

Module 09: The 1960s: Who Won? Student Protest and the Politics of Campus Dissent

Evidence 17: "Demonstrations and Williams occupation bring pro and con reactions from students," May 1970

A

Introduction

This collection of letters to the editor, written and published after a month of escalating protests, presents a particularly strong set of opinions about student activism and campus unrest.

Questions to Consider

- What reasons do the respective authors give for the widespread student opposition to the protests that occurred in spring 1970?
- What do the letters suggest about the sentiments and priorities of a sizable proportion of the student body at VPI?

Document

Demonstrations and Williams occupation bring pro and con reactions from students

Editor, Collegiate Times:

We are writing to express our opinions on the recent strike on this campus.

We object to the forceful seizure of Williams Hall by a small majority of students on campus last night. They contend that they took this action for several reasons.

They contend that this action was necessary to protest the decision of the University Council. We feel that in making this decision, the University Council bent over backwards to acquiesce to the minority's demands. We feel that the decision was equitable because the students that wished to strike were given an extended date to leave without penalty. Those of us who came here for an education were likewise, given the chance to study.

Secondly, the militant's claim that seizure was necessary in order to

prevent violence. If they had stayed at home and worked through channels, which contrary to popular belief, are available, we would have had another peaceful night on the VPI campus.

Fortunately there was no violence after all. Some of us viewed the incident this morning. And, we wish to congratulate and commend the state police and the administration on the orderly and non-violent removal of trespassers.

None of us like war! None of us like to see our fellow students killed! But we came here for an education. Is a disruption of this education going to promote peace and harmony? We think not!

Thomas M. Leonard '69

William S. Pafford '70

Barbara A. Ross '72

Stuart F. Updike Jr. '70

James E. Webster III '70

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Editor, Collegiate Times:

Hooray for Dr. Hahn [President of VPI]! I, for one, and I am sure I am not alone, applaud Dr. Hahn's decision to rid this campus of such persons that would cause wholesale destruction to university property.

I do not oppose peaceful dissent and protest, rather, I approve of it as a means to express dissatisfaction with a system and also, hopefully, to express ideas on the improvement of that system. However, when dissent becomes open rebellion with intent to destroy the property and rights of others, that dissent is nothing more than anarchy and an attempt at nihilism of government. These people do not believe in the rule of the majority, or even in respecting the rights of anyone but themselves.

Again, I say, good riddance to those who wish to see democratic rule destroyed.

Edward S. Miller

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Editor, Collegiate Times:

Please allow me to take this opportunity to commend our law enforcement officials for their fine work in removing the 168 students from Williams Hall "in order that University functions may continue as usual." Glad to see things are back to normal.

Charles Volkstorf

Source:

"Demonstrations and Williams occupation bring pro and con reactions from students," *The Collegiate Times* (15 May 1970), 2.