

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

Evidence 10: Ann M. Allred, Letter to the Editor, May 1970

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Introduction

In the letter to the editor reproduced below, a female VPI student tries to set the story straight about the protests and student politics on campus.

Questions to Consider

- How does the author characterize student opinions and beliefs?
- Did most demonstrators resemble the frightening radicals or countercultural hippies that the local media likened them to?
- Out of approximately 11,000 students enrolled at VPI at the time, how many students actively supported the strike? How many ignored it? What do the numbers suggest about overall student attitudes toward political protest?
- According to the writer, what represents the best political path to follow?

Document

Editor, Collegiate Times:

This is an open letter to the news media and its representatives that have been covering the last week's happenings in Blacksburg. I would like to strongly urge that the newsmen be very conscience of reporting what has and is actually happening. On the evening of the occupation of Williams Hall, I watched the eleven o'clock news on television to find out what had happened. On one station it was reported that the University Council had approved a "soft" strike. I changed the channel to discover that the University Council had vetoed strike proposals. These are completely opposite versions of the same story. Since that time, I have questioned anything the mass media have said about the situation at Tech. I would also encourage parents and other interested individuals to accept the news media's version as only one of many versions of what the situation is in

Blacksburg.

The protests originally were supposed to represent the dissatisfaction with Nixon's Cambodian policy and the killings at Kent State. From my knowledge, this was one of the reasons for protest at Tech. But general discord with the administration was also cited as a cause for the students to be heard. Today I have questioned people as to their motives for supporting the strike in an effort to discover what the real issues are. From what I can gather, students at Tech are now protesting the actions taken against the students who occupied Williams. On the day of this incident, opinion was moderate for the most part. Today I became more and more convinced that the students and the faculty are being split into two factions, either pro or con. The middle of the road is disappearing. This is regrettable. But the reporters covering the story should be aware that this demonstration is no longer on the national level of issues on the Blacksburg campus. And these reporters should investigate more closely and report this to the public if this is what is actually happening as I and others believe it is.

I regret that some reporting has been slanted toward the sensational. I cannot believe that the situation is as bad as the television film of the student arrests would seem to imply. There was no mention of the nine-thousand plus students who did go to class as usual. If I were not on this campus to see and hear for myself what happened, I would have to rely upon reports that have not been as accurate as they should have been. I realize the position of newsmen as outsiders, but I would prefer the retelling of the story by some intelligent individual who is more familiar with the situation at Tech before the demonstrations.

Ask any Tech student about activism on campus and they will tell you that the overwhelming majority of students are apathetic. But in the last few days students have become more or less apathetic. These demonstrators are not all radicals or hippies. A considerable number of them are straight. The stereotyped apathetic Tech man is a rarity on campus as of this week. Perhaps the real story at Tech is not being reported fully to worried parents and concerned alumni. Please consider the possibility that more reporting needs to be done on what has caused the students to demonstrate their feelings and beliefs, not how they have chosen to do so.

Ann M. Allred

Class of '70

Source:

Ann M. Allred, Letter to the Editor, *The Collegiate Times* (27 May 1970), 2.