

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

Evidence 1: Ed Miller, "What caused demonstrations," April 1970

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Introduction

The article below, from the front page of the April 15, 1970, issue of *The Collegiate Times*, explains some of the reasons why approximately 200 VPI students chose to disrupt the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets' regularly scheduled military drill on the central campus green space known as the Drillfield.

Questions to Consider

- Why did the protesting students believe their demonstration to be both legitimate and reasonable?
- Why did antiwar protesters feel like they had no other option but to disrupt the on-campus military drill?
- What was the university's response to the protestors, according to the article? How did the protesters feel about the official response?

Document

What caused demonstration, what now; discussed in special CT analysis

Many Tech students are probably still wondering what caused approximately 150 students to march in their own formation and disrupt a regularly scheduled ROTC drill on Tuesday. Many of these students, plus about 200 of their fellow students, marched on Burruss Hall [university administration building] on Wednesday demanding to see Dr. Dean and to have a court injunction dropped against 10 students involved in Tuesday's activities by Dr. Hahn and Dr. Dean.

What caused the student unrest at VPI? While seeking information from Student Personnel needed for an article which this writer was doing, this reporter was asked by Dean Brown, "What's your hurry?" Statements such as this are one of the main reasons for the student demonstrations. Many of the demonstrators and their faculty supporters felt that they were

getting nowhere by trying to go through legitimate channels. For example, they're asking, "Where did [we] get by going through the channels?"

These students are refusing to accept the old line of reasoning used by the administration that if you go through channels, you may eventually get what you want. The students feel that the legitimate channels were not effective enough and expedient enough to meet their needs.

The demonstrators mainly used the ROTC drill to dramatize their feelings about the ineffective input they have into these channels. . . .These activist students are tired of being told "to wait."

The action taken by the administration will only lead to more demonstrations and possibly violence. By using coercion (i.e. the injunction brought against the Blacksburg Ten [those people specifically named by the university as instigators of the drillfield demonstration]), the people in Burruss will force the demonstrators to take a harder stand for what they want.

One of the prime concerns of the leaders of the activist group is to get the University Council meetings open to all students. That proposal was made and defeated by the University Council Wednesday afternoon. Another legitimate channel for communication which the demonstrators felt that Tech students deserved has been closed. . . .

What can the administration do to bring the crisis to an end? One possibility is to have a committee composed of students from various segments of student life at VPT. This committee would meet directly with some of the top administrators on the Tech campus monthly or whenever necessary to air their views. This committee idea could alleviate the feeling of many students that they are not represented. This could also prevent the occurrence of more demonstrations. Something must be done soon or VPI may no longer be known as "A serene university in southwest Virginia." . . .

Source:

Ed Miller, "What caused demonstrations, what now; discussed in special CT analysis," *The Collegiate Times* (15 Apr 1970), 1.