

Peaceful Yet Divided: Western Illinois University's Student Protest Movement during the Vietnam War

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Western Illinois University's student anti-war protest movement remained nonviolent throughout the Vietnam War mostly due to the leadership of President John Bernhard. Bernhard's administrative and political beliefs allowed him to develop a good rapport with the student body. He supported the students' demands for better representation on campus and openly opposed the Vietnam War. Under his direction, students gained control of the student government and the student publication *Western Courier* in spring 1969. As the war dragged on, Bernhard sympathized with the Vietnam War protestors. Student activists escaped confrontations with authorities in May 1970 because Bernhard understood the source of their anger. Thus, Bernhard curbed student anger from growing and turning violent against his administration by acknowledging their grievances. However, the absence of violence should not just be attributed to the president's leadership. Student protestors displayed remarkable calm and poise during the Vietnam War, even in May 1970. Approximately 1,000 students took over Simpkins Hall on May 4, 1970 in response to the Kent State shootings. Yet, very little destruction occurred during the five-day occupation. Nonetheless, Bernhard peacefully subdued student anger by allowing them to vent their rage and accepting some of their demands in the final day of the occupation.

There is little literature that covers Western Illinois' Vietnam War experience. *First Century: A Pictorial History of Western Illinois University* and *The Management of Dissent: Responses to the Post Kent State Protests at Seven Public Universities in Illinois* are the two most notable books that offer insight into the anti-war movement at Western; however, even their commentary is very limited on the subject. *First Century*, written by local historian John Hallwas, provides only snippets of information

regarding the movement, as it explores the entire history of Western Illinois, established in 1899 as a teaching school. Author Brian K. Clardy of *The Management of Dissent*, meanwhile, only offers brief coverage of President Bernhard and his response to Western's anti-war movement, as he mostly focuses on Illinois institutions that experienced the greatest violence.

However, numerous historians have stressed the need for more in-depth analysis into smaller campus movements. Historian Kenneth J. Heineman stated that smaller state institutions, such as Western, have received little to no attention from scholars because they struggled to start an anti-war movement during the early stages of the war, unlike larger elite universities that captured national attention in 1965 and 1966. He contended this kind of focus ignores "the differing cultural and historical context of each campus community and the ways in which those differences affected antiwar protest."¹ He also argued the media at the time falsely portrayed the "the erroneous image that there was a generation gap in which youths overwhelmingly opposed the war while their parents embraced it."² In fact, most students supported the war effort in Vietnam like most Americans during the initial stages of the conflict. Further still, the majority of students throughout the U.S. never agreed with activist demands for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. And, this proved to be the case at Western Illinois.

Most Western students frowned upon the anti-war movement in 1966 and 1967. The *Western Courier*, a student-run newspaper under strict administrative control, reported in September 1966 that students identified the demonstrations on the Vietnam War as the most bothersome from a list of thirteen national issues.³ Furthermore, some students actively harassed demonstrators in spring 1967. They jeered, threw eggs, and tore signs against anti-war protestors. Heineman said this conservative climate existed at most college campuses across the United States, stating they were more representative of the nation than California-Berkeley, Columbia, and Wisconsin.⁴

¹ Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ "Gut Issues That Shake Up College Campuses Cause Quiver Here," *Western Courier*, September 1966.

⁴ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 5.

Most of the early demonstrators at Western consisted of faculty members. The *Courier* reported in April 1967 that out of just over twelve demonstrators, nine were faculty members, who had also been accompanied by their spouses.⁵ Former student activist Rich Hoppe said most of these faculty members came from liberal arts backgrounds and organized the early marches in downtown Macomb. This was not a unique development. Historian Kenneth Heineman noted that a small contingent of faculty members at Kent State had been the first to identify themselves as opponents of the Vietnam War as well, adding that they bore significant responsibility for fomenting campus dissent at that university.⁶ According to Hoppe, most students at Western did not participate because they did not understand the war. “I hadn’t figured out the war in 1966 I was just out of high school. I was a freshman in college. The peer group that I grew up with hadn’t been in Vietnam and come back and told me what was going on yet.”⁷ Renowned scholar Melvin Small said most students in the United States had not concluded that the Vietnam intervention had been mistake in 1967, too, noting that only 32 percent of Americans that year had reached that conclusion.⁸ Even after 1967, only a minority of students demanded immediate withdrawal from Vietnam.

The *Courier* first reported on a peace march on April 19, 1967 with the headline, “Peace Walks Hit Macomb.” The small demonstration in downtown Macomb saw little over ten demonstrators. These protestors endured much harassment from both students and Macomb residents. “Reaction finally came from WIU students as they jeered the marchers and tore the signs. Interference from a group of older Macomb citizens came in the form of a comment: ‘If you want peace boys—fight for it—that’s what we did.’”⁹ The overwhelming response against the demonstrators reflected the attitudes of Americans across the nation. However, English professor Stephen Fawley did not seem fazed by the opposition, according to the report. Fawley told the student reporter he wasn’t “concerned if there were 10 or 100 there.”¹⁰

⁵ Linda Haka, “Peace Walks Hit Macomb,” *Western Courier*, April 19, 1967.

⁶ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 180.

⁷ Rich Hoppe (Seattle, Wash.), Telephone Interview with Author, April 8, 2012.

⁸ Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America’s Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002), 55.

⁹ Haka, “Peace Walks.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The protestors came back in larger force with 43 participants the following month on May 22, 1967 in Chandler Park in downtown Macomb. However, they continued to suffer harassment from students and town residents who numbered around 250. Peoria's *Journal Star* reported, "For a number of the hecklers—suntanned boys and a few girls of college age—it was a chance to let off steam and get some laughs at the expense of a primarily faculty group after final exams." One heckler held the sign, "Fight for the Boys who Fight for Us!" Once the walk ended after just thirty minutes, the hecklers followed the demonstrators as they dispersed. Although only one person was physically assaulted, this event illustrates the hostility most students and Macomb residents had towards the anti-war protestors.¹¹

President Arthur Knoblauch (1958-1967) believed the demonstrators had the right to protest. He told the *Journal Star*, "This is the faculty members' private affair. It's their business and none of mine what they do as private citizens. The university is not involved at all," he said.¹² However, Knoblauch is remembered, as one student recalled, for being "extremely conservative" for his control over the student body.¹³ The student government body at the time, the All University Student Government (AUSG), essentially had no say in administrative matters. AUSG was only allowed to plan and manage student activities such as Homecoming.¹⁴ In a 1969 news feature, Hoppe claimed that Knoblauch also censored the school's newspaper, the *Western Courier*, by having journalism professor Reef Waldrep serve as its adviser. Hoppe said Waldrep did not allow the *Courier* to publish opinion pieces that did not go along with the opinions of Waldrep. "Waldrep isn't a popular man here," he said to the reporter. His friend and roommate, instructor Fawley, added, "He isn't as unpopular as he should be, because not many people know what he does to the paper."¹⁵

Thus, students sought better representation from AUSG when President John Bernhard arrived in September 1968, and they found a more receptive ear. Bernhard called for shared governance and shared

¹¹ "Freedom of Expression Among Issues," *Journal Star*, May 28, 1967.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ John Boland, "Rocking The Boat At Western Is Moliner's 'Thing,'" *The Daily Dispatch*, Feb. 24, 1969.

¹⁴ John Hallwas, *First Century: A Pictorial History of Western Illinois University* (Macomb: Western Illinois University, 1999), 145.

¹⁵ Boland, "Rocking The Boat."

responsibility in his inauguration speech. Local historian John Hallwas claimed President Bernhard's inauguration speech "was a profound critique of the rigid conservatism and authoritarian leadership that had characterized his (Knoblauch's) administration."¹⁶ Bernhard, a Mormon, began his career at Brigham Young University in 1950 as a professor of history and political science. He later became state senator in Utah from 1961 to 1966 after becoming an administrative assistant to the president at BYU.¹⁷ Former student activist Bill Knight recalled, "He was a likeable guy. He was sort of our George Romney in that he was Mormon, he was kind of moderate to liberal, and he was open-minded."¹⁸ His policies not only gained favor with students, but also professors on campus. In fact, former university ombudsman Don Daudelin claimed he was one of the best presidents Western has ever had. "There would be no Faculty Senate or Student Government Association if he hadn't been the president at that time," he said.¹⁹

Student rights became the dominant issue on college campuses throughout the United States before the Vietnam War took center stage. According to Small, college students had become agitated with paternalistic administrations and rigid curriculums. "In the early sixties, many college administrations enforced dress codes and curfews for coeds, and some even sent students' grades to their parents."²⁰ Other issues gained attention from students as well. The most significant case comes from Columbia University in spring 1968. Columbia students occupied five buildings to protest military research on campus and the way the university interacted with the local African American community. The student protests there gained significant media attention and led to 700 arrests. However, the students' actions at Columbia influenced many student activists across the United States, including at Western Illinois University.²¹

Western students mimicked the events at Columbia by taking over the University Union on February 6, 1969. The student sit-in developed due to a controversy in the AUSG presidential election, which had three candidates vying for the top seat: John Gelling, Rich Hoppe, and John King. Hoppe,

¹⁶ Hallwas, *First Century*, 167.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 167.

¹⁸ Bill Knight, Personal Interview with Author, Macomb, Ill., April 2, 2012.

¹⁹ Don Daudelin (Bloomington, Ill.), Phone Interview with Author, April 3, 2012.

²⁰ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 85.

²¹ *Ibid*, 87-88.

though, entered the race late and ran as a write-in candidate. Nonetheless, he formed the Merry Pranksters Party with the help of Fawley and successfully tapped into student concerns by calling for a more effective student government. Hoppe recalled, “Fawley and I got this idea that we would run a campaign for student government and we called ourselves the Merry Prankster Party based on ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’ and ‘The Electric Acid Kool-Aid Acid Test,’ stuff that was already pervasive in the culture. And everybody that was anybody knew what that stuff was about.”²² Hoppe claimed that the AUSG had done nothing and that it had not “even set up machinery through which the students can make their wishes known to the administration—let alone something that would make the wishes carry some weight.”²³ Other students agreed. Michael McGuire argued in the *Courier*, “One can’t help but get the impression that AUSG is little more than a debating club or an organization some seek to join because ‘it looks good on the record.’”²⁴ Daudelin said students became heavily involved in the student government debate because they wanted a representative government that was not under control of the vice president for student affairs. “It was controlled by the vice president for student affairs and his underlings and they wanted to be free of that kind of control,” he said.²⁵

Other agendas Hoppe supported included ending dorm hours for freshman girls and placing student representatives on the college curriculum committee to give students more say on graduation requirements and textbooks.²⁶ Under this platform, Hoppe won the majority vote: Hoppe-1463, Gelling-1305, and King-1133.²⁷ However, AUSG refused to hand over the position to Hoppe, claiming he was not qualified due to several technicalities, which caused over 2,000 students to occupy the Union. AUSG president Larry Lepper refused Hoppe the seat because “he did not meet the eight month associate membership or four month AUSG membership qualification clearly stated in the present constitution.”²⁸

²² Hoppe, Phone Interview.

²³ Boland, “Rocking The Boat.”

²⁴ Michael McGuire, “McGuire Disputes Editorial, Says AUSG Is ‘Ineffective,’” *Western Courier*, Jan. 29, 1969.

²⁵ Daudelin. Phone Interview.

²⁶ Boland, “Rocking The Boat.”

²⁷ Sharon Kucera, “Give Reasons Why AUSG Didn’t Seat Rich Hoppe,” *Western Courier*, Feb. 12, 1969.

²⁸ Kucera, “Give Reasons.”

Hoppe and his supporters responded by forming a government in exile called the United Student Government to stop the second place finisher, John Gelling, from being seated.²⁹ Hoppe stated, “They (AUSG) were just like all power centers. They had a vested interest in maintaining that power.”³⁰ The Pranksters’ actions led Gelling to call for a referendum, held February 25. This time, Gelling won the majority vote. However, the dramatic event led the student government to rewrite its constitution becoming the Student Government Association and freed the *Courier* from administrative control.³¹ With the consent of Bernhard, the student body gained significant control over the student government and the *Courier*. Daudelin remarked, “The SGA decided to rewrite the rules they were governed under, and that was another all-nighter where a bunch of us sat in the Union and rewrote the SGA constitution. It provided for a judicial system and provided for all kinds of fair things.”³²

During the whole ordeal, Bernhard’s administration kept a “hands-off” approach. In an open letter to students, he expressed an appreciation for all of the students’ efforts. He wrote, “Frankly, I know that you would feel insulted were I to intervene in your present constitutional struggle. And you would be right! You *should* assume the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood, and lately you have been doing precisely that.”³³ Daudelin pointed out that the university had been pleased with the situation because there had been no property damage or violence. “The students were very serious about rewriting the constitution. A lot of us that helped were very proud of them,” he said.³⁴ Hoppe, meanwhile, remarked the university had been shrewd to disassociate itself from the student matter. “They didn’t do anything that anybody could say that they were bad guys,” Hoppe said.³⁵

The Union sit-in marked an important point in Western Illinois history. Firstly, Bernhard established a good relationship with the student body by taking a “hands-off” approach. Although this relationship became strained the following year, good relations and order persevered partly because the

²⁹ “AUSG Refuses Hoppe Seat; Pranksters Set Up Government In Exile,” *Western Courier*, Feb. 12, 1969.

³⁰ Hoppe, Phone Interview.

³¹ “Governments Get Their Message To Students,” *Western Courier*, Feb. 26, 1969.

³² Daudelin, Phone Interview.

³³ John Bernard, “Dr. Bernhard Urges ‘Hands Off’ Policy,” *Western Courier*, Feb. 19, 1969.

³⁴ Daudelin, Phone Interview.

³⁵ Hoppe, Phone Interview.

student body was never severely agitated with Bernhard's administration, which granted unprecedented freedom to the student body. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Bernhard also approached the idea of creating the university ombudsman, a liaison between the student body and administrators, to provide students an outlet for their complaints and concerns regarding a number of issues ranging from the draft to housing. This position came into fruition in fall 1970 with Reverend Don Daudelin heading it, largely due to his role during the Simpkins Hall takeover that occurred immediately following the Kent State massacre on May 4, 1970. The ombudsman position further helped soothe student tension and anger during the latter stages of the Vietnam War.³⁶

The Union sit-in was also significant because it sparked students to become more focused on social issues and more involved in the campus community. For example, 100 students demonstrated and picketed in downtown Macomb in front of Spurgeon's Department Store on February 22 when one female black student was arrested for passing two checks she could not afford.³⁷ "There was a lot of stuff that took off from that runoff election that changed the campus a bunch over the next few years," Hoppe said.³⁸ Finally, the student control over student government and the *Courier* opened these mediums to more liberal elements on campus. Eventually, both SGA and the *Courier* became outlets for campus dissent during the latter stages of the Vietnam War.

The *Western Courier* changed dramatically after a joint student-faculty committee selected Paul Reynolds as editor in chief in 1969. From the onset, Reynolds sought to transform the *Courier* into an underground newspaper. Reynolds had served as editor for the underground newspaper *May West* prior to joining the *Courier*. Hoppe recalled, "He actually brought on board a lot of liberal people, me and bunches of other people. And it changed the flavor of the *Courier*. It changed because the whole country was changing."³⁹ Heineman observed that the failure of Eugene McCarthy to win the 1968 presidential election and the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy caused many students across the United States

³⁶ Daudelin, Phone Interview.

³⁷ Rick Alm, "Students Picket Spurgeon's Action," *Western Courier*, Feb. 26, 1969.

³⁸ Hoppe, Phone Interview.

³⁹ Ibid.

to flock to radicalism in 1969. He added more students became involved in confrontational politics, remarking, “Throughout 1969 students and police clashed across the nation, draft resistance mounted, and ROTC and campus military research projects became focal points of protest.”⁴⁰ So in one of the first issues of the fall 1969 semester, Reynolds announced his opposition to the war on the front page in bold letters. “Last year as editor of the *May West* I signed ‘We won’t go’ statement. I signed it again this summer as editor of the *COURIER*,” he proclaimed.⁴¹ This proclamation clearly shows Reynolds’s intentions immediately to convert the *Courier* into a larger *May West*.

Additionally, the paper actively promoted the October Moratorium, a national anti-war demonstration that extended across the United States. Along with his declaration, Reynolds published an article called, “Call for Vietnam War Moratorium—Oct.” The article declared, “We call upon our universities to support the moratorium and we commit ourselves to organize this effort on our campus and in our community. We ask others to join us.”⁴² Another article titled “Moratorium Strategy” emphasized the importance of recruiting new members, “It is important that the rhetoric employed emphasizes the work being done in the larger community and that the moratorium center around the notion of building this base so that others will join the action in ensuing months.”⁴³ These articles are important to note because they display Reynolds’s intentions to use the *Courier* to catapult the anti-war movement at Western. “The *Western Courier* at that time in the fall of ’69 had an editor (Reynolds) who was selected, who really took the *Courier* on a social editorial agenda,” said former student John Maguire, who eventually took over the alternative conservative student newspaper, the *Western Catalyst*, initially started by Rick Alm. “He desired to point out the fault of the war, the desire to talk about social issues. [Racial] discrimination became paramount and interest in reporting local campus activities and events was secondary,” Maguire added.⁴⁴ According to Bill Knight who contributed to the *Courier*, the student

⁴⁰ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 182.

⁴¹ Paul Reynolds, “Western Prepares For National Moratorium,” *Western Courier*, Sept. 10, 1969.

⁴² “Call For Vietnam War-Oct.,” *Western Courier*, Sept. 10, 1969.

⁴³ “Moratorium Strategy,” *Western Courier*, Sept. 10, 1969.

⁴⁴ John Maguire, Personal Interview with Author, Macomb, Ill., April 4, 2012.

newspaper really embraced its independence. “It was pretty slanted. There wasn’t any attempt for impartiality,” Knight said.⁴⁵

The *Courier* immediately received heavy criticism from some local residents, conservative students, and students’ parents. One father expressed disbelief that the *Courier* received university funds in a letter addressed to President Bernhard. “I got the impression that this was, perhaps, one of the so-called ‘underground’ publications with which our society is becoming increasingly favored these days. However, my daughter assures me that the *Courier* is the official student newspaper_of the institution!”⁴⁶ According to another letter written to Bernhard, a group of parents emphasized their revulsion to the student newspaper, stating, “We have read with extreme shock and disgust the issue of *Western Courier*,” continuing, “We believe that any newspaper, campus or otherwise, must be objective in its presentation and give both sides to any issue. We therefore resent the one-sided, left-wing, reactionary and revolutionary polices of Paul Reynolds and his staff as they are expressed in the *Western Courier*.”⁴⁷

The *Courier*’s liberal agenda built such resentment that another student newspaper, the *Western Catalyst*, launched on October 7, 1969 with the support from local community members. Founder Rick Alm, who also acted as Senator at-Large on SGA, created the alternative paper to mimic traditional newspapers and cover campus events, which the *Courier* ceased doing after Reynolds assumed editorship of his newspaper. Maguire said, “There was a group of individuals who were more traditional journalists led by a gentleman (Alm) who was frankly looked over to be editor of the paper (*Courier*). Others in the college and community wanted to see that traditional journalistic approach.” Maguire explained the *Courier* was not a “traditional” newspaper because it ignored local events on campus that did not involve social issues. Maguire said finding advertising support from local businesses was no problem, either. He recalled, “It ran based on local advertising because Macomb at that point in time and to a lesser extent today is still a conservative, moderate town in terms of its concepts about supporting veterans and

⁴⁵ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁴⁶ Letter to President Bernhard, August 29, 1969, The Papers of President John Bernhard, Western Illinois University Archives, Macomb, Ill.

⁴⁷ Letter to President Bernhard, Sept. 19, 1969, The Papers of President John Bernhard, Western Illinois University Archives, Macomb, Ill.

supporting military-industrial complex. So, when the *Courier* was basically saying, ‘Fuck the war,’ – that’s exactly what they were saying in print—people in the traditional community were offended and didn’t want any part of it.” Maguire explained the *Catalyst* operated out of a basement in the shop that produced the weekly *Business News* in the downtown square. “We were low budget. It didn’t cost us much to do it. He (the shop owner) let us use his equipment for a nominal fee, next to nothing,” Maguire said.⁴⁸

The *Courier* found immediate support from the Student Government Association majority, though. *Courier* correspondent Steve Morse reported on October 1, 1969 that the SGA passed a bill to support the October Moratorium with a 22-8 vote. Morse stated, “This bill was largely the result of a plea made by Paul Reynolds for S.G.A. support of the Moratorium at the Senate’s Sept. 9th meeting.” One of the bill’s amendments gave students the option of boycotting classes, while another SGA amendment added that “repercussions will not be taken by individual instructors upon students who boycott.” Morse further reported in his article that the “Moratorium bill is an indication the senate is willing to insure students that they may take responsible stands on controversial subjects.”⁴⁹ Although the SGA bill marked a significant alliance with the *Courier*, SGA had no way to enforce the bill on the university and its faculty. When a student asked President Bernhard if he did not attend class on October 15 due to the moratorium, Bernhard responded by saying that the student must be prepared to suffer the consequences.⁵⁰ And in an open letter to students, Bernhard told students the university would hold classes as usual because it “cannot take any position whatsoever on an issue such as the Vietnam War.”⁵¹

Up to this time, the October Moratorium marked the largest anti-war protest movement in Western Illinois history. It occurred as part of a national anti-war demonstration against President Richard Nixon’s “Vietnamization” policy that only promised to pull out troops in small increments. Small speculated that approximately two million people in over two hundred cities and towns participated in the

⁴⁸ Maguire, Personal Interview.

⁴⁹ Steve Morse, “SGA Supports Moratorium,” Oct. 1, 1969.

⁵⁰ Bud Krcilik, “Campus Leaders Speak At Higgins Hall,” *Western Courier*, Oct. 15, 1969.

⁵¹ John Bernhard, “Open Letter To W.I.U. Students,” Oct. 6, 1969, The Papers of President John Bernhard, Western Illinois University Archives, Macomb, Ill.

national event.⁵² Approximately 600 students at Western marched from the Union to Chandler Park for the Moratorium, which was led by several students including Paul Reynolds. According to the *Courier*, Reynolds spoke briefly, proclaiming that the march was to be one of many more moratoriums. However, the highlight of the march came when students planted “A Tree of Peace” in Chandler Park, which was followed by a Vietnam veteran who read off the names of his friends who had been killed in Vietnam. Unknown persons cut down the peace tree later that night. The march, however, ended peacefully without any violence or property damage. Interestingly, the *Courier* observed that some Macomb residents hung American flags outside their homes in silent protest to their march.⁵³

President Bernhard expressed delight with how students behaved in the march. He even exclaimed in a written letter, “Personally, I felt very proud of the students and their behavior. Should make others THINK!”⁵⁴ As his final remark indicates, Bernhard staunchly opposed the war. Bernhard openly displayed his opposition to the war in the following November Moratorium. He remarked, “War is the greatest failure of mankind. It is our cancer. It is our greatest cancer.” Bernhard continued, “Withdraw we must. The only question is one of implementation.”⁵⁵ Bernhard’s support for the movement is not necessarily unique among university presidents, though. Heineman noted that State University of New York at Buffalo President Martin Meyerson had supported student dissension over the Vietnam War as well.⁵⁶ However, many university presidents disliked student dissension on campus, including Southern Illinois University at Carbondale President Delyte Morris who used force to subdue student protests.⁵⁷

The October Moratorium also provoked an open conservative reaction. A group of Macomb citizens put together funds to place a full page ad in the *Courier* stating, “To the majority of students at Western Illinois University that demonstrated their beliefs and confidence in the United States

⁵² Small, *Antiwarriors*, 108-110.

⁵³ Paul Reynolds, “October—15—“By The Dawn’s Early Light,” *Western Courier*, Oct. 22, 1969.

⁵⁴ Letter from President Bernhard, Oct. 17, 1969, The Papers of President John Bernhard, Western Illinois University Archives, Macomb, Ill.

⁵⁵ “Vietnam War...A Tragedy: Bernhard,” *Western Courier*, Dec. 10, 1969.

⁵⁶ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 113.

⁵⁷ Robbie Lieberman and David Cochran, “‘It Seemed a Very Local Affair’: The Student Movement at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale,” *The New Left Revisited*, ed. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 13.

Government, by continuing their education in the classrooms and not in the streets – we salute you! This will make for a better America,” and signing the message, “Appreciative Citizens of Macomb.”⁵⁸ One conservative faculty member from the Economics Department wrote a lengthy letter condemning the march, believing the demonstration demoralized American troops and reinvigorated North Vietnamese combatants. “It greatly saddens me to witness such a waste in mis-directed, ill-advised activity...I have a strong suspicion that all these marches, rallies, sit-ins, demonstrations and other manifestations of similar ilk have done more than anything else to prolong the war,” the instructor said.⁵⁹

Despite the opposition, the *Courier* published updates for the November Moratorium; an event planned by the student-controlled Moratorium Committee. The Moratorium Committee proclaimed in one published report, “The October Moratorium was a mere beginning; the Moratorium will not end until war does.”⁶⁰ However, the Moratorium Committee stressed the need for more faculty participation and better leadership in another article.⁶¹ Those weaknesses became prevalent the day of the November Moratorium. The November Moratorium only gained half the number of participants from the previous month, as leadership seemed to have disappeared the day of the event. The *Courier* reported on its front page that the primary movers went to Washington D.C., leaving the “home front a little lacking in leadership.” Nonetheless, about 300 students attended a speech from Bernhard denouncing the war, which was followed by a brief candlelight march on campus. Additionally, crosses were planted near the Union to represent “man’s sins” for waging war on one another.⁶²

The November Moratorium revealed that Western’s movement lacked strong leadership and efficient organization, which prevented it from sustaining success after the October Moratorium. This also plagued the national anti-war movement as well. Small argued the movement peaked in 1969 because “it became less cohesive and more fragmented than it had ever been before.”⁶³ Small explained that many

⁵⁸ “Appreciate Citizens of Macomb,” *Western Courier*, Oct. 22, 1969.

⁵⁹ Prof. James A. Yunker, “A Voice In Constructive Criticism,” *Western Courier*, Oct. 29, 1969.

⁶⁰ Moratorium Committee, “Wear Your Armbands, Fly Your Flags,” *Western Courier*, Nov. 5, 1969.

⁶¹ Dave Huey, “M-Day Group Plans Nov. Action,” *Western Courier*, Oct. 22, 1969.

⁶² “October Crosses,” *Western Courier*, Dec. 10, 1969.

⁶³ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 119.

anti-war activists had exhausted their efforts by the end of 1969. Additionally, Small pointed out that Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech had severely crippled the movement by reassuring Americans that more soldiers would return home in the near future.⁶⁴ Like most Americans, the student majority supported Nixon's speech and continued to oppose protestors' demands for immediate withdrawal. Generally, this proved to be the case throughout the war. According to Small, "At no time from 1965 through 1972 did a majority of Americans call for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam."⁶⁵

The movement's decline led President Nixon to send American and South Vietnamese troops to Cambodia in April 1970.⁶⁶ Despite Nixon's shocking announcement, many universities still maintained peace and order. Unfortunately, tragedy struck Kent State on May 4, 1970. At approximately 12:30 p.m., Ohio National Guardsmen fired volleys into a crowd of peaceful students at Kent State, killing four. The incident ignited fury all over the United States. According to scholars Clyde Brown and Gayle K. Pluta Brown, over 1,300 college campuses responded immediately in protest to the Kent State massacre, including Western Illinois.⁶⁷ "It wasn't like we waited two days," Knight said. "I remember people coming by our house saying, 'They're killing us.' And people that night were raising hell. So, it was almost a spontaneous reaction nationally. We were just the local version of that."⁶⁸

Eventually, a group of students started going dorm to dorm to tell other students what had happened at Kent State. Dave Huey, who contributed to the *Courier*, recalled being part of that group, which consisted of other *Courier* members including Reynolds. Huey recalled, "So, we were going around telling people what we knew about it and eventually, we wound up making the rounds of the high rise dorms."⁶⁹ The *Catalyst* estimated that after all the residence halls had been reached, 1,000 people had congregated outside. These students then went to President Bernhard's home to demand he shut down the

⁶⁴ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 119.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 122. This was not the only reason Nixon sent troops into Cambodia, of course.

⁶⁷ Clyde Brown and Gayle K. Pluta Brown, "Moo U and the Cambodian Invasion: Nonviolent Anti-Vietnam War Protest at Iowa State University," *The Vietnam War on Campus: Other Voices, More Distant Drums* (London: Praeger, 2001), 119.

⁶⁸ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁶⁹ Dave Huey (Seattle, Wash.), Phone Interview with Author, April 6, 2012.

university. However, the police informed the students he was out of town.⁷⁰ Thus, students decided to reemploy the same tactic that had been used earlier in 1969. “So, somebody came up with the idea of occupying the ROTC that was housed at Simpkins Hall,” Huey said. “So, that’s what we did. We just walked over to Simpkins Hall, all thousand of us, and they had a gymnasium in there and we sat down.”⁷¹

The ROTC, as well as other military programs, became common targets on campuses throughout the United States. At Southern Illinois University, 1,500 students occupied Wheeler Hall, where the air force ROTC offices were located.⁷² At Iowa State University, students staged a sit-in at an armory where ROTC cadets drilled.⁷³ Students across the United States vented their anger against military programs on campus because they represented U.S. aggression in Vietnam, and they hoped to remove the programs from campus. *Courier* columnist Greg Norton expressed this sentiment in his column, “The idea was to off ROTC, ROTC that teaches murder (as an extracurricular activity), ROTC that fuels the most vicious war machine since Hitler, ROTC that corrupts already well conditioned minds.”⁷⁴

In response, SGA President Harold Lotz called for a student referendum to decide if ROTC should remain on campus. However, the referendum did not take place until the fourth day of the occupation. Thus, many students walked in and out of the building during the five-day occupation. During certain periods, fewer than fifty students occupied the building, but during others, more than 2,000 rallied around the structure.⁷⁵ Strangely enough, some of the students who walked in and out of the building were attending classes as usual as protestors occupied the Simpkins gym.⁷⁶ “It was a good target logistically because it had a physical presence in that building, but it was also an English building. So, it was always an odd thing,” Knight recalled.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ “The March...The Countermarch,” *Western Catalyst*, May 12, 1970.

⁷¹ Huey, Phone Interview.

⁷² Lieberman and Cochran, “Local Affair,” 19.

⁷³ Brown and Pluta Brown, “Moo U,” 126.

⁷⁴ Greg Norton, “Don’t Bank on Amerika: Radical Notes On The Occupation Of Simpkins,” *Western Courier*, May 20, 1970.

⁷⁵ “The March...The Countermarch.”

⁷⁶ “Administration Rejects Major Proposals Of Protesters,” *Western Courier*, May 13, 1970.

⁷⁷ Knight, Personal Interview.

Concurrently, students marched from the campus area to downtown Macomb during the second day of the occupation. Approximately 2,000 students participated in the peace march. “The anti-war people did a march to support that cause. ‘1,2,3,4 we don’t want the fucking war,’ I think that’s how it went, chanting all the way through Macomb,” Maguire said.⁷⁸

The march sparked a major reaction from conservative students and Macomb residents, as thousands marched two days after the anti-war march in a countermarch. The countermarch displayed a huge rift not just between the student body and the Macomb community, but also the students themselves. “There were a lot of veterans who went to school at Western on the GI bill,” Maguire said. “One of my good friends who worked on the *Catalyst* was a columnist named John Stiles, he served in the war. He didn’t care much about the anti-war people.” He continued, “There were a lot of veterans and they decided enough of these long-hair, foul-mouthed (people). We’re going to have just as many people march, carry the flag, and they did.”⁷⁹ Stiles’ perception of the movement may be explained by the media’s portrayal of it. According to Small, many Americans despised anti-war protestors because they only saw disorderly dissenters. “According to one journalist, the typical activist seen in the media was ‘a hairy, filthy ragged youth with his arm and hand raised in an angry gesture [usually] with a single raised finger.’”⁸⁰

The student body overwhelmingly chose to keep the ROTC program on campus in a resounding 2 to 1 vote. The *Courier* reported a record voter turnout with 6,653 participants out of 10,162 students. 4,349 of the voters favored the ROTC program, while 2,295 voted to boot it off campus.⁸¹ Curiously, Maguire explained the referendum vote did not mean the student majority supported the Vietnam War. “Why shouldn’t it be there? If you have the right to freedom of speech and freedom of expression against the war, why shouldn’t people who want to be in the ROTC have the right to be in ROTC? I think the majority of students who got involved in the referendum saw that you could really kind of support both. If

⁷⁸ Maguire, Personal Interview.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 27.

⁸¹ “Administration Rejects Major Proposals.”

you felt really strongly against the war, you can do that. That doesn't mean throw out everybody who is in the ROTC program," Maguire said.⁸² In fact, Huey believed the student majority was far from supporting the Vietnam policies and the draft. "I think the majority were clearly against them being drafted to participate in the war. But how strongly they felt? That's open to question."⁸³ However, most students still did not agree with the protestors' demands. Although the majority opposed military escalation in Vietnam and the draft, it did not support radical demands for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam—and in this case, the removal of the ROTC as well. Therefore, the referendum showed that radical students at Western who were committed to the anti-war cause fell in the minority, even at the movement's highest peak.

Following the referendum, most of the students in Simpkins Hall left, but about 200 remained, agreeing they would practice passive resistance and awaited removal from the police. However, future university ombudsman Don Daudelin, who acted as liaison between the students and the administration throughout the ordeal, had these students draft ten demands and concede they would leave the building if the university agreed to at least three of them.⁸⁴ Bernhard and Vice President for Student Affairs Richard Poll agreed to three of the demands: the formation of a peace committee, creation of a peace center, and change in university policy to inform the national draft board the academic statuses of students on a yearly basis instead of quarterly.⁸⁵

The peace center became the most lasting result from the Simpkins Hall takeover, which the university created just off campus the following academic year. The peace center lasted for about three years on Pierce Street next to East Village, keeping its doors open 24 hours a day. The center provided volumes of educational material and hosted seminars, rap sessions, and other events for students regarding social issues from the Vietnam War to the civil rights movement.⁸⁶ "That was somewhat

⁸² Maguire, Personal Interview.

⁸³ Huey, Phone Interview.

⁸⁴ Daudelin, Phone Interview.

⁸⁵ Harold Lotz, "Lotz Thanks Students," *Western Catalyst*, May 12, 1970.

⁸⁶ Gary Davis, "WIU Peace Studies Center," *Western Courier*, Oct. 22, 1971.

meaningful way out of it, a way for students to gain something, to save face and the university do something that didn't cost them anything and it really spoke to higher education," Knight said.⁸⁷

President Bernhard had been unprepared to deal with the precarious situation, as revealed in an office memo from Vice President Richard Poll, who stated it was "an exercise in improvisation."⁸⁸ No matter, Bernhard successfully managed a potentially explosive matter. Firstly, he maintained remarkable patience during the occupation, which lasted five days. Although the president unsuccessfully spoke to students during the third day of the occupation after getting shouted down by students in Simpkins Hall, he kept his calm and refused to allow law enforcement to disrupt the hectic affair. "He didn't send in the National Guard. He could have overreacted, but he took a much more compromising point of view," Knight said.⁸⁹ Secondly, he remained open to a compromise and accepted to allocate university funds and resources to establish a peace center so that the remaining 200 students left the building peacefully. Furthermore, it is worth noting he did not condemn the students' actions following the events of May. Instead, he expressed understanding for the students' anger and demonstrated gratitude for not resorting to violence and destruction, stating in an open letter published by both the *Courier* and *Catalyst*, "I sincerely hope that all of us may gain greater understanding and wisdom from this recent experience. An open University must always foster free dialogue and debate about the troublesome issues of our time."⁹⁰

Nonetheless, mixed reactions followed the turbulent events of May. Some protestors felt disappointed. *Courier* columnist Neil Stegall, who became SGA president the following academic year, claimed the protestors choked away a perfect opportunity. "I believe that most of these people were more prone to think of personal consequences, i.e. arrests, reprisals, etc., rather than of the more important consequences of their mass political behavior...Their nonviolence seemed to be couched in terms of fear

⁸⁷ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁸⁸ Office Memo from Vice President Richard D. Poll to President Bernhard, Aug. 17, 1970, The Papers of President John Bernhard, Western Illinois University Archives, Macomb. Ill.

⁸⁹ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁹⁰ John Bernhard, "Bernhard's Statement," *Western Catalyst*, May 12, 1970.

for personal safety,” he exclaimed.⁹¹ However in another *Courier* column signed by “Bugs Bunny,” success had been achieved because “more people on this campus had become more aware of a war which kills not only soldiers but children in Asia and students in America.”⁹² Knight believed the takeover was successful because it provided students an outlet for their anger. “Mostly, it was an expression of anger,” he said. “People weren’t angry with Macomb or Western, but they were killing students who were protesting, and similar takeovers happened nationwide. So, we felt we were part of this huge outcry of anger about the student protestors being killed.”⁹³ However, one *Catalyst* columnist proclaimed that the referendum marked a complete defeat for the anti-war movement. The columnist rejoiced, “To sum up the feeling of a majority of people, the individuals living in Simpkins last week were a minority of militant hippie freaks who proved nothing and who infringed on the rights of the majority of the students.”⁹⁴

To a limited extent, the Simpkins Hall takeover was successful. As noted by Knight, the takeover provided an outlet for students to peacefully discharge their anger, and students saved face with the peace center. However, Western’s student protest movement did not sustain success. It fell apart again much like it did in fall 1969. Its collapse largely occurred for two reasons: lack of leadership and the majority’s opposition to the movement’s demands. Again, most Americans including students supported Nixon’s gradual withdrawal policy, which had reduced troops from the 1969 high of 543,400 to 335,000 by the end of 1970. And, troop deaths declined significantly from 2,900 in early 1970 to 1,350 at the end of the year.⁹⁵ Western’s movement also struggled due to poor organization and leadership, a characteristic that plagued the entire national movement as well. “There was just that focal point of the occupation of Simpkins Hall and referendum and it kind of had its big spurt and went back down,” Maguire said. “Fortunately, there was no other tragedy like a Kent State or other things.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Neil Stegall, “The Radicals Choked: The Simpkins Hall Massacre In Perspective,” *Western Courier*, May 20, 1970.

⁹² Bugs Bunny, “A Night To Remember,” *Western Courier*, May 13, 1970.

⁹³ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁹⁴ Janet Stuart, “Some were proud of their apathy,” *Western Catalyst*, May 12, 1970.

⁹⁵ Small, *Antiwarriors*, 133.

⁹⁶ Maguire, Personal Interview.

For two years, Western's anti-war movement struggled to attain any success, as demonstrated by the White Panther Party led by Bill Knight in fall 1970. According to Knight, the White Panther Party combined anti-war militarism with the countercultural music scene of the time.⁹⁷ However, the "party" was very weak, as evidenced in a letter written to the *Courier* by a "Disillusioned White Panther," Douglas Eagon. Eagon slammed the party's failure to host an October 1970 rally that was called off by Knight. "Some people in the [*Courier*] office said that nobody had shown up and that Bill Knight had decided it was pretty cold for a rally. This attitude did not surprise me considering the political apathy of WIU," Eagon said. "How are the people going to get involved if the leaders don't even care enough to show up?"⁹⁸ Another anti-war group, FACE (Forum for Action, Communication, and Education on War and Peace), sought to educate students about nonviolent resistance and organize marches and rallies. The group planned and organized one protest in early March 1971. But according to the *Courier*, FACE "did not publicize the event sufficiently," and only 25 people participated in a march to downtown Macomb.⁹⁹ Not only do these events display the continued lack of leadership on campus, but also the reluctance among most students to join the anti-war cause because they preferred gradual withdrawal, or "peace with honor," over an immediate one.

However, Western's movement had one last spurt in spring 1972, highlighted by a candlelight march. The spurt started in April 1972 when several hundred students responded to the nationwide student strike that occurred due to President Nixon's escalation of bombing in the Vietnam War. The student strike saw students imitate the guerilla war in Vietnam by having several students lying on the ground covered in red paint, signifying blood.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, around 400 students attended a rally in the Union Grand Ballroom to support the nationwide strike. However, the student boycott was plagued by

⁹⁷ Knight, Personal Interview.

⁹⁸ Douglas Eagon, "Eagon Slams Rally Failure; Knight Replies," *Western Courier*, Nov. 11, 1970.

⁹⁹ Dave Nieland, "'About FACE,' he said arrestingly," *Western Courier*, March 9, 1971.

¹⁰⁰ "The Student strike; the war goes on," *Western Courier*, April 25, 1972.

rain and did not galvanize enough support to affect classes the day of the planned boycott. The *Courier* reported, “The strikes here and elsewhere were not totally successful for one simple reason; rain.”¹⁰¹

But the movement did not fade. In fact, the *Catalyst* reported that around 3,000 students participated in a second candlelight walk on May 11 to Macomb’s armory in response to America’s continued involvement in the Vietnam War. That same week, one student received a “thunderous standing ovation” from the Illinois Senate. Western student Richard Chaffee arrived in Springfield, Illinois to protest President Nixon’s bombing of Vietnam. Chaffee, described by the *Chicago Daily News* as a “peace freak” because of the “hair flowing over his shoulders” and “Da Vinci Head of Christ beard,” pleaded to the state senate that the Vietnam issue needed to be approached from a moral perspective. He received a standing ovation after he announced, “Let us deal with this problem as human beings, not politicians.”¹⁰² However, some of the students who participated in the second candlelight walk expressed frustration with the protests because they felt the rallies had not affected any change on Vietnam. One student asked, “How many felt they were stopping the war in the other rallies and marches? How many people do you know who are dedicated enough to get arrested for what you are committed to?”¹⁰³

Thus, Western’s anti-war movement only displayed brief moments of strength, and they occurred rather spontaneously in reaction to events happening in the United States and Vietnam. Its weakness may be attributed to the lack of leadership and the feeling among most students to support gradual withdrawal instead of an immediate one. Thus, Western’s Vietnam experience reflected the attitudes of most Americans throughout the country. The events that transpired at Western reminds scholars that anti-war student activists clearly fell into the minority throughout the war and that most college campuses remained calm for most of the war. Additionally, Western’s experience reveals the personal experiences of those involved, such as Paul Reynolds and John Bernhard. Perhaps from this perspective, Western’s could be said to be unique because it consisted of living historical actors who affected change on a local

¹⁰¹ “Showers put damper on WIU ant-war strike,” *Western Courier*, April 25, 1972.

¹⁰² Tony Fuller, “‘End Killing,’ student begs,” *Chicago Daily News*, May 13-14, 1972.

¹⁰³ Bill Neven, “Candle Light Walk Highlights Week of WIU Student Protest,” *Western Catalyst*, May 17, 1972.

level. For example, student activists pressured university administrators to create a new student government, a peace center, and an university ombudsman. Furthermore, this study should reveal to scholars that Western could have easily dipped into violence, as witnessed in Carbondale. Therefore, students from the era should be applauded for maintaining peace during its existence, most notably for the events of May 1970. “They didn’t do any kind of rioting. They marched around the campus and into Simpkins Hall. They stayed there five days and when the issue was resolved, they got out. So they weren’t destructive, and they weren’t ugly,” Daudelin recalled.¹⁰⁴ With this in mind, President Bernhard successfully quelled a potentially dangerous situation by remaining calm and not overreacting to student outrage in May 1970. Additionally, he skillfully gained student approval by allowing them to gain better representation on campus and permitting them to voice their opinions against the war. Thus, Bernhard’s essentially “hands off” approach generated respect among most students. When the anti-war movement hit its peak, the student protestors did not seek out violence or destruction because there was not any real hostility among the general student body against Bernhard’s administration and it never developed due to his successful management of campus dissent.

¹⁰⁴ Daudelin, Phone Interview.

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