



Silent Protests:  
Student Dissent at Jacksonville University during the late 1960s and early 1970s

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Over four decades have passed since the social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s impacted college and university campuses across the United States. Indeed, the civil rights and anti-war movements of the era radicalized a whole generation of students and teachers at prominent universities, such as Harvard, Cornell, University of California at Berkeley, and Kent State. Since then, scholars and the public at large have accepted the view that most students and campuses became radicalized in favor of these social movements. Prominent scholarly works by Melvin Small, Charles DeBenedetti, Nancy Zaroulis, Gerald Sullivan, and Seymour Martin Lipset ably retell the origins of the antiwar movement, the ways that student activists organized, and the struggles that women, African-Americans, and students faced on campuses as they participated in social movements. In *patvkewuct*, Nkrugvøu *Rebellion in the University* remains the classic work on student and faculty political activism during the 1960s and 1970s, and this work has profoundly impacted how we view students and student activism. Even today, most are familiar wivj vjg gtcøu keqpke k o cigu, uwej cu nctig uvwfgpv rtqgvuvu, ÷jkr rkguø ftguugf kp jgcfdcpfu cpf vkg-dye, and massive antiwar rallies.

At the same time, however, the images that are so readily associated with the late 1960s and early 1970s are disproportionate to how the majority of students actually behaved. Focusing on some of the more radical student activists tends to ignore the experiences of other groups of young people, such as those of right wing students, students apathetic to protests and demonstrations, and students that used bilateral communication with the administrators have not been emphasized enough. Indeed, recent research has shown that although college students were crucial as organizers within the social movements of the era,



day and wanted to promote changes on campus.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Campus “Family”**

Since its founding in 1934, JU has been a private school with a low number of enrolled students. Between 1966 and 1971, the highest total number of students during one semester was in 1970 with 3137 students enrolled. The average number of students attending JU during those years was 2660.<sup>4</sup> By comparison, in 1970, fifty colleges had at least fifteen thousand students, and eight universities had more than thirty thousand enrolled. It was not peculiar to have two thousand students taking an introductory psychology course at one of these larger public schools.<sup>5</sup>

The smaller class sizes and limited numbers at JU allowed students, faculty, and administrators to interact more on a daily basis. This attracted many students to JU. In one 1967 article, Merrill Haber, a student reporter extolled the virtues of a small campus and noted that the small size of the campus, the close relationship between students and faculty, and the opportunity for students to interact with faculty and administrators were the primary reasons for the success of the university. He noted that the small size of the campus allowed for a more intimate atmosphere, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success. He also noted that the small size of the campus allowed for a more diverse curriculum, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success. He concluded that the small size of the campus was a major factor in the university's success, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success. He noted that the small size of the campus allowed for a more intimate atmosphere, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success. He also noted that the small size of the campus allowed for a more diverse curriculum, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success. He concluded that the small size of the campus was a major factor in the university's success, and that the close relationship between students and faculty was a major factor in the university's success.

### **The administration and student body at Jacksonville University during the 1960s**

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, students, like Bob Comer, went as far as to give his understanding of transience of students and the campus in general to why apathy was a problem on campus. See Dqd Eq ogt, öC Dcuku hqt Crcvj {,ö *The Navigator*, 31 October 1969, 2.

<sup>4</sup> George Hallam, *Our Place in the Sun* (Nashville: Nicostone Book Bindery, 1988), 113; these numbers were meager in comparison to 27,000 students who attended UC-Berkeley in 1964. See Heineman, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Heineman, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ogttkm J cdgt, öPc ogu, Pqv Pw o dgtu,ö *The Navigator*, 16 Nov. 1967, 2.

tended to be socially and politically conservative, reflective of its neighborhood. The campus is located in Arlington, which was at the time predominantly white, southern Baptist, suburban area of metro Jacksonville.<sup>7</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, many students were active in fraternities, sororities, and student government. These campus organizations played an important role on campus, because there was little to do beyond Greek life.<sup>8</sup> They were the center of campus activities, sports, and social gatherings. The Student Government Association tried to enliven campus life by booking live entertainment for the school, such as Dionne Warwick, 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension, and Tommy James and the Shondells.

While many student protest organizations thrived on college campuses in the US formed politically charged student organizations, neither politically far left nor far right. Traditional political groups, such as the Young Democrats and the Young Republicans, had established clubs that had varied in strength year to year.<sup>9</sup> Some socially progressive groups formed, such as the Arab Student Organization (ASO) and the Student Peace Union (SPU). The ASO was established to further the understanding of Arabic culture and to have an open exchange of ideas on campus.<sup>10</sup> The SPU was mostly a moderate political group that JU hosted briefly in 1968.<sup>11</sup> The only student organization considered politically radical was the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC), which advocated the immediate and total withdrawal of all American troops from Southeast Asia. They sought to achieve this goal via legal, non-violent protests. Its founders of the SMC opened their doors to all students who

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<sup>7</sup> Walker Blanton, interviewed by Matthew Avery, written notes, Jacksonville, FL, 22 Feb 2009.

<sup>8</sup> *The Navigator*, 9 Feb. 1968, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Hallam, 73.

<sup>10</sup>

wanted to join; however, not many did, and it was defunct shortly after it was created.<sup>12</sup> The UOEØu ngc fgtujkr jcf dtqwi jv vjg Xkgy pco Oqtcevqtkw o vq ec o rwu kn 1969, but the SMC disbanded after the election of Richard Nixon in 1972.<sup>13</sup>

### **Civil Rights**

In the early 1960s, JU was forced to confront the issue of racial integration on its campus. Since 1934, the university had not had an African-American student, and cf o kpkuvtcvqtu tgukuvgf vjg kfgc d{ vjg 3;82u0 kp 3;7:, Htcpmn{p Lqjpuqp, LWØu Rtgukfgpv dgvy ggp 3;78 vq 3;85, jcf eqo o gpvgf vjcv, ðkV (LW) jcu pq kpvgpvkqp hqt vjg hqtguggcdng hwwwtg qh ceegrvkpi eqnqtgf uvwfgpvu0ö<sup>14</sup> By 1962, there were still no African-American students enrolled, and it was one of only two Florida universities that had not integrated, the

presidency vacant.<sup>18</sup>

The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. raised some awareness about issues affecting African-American students at JU. Sadness of the tragic event was reflected among the student body on campus. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968, the student editors of *The Navigator* published an issue for African-American students. This particular issue contained various articles and letters written and reprinted about African-American themes.<sup>19</sup> Still, perhaps because of the small number of African-American students, discussion of civil rights issues remained largely muted.

### **The Vietnam War**

One of the most controversial and divisive subjects during the 1960s and 1970s was the involvement of thousands of US soldiers in Vietnam. Protesters rallied in cities and towns across the country, and bombings. Still, many students expressed strong opinions about the war. As early as

faculty, and administrators an opportunity to read student opinions on different issues ranging from federal government policies and important campus issues.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1968 and 1969, *The Navigator* took opinion polls of the students to get a better understanding of where the JU campus stood on the Vietnam War. By early 1968, student opinion had clearly shifted in favor of a withdrawal from Vietnam. In one poll, fifty-two percent wanted a phased or immediate withdrawal of troops, fifteen percent wanted to maintain or slight increase, and thirty-three percent wanted an all out military effort in the war. With regard to continued US bombing campaigns, forty-seven percent wanted to slow or stop all bombing, thirty-three percent wanted an increase, and nine percent wanted to use nuclear weapons on the North Vietnamese.<sup>21</sup> When editors posed the question about US troop involvement in Vietnam in 1969, the figures had dramatically changed to seventy-nine percent of the students in favor of a phased or immediate withdrawal, and twelve percent wanted an escalation.<sup>22</sup>

During the latter part of the 1960s, many students at JU expressed stronger anti-war opinions. Between 1968 and 1969, Fred Davis had four letters published in the student forum, mostly criticizing the editorial staff at *The Navigator* for being too conservative. In one pointed letter, Davis complained that the paper was on a fraternal, pro-Vietnam piggyback of the dregs of the campus, and that it was a disgrace to the university. Davis continued to write future letters that discussed how he had hoped to see the paper become a more balanced and objective source of information. He also expressed his frustration with the paper's editorial board and its lack of independence.

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<sup>20</sup> Fred Davis, "The Navigator," 9 Sep. 1966, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Davis, "The Navigator," 17 May 1968, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Fred Davis, "The Navigator," 11 Nov. 1969, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Fred Davis, "The Navigator," 14 Oct. 1969, 2.



hggn nkmg jg ycu kp c ðhcuekuv qt icpk|cvkqp nkmg vjg ct o {0ö<sup>24</sup> In 1968, Merrill Haber, wrote a controversial artieng gpvkngf, ð I gpgtcnkuuk oq Jgtujg{,ö ytkvvgp kp tgurqpug vq jqy I gpgtcn Lewis Hershey, the director of Selective Services, had said in a speech that military service was an honor and a privilege. In the same speech, he argued that students who were not

candlelight vigil in Williams Circle.

library, and cafeterias, and they were required to be clean cut and shaven.<sup>34</sup> Over seven-hundred students participated in the vote, and ninety-two percent of those who voted wanted more freedom in the dress code or no dress code at all. The dress code was re-written with eqpeguukqpu vq o cvej uvwfgpvuø tgswguvu, cpf vjg cf o kpkuvtcvkqp k o rng o gpvgf vjg rqnke{ during the following semester.<sup>35</sup>

Satisfied with the dress code concessions, students then moved to change the quality qh hqqf ugtxkeg0 Uvwfgpvu eqpuvcpvn{ eq o rnckpgf cdqww vjg echgvgtkcøu jqwtu qh qrgtcvkqp cpf the quality of the food. In November 1967, the Dorm Council encouraged students to write Dean Corbin and issue their complaints. Over two-hundred students wrote letters and submitted them to the dean requesting that he contemplate their arguments.<sup>36</sup> President Robert Spiro and Dean Corbin considered issues brought to their attention, and by the end of December, all demands had been met. Two lines were developed for quicker service, the food was to be prepared with less grease, the hours of operation were extended, and the o gcnu yqwnf dg mgrv jqv0 Qpg uvwfgpv rtckugf vjg cf o kpkuvtcvkqp, kpfkcvkpi vjcv ökv is very likely we have more freedom of expression at this location than on any other campus in the eqwpvt{0ö<sup>37</sup>

After the dress code was changed in the late 1960s, students dressed how they felt best represented them. The movement had noticeably emerged when students returned from

rgceg o qxg o gpv ku i tqy kpiö<sup>38</sup> He also claimed that this movement was a growing fad dgecwug rgqrng ygtg ð o kpfnguu ujggr nqmqkpi hqt uq o g rnceg vq jgtfö cpf vjcv vjg rgceg movement was popular but would be short-lived. One student, M.F. Stanford, responded the following week:

I would like to congratulate Mr. Constantini on his perceptive appraisal of the fgegfgpv uvcvg qh chhcktu cv LW0 Kv ku swkvg qdxkqwu, vq gxgt{qpg y j q kupøv c Godless Communist, that there ku c ð rgceg o qxg o gpv qp ec o rwuö Vjku situation cannot be tolerated (it might result in peace)!<sup>39</sup>

President Spiro aggressively worked with students and provided different events as qwvngvu vq gzrtguu vjqwi jvu cpf kfgcu rwdnken{0 Vjg ðkuuwguö ugkku, uvctted in the fall 1968, was devoted to important problems of the world. The student government would invite guest speakers, along with administration and faculty, to discuss national and global events. The students were encouraged to come out and have questions ready to ask.<sup>40</sup> In the winter of that year, a series was started in which questions would be posed by the students to the faculty and administrators, who would compose a panel to answer those questions. This ugkku y cu ecmgf, ðEc o rwu Eqphtqpvcvkqpuö Kv y cu gزرgevgf vjcv uwfpgvu yqwnf cvvgpf qpeg a month to articulate any concerns they had regarding the campus. The same topics always seemed to re-appear: curfew hours, meal plans, campus housing, activity direction, physical planning, Greek housing, teacher hiring, and disciplinary matters. The faculty and administrators were curious about what the students had to say, and they were given a forum so they could have no claim that their voice was being subdued.<sup>41</sup>

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Still, the administration could not always manage student dissent, and in 1970 it was book form. *Svdfgpn gfkvqtu rwdnkujgf cp wpcwvjqt|gf xgtukqp qh LWøu cppwen {gctdqqm, vjg Riparian*, and this immediately touched off a conflict between administrators and students. The yearbook featured material that was a few uvwfgpnøu ctvkuvke uvcvg o gpn qh y jcv c {gctdqqm should be. The back and front covers were decorated with a purple tie-dye pattern. The ugeqpf rcig ycu dncpm y jkvj ykvj vjg yqtfu ÷cnn yg ctgø kp dncem rtkpv0 Vjg hqnnqykp i ygtg sk o knct vq vjg ugeqpf, dwv ykvj vjg yqtfu, ÷uc{kpi ku,ø qp vjg hqwtvj, cpf ÷ikxg rgceg c ejcpeg,ø qp vjg ukzvj0 Kp dgvyggp vjgug rcigu ygtg rkevwtgu, uwej cu c rgceg u{ o dqn qp rcig three, a dove on page five, and a devilish caricature of President Richard Nixon on page seven. Every section of the yearbook had a new tarot card corresponding with the beginning of different sections. The title page for the fraternities and sororities was a picture of a woman from her shoulders to her mid-section with all the

represented.

In response, the Board of Trustees authorized six thousand dollars for a revised reissued yearbook. The result was the size of a thick pamphlet, to supplement the yearbook. The *Riparian* editor that year was Robyn Moses, and after it was released, the administration contemplated holding her degree. The *Riparian* faculty advisor and Professor of English, Wilma Horton, pleaded ignorance to the whole issue, but Moses insisted that she had approved everything but the naked girls. The unsold editions of the yearbook, over 100 copies, were later destroyed.<sup>43</sup>

The administration also had a difficult time in managing student opinion when it came to the issue of mandatory student attendance for convocations. In the late 1960s, students were growing restless about attendance policies to campus events. In the first place, if students did not attend convocation, they were charged five dollars. Students also openly complained that the event ran too long. After the 1967 convocation, one student shouted, "I don't want to go to convocation!"<sup>44</sup> However, in March 1969, a group of students decided not to attend the convocation and instead gathered outside of the ceremony in order to demonstrate against an event that they believed had no pertinent meaning to them. It began with two students but shortly grew into a larger protest of thirty. The instructor honored that day was Gerson Yessin, named the Teacher of the Year, who performed Chopin and Liszt instead of delivering a speech.<sup>45</sup> A week later, student leaders called for reforms to the system, and Dean Corbin and President Spiro organized a meeting open to the public. Spiro argued that convocations should still be

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>44</sup> Hallam, 117.

<sup>45</sup> "Eppxqecvkqp Eqpvtqxgtu{ Vcmgu Ujcrq,ö *The Navigator*, 21 March 1969, 6.

mandatory to maintain a sense of family.<sup>46</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The thirty students that participated in the sit-out and the hundreds who demonstrated in the Vietnam Moratorium were part of the bolfguv rtqguvu qp Lcemuqpxknng Wpkxgtukv{øu campus. Both represented challenges to the status quo, and they were intended to challenge authority and entrenched campus policies. However, it would be a mistake to suggest these events represent the whole of student activism during the 1960s and 1970s.

In reality, the vast majority of student opinion about campus or national issues flowed through traditional channels, such as newspapers. The administration, especially President Spiro, managed to reach out tq cftguu uvwfgpvuø eqpegtpu dghqtg vjg{ itgy vqq wpykgnf{ vq

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