Hensley (1998) wrote, "the shootings have come to symbolize a great American tragedy which occurred at the height of the Vietnam War era, a period in which the nation found itself deeply divided both politically and culturally" (p. 16). These events began to raise questions concerning the communication channels and overall administration and leadership of America's higher education institutions (*Report,* 1970; Skolnick, 1969). These events also began to raise questions about university responses to crisis and the mechanisms in place when such crises occurred (Phillips, 1985). The culmination of these events also led some to question the constitutional rights of students and the protections they could and should be afforded (*Report*).

Conclusion

The atmosphere on many American college campuses changed dramatically during the 1960s. After two decades of relative calm, students felt freer to speak out on issues they perceived to be unjust or immoral. These students grew up during more liberal times when parents exercised fewer controls, and when society began to expect more from its government and institutions.

During the early 1960s, students noisily but peacefully challenged the status quo. Issues such as racism, civil rights, freedom of speech and assembly, the Vietnam War, and university policies and procedures were protested. In response, the students found these challenges ignored, marginally disregarded, or met with brutal acts and arrests from those they began to perceive as "them." The "us" versus "them" theme began to play out in all sectors of campus life and in almost all issues. The students also found that the louder and more disruptive they were, the more attention they would receive. Escalation was the key, many students believed, to change. Gallup polls and surveys conducted during the sixties reported that many outsiders were supportive of violent interventions and reactions against student protesters.

Students, joining in the civil rights movement, began to view their own universities as prejudicial and untrustworthy. The perception of the university as a system—a system that they could not and did not trust—was prevailing. When the Berkeley Free Speech Movement took place, students began to view the college campus as a place where broader issues could be protested. Students nationwide began to recognize their power to affect change and make powerful statements about issues critical to them. Civil liberties, racial inequality, student governance and the loss of interest in teaching were issues that gained momentum during the 1960s. The Vietnam War and the Kent State

tragedy were the most significant events marking the end of the decade. Four students were killed and a nation mourned.

As reported in Davies (1973), when Federal District Court Judge Ben C. Green rescinded the gag order earlier imposed on witnesses in the trial of the national guardsmen, he stated: "The events which occurred at Kent State University…are a matter of national, social, political, and moral concern and debate. The ban prevents not only the three hundred [witnesses] from speaking, but the rest of the world from hearing" (p. 157). The rest of the world began listening.

Skolnick (1969) reported that the student movements during this decade had a profound impact on the power and influence of American students. The result of their activism was that students began to take on formal roles within university governance as never before (Skolnick). After these movements, people began to view students differently. Administrators, faculty or society no longer saw students as complacent and unconcerned about issues that impacted them and the country. In fact, students began to take on more formal roles in society as well. Schamel (1996) credits the antiwar movement for the passage of the 26th Amendment in March 1971, which extended voting rights to 18-year-olds. It is the authors' belief that people began to see youth as motivated, involved, and educated, as well as in a position to serve in the military and give their lives for their country and thus, worthy of voting privileges. Skolnick warns: "It is neither reliable nor justifiable to expect contemporary students to remain content as second-class citizens within the university" (p. 122). After these movements, people began to view students differently.

Campus protests declined significantly during the early to middle 1970s. The end of the Vietnam war, the movement by federal courts to impose their will on those states who failed to integrate their schools and colleges, the passage of federal legislation to improve the civil rights and civil liberties of students and others, and the recognition by colleges and universities that their students were adults with constitutional rights signaled that the student protests had achieved many of their goals. Lucas (1994) writes: "Peace had somehow inexplicably returned, and it would endure for some time to come" (p. 263). While this is true, students continued to push their causes through less aggressive campus activism and in the courts. With the coming of the late 1970s and 1980s also came another evolution in student goals, directions, and focus.

The 1960s were certainly turbulent times on college campuses. With the changes shaped by student protest, the student affairs profession changed as well. Student affairs professionals who had often served as quasi parents to

their students prior to this period took on new and significantly expanded roles hereafter. A period of what Bickel and Lake (1999) have called the "bystander era" in which colleges and universities treated students as adults for whom they had no responsibility and over whom they had no control followed the protest era. Student affairs professionals, however, began to see "student development" as their primary role within the institution and the profession and its supporting "professional" organizations began to grow. Protests gave way to other issues and the students and student affairs professionals have changed over time. Now the generation X students (Levine and Cureton, 1998) are being replaced by "millennial" students (Howe and Strauss, 2000) and the interests of students are more outwardly focused.

Did the "millennial" students begin to flex their numerical and ideological muscles in the activism that began to emerge around the war with Iraq? Will student affairs administrators need to acquire skills for dealing with student protest, long forgotten or never acquired? How will the lessons learned in the 1960s need to be re-taught to the new generation of campus leaders, students, and faculty? These questions and others may need to be answered within the student affairs profession and in graduate training programs in the years to come.

References

Bailey, B. L. (1999). *Sex in the heartland.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bickel, R. D., & Breckner, J. A. (1978). The role of college or university legal counsel. In D. D. Gehring, & D. P. Young, (Eds.), *The college administrator and the courts: Basic casebook* (p.8). Ashville, NC: College Administration Publications.

Bickel, R. D., & Lake, P. F (1999). *The rights and responsibilities of the modern university: Who assumes the risks of college life?* Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Bills, S. L. (Ed.). (1988). *Kent State/May 4: Echoes through a decade.* Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

Bledstein, B. (1976). *The culture of professionalism: The middle class and the development of higher education in America.* New York: Norton.

Bloustein, E. J. (1972). *The university and the counterculture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Cornesky, R., & McCool, S. (1992). Total quality improvement guide for institutions of higher education. Madison, WI: Magna.

Davies, P. (1973). *The truth about Kent State.* New York: American Report.

Dey, E. L., & Hurtado, S. (2000). Students, colleges and society: Considering the interconnections In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P.J. Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century* (pp. 298-322). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education, 294 F.2d 150, (Fifth Circuit, 1961).

DuBose, F. (1967, May 5). Student freedom. *Daily Texan,* p. 2.

Gerlach, A. (1997, January). Economic decline and the crisis of American liberalism. *Contemporary Review, 270* (1572), 1-8.

Gordon, W. A. (1990). *The fourth of May.* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.

Greeblatt, A. (1995, May 13). Crossing the line in the dust. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 53* (19), 1295-1298.

Gregory, D. E. (1987). *The role of college and university legal counsel as defined by operational and policy making responsibilities.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia.

Hayman, E. (2000, May 3). *History channel revisits Kent State tragedy.* Retrieved February 21, 2003, from www.apbnes.com/media/reviews/television/.

Healy v. James, 408 U.S. 169 (1972).

Howe, N., & Strauss W. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation.* New York: Vintage Books.

Hunt, A. (1999). When did the 60s happen? Searching for new directions. *Journal of Social History, 33* (1), 147-159.

Isserman, M., & Kazin, M. (2000). *America divided: The civil war of the 1960s.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Judis, J. B. (1998, August 31). The spirit of '68: What really caused the 60s. *The New Republic, 219* (9), 20-27.

Kaplan, M. A. (1998, May). The misbegotten 60s. *World and I, 13* (5), 309-317.

Levine, A. (1981). *When dreams and heroes died.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Levine, A., & Cureton J. S. (1998). *When hope and fear collide a portrait of today's college students.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewis, J.M. & Hensley, T.R. (1998). *The May 4 shooting at Kent State University: The search for historical accuracy.* Retrieved February 12, 2003 from http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/leis/LEWIHEN.htm

Lipset, S. M. & Wolin, S. S. (Eds.). (1965). *The Berkeley student revolt: Facts and interpretations.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor.

Lipset, S. M. & Altbach, P. G. (1967). Student politics and higher education in the United States. In S.M. Lipset (Ed.), *Student politics* (pp. 199-252). New York: Basic Books.

Lucas, C. J. (1994). *American higher education. A history.* New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Mangan, K.S. (2003, March 28). Reacting to war. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, XLIX* (29), A6-A9.

Marklein, M. B. (2003, March 25). College students unite in protest. *USA Today,* D1-D2.

Miller, M. (2000, Winter). Organizing for social change: What we did right, what went wrong, how we can overcome. *Social Policy, 31* (2), 4-13.

Oppenheimer, M. (1984). The movement—a 25-year retrospective. *Monthly Review, 36* (9), 49-56.

Phillips, D. E. (1985). *Student protest, 1960-1970: An analysis of the issues and speeches.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rhatigan, J. J. (2000). The history and philosophy of student affairs. In M. J. Barr & M. K. Desler (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (pp. 3-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Roberts, S. V. (1993, October 25). 1963: A new civil war raging. *U.S. News & Report, 115* (16), 36-41.

Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American college and university: A history.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Santayana, G. (1905). *The life of reason or the phases of human progress: Reason in common sense.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Scalmer, S. (2000). Translating contention: Culture, history, and the circulation of collective action. *Alternatives: Social Transformation and Humane Governance, 25* (4), 491-514.

Schamel, W. (1996). The 26th amendment and youth voting rights. *Social Education, 60* (6), 374-376.

Semas, P. W. (1970, May 11). A week of tragedy: Disorders flare, 4 students die as U.S. action in Cambodia inflames many campuses. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 4* (31), A31.

Skolnick, J. H. (1969). *The politics of protest.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

The President's Commission on Campus Unrest (1970). *The report of the President's commission on campus unrest.* New York: Arno Press.

Thomas, E., & Kunen, J.S. (1986, May 19). Growing pains at 40: As they approach mid-life, baby boomers struggle to have it all. *Time,* 127, 22-31.