

"We Will Not be Moved!":  
The 1968 Student Occupation of Columbia University and Its Influence on  
Protest Movements Around the Western World"

By

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"We Will Not be Moved":  
The 1968 Student Occupation of Columbia University and Its Influence on  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the Columbia University student occupation in the context of other protests that arose in 1968. It illustrates that the occupation of the Columbia campus was a turning point in student protest and protest movements in general. The Columbia protest, led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Society of African-American Students (SAS), was more radical in scope than previous student protests on other campuses, and thus it prompted a more radical – and violent – response from police and institutional authorities. As a result, the impact the Columbia University protest had on others that followed was vast, influencing a general strike in Paris and student unrest at the Democratic Convention in Chicago later that summer. There was a certain irony in the expansive influence of the Columbia protest, in that it proved to be disorganized and quickly divided between black and white students. There were numerous ideological breaks between the different student groups, prompted in part by their differing goals and in part by the university's various negotiation attempts to end the protest. Yet the violent reaction of the police to the largest group of protestors inspired action on the part of students involved in the Paris protests in May 1968 and the London and Chicago disturbances later in the year.

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## Introduction

The student protests that took place on the campus of New York City's Columbia University in April 1968 marked a turning point in the nature, the focus and the handling of student protests in the United States, and to some extent, around the world. Earlier campus protests in 1967-1968 such as those in Prague and Paris began as peaceful sit-ins by small groups to address students' grievances with university policies. Violence was not a part of the protests until people outside of the universities joined in the demonstrations and included societal issues in their grievances. For example, students at Prague Polytechnical University held a sit-in to gain better lighting and heat. When the government took their concerns seriously, other students and workers in Prague began their own protests for greater political freedoms. At the University of Paris at Nanterre, students protested the treatment of lower class Parisians and students. Only later in May did other students join in, and workers also demanded greater economic and social justice.

A change occurred with the student protest held on April 23, 1968 at Columbia. Two student groups met and occupied two main campus buildings on the Columbia campus. The Student Afro-American Society (SAS) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were upset about Columbia's affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a military think-tank advising the US government about strategy in the Vietnam conflict. The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. occurred just two weeks earlier, accompanied by widespread rioting and violence. Meanwhile, a newly constructed gym in

Morningside Heights had a separate entrance for Harlem residents, echoing segregationist policies in other states that the civil rights movement was trying to eradicate. In response, the SAS occupied Hamilton Hall while SDS occupied the Low Library. This occupation did not begin as separate black and white student protests, but soon degenerated into just that as the SAS students were mainly protesting the gym, while SDS's concerns were over the gym, IDA, a university ban on indoor demonstrations and amnesty for the present and previous protests.

The occupation of Hamilton Hall, Low Library and three other buildings ended on April 30 when police arrived to break up the protests. The police clashed with a large group of peaceful students who blocked the entrances to the buildings to protect the occupying students inside. Arriving with nightsticks and blackjacks, the police beat many outside protesters who did not want violence, along with the occupiers of the buildings. As with other protests that took place in 1968, passive students that had not taken part in the protests became radicalized after watching the arrests and police riot. They became part of a campus wide student strike that affected classes and campus activities through the end of May. As an overall event, the student protests at Columbia in April 1968 created a vastly different environment for passive and militant students, which transformed the college experience on the campus well into the 1970s. By then, peaceful protests no longer had a place on the college campus and a movement began outside of academia to change American society.

Though Columbia represented a radical change in student protests, the occupation and subsequent arrests were overshadowed by the student protests in Paris. Like the events at Columbia, the students in Paris were more radical and vocal, teaming with blue collar and union workers to present a united front against the Paris police. The protests from April 1968 forward, including Columbia, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and London were protests that involved police violence and student radicalism, and mostly centered around the Vietnam conflict.

This thesis asserts that the rebellion that occurred at Columbia altered the nature of student protests around the world for the rest of 1968. It argues that the ambitions of the Columbia SDS protestors – to extend their protest beyond their college campus, and make it into an indictment of American society in general – met with limited success when police attacked the students and extended the students' concerns beyond simple issues of freedom of speech on a college campus. This was despite the fact that the SDS' students' protest ultimately achieved nothing tangible, while the SAS students forged a new relationship based in respect with the Columbia administration, and became leaders in the surrounding Harlem community. The SDS students' success, limited though it was, came from the Columbia protest's visibility and influence on other student protests around the world in the following months, especially those in Paris, Chicago and London. The thesis will utilize the contemporary written accounts of the student activists, who were present at the Columbia University protest, such as Mark Rudd, the de-facto leader of the protest, and the writers of the *Columbia*

*Daily Spectator*, a student newspaper. The thesis will also examine the larger student protests and compare them with contemporary writings of the student leaders.

There are numerous books on the subject of 1968 regarding student protests. The authors generally use a linear model to discuss the tensions that built up throughout the decade. Escalating social, cultural and political tensions created the atmosphere for the student protests in the different countries. Various causes surrounding these protests became more important as the years went on.

Marxist historians writing about 1968 mostly discuss the struggle and growing tensions that started in the early 1960s and continued through 1968. These tensions included the inequities in student housing, the draft for the Vietnam conflict in the US and race and class relations in the respective countries. The sources focus on grievances the students had toward the society they lived in and the inequities the universities created in the surrounding neighborhoods. In the United States, the origins of protest were rooted in the founding of the Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee which was part of the civil rights movement.

Authors that write about student protest in 1968 include Jurgen Habermas, a German philosopher who discusses how student discontent at universities arose from internal factors like housing and bureaucratic decisions made by school officials. Other authors that write about the growing movement are C. Wright Mills, a sociologist and Immanuel Wallerstein, who was a faculty member at Columbia and participated in the negotiations with students during the



Columbia protest. Other publications such as the Cox Commission Report utilized the Columbia protests to form a committee to examine the disturbances and explain how they happened in an effort to prevent future actions.<sup>1</sup> In the instance of the Paris sit-in and strike, the students protested class discrimination, and at Columbia protests began over an addition to the gymnasium that would have separate doors for patrons to use based on race.

External factors such as Vietnam resonated in multiple countries too, like France, England and the United States. Charles Kaiser's *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture and the Shaping of a Generation* suggests that the Prague student protest in 1967 planted a seed for activists such as Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies to protest the Vietnam conflict at the Democratic National Convention in August 1968.<sup>2</sup> The struggle for both of those groups was inspired by the Marxist emphasis on social inequality. Abbie Hoffman's experience as a member of the Yippies and the events in Chicago are chronicled in *The Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman*.<sup>3</sup> One of the Yippies' major issues in Chicago was with the war in Vietnam and the draft's inequality, as a much higher proportion of African Americans and poor people were drafted rather than people of a higher social standing.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia: Report of the Fact-Finding Commission Appointed to Investigate the Disturbances at Columbia University in April and May 1968* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Grove Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Abbie Hoffman, *The Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1980).

Like Kaiser, current scholars are interested in examining the global effect the student protests had not only in 1968, but throughout the decade. The global effect is examined through oral histories and stories told by students who participated in the protests in *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* edited by Ronald Fraser.<sup>4</sup> Current scholars have also written about the experience of the Black students at Columbia and other universities as well. Published recently, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Power in the Late 1960s* by Stefan M. Bradley provides insight into the motivations and actions of the SAS and Black students at Columbia.<sup>5</sup> Several of the authors illustrate the idea that students adopted their ideals and motivations after reading the Port Huron Statement and reading about the protests by students at different schools around the world. Written by Tom Hayden for the Students for a Democratic Society, the manifesto reiterated the goals of the burgeoning student movement to create equality and eliminate class conflict.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis will contribute to the recent scholarship by providing a point of view not only inspired by Marxist historiography, but the New Cultural School. This school of historical writing includes the history of the student protests, but also new interpretations of how they relate to one another and the impact the different student protests had on each other as well. It is the goal of the thesis to

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Fraser, ed., *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Power in the Late 1960s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Tom Hayden, "The Port Huron Statement," *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, Judith Clavir Albert & Stewart Edward Albert, eds., (New York: Praeger, 1984), 179, 196.

move forward the interpretation of student protest to be more inclusive of the students' ideals and to try to examine their hopes to create a better world with the seriousness it deserves.

## Chapter I: The Growth and Development of Activism

In April 1968 Columbia University experienced a large demonstration that involved two student organizations that came together to protest the construction of a new gym. The protest grew to include a larger group of students, some of whom occupied five buildings on the campus and others that remained outside to encourage a peaceful end to the protest. It created tense relationships between the student groups in each building, the faculty and the Columbia administration. The beginnings of the protest surrounded Columbia University's construction of a gymnasium in Morningside Park, a "barrier" that separated the school from the Harlem neighborhood. The plans for the new gymnasium included a back door entry for the Harlem residents. In the wake of the events that took place in April 1968, such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination and growing racial tensions in Harlem and Columbia University, the back door of the gym was not accepted by the student activists. As a primary issue of the protest, the gym represented the negative aspects of the University and the administration. Though the protest did not continue with the gym as a primary grievance, it served as a trigger for the campus wide occupation that allied two student activist groups at Columbia University. Eventually, the coalition of student groups dissolved over a variety of issues.

The Columbia protest was part of a growing level of activism directed at the nature of America's affluence and power during the 1960s. Four factors contributed to the protests on the Columbia campus. The factors included: the characteristics of the present generation's desire to change the way society

functioned, US involvement in the war in Vietnam and the division of opinions it created among students and other Americans, the civil rights movement, especially as reflected in community relations between the Harlem neighborhood and Columbia University, and the grievances and problems of the black students that attended Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Writings by Columbia sociologist C. Wright Mills were the inspiration for many of the planned and spontaneous activities that took place during the 1960s. His 1956 publication *The Power Elite* asserted that responsibility for the fate of the nation rested on a “small group of Americans – including members of government, titans of industry and military leaders.”<sup>2</sup> Many of Mills’ readers, including students at Columbia came to believe he was correct. The desire to expand the size of the “power elite” inspired much of the student activism of the 1960s.

The war in Vietnam, civil rights and the increase in political participation on behalf of activists and students were key issues for social activists. A primary reason for the change in politics was the social consciousness and idealism taught in schools and embraced by activists.<sup>3</sup> The activists in turn envisioned a better life for not only themselves but for other groups that they felt were exploited. This led to more groups participating in the political process and government officials responding with legislation in support of those changes. Many students were from middle class backgrounds and grew up enjoying the

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<sup>1</sup> The Cox Commission Report, 4

<sup>2</sup> “Shaping a New America: Student Activism,” *US History: Pre-Columbian to the New Millennium* <http://www.ushistory.org/us/57g.asp> [accessed 18 July 2014].

<sup>3</sup> The Cox Commission Report, 4.

economic boom after World War II. The post-secondary student population tripled in the 1960s due to the baby boom that started after World War II and the steady up-turn of the economy.

Active groups in the 1960s included the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which attracted students and other members to their cause. The women's movement also started to gain momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. The decade of the 1960s cultivated an environment where activism became a way for causes and beliefs to be heard by the American public and politicians. SNCC and CORE worked together during the Freedom Summer of 1964. Students became involved in causes to register black voters in the South and protest for better housing. Preaching non-violence, these groups attracted students and other activists that began to view the struggle for rights as an important cause and a catalyst to bring change to the United States.

The influential beginning of the women's movement in the 1960s was the civil rights movement. While those working to obtain civil rights sought equal housing and employment opportunities, many women activists desired to gain freedom and protection where they saw the most discrimination based on sex. Many activist women wanted the word "sex" to be added to the Civil Rights Bill that was enacted on July 2, 1964. "Sex" was added to the Civil Rights Act in Title VII which "prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion,

sex and national origin.”<sup>4</sup> In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) formed to fight injustice on behalf of gender. NOW’s organizers declared “the purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men”.<sup>5</sup> NOW sought to engage women in all aspects of society as well as recognize the struggles that women still faced.

One of the student groups that formed in the early 1960s that played a large role in student activism throughout the decade was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS was the result of the merger of two groups that supported and represented workers: the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) and League for Industrial Democracy (LID). In the Port Huron Statement published in 1962, they outlined their goals and views of society in the form of a manifesto that governed the group and its members until the group eventually split in early 1969. The document represented a radical approach to education and how students, faculty and universities could utilize their influence to create a better society. Tom Hayden, author of the Port Huron Statement, spoke of the great influence that the university had on society and the social change it could direct:

We believe that the universities are an overlooked seat of influence [in pursuit of social change]... Our agenda will involve national efforts at university reform by an alliance of students and faculty. They must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy.

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<sup>4</sup> “Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm> [accessed 2 August 2014].

<sup>5</sup> Nancy MacLean, ed., *The American Women’s Movement, 1945-2000* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2009), 72.

They must make fraternal and functional contact with allies in labor, civil rights, and other liberal forces outside the campus. They must import major public issues into the curriculum- research and teaching on problems of war and peace is an outstanding example. <sup>6</sup>

The SDS groups spread across the country, mainly at college campuses.

At the time of SDS's founding, the American university community fostered a philosophy of *in loco parentis*, a theory "which ratifies the Administration as the moral guardian of the young."<sup>7</sup> SDS students often joined in on social causes related to civil rights. With the war in Vietnam gaining attention in the mid-1960s, SDS turned to educating other students about the war. By 1967, SDS had chapters on all major campuses throughout the United States. The most prominent groups in the country were at the University of California-Berkeley, the University of Michigan and Columbia University in New York City.

Campus organizing gained much notoriety from the Berkeley Free Speech movement which took place in 1964 at the University of California-Berkeley. The Free Speech Movement was one of the first protests to take place in the decade as part of the counterculture that swept the nation by 1968. The Free Speech Movement began when the University of California banned clubs from sponsoring political and off-campus speakers unless the speakers were also sponsored, and thus approved, by the school itself. Oftentimes, speaking events took place in People's Park, a strip of land that was thought to be city property.

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Hayden, "The Port Huron Statement", *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, Judith Clavir Albert & Stewart Edward Albert, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1984), 179, 196.

<sup>7</sup> Hayden, "The Port Huron Statement," 183.



Instead, the University of California-Berkeley assumed ownership and banned political rallies by student groups.

A gathering commenced after police arrested a former student for sitting at the CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) activity table at a student activities fair on campus. The rule passed by the administration specifically outlined who could participate in the student activity fairs. On December 2, in response to the arrest, 6000 students held a sit-in at Sproul Hall, the administrative office building at Berkeley. The group named themselves the Free Speech Movement (FSM) and attempted to negotiate with the administration. The group “was to find ways of applying the SNCC example to an American campus that were to bring Berkeley to a halt.”<sup>8</sup> In the spirit of the Freedom Summer, SNCC and other groups utilized peaceful means to fight for freedom, and the Berkeley students followed that example. The negotiations with the administration were not successful; the peaceful sit-in continued in Sproul Hall until officers broke it up. After 800 arrests, the students took to People’s Park to continue the sit-in and petition for freedom of speech on the campus.

On December 8, Berkeley faculty members came to support the students and voted to overturn the policy change, restoring freedom of speech. A primary reason the FSM attracted so many supporters was “politics and intellectual life were all wound together in that period, there was a constant confrontation with questions about what we were doing at the university – why are we here?”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Fraser, ed., *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt, An International Oral History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 90.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, ed, *1968*, 91.

During this time, several student leaders rose to prominence, including Mario Savio, who gave an iconic speech about placing bodies upon the gears on the front steps of the administration building on December 2, 1964. His speech inspired many to fight the administration and keep on working to restore the freedom of speech:

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.<sup>10</sup>

The movement came to an end when the administration changed its views and granted students freedom of speech. The FSM was a clear victory for the students and started a wave of activism that occurred throughout the decade.<sup>11</sup>

The Columbia SDS formed in the spring of 1966, and it became a strong presence on campus a semester later when its members became active in campus politics. They protested the University's relationship with the US government and the growing war in Vietnam. One of their first activities was to protest a CIA recruiter on campus. Even though a small group of students turned out for the protest, the next week an even larger group of five hundred students led by the Columbia SDS marched to President Grayson Kirk's office in Low

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<sup>10</sup> "Mario Savio Quotes", *Goodreads*  
<http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4046067>. Mario\_Savio [accessed 2 August 2014].

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States c. 1958-1974* (London: Bloomsbury Reader, 2012), 486, 488-489.

Library to confront him about the school's involvement with the military and to push for student rights on campus. This encounter with the administration cemented the group's presence on campus. The march to Low Library recruited many new members that agreed that there was a need for a new radical organization on the Columbia University campus.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout 1967 and 1968, the Columbia SDS was active in protests on the campus regarding a number of issues that concerned the group. A primary issue was the school's affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), which had direct ties to Vietnam War. The SDS students felt that Columbia was aiding the war effort, and seeing the war as unjust, they protested to urge Columbia to sever its ties to the IDA.

The anti-IDA movement began during a turbulent time for not only Columbia University, but the SDS. Prior to 1968, the SDS "held peaceful demonstrations, petition campaigns, polite debates, and educational forums concerning the university's involvement with the war and also its expansion into the Harlem community."<sup>13</sup> Mark Rudd, a member of the Columbia SDS, aligned himself with a more active and radical faction and ran for chapter chairman subscribing to the new direction of the group "from protest to resistance."<sup>14</sup> Rudd saw an opportunity for the group at Columbia to embrace a more radical approach to demonstrations. Rudd was appointed chairman of the university

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<sup>12</sup> Jerry L Avorn, Andrew Crane et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1968), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (New York: HarperCollins Press, 2009), 43.

<sup>14</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 43

branch after aligning with radical friends within the group and attracting thirty-two new members to the “action faction” as they were now called.

The old SDS leadership and the Columbia administration strongly disliked the new “action faction”. The old leadership of SDS pushed for peaceful resistance and they were uncomfortable with the new strategies. The administration disliked the radical direction of SDS because the university had adopted a ban on indoor demonstrations before the 1968 school year began, and SDS challenged that new ban like no other group. The action faction of the Columbia SDS held numerous sit-ins, mostly in reference to the IDA and Columbia’s contracts with the CIA and State Department. The SDS felt that Columbia’s collaboration with government entities contributed to the war and its policies.

During the IDA protest, the university identified six of the SDS members as having broken the indoor demonstration rule and the administration summoned the students to appear for disciplinary action. The six members “refused to appear, demanding a public hearing on our case before the whole university.”<sup>15</sup> The group called themselves the IDA 6 to illustrate how the school was not remaining neutral when dealing with matters of government entities and policies. They quickly became a cause célèbre for the other SDS students, especially Mark Rudd.

Other student groups besides the SDS gained notoriety at the University. One major group was the Student Afro-American Society (SAS). New African-

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<sup>15</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 47.

American students at Columbia like Cicero Wilson, the SAS president, pushed the SAS and its members to embrace Black Power and utilize it to bring attention to their causes. The Black Power movement gained notoriety in California among members of the Black Panther Party beginning in 1968. The movement gained followers who had broken from the original creed of the civil rights movement to peacefully and passively resist. Those embracing the cause no longer subscribed to passive resistance and felt that it was not working and more aggressive protests were needed to draw attention to the plight of black students, especially at Columbia.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of the gymnasium had long had the attention of the SAS, though there were other unresolved issues between the Harlem community, black students and Columbia University. A trustee had proposed building a gymnasium in Morningside Park, for use by both Columbia students and the Harlem community, and funding had been approved by the New York Legislature in 1960. Yet long funding delays and arguments over community access to the gym made it a controversial project over the course of the 1960s. Construction crews finally broke ground for the gym in February 1968. Perusal of the design, however, prompted anger on the part of students and Harlem residents alike, when blueprints showed that students would enter the middle level of the gym on the western half of Morningside Park and have full access to the facilities, while Harlem residents would enter the gym at the basement level on the opposite side of the park and thus have only limited access. In the era of protests against Jim

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<sup>16</sup> Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 8.

Crow segregation laws in the south, separate entrances to the gym leading to unequal access to its services seemed like a northern, New York City version of the same thing.<sup>17</sup>

In the spring of 1968, the new leadership of SAS decided to take action against the gym, citing it as an important cause for not only the black students, but the residents of Harlem as well. The SAS students were leaders in their community on campus and within the surrounding community of Harlem. It was because of this leadership role that they saw themselves as representatives for Harlem within Columbia.<sup>18</sup> The separate entrance represented a segregationist Jim Crow past; in fact, SAS members referred to the policy derisively as “Gym Crow”.<sup>19</sup>

Another contributing factor to the development of activism in the 1960s was the Vietnam War and the growing involvement of the United States. After the defeat of the French by the Viet Cong in 1954, the United States honored a promise to the French to send in advisors to aid the South Vietnamese in an escalating civil war in Vietnam. The military advisors eventually became ground and air troops, with the United States military becoming fully involved by 1967 under President Lyndon B. Johnson. President John F. Kennedy increased the troops in Vietnam; his assassination handed the management of Vietnam to Johnson, who by 1968 increased the troop involvement by instituting a draft for

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<sup>17</sup> “Morningside Park Gymnasium”, 1968: *Columbia in Crisis*, Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions  
<https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/1968/causes/gym> [accessed 3 August 2014].

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 13.

males over the age of eighteen. With the draft in place, eligible men could receive deferments by attending school or getting married. These deferments, however, were difficult to obtain for African Americans who did not attend college or have the financial means to do so. Due to the economic disparity between white and black men, many of the draftees were African American and served as ground troops.

The SDS criticized the government for responding to poverty and oppression in Vietnam, but ignoring poverty and oppression in southern states. The lack of action toward the poverty in the south allowed for poor African American men to be drafted in higher numbers than their white counterparts.<sup>20</sup> The disparity in economic opportunities and housing was clear in Harlem, a situation that student David Gilbert took in as he matriculated at Columbia in 1963. It was there the full picture of poverty inflicted on the residents of Harlem became clear. Gilbert described the poverty after working in an off campus tutoring program:

...until then I didn't realize how bad the oppression was in this, the wealthiest country in the world. I saw the buildings, the houses without heat. Saw the police who seemed like an occupying army to me. Saw someone die in the family I worked with from a condition which if he'd had decent medical care, would have been routine. There weren't abstract social issues, but involved people with whom I had personal relations.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1968 started off with controversy, and a turn of public opinion about the war in Vietnam. In January 1968, the Tet Offensive changed the minds

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<sup>20</sup> Fraser, ed., 1968, 102.

<sup>21</sup> Fraser, ed., 1968, 107.

of many Americans as they began to question US involvement. It was also unclear as to who was actually winning the war. After the Tet Offensive and the realization that the United States was not winning the war, students became even more involved in the political protests against the conflict. They no longer trusted the Johnson administration as it repeatedly told them that the United States was close to achieving victory.

The Tet Offensive occurred on January 30, 1968 as “part of an attack by sixty-seven thousand pro-North Vietnam troops on thirty-six provincial capitals and five major cities including Saigon.”<sup>22</sup> The attacks surprised the American troops who assumed the Vietnamese would observe the cease fire through the New Year. The attacks played out on televisions in American households, who had become accustomed to watching the war during dinner time newscasts. These films, however, clearly showed the panic and death American soldiers faced fighting the war. Even though General Westmoreland, who was in charge of the war, maintained his view that the war was being won, the battles proved different to the Americans who now started to doubt the war. Americans lost faith when Walter Cronkite on CBS announced his doubts the war could be won, causing President Lyndon B. Johnson to famously say “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost America.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005), 50.

<sup>23</sup> “Walter Cronkite,” *American Masters*  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/walter-cronkite/about-walter-cronkite/561/> [accessed 2 August 2014].



On March 31, Lyndon B. Johnson announced his decision not to seek another term in office, which was hailed as a victory by the SDS members. The SDS felt that the anti-war movement succeeded in forcing a president out and that an end to the war was in sight. The feeling of victory was short lived for the SDS when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4. Many black communities, including Harlem, reacted violently with riots and burning buildings. The issue of racism in America was put front and center with the assassination and the community reactions to it. The feelings at Columbia University and Harlem were more intense, as the new gymnasium would expand the campus into the neighboring Morningside Heights community, and furthermore, provide Harlem residents with a mere back door entrance with “15 percent of the space in the facility allotted to them.”<sup>24</sup> Dissent against the gym was quick to develop in the Harlem community, though few in the white community at Columbia paid any attention. Dr. King’s assassination, however, brought the issue front and center. The white students now saw how his death affected the black residents of Harlem, and they believed they could and should do something to end racism by protesting the gymnasium.<sup>25</sup>

To honor the life of Dr. King, Columbia University held a memorial for him on April 9, 1968. The memorial took place at St. Paul’s Chapel. The SDS protested the hypocrisy of the event by handing leaflets to attendees outlining the University’s mistreatment of “Black and Latino employees, its eviction of over ten thousand mostly nonwhite residents from Morningside Heights buildings, and its

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<sup>24</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 14.

theft of land from a public park to build a segregated gym.”<sup>26</sup> Rudd, the SDS leader, stepped up to the podium in front of Columbia Vice-President Dr. David Truman and announced the hypocrisy of the University toward the minority workers and residents of Morningside Heights while holding a memorial for Dr. King. Rudd then led a walkout of “forty people, including SDS students, Black students and an elderly Black couple from the community.”<sup>27</sup> Rudd and the SDS had once again defied the rule against indoor demonstrations on the campus. On the other hand, the protest led to an uneasy unification of the SDS and SAS students on the campus. The unification allowed a protest to develop that involved a larger cross-section of the campus population and campus buildings.

While the gym issue was extremely important to SAS and the residents of Harlem, the Columbia SDS was late to the cause. Even when SDS became involved in the gym issue, their goal was to include a larger portion of the student body in SDS. Its leaders hoped that their support for the cause of the SAS students would attract SAS to protest the University’s administration’s support for US involvement in Vietnam.

The events at Columbia University were important because they represented a change in student politics and student activism: students evolved from using peaceful tactics to becoming more antagonistic and radical. According to Arthur Marwick, the events at Columbia University “remind us once again to think in terms of an entire decade of transformation, rather than putting too much

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<sup>26</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 51-52.

<sup>27</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 52.

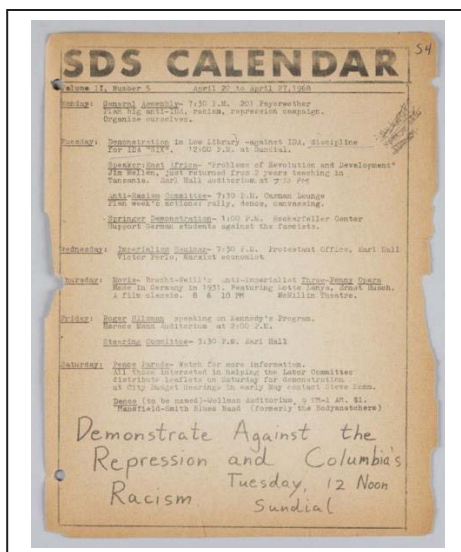
emphasis on 1968 as a single year of change.”<sup>28</sup> Student protests in previous years were peaceful marches or sit-ins that were resolved by peaceful means. As the 1960s wore on, the protests grew more violent and active, because violence brought attention to the protests and thus highlighted the causes. Provoking violent action became a particular focus for the SDS. This change in activism on the part of the SDS proved hypocritical, however. The students desperately wanted to bring change to American society in their attempt to spread the protest outside of the university, but they were not prepared to change themselves as well.

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<sup>28</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 595.

## Chapter II: The Occupation of Columbia

By April 1968, student activism at Columbia University on the part of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Student Afro-American Society (SAS) arose in response to issues of racial tensions, the Vietnam War and Columbia's involvement in its propagation, and the construction of the new gymnasium in Morningside Park. For SAS, the gym issue and racial tensions were the main tipping points. A planned protest for April 23, 1968 and an uneasy



"SDS Calendar," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed August 2, 2014, <https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/items/show/5533>.

unification between the groups made possible a seven day protest that included the occupation of five campus buildings and a large number of student supporters and dissenters.

In past dealings with the administration, the SDS broke the indoor demonstration rule a number of times. These occurred during the sit-ins held against Columbia's relationship with the CIA and its contract with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). Columbia

University entered into contracts with the CIA and the Department of Defense, and the SDS felt the school was contributing to the government policies that applied to the war in Vietnam. SDS was adamantly opposed to the war and felt that Columbia did not remain neutral toward the conflict. SDS protests had already been directed at getting the university to withdraw from the government

departments, and six student activists from SDS faced university discipline for their involvement in a banned indoor demonstration. They further broke the indoor demonstration rule during the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in which Rudd spoke out against the administration. At the time of the Memorial, the action faction activists also faced disciplinary action by the administration for consistently breaking the rule, and they refused to appear for a hearing at the university a few days prior to the scheduled protest. With the planned gym protest, Rudd and the SDS saw an opportunity to piggyback their agenda with the SAS in protesting the gymnasium.

After the Dr. King Memorial protest, a large group of 500 students, mostly SDS and SAS members, gathered at the Sundial at noon on April 23, 1968. The planned action was a number of speeches against the construction of the gym and a march to Low Library to picket the President. Also on campus that day was a small group of students that were part of the right-wing group Students for a Free Campus that gathered around the protest. The goal of the Students for a Free Campus was to protect the integrity and daily function of Columbia. The dissident group assembled in front of Low Library as a measure to protect the building. The group also disliked Mark Rudd and the action faction, writing to the *Columbia Spectator* in the days before the protest chastising the actions of the SDS at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.

SDS members Ted Gold, Nick Freudenberg and Mark Rudd addressed the crowd, then SAS leader Cicero Wilson spoke. Many of the speeches were against Columbia University's Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), which was

affiliated with the Department of Defense and the war in Vietnam. Yet the primary reason for the gathering was the construction of the gym in Morningside Park. There was no plan beyond the speeches and the march. Mark Rudd thus attempted to keep the crowd interested while planning the next move.

Due to the leadership style and beliefs of Rudd, a 500 person protest on the Columbia campus was not going to solve the issue of the gym and the administration practices. Rudd envisioned the protest going outside of the school and engaging Harlem residents, and eventually the nation. In a position paper written by Rudd and submitted to Columbia University, he stated the goals of the SDS to be “the radicalization of students...showing them how our lives really are unfree in this society and at Columbia.” Rudd further called on the students “to take part in ‘striking a blow at the Federal Government’s war effort,’ as it affected the University.”<sup>1</sup>

Seeing the demonstration start to become out of control, Rudd proposed that the crowd march to the locked Low Library anyway and the students linked arms and chanted “IDA MUST GO! IDA MUST GO! IDA MUST GO!” referring to the Institute for Defense Analyses.<sup>2</sup> According to Rudd, there was a lot of confusion and the leaders did not know what to do upon reaching the library. One thing that was clear to both the SDS and SAS was that they had to keep the crowd engaged to bring the administration’s attention to the gym protest. Since Rudd and the SAS leaders did not plan beyond a few speeches to bring awareness to the gym issue, something had to be done to keep the protest alive.

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University*, 66.

<sup>2</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 59.

Someone suggested marching to the gym site and confronting the issue. Rudd and the leadership agreed and the crowd marched over to the gym site.

The crowd that assembled at the gym site was taking part in tearing down the fence erected around the construction, and police officers had already reported to the scene in a standoff with some of the students. Administrators also were at the scene and asked Rudd to control the crowd. Rudd refused to work with the administrators and instead attempted to free a student that was arrested for tearing down the fence around the gym site. When the arresting officer refused to give in to the students' demands, Rudd and other students discussed the next step.

Two former SDS leaders, Ted Gold and Ted Kaptchuk, had grudgingly accepted Rudd's election as chairman to ensure a defeat of the Progressive Labor State. The defeated students were a Maoist group that attempted to take over the SDS.<sup>3</sup> Now, they approached Rudd to inform him that his demonstration was out of control. They told Rudd that a large group of students was still located at the Sundial and the only way to resurrect the protest was to gather the people at the Sundial with those at the gym site. Rudd agreed with Gold and Kaptchuk and the two former SDS leaders went back to the Sundial, while Rudd stayed at the gym site and attempted to gather those participants.

Per the Port Huron Statement, the SDS policy of decision making and organizing was based on a participatory democracy model. Each person had input, and leaders facilitated debates. A common slogan for SDS was "let the

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<sup>3</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 43.

people decide.”<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to bring the crowd together and make a decision, Rudd and other SDS members proposed a strike amongst the students, but poor timing meant that they could not organize a strike on such short notice. The marchers started back toward the center of campus, where they met the 300 remaining students from the Sundial along with Gold and Kaptchuk. After the reunited group returned to the central campus area, Rudd gave the podium to Cicero Wilson. When Wilson spoke, he implied that the SAS would take over and “SDS can stand on the side and support us, but the Black students and Harlem community will be the ones in the vanguard.”<sup>5</sup>

Cicero Wilson, the leader of the SAS, embraced the Black Power ideal and envisioned Columbia University as part of the Harlem Community. He did not see a divide between the community and the school; it was part of a Black residential area and “the residents in that area had just as much rights as the university to make decisions that would affect their homes and lives.”<sup>6</sup> Wilson wanted the SAS and SDS members participating in the protest to fully engage and become part of the struggle that black students faced not only at the school, but in Harlem. Wilson defied the athletes and conservative students that had gathered to the sides of the protest to protect the integrity of Columbia, and attempted to engage them by explaining the “duty of both the white and Black

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<sup>4</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 59.

<sup>5</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 68.



students of Columbia to help their Black and Puerto Rican neighbors keep control over their land and neighborhoods.”<sup>7</sup>

Rudd and Wilson did not agree on the end goal of the demonstration, mostly because the gym was the primary issue for the SAS and Rudd wanted to include other issues important to SDS. Bill Sales, a member of SAS, however was inspired by the turnout of white students. Commending their actions as a demonstration of “superior organization and superior commitment,” Sales encouraged the crowd to stay and continue to protest the gym.<sup>8</sup> The white students that turned out and remained had fulfilled the duties outlined by Wilson and were willing to take the demonstration indoors and around the campus. The willingness of the white students to remain part of the protest sent a message to the SAS that they actually cared about the gym and realized how the lives of the Harlem community would be affected by its construction.

After Sales spoke to the crowd, Mark Rudd spoke again, proposing the end of the IDA. Part of Rudd’s second speech was in reference to the six students that had been disciplined by the University for holding an indoor demonstration against Columbia’s involvement with the IDA. He wanted one of the goals of the demonstration to be to convince the university to revoke the discipline handed out by Columbia’s administration that day and previous days in reference to the IDA 6 and SDS students who participated in indoor demonstrations.

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<sup>7</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 63.

While Wilson and Sales agreed with Rudd, a few demonstrators noticed that Hamilton Hall was open. An open hall was considered a success for the group willing to take the demonstration indoors. Low Library was closed, but occupying another building presented an opportunity to cement the presence of the protesting students and their demands on the school. A member of the crowd yelled “seize Hamilton!” and the crowd ran toward Hamilton Hall chanting against the IDA.<sup>9</sup>

At this point, though the protest had gained followers and now occupied a campus building, it was still very disorganized and confusing. This was entirely due to a lack of unifying purpose in terms of its focus. The protest started out as being in recognition of the university’s hypocrisy in memorializing Martin Luther King Jr. at the same time that the gym it was constructing had a separate entrance going up specifically for black Harlem residents. SAS students still maintained that goal, exclusively. Yet SDS students, merely by participating in a protest, had another reason to protest yet again – against the university’s indoor demonstration rule, which they considered to be a violation of their freedom of speech. Furthermore, at all protest opportunities, SDS aligned itself nationally against the Vietnam War, and Columbia students had a local focal point for anger in the university’s participation in the Institute for Defense Analyses. Finally, the leader of Columbia’s SDS faction, Mark Rudd, was an action faction radical determined to turn any protest opportunity into a larger, potentially violent action that would spread beyond the university to society as a whole, and looked for

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<sup>9</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 63.

chances to exploit spontaneous action and direct it out past the bounds of the original protest. The protest now encompassed a multitude of ideals and demands that were not clear between the participants and the leaders. Between the leaders themselves, Rudd, Wilson and Sales agreed that the gym should be the focus, but were willing to include the demands of the SDS.

Once inside Hamilton Hall, Acting Dean Henry Coleman and security officer Proctor William Kahn were taken hostage. Using the Dean and security officer as collateral to get the university to give in to their demands, the students interrogated the Dean. The Dean simply stated that they could have met with President Kirk earlier, and a demonstration of this kind would not succeed. The group decided to hold the men in the building in order to get a response from President Kirk. Coleman and Kahn retreated to the Dean's office and three students stood guard at the door to protect them.

Once the occupation started, the SDS and SAS leaders formed a steering committee. Nine students taken from SDS, SAS, the College Citizenship Council and an 'unattached liberal' came together to govern the occupation. According to Rudd, they were all men, and in hindsight he spoke of this as a mistake.<sup>10</sup> Rudd's observation of the lack of women came from hindsight. Typically during protests in 1968 women did not have an active role except for planning and organizing. During the occupation, women participants served the movement by planning food and sleeping arrangements. They worked with other students to plan out security and the basic needs of the occupants. Sue LeGrand, Mark Rudd's

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<sup>10</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 65.

girlfriend, was a Barnard student and participated in protests with the Columbia SDS. After the SDS occupied Low Library, Sue suggested that Mark lie down due to the length of time he went without sleep. Throughout the occupation, the women, particularly those from neighboring Barnard College, became frustrated with the male leadership. As progressive as the New Left was, the leadership and policies were still heavily misogynistic and not open to change. The women



Source: "At Issue," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed August 2, 2014,

participants went on to use the events at Columbia as a springboard to become more involved in the Women's Movement in the 1970s.

The steering committee made a list of demands for the administration, while the remaining occupying students divided themselves to cover all of the requirements such as food, garbage, security and entertainment.<sup>11</sup> They

wrote a lengthy document outlining the reasons for the strike and occupation, citing their individual and group causes, along with the six

demands that were to be presented to the university. The students envisioned the university as a part of a bigger entity and felt they were stuck in a system that it had created, and felt it was their duty to reject the "gap between potential and realization in this society."<sup>12</sup> Even though the SAS students remained focused on

<sup>11</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 65.

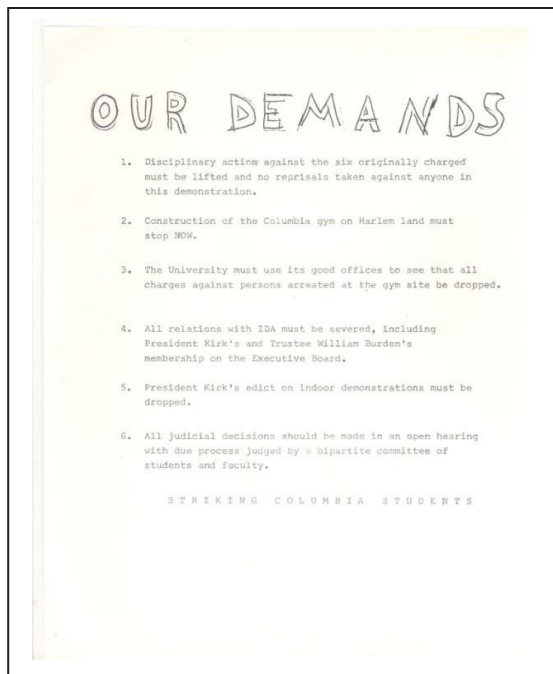
the construction of the gymnasium, the support from the white students was important. The SAS and SDS reached a compromise to include the SDS demands; however, the working relationship between the two groups was becoming strained as the day wore on.

The steering committee's demands highlighted a stark contrast between the political philosophies of SDS and SAS. The SDS members wanted a more participatory approach where each member had a say in the direction of the steering committee and their demands. This was in direct contrast to the black students who had an appointed leader that spoke for their members as a trustee and therefore did not hold votes to find out what the group wanted. To the SAS, the SDS students' constant need to consult with one another over every issue quickly became a source of frustration.

At 3 p.m., the steering committee presented the demands to the students that had occupied the lower floors of Hamilton Hall. After reading the demands to the students, Rudd and Wilson posted the demands in the lobby of Hamilton Hall. Announcing to the students that they needed to stay until the demands were met, Rudd asked that them to pledge their dedication before the committee by raising their hands. He also suggested that the protesters garner support from outside chapters of SDS and residents of Harlem. SAS had been in touch with CORE and SNCC while the SDS chapters from around the country pledged support for

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<sup>12</sup> "Columbia [University] Strike Coordinating Committee, 1968," University of Michigan Dearborn Personal Pages PPenock <http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~ppenock/doc-Columbia.htm> [accessed 2 August 2014].



Source: "Our Demands", *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions* <https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/items/show/5660> [accessed August 2, 2014].

the protesters. The SDS demands highlighted the individual and group causes that were present in Hamilton Hall.

1. That the administration grant amnesty for the original IDA 6 and for all those participating in these demonstrations.

2. That construction of the gymnasium in Morningside Park be terminated immediately.

3. That the university sever all ties with the Institute for Defense Analysis and that President Kirk and Trustee Burden resign their positions on the Executive Committee of that institution immediately.

4. That President Kirk's ban on indoor demonstrations be dropped.

5. That all future judicial decisions be made by a student-faculty committee.

6. That the university use its good offices to drop charges against all people arrested in demonstrations at the gym site and on campus.<sup>13</sup>

After posting the demands in the lobby of Hamilton, the leaders of both groups read the demands to Dean Coleman. The Dean made a point to the protestors that the Vice President of Columbia was willing to meet with them earlier in the day to discuss the demands, as highlighted in a letter to SDS President Rudd. At this time, according to instructions from the SAS leadership, the protestors offered Dean Coleman his freedom. The SAS leadership decided that Hamilton Hall was to be closed off to students and only those currently inside would stay. Wilson and the other SAS members risked losing credibility from the

<sup>13</sup> "Columbia Strike Coordinating Committee Statement."

university during the protest while holding two officials hostage, which led them to offer freedom. Dean Coleman declined and opted to stay with the students to prevent any violence or unnecessary escalation.

After the steering committee presented its demands, the contrasts between leadership styles and ideologies started to wear on the SAS leaders. Cicero Wilson grew irritated with the participatory democracy style of SDS. He thought it was too elaborate for governing and decision making. He also perceived that the SDS members were not interested in protesting the gym. Rather, the SDS students wanted to put their agenda front and center, which could be seen as detracting from the SAS's agenda. By 2 a.m., the black leaders separated themselves by going to the third floor, leaving the remainder of the building to the whites.<sup>14</sup> The two groups met separately to plan a meeting for the next morning.

Attempting to reach a compromise with the SAS, Mark Rudd spoke with its leadership and Cicero Wilson. SAS told him that they had decided to close the building and block the entrance of Hamilton Hall to incoming students and faculty members. By 5 a.m. compromise between the two groups was impossible. This was not only due to the difference in political processes between the groups, but also the growing feelings that the SDS students were not part of the protest for the same reasons the SAS students were. The SAS students wanted the protest to focus solely on the construction of the gym and its social ramifications. The SDS had different goals: in particular, they wanted to expand the protest outside

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<sup>14</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 60.

of the university and include the grievances of students everywhere against the social ills of American society. This goal reflected the stated goals of the 1968 SDS group on the campus in the manifesto written by Rudd the previous fall. A member of the SAS also cited confusion on the part of SDS in that they “would make decisions then undo them and go back and forth...”<sup>15</sup>

Mark Rudd returned to the seventh floor, where the white students had been gathering and stated that “the Blacks have asked us to leave the building – and I think we should.” Having the desire to keep the group together to continue the protest, Rudd continued by saying that “the Blacks have chosen to make *their* stand, we should – not in support, but in attack of our common enemy, the administration, go and find your own building to make a stand in.”<sup>16</sup> Rudd did not specify what the students should stand for, however. The black students that imposed the separation had seen an ideological and practical difference between the groups, but wanted to continue to make their mark on the university with the protest. In an attempt to keep the group together amongst the exodus of white students, Bill Sales yelled after them that the blacks were with them and wished them luck.

From the point of view of the SAS, the eviction of the white students was necessary to ensure the success of the protest, and to highlight the cause of the black students, which was primarily the gym issue. Ray Brown, a prominent SAS member, said of the white students leaving “if they remained, it would probably

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<sup>15</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 63.



have diluted the effectiveness of the protest.”<sup>17</sup> The SAS started to see the SDS activists as only participating in order to radicalize the white students, and not for the gym issue which was the number one goal. These distinct identifiers of both the SDS and SAS remained with the protesters and contributed to the deterioration of the groups coming together to achieve their initial goals as the week wore on.

After the SDS and white students left Hamilton Hall to occupy their own buildings, only a few went on to Low Library. Since the occupation of Hamilton Hall and the protest continued throughout the night, most students went back to their dorms in search of sleep. The remaining students that went on to Low split themselves from the militant SDS members who occupied President Kirk’s office. Rudd and other SDS members stormed Kirk’s office and occupied it, searching for evidence of involvement with the CIA and Department of Defense. The other students that occupied Low sought refuge in other areas of the large building, and some even gathered in neighboring Ferris Hall. The following days, students who were not members of SDS occupied three other campus buildings. These groups consisted of graduate students, architecture students and moderate students. They all agreed the occupation was important, however did not agree with Rudd and the militants. The differences in philosophy were not realized until negotiations with faculty members to end the strike came up at the end of the week.

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<sup>17</sup> Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia*, 75.

### Chapter III: The Split

By 5 a.m. April 24, the alliance of the SAS and SDS students fell apart as the SAS continued to occupy Hamilton Hall as the focus of the gym protest. The SAS leaders asked the white students to leave Hamilton Hall, and the black students agreed to continue the protest with them, only occupying different buildings. After the SAS asked the SDS members to leave Hamilton Hall, the large group of SDS and white students wandered through the campus and pondered their next move.

In an attempt to once again enter Low Library where President Grayson Kirk's office was, the large group of approximately 250 students broke a window and forced themselves inside the building. Only half of the students made it to Grayson Kirk's office, due to the size of the building and the belief that occupying the building was more important than Kirk's office. Rudd and the other SDS militants stormed off to Kirk's office while the remaining students occupied other parts of Low Library. After gaining entrance to Kirk's office, its opulence and wealth amazed the students. They began to search for evidentiary links of the University and the military by rifling through the files.

As the students searched through President Kirk's office, a security guard who had been injured upon the students' entrance called the police to Low Library around 8:00 a.m. Word spread about the increasing amount of officers that were present to arrest the students. Mark Rudd "advocated abandonment of

the suite and organization of a student strike.”<sup>1</sup> This was the second time since the beginning of the demonstration that Rudd pushed for a less radical course of action, as he was utilizing judgments of the immediate situation versus the goal of the protests. Arresting more students would end the occupation and fail to send a message to the administration. In an attempt to avoid being arrested, students abandoned the building by exiting through the windows, and only about 25 students remained hidden throughout Low Library.

A second group of students had gathered in nearby Ferris Booth Hall and formed a student strike committee. The security guards and officers soon exited the building and students flowed back in and soon re-occupied the executive suite of President Kirk and other parts of the building. Rudd went there and suggested that more buildings be taken on the campus. Another SDS member, Ted Kaptchuk, opposed this measure and in response Rudd stepped down as SDS chair. The meeting ended and the students appointed a Strike Coordinating Committee (SCC) to serve as the governing body of the occupied buildings during the protest. In contrast to the original steering committee that caused a rift within the SDS and SAS, the organizations chose two members from each occupying building as leaders. The occupants of Hamilton Hall however, never participated in this committee nor allowed the committee to speak on their behalf for the remaining part of the occupation.

The Columbia University administration made multiple attempts to compromise with the students, and offered many possibilities for them to work

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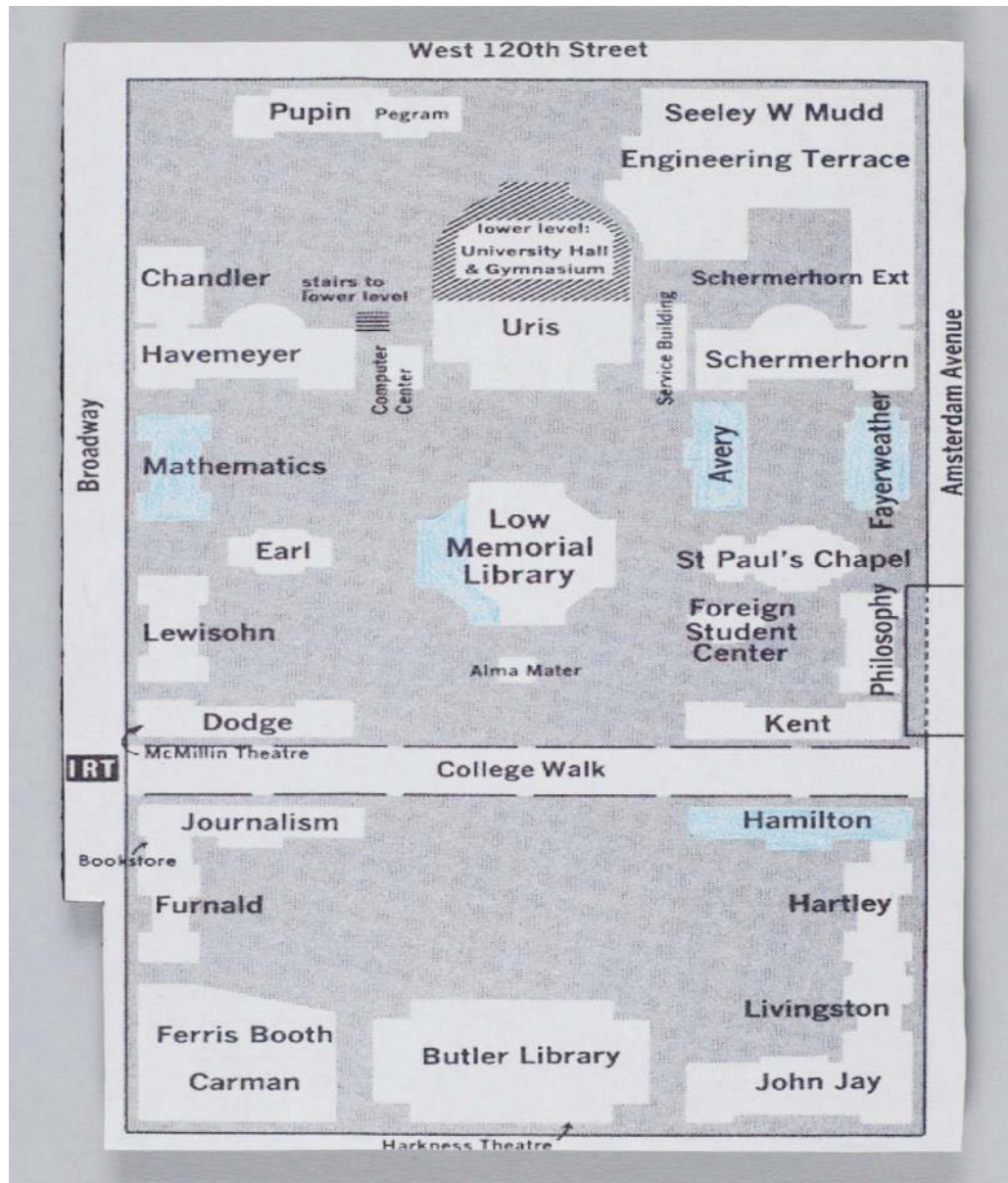
<sup>1</sup>Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 108-109.

with President Kirk and the rest of the administration. At one point, a delegate from the administration, Dean George K. Fraenkel, offered that “if the leaders were really interested in the substantive demands for changes in the University’s policies with respect to the gymnasium and IDA, they should be big enough in spirit to drop the demand for amnesty for individual leaders of the uprising.”<sup>2</sup> Because the university would not consider amnesty for the student leaders and the occupying students, the students perceived it as a direct attack and a plan by the university to expel the SDS activists. An unintended result of the protest was that the students no longer had any trust or confidence in the disciplinary system at Columbia. The exchange between Fraenkel and Rudd became nasty and it was suggested by the dean that Rudd would not be returning to the university after the protest was over.

By Wednesday evening, April 24, it was not just the SDS and SAS occupying campus buildings, but other groups that were participating in the protest events. The evening of Wednesday, April 24 had the students in the school of architecture occupying the hall they called home, Avery Hall. Originally they had actually barricaded themselves inside for the initial purpose of continuing their homework, because the University had ordered campus buildings closed at 6 p.m. The University administration reacted to the recent occupation of Low Library and Hamilton Hall by protecting the remaining campus buildings from further occupation. The Avery Hall occupants soon joined in the protest, angered by their eviction from their classroom building. On Thursday

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<sup>2</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 110.



Source: Student and Staff Columbia University Directory, Officers and Staff, 1967-1968.

morning, a group of students occupied Fayerweather building, and similar to the occupants of Avery Hall, these students were not tied to the SDS. They were graduate students at Columbia University with grievances of their own.

Altogether, students occupied five campus buildings and the administration made

no efforts to either clear the students or prevent new buildings from being occupied.

Faculty and administrative responses began to occur on Thursday, April 26, the third day of the occupation. The administration could not see an end to the occupations. Clearly they were wrong about the protest playing itself out. A meeting with President Kirk and the Vice-President of Columbia Dr. David Truman, met with city officials and members of the police department to discuss how to end the occupation. The police refused to confront the SAS and black students. Referencing the riots in response to the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination and the tumultuous relationship that Columbia had with the residents of Harlem, the police wanted a peaceful way to deal with the black students in Hamilton Hall.

A faculty proposal for the black students suggested partial amnesty with only university discipline given. However, the students had to evacuate Hamilton Hall immediately. The administration took this proposal further to include disciplinary probation for one year and the identification of the students by name, thus to end their participation in campus activities such as the SAS.<sup>3</sup> An ongoing problem for the Columbia administration was they did not know the identities of most of the activists in the occupation. When the officers reported to Low Library, they were given the student IDs of Mark Rudd and the other action faction members who occupied Kirk's office. The administration felt that knowing the names of the activists could help them in dealing with student protestors. The

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<sup>3</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 112-113.

proposal was taken to the black students in Hamilton Hall, but they ultimately chose to stay.

The reaction to the SDS was less favorable. Having had an altercation with Dean Fraenkel, along with its previous record of campus violations regarding indoor demonstrations, the administration refused amnesty to the SDS and was ready to press criminal charges as well as impose university discipline.

While the Columbia administration met to discuss the campus protest situation, the faculty responded to the occupation as well. The faculty met to discuss a possible end to the protest, and agreed upon a “need for strong faculty action both to disapprove the students’ tactics and to reform the position of the Administration upon the gymnasium, discipline, and other issues of grave student concern.”<sup>4</sup> The faculty went on to further suggest full amnesty for the students, and for the university to reconsider the construction of the gym. President Kirk disagreed with the faculty about the students, but in a rare instance of compromise, he brought the proposal about the gymnasium to the trustees. Unfortunately, the trustees took no action and amnesty was not granted as it was seen as undermining university policy that shaped the credibility of the school.

The decision by President Kirk and the administration did not deter the faculty from making other attempts. The faculty formed a group called the Ad Hoc Faculty Group (AHFG), which involved teaching assistants as well as faculty. They drafted and signed a second proposal to the administration in hopes to end the occupation and work with the administration. The second proposal almost

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<sup>4</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 114.

mirrored the initial demands of the students in Hamilton Hall in regards to discipline, construction of the gym and respect toward the student strike until the crisis was resolved.

By Friday, the campus had closed down due to the occupation. In response to the student occupation, a group of dissenters that previously protected Low Library from the SDS and SAS at the Sundial on April 23, gathered on the campus protesting, citing amnesty for those occupying the buildings. These students felt that the university administration made the rules and they should be followed. It is important to note that a similar group formed at the Sundial on April 23 against the initial crowd of protestors.

Amnesty for the occupying students was the main point of contention between the students and the administration. Despite the work of the faculty on behalf of the students, not all groups occupying the campus agreed on the amnesty issue. Rudd and the action faction felt that amnesty was the only point left to argue and it became very important to their exit from Low Library. They felt this was the most important for one reason: they were right in protesting and the administration was wrong. Rudd spoke of the importance of amnesty due to the large amount of participants and their First Amendment protections: "it's going to be impossible to discipline people at all for these crimes...there is only one solution: recognize that these are political acts and the reasons behind them are political...Amnesty is really the only solution. I ask that this group grant us amnesty with the understanding that what we did was right."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jerry Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 140-141.



To the faculty and students involved in the protest, amnesty was the main issue that was not settled and it was critical to the movement as it was the only issue that now kept the different groups in the campus buildings together. In many cases, while the students were a part of the protest, they did not hold the same philosophical beliefs as those in Hamilton Hall or Low Library. An example of the differing philosophical beliefs was the group of students in Fayerweather Hall. Their approach to the occupation was more moderate, and they were the first to vote to drop the amnesty for all. Instead, the graduate students supported a different approach to discipline on the part of the university to give the Columbia administration an opportunity to regain their image among the general public.

Rudd and other students in Low Library did not agree with this proposition. The AHFG characterized Rudd as rude in negotiations with the administration. Each occupied building had a collective belief of how the occupation should be settled. They took their beliefs to the SCC, the governing body of the occupation. After working over the weekend with the AHFG, the students and the faculty worked to create a tentative agreement to take to the university involving the important topic of amnesty. They also addressed the gym controversy, the IDA and the previous discipline of the IDA 6. Unfortunately, the proposal was not well received by the administration. The administration did not have a good relationship with the SDS and perceived that the occupation was just another stunt by Rudd and his colleagues. The administration worked with the police to plan a bust to be held on April 30. The result would be the arrest of all those

students occupying campus buildings with the exception of the students in Hamilton Hall.

The bust came at a time when the administration felt the students were at their weakest. Food supplies that had been successfully delivered to the occupied buildings all week were now cut off, especially in Low Library. Thus the administration felt it was a good time to act. This assumption on the part of the administration was incorrect, because food supplies were still coming in to the demonstrators. Even with the blockage, Reverend A. Kendall Smith from Harlem successfully delivered food to the occupants in Low Library. Seeing the error in their thought process, the administration attempted to broker with the Reverend. His goal was to deliver food to the occupants; however Columbia administrators were adamant in preventing that. It was possible to starve out the students and end the protest. An occupant of Low Library announced to the administration that they would only receive food through the windows and chanted "We Shall Not Be Moved."<sup>6</sup>

Very early on Tuesday morning, April 30, 1968, the police arrived on the Columbia University campus with one mission in mind: to clear the occupied buildings. Prior to the bust, the University had cut off the water supply to the buildings. Along with the students inside the buildings, there were groups of students outside of the buildings wearing green armbands signifying their role to deter violent actions on the part of the police. The AHFG had previously promised to stand in front and prevent entry to the occupied buildings to protect

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<sup>6</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 177.

students inside. Reportedly, though, the only force protecting the occupiers was the students with the green armbands. According to the administration's theory and that of the police, those who wanted to leave the buildings on their own accord had had plenty of time throughout the occupation and were free to do so at any time prior to the bust. This was the case for the students inside Hamilton Hall. Hamilton Hall was cleared peacefully just as the police arrived on campus. Once outside of Hamilton Hall, the police escorted the SAS students into a van and arrested them. The police arrested a total of eighty-six students at Hamilton Hall.

The next destination for the police was Low Library. The students inside decided to engage in passive resistance, which meant going limp for the police, which was not entirely successful. As the police marched through the building, they clubbed and dragged away students. The police again used force in Avery Hall where the students resisted arrest, and were dragged out by officers. Fayerweather had the most arrests of any of the buildings. A total of 268 students either exited the building peacefully, went limp or resisted the officers. Fayerweather was the only group that had not collectively decided on a plan when met by officers during the bust. The Mathematics building was the last building to be cleared. The police finally entered the Math building around 4:00 a.m. where most of the radical students were and were met by soapy stairs which caused them to fall. The Math building had the least amount of violence by the police, even though some students resisted arrest. Next to Fayerweather, though, the Math building had the highest number of arrests at 203.

The police arrested over 700 students on April 30, 1968, thus ending the Columbia University occupation. Many of the students that were arrested were inside the occupied buildings, but there were a large number that were outside promoting peace who were caught in the bust and were clubbed and arrested with the rest of the students. The only building to be evacuated peacefully was Hamilton Hall, which was brokered with the New York City police department in advance of the bust.

The police initially suggested that there would be no need for violence, but the multiple groups of students standing guard created a chaotic situation that did not allow for peaceful evacuations. The police bust not only created a chaotic environment, but it angered students who were not part of the demonstration and, in a sense, radicalized them and made them more sympathetic to the protesters. The statistics of the bust pointed to a larger misconception about the protest as well. Seventy-five percent of those arrested on April 30 were Columbia students, and small percentages were Columbia alumni. The release of those figures dispelled “the suggestion that the demonstration was work of ‘outside agitators’ or a small band of Columbia radicals bent upon revolution.”<sup>7</sup>

A major outcome of the police bust on April 30 was a University wide student strike that involved even those more moderate and conservative students who felt the police and administration had gone too far. The strike lasted throughout the month of May and radicalized students who had never participated in protests before. The Columbia student occupation not only

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<sup>7</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 142.

created a new group of student protestors, but also cemented new relationships between the administration and the Black students. Those students eventually became involved in planning curriculum, and the administration included them in the development of the campus. For the SDS, the university went on to expel the members of the action faction and those participants who had been involved in multiple protests prior to the occupation. After the occupation and bust, students viewed the university differently and opposed not only their policies, but the handling of discipline and demonstrations.

#### Chapter IV: Columbia Aftermath and Impact on Activism in the Western World

The student reactions to the April 30 police “bust” on the Columbia campus changed how the student occupation was viewed overall. The students that witnessed the bust felt the actions of the police were unnecessary and students pushing for a peaceful end were injured and arrested. In many cases, students who had not participated in the protest became radicalized and participated in the student strike. A secondary reaction was the new collaboration of the SAS and the Columbia administration.

On May 1, students who had been beaten and arrested began to return the campus. Angry and confused over the previous night’s events, Rudd climbed out on the ledge of Hamilton Hall and engaged the crowd that gathered on the College Walk. The area known as College Walk was the location of the Sundial in central campus that was the meeting place for the first protest on April 23, 1968. Rudd and four other students identified by Kirk and the administration pushed the limits of their probation during the occupation. The probation stemmed from earlier protests including the Anti-IDA sit-in and the Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial disruption.<sup>1</sup>

Now, after meeting with the administration and participating in the strike, these protestors were destined for expulsion from Columbia. There was still a police presence on campus and the angry students approached them chanting “COPS MUST GO!” The police reacted to the approaching group by beating

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<sup>1</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 175.

them. *The Columbia Daily Spectator* noted that the school had not authorized the police to use clubs nor clear the College Walk.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the second “bust” at Hamilton Hall on May 1, a large group of students, faculty and community supporters attended a meeting at the Wollman Auditorium. The Strike Coordinating Committee (SCC) planned the meeting to decide whether to keep the original six demands. Rudd’s vision of a larger protest in April seemed like a reality now. When writing about the strike and its potential, Rudd said “with almost 8 million young people attending postsecondary schools in 1968, the potential for antiwar and antiracism protest was enormous.”<sup>3</sup>

David Gilbert, a Columbia student who envisioned a better world for the people of Harlem after witnessing the awful conditions in which they lived, was an SDS activist. Mark Rudd greatly overshadowed Gilbert’s role in the occupation. However, Gilbert’s role grew at the meeting at the auditorium when he suggested a change in the demands. He spoke to the crowd stating, “the original six demands are no longer sufficient, in addition to winning political demands, we must begin to create a new university.”<sup>4</sup> The crowd reacted positively to Gilbert’s message, then Rudd suggested that the crowd strike against the university. Instead of the bust breaking up a movement and ending the cause, it had, instead, created a new movement that included many more

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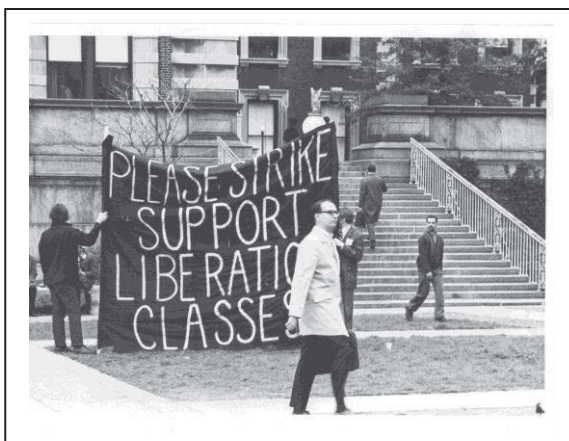
<sup>2</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 91.

<sup>3</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Rudd, *Underground* 9, 91.

members than before. The people at the meeting heard Rudd's message and they chanted "STRIKE, STRIKE" in response to his analysis of the group.<sup>5</sup>

The Columbia student strike in May 1968 inspired many more people to join the cause than just radical students, including faculty members, community members, graduate students, university employees and a fraternity. Five thousand people in total participated in the month long strike. The strike was



Source: Columbia College Today, "Liberation Classes Sign," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed July 29, 2014, <https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/items/show/5647>.<sup>1</sup>

disruptive, though not all classes were shut down. Picket lines formed around campus buildings to ensure that classes did not meet consistently. For the most part, the Columbia campus community respected the strike. The

strikers felt they had made a difference in the operation of the University, even going so far as to refer to President Kirk and the administration as an older

form of power at the school. Rudd and the Strike Coordinating Committee formed a "Liberation School" and wrote a memorandum on the "Renaissance of Learning at Columbia:"

The old administration (represented by President Kirk) has proven itself incapable of meeting the legitimate desire of the University community for a free and democratic, creative and relevant educational institution...Most recently, the old structure has taken a major step toward capitulation by cancelling old classes for the rest of the term...This means that the will of the majority of the participants (students, faculty and others together) in

<sup>5</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 92.



each counter-class should prevail on questions of form and content...Almost anything is worth a try, and special effort should be made to break the confines of the traditional 'lecturer and passive audience' mold.<sup>6</sup>

As the strike wore on, however, even though it was respected by members of the campus community, attendance at the picketing and rallies shrunk. It became clear that students were beginning to lose interest in the cause. Hoping to increase involvement in the strike, the SCC planned a rally on Friday, May 17. Using leaflets and other posters, they created a sense that this "monster rally" would end up occupying another building or presenting another dramatic action.<sup>7</sup> The planned rally attracted nearly seven hundred people, though there were many non-students. Once again, Cicero Wilson and Mark Rudd teamed up to address the crowd and to ignite a passion to change the administration at Columbia. This time, however, it was not just an action on campus. A student conveyed a message to Rudd and Wilson that the Harlem community had liberated a building downtown.

The crowd followed the students and grew in numbers as it made its way through the downtown. Rudd's initial hope that the demonstration would expand beyond the university had happened, at least in Harlem. The community came together in response to the school's tactics and now fought back. They now occupied a tenement that Columbia had purchased and was in the process of evicting the tenants. The students, respecting the symbolism of the community occupation, remained outside and sang "We Shall Not Be Moved", reminiscent of

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<sup>6</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 226-227.

<sup>7</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 241.

the singing in Low Library just a few weeks earlier.<sup>8</sup> Also reminiscent of the events of April 30, the administration called the police and they eventually broke up the gathering. To the protestors that night – community members and students – “the memory of April 30 was strong in their minds.”<sup>9</sup>

In response to the occupation in Harlem on May 17, the SDS planned a second rally on May 21 at the Sundial. Five SDS members identified by the administration now faced disciplinary action and they had lawyers to aid them in negotiations with the school. On May 21, prior to the disciplinary hearing, the gathering held at the Sundial attracted approximately 350 sympathizers and supporters. They marched over to Hamilton Hall where they demanded that the suspensions for the five SDS students be lifted, and refused to leave Hamilton. A second occupation of Hamilton Hall began. The occupation lasted until early morning of May 22. The administration called the police again and instead of violent action like the bust on April 30, the demonstrators left Hamilton peacefully. This peaceful end to the demonstration, however, did not last. The demonstrators lingered on the Campus Walk and President Kirk announced over WKCR, the campus radio station, for the crowd to vacate the area. The crowd now outside of the buildings did not hear the message, so an administrator “rushed back to the Sundial, and he told 800 to 1000 students of the decision through a bullhorn.” The police then came and attempted to break up the crowd.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 243.

<sup>9</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 244.

<sup>10</sup> Cox Commission Report, *Crisis at Columbia*, 181-182.

Those on the campus facing off with the police became enraged and attacked the police officers. After facing off with the attacking students, the police responded with violent arrests and clearing tactics. By 5:30 a.m., the campus was secured. In the wake of the attacks by the students against the police, the radicals' and participants' perception of the cause had changed. They viewed the attacks as unnecessary, and that the goals of the strike had turned a corner. Students that respected the strike and the actions of the SDS and other protestors now only saw the negative aspects of the protest and rejected it.

Hamilton II, as the second occupation came to be known, turned away more moderate students who now felt that supporting a strike was no longer feasible. The radicalization that once took place after April 30 had now lost its effect and the campus was anxious to get back to normal.<sup>11</sup> The last gasp of student activism occurred on June 4, when Mark Rudd attempted to interrupt a service at St. Paul's Cathedral, but this was not well received. After June 4, Mark Rudd received a letter from Columbia University informing him of his suspension. After a tumultuous year at the University, the administration, faculty and students were looking forward to a traditional graduation without interruption.

Even though the student strike in May 1968 backfired on the organizers, a positive outcome of the Columbia strike happened in the spring of 1969. Proposals for a new curriculum in urban and minority affairs made its way around campus, and surveys followed to gather student input. The student input from the

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<sup>11</sup> Avorn et al, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 282.

surveys demonstrated that the students felt that social action should be added to the Columbia curriculum, and including the community allowed for a well-rounded, more informed college education as well.

In addition to the surveys, Columbia University now accepted input from the black community. When speaking about community involvement, Columbia now adopted the policy that “Communities are not interested in merely having someone do a good job for them. All programs must have full community participation at the planning and policy-making stage.”<sup>12</sup> In many ways the SAS and Harlem community succeeded in changing the outlook and policies of Columbia University, which the SDS was unable to do. With more community involvement and an open dialogue, the Harlem community and black students now had more power and input in their education.

The “action faction” students eventually left Columbia University, but still participated in protests on campus in the fall of 1968. Mark Rudd’s vision of a protest going beyond the university came true with the Columbia student strike and now he sought to work for the revolution. Rudd had fully embraced the militant stance of the SDS and became part of a secondary faction that later led to a split in the national SDS organization. At the 1969 SDS convention, the more militant members of the SDS led a revolt against those who wanted to be more inclusive and continue to practice non-violence. A small faction that included

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph G. Colmen, Barbara A. Wheeler, editors, *Human Uses of the University: Planning A Curriculum in Urban and Ethnic Affairs at Columbia University* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

Mark Rudd, Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers and others broke from the SDS and formed the Weather Underground to condone the action faction philosophy.

An example in the change of leadership and Rudd's desires for the SDS occurred when the group formed an SDS Draft Committee and attended a speech by Colonel Askt, head of the Selective Service System for New York City. The plan of the group was to ask "probing questions."<sup>13</sup> The passive resistance to the draft official outraged Rudd, who thought of the official as a war criminal. Rudd and the action faction felt that more active protests would drive the point home, which eventually took on the phrase "bring the war home".<sup>14</sup>

After the small faction that eventually became known as the Weather Underground formed, the first course of action was to hold a National Action in Chicago from October 8 to 11, 1969. The new SDS leadership, in connection with the Chicago 8 conspiracy trial that took place against activists at the Chicago Democratic Convention protests, decided to 'bring the war home' and march through the streets of Chicago. The march was designed to expose the American people to what other places like Vietnam experienced as a consequence of United States government policy. After a strong advertising campaign throughout the summer of 1969, the new SDS leadership – then calling itself the Weather Bureau – tried to inspire a large student and activist turnout for a National Action that would be called the "Days of Rage" by the press.

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<sup>13</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 155.

The demonstrators met in Grant and Lincoln Park on October 8, the location of the Democratic Convention protests the year before. The event, though well publicized, failed to bring out the crowds the Weather Bureau expected. The Weather Bureau failed to reach a majority of the SDS chapters as “only a tiny handful of the more than 350 campus SDS chapters were represented. Weatherman was alone.”<sup>15</sup> The demonstration pushed forward with the crowd hitting the streets and breaking windows of Chicago businesses. The demonstrators were met by a police barricade and “after just an hour, the demonstration – and the carnage – was over. The result: six Weatherman shot, many dozens more injured, sixty-eight arrested...”<sup>16</sup> The lack of attendance and the radical philosophies of the Weathermen failed to resonate with most student activists and the group became both marginalized, and even more radical.

While the student strike and the Hamilton II occupation took place on the Columbia campus, Paris, France experienced major protests as well. Beginning in May 1968, the Paris students held a strike in the streets that attempted to change the French government and the French President. The strike came at a time when the SDS activists were beginning to lose hope at Columbia. The events in Paris, however, rejuvenated the SDS, especially at Columbia. An SDS activist praised the events in Paris as “Heady Days! Tie in Columbia with what was happening in Paris, where it appeared that the government might actually

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<sup>15</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 173-174.

<sup>16</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 175.

fall and there might be a new left revolution...<sup>17</sup> The SDS activists thought of the students at the Sorbonne and the University of Paris at Nanterre as changing the societal structure with their mass strike in May. The actions of the Paris students encouraged others to protest, not just students. The Paris protest eventually included blue collar workers, police officers and others as well, much as the SDS students had hoped for at Columbia.



Source: Columbia University Strike; 1968; 1968  
 Revisited Exhibition Collection; MC 132; Box 1; Folder 7;  
 New York University Archives.

The Paris strike in May 1968 was a general strike that took the world by storm. Beginning on May 2, 1968, an ultra-right-wing commando attacked a student union office at the Sorbonne in Paris. Recently, the fights between right and left wing students that occurred on the campus stemmed from the student sit-in at the University of Paris at Nanterre.<sup>18</sup> The left and right wing students opposed the closure of the University of Paris at Nanterre and the subsequent punishment the activists faced. Their coming together was not planned, and it was unusual for both groups to protest at the same time for the same cause.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Fraser, editor, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 200.

<sup>18</sup> Fraser, ed., *1968*, 203.

For the activists at the University of Paris at Nanterre, their “revolution” began in fall of 1967 and carried over to spring of 1968. The French government built the Nanterre campus to house the increasing population in Paris that was now attending postsecondary schools. Built in the early 1960s, the school bordered an area that was home to poor North African migrants. Similar to the set up at Columbia, a wall divided the campus from the neighboring *bidonville* or French slum.<sup>19</sup> A group of sociology students went on strike in November 1967 due to the decreasing number of economic opportunities. The job loss was the result of a national economic downturn that started in the mid-1960s and came to a head in 1967. The small strike that began in Nanterre soon spread to the Sorbonne and engaged students on both campuses.

The leader of the movements in Paris and Nanterre was a radical student named Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Cohn-Bendit’s family fled Germany during World War II, and by 1966 he was a student at the University of Paris at Nanterre studying sociology. Cohn-Bendit’s radical ideas attracted many students at Nanterre. After successfully avoiding expulsion from the school after the 1967 strike, Cohn-Bendit and a group of students occupied the administrative offices of Nanterre on March 22, 1968. The occupation consisted of left-wing and right-wing groups that opposed the French bureaucracy in regards to University funding and class discrimination at Nanterre. They called themselves the “Movement of 22 March”<sup>20</sup> and occupied the building to gain attention from the

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<sup>19</sup> Fraser, ed., 1968, 171.

<sup>20</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 548.



administration. The administration called the police and the police surrounded the building.

The students demanded to be heard. The administration complied and the students published a leaflet explaining the reasons they protested. Since multiple groups participated, they could not sign the leaflet on behalf of the individual organizations, so they signed it “Le Mouvement du 22 mars.”<sup>21</sup> The students then left peacefully. The Movement of 22 March was a new phenomenon in the French student movement at the time due to its makeup of students

...divided by their political beliefs but united by a common will to act, and a pact that all decisions would be taken by general assemblies. Without formal leaders, without common theoretical positions, the new movement was to play a key role in the May events that were shortly to rock France and astonish the world.<sup>22</sup>

In response to the occupation on campus, the administration brought charges against eight of the students involved, including Cohn-Bendit. The administration at Nanterre went so far as to close the University on May 2 for conflicts between the students and the administration. In addition, protesting students at Nanterre in March received orders to appear at the Sorbonne in Paris on May 6 for the discipline hearing. The combination of grievances against the administration for the closure of Nanterre, the student discipline at Nanterre and the hearing served as a cause for demonstration against the university.

On May 3 approximately five-hundred students took to the streets of Paris. The Parisian police soon arrived, expecting to clear the streets of all of the

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<sup>21</sup> Fraser, ed., 1968, 189.

<sup>22</sup> Fraser, ed., 1968, 189.

students. After loading the students into a van, people passing by grew enraged over the arrests. Parisians objected to the arrests of the students, because there was a strong alliance between them and the students, and they felt anger toward the De Gaulle government. The students reacted by grabbing paving-stones and tools and started tearing up the road. The police threw tear gas to break up the crowd and arrested 590. In the following days, the police presence remained at the Sorbonne which created tensions among the students on the campus.

A major difference between French students and American students was that the former were part of a union called Union Nationale des Etudiants de France (UNEF). As the largest student union in France, the students' enrollment in school was a job and it came with rights and responsibilities. On May 6, the same day as the scheduled hearings for the Nanterre students, the UNEF and the teacher's union called for a protest march against the police presence on campus. The police sealed off the Sorbonne but soon faced 20,000 students, teachers and supporters as they marched toward the campus. The marchers used barricades, stones or any other accessible materials. The police responded by throwing tear gas and arresting more participants than the previous night.

The protests on May 3 and May 6 in Paris "provoked outrage throughout the universities of France," and by Friday, May 10, the moderate Parisian students had become radicalized.<sup>23</sup> They joined the militants and idealists to form an offensive against the government. Though the initial May 2 protest mobilized students, the buildup process began in the early spring of 1968. "The May

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<sup>23</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 550.

movement in France was not triggered until small core groups of students began undertaking limited unconventional actions and noticeably 'upset' university operations by breaking rules, violating taboos, and committing other provocations."<sup>24</sup>

The small groups participated in a march on May 10 and now had support from high school students to protest the imprisonment of four students from May 3. The original plan of one group was to execute a union-type march, while other groups sought to damage the Sorbonne with pieces of the road like they had on May 3. The march started around the Latin Quarter and after reaching a square not far from the Sorbonne, the protestors refused to move until the government met their demands:

1. The release of the arrested students during the protest march.
2. Reopening the Sorbonne.
3. Withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter.<sup>25</sup>

In their refusal to move from the streets, many protestors built barricades against the police. The act of building a barricade had great meaning in French culture as it represented the revolutionary struggles of the French citizens and it represented the uprising of a people. More importantly, the barricade is a symbolic "defense of the poor, of the workers against the armies of the kings and reactionaries."<sup>26</sup> The next day, factory workers and other blue collar workers

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<sup>24</sup> Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, Detlef Junker, editors, *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 259.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, editors, *1968 In Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 115.

<sup>26</sup> Fraser, ed., *1968*, 211.

announced a strike in support of the students, and soon the movement had nearly nine million participants.

The movement gained recognition not only from the workers, but the press as well. The French newspaper *L'Express* ran 'Students: Insurrection' as its headline until May 19.<sup>27</sup> Along with the media exposure and support from the union workers, the Paris strikes resonated with American students as well. Columbia University and Berkeley experienced rallies in supporting the French students.

The blue collar workers that joined the students in Paris did so spontaneously. One day after erecting the barricades against the police, the workers responded by going on strike with the students and did so "without a call from union headquarters."<sup>28</sup> The spontaneous actions on the part of the workers were also in the hands of the students. The union meeting was the only planned activity on the part of the students. The barricades and occupation of the streets developed organically, and allowed the movement in France to remain "a spontaneous, unforeseen development."<sup>29</sup> One of the issues that tied the students and workers together was the conservative agenda of French President Charles De Gaulle and the National Assembly. Part of the protest was not just to re-open the Sorbonne and Nanterre, but to draw attention to the struggle of French union workers. The protestors adopted a "generalized Marxism that was

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<sup>27</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 550.

<sup>28</sup> Klimke and Scharloth, eds, *1968 In Europe*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Fink, et al., *1968*, 269.

perceived by many in all sections of society”<sup>30</sup> This idea harkened back to the French Revolution and the struggle of the peasants against a repressive King and Queen. The people perceived the repressive administration of President Charles De Gaulle as against the people; therefore the people remained in the streets of Paris against him.

The protestors remained in the streets of France throughout the month of May. Workers and students successfully shut down factory production and essentially stopped the French economy. As May wore on, the workers grew tired and the students developed a taste for summer. By May 24, Charles De Gaulle, who was expected to resign, announced that he would not resign and threatened army intervention to the protestors. He did, however dissolve the National Assembly.<sup>31</sup> Along with his speech, he encouraged those union members as part of the protest to return to work. The teacher’s union and UNEF responded to De Gaulle’s requests and ordered the remaining students off the streets.

While the Paris and Columbia protests involved grievances against the University, other protests such as the Grosvenor Square protest in London and the Democratic Convention protest in Chicago occurred due to grievances against the war in Vietnam. Both London and Chicago involved protestors that

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<sup>30</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, 557.

<sup>31</sup> Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8.

were not specifically students, but multiple groups of activists that came together to protest the war.

As 1968 wore on the anti-war movement was gaining more ground in light of the Tet Offensive and the realization that the United States was not winning the war. From August 26 through August 29, 1968, the Democratic Convention came to Chicago. In recent months, Lyndon B. Johnson decided against running for another term, and Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. The Democratic candidates that were still left in the field no longer represented the student movement, but the students planning on attending the convention felt action needed to be taken to protest the war – after all, opposition to the war had driven the hated Johnson out of the race.

A planned protest by Jerry Rubin and the Yippies was to take place starting August 23. The Yippies were a group of protestors led by activists Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. According to Hoffman, a Yippie was “someone going to Chicago.”<sup>32</sup> Since “hippie” was a term used in the press, Hoffman and Rubin, along with some friends wanted to create a play on words by dubbing themselves as Yippies. To them, a Yippie was a “political hippie, or a flower child who was busted.”<sup>33</sup> The Yippies believed that the “turned-on baby-boom generation was already ‘the revolution’ in the embryo.”<sup>34</sup> Their beliefs about the baby-boomers

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<sup>32</sup> Abbie Hoffman, *The Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1980), 137.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, *Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman*, 137.

<sup>34</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 235.

born in revolutionary ideas were only waiting to be picked up by the rest of society.

Hoffman and Rubin actively spoke on college campuses and regularly attended protest marches. The protestors felt Chicago was the place to take the protest as the political pundits would see what the students wanted, and participatory democracy was the only way to make changes. Other groups expected to attend the protest included the SDS and the Black Panther Party. The mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, did not welcome the protestors, and had the police on stand-by in case the planned demonstrations became out of control.

Other issues that faced the protestors were park permits and curfews instituted by Mayor Daley. Park permits could not be found for the protestors that occupied Lincoln Park, and with the curfew in place, they could not occupy the park overnight. With a strict curfew facing the protestors, the Yippies like Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman felt the park should be defended. Rubin, Hoffman and the other Yippies believed that the large amount of people involved in the protest ensured that a police bust could not happen.<sup>35</sup> Others opposed this suggestion due to the recent violence by police that occurred at previous protests. The opposition did not see a reason to be beaten or killed over a park.

By August 25, the police surrounded the students who gathered in Lincoln Park. As the 11:00 pm curfew time came closer, student leaders such as Tom Hayden worked to push those in the park to “test the curfew”. Radical SDS

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<sup>35</sup>David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 173.

members felt that taking the protest to the streets was the smart decision as spreading it out geographically would keep the protestors from being overrun by the police.

Exactly at 11 P.M., the police that surrounded Lincoln Park moved in on the demonstrators. Instead of peacefully moving them out of the park and streets, the police became angry and incited a riot against the protestors. Officers “began to methodically club people. Some police beat people bloody.”<sup>36</sup> The protestors fought back and attempted to take the streets back from the police. They chanted, “the streets belong to the people,” but their attempts failed as the police continued to beat protestors until the streets cleared. The next few nights, the protestors faced off with police again, eventually making their way to Grant Park where the police permitted them to sleep. The first night of protests attracted many more people than anticipated, and by August 28, over seven thousand arrived to participate in the protests. Tom Hayden and other activists, who used the day to plan out activities, needed the television access that Grant Park provided to attract awareness to the cause.

After the first night of violence by the police, the National Guard arrived in Chicago to aid them. At nightfall, the police reacted violently toward the protestors once again, this time on behalf on any injured policemen that came into contact with them. The protestors learned from the previous days in their dealings with the police to be armed and utilized rocks and sticks to defend themselves. The actions on August 28, unlike those on August 25, were caught

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<sup>36</sup> Farber, *Chicago '68*, 182.



on tape with protestors chanting “the whole world is watching, the whole world is watching.”<sup>37</sup>

On multiple occasions in 1968, London students and activists participated in protests over the US involvement in Vietnam in Grosvenor Square and the London School of Economics. The protests rooted themselves in grievances against the war, though they utilized different protest strategies. In October 1968, the Vietnam Solidarity Committee organized a mass march to the American embassy in Grosvenor Square.<sup>38</sup> The protest was heavily advertised in a radical socialist newspaper called *Black Dwarf*.

The group marched to the American Embassy to protest the involvement in Vietnam. Noticing a door was open, a few marched inside. A violent confrontation with police occurred, and while there were no fatalities, students and protestors clashed with police. The London School of Economics dealt with a student occupation in the main building against “archaic university rules and procedures.” The students cleared out of the main building, but the school closed due to an employee dying of a heart attack because of the occupation.<sup>39</sup>

The aftermath of Columbia and the events in Paris differed from one another in planning and execution, but their impact on the student movement was felt throughout the summer. Student activism did not die out with the end of the Columbia protest or Paris occupation, but grew to include a large planned

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<sup>37</sup> Farber, *Chicago '68*, 200.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 293.

<sup>39</sup> Morgan, *The People's Peace*, 294-295.

protest in Chicago against the Democratic Convention and in London against the Vietnam War and school procedures. Students and activists in Paris and Chicago used the Columbia protests as a springboard to drive their message home against the French government and school closures. In a telegram sent from Paris to the Columbia students who were on strike at the same time, the Parisian students informed their fellow strikers “We’ve occupied a building in your honor. What do we do now?”<sup>40</sup> While the London and Chicago protests were not directly related to Columbia, the spirit of Columbia resonated with those protestors as they occupied parks and buildings to attempt to shut down oppressive power.

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<sup>40</sup> Rudd, *Underground*, 113.

## Conclusion

A radical change occurred in student protest starting in 1968 and continuing through 1974. Throughout 1968, student unrest affected not only college campuses like Columbia and the Sorbonne, the London School of Economics and the University of Paris at Nanterre, but also government and political gatherings. Students began to occupy buildings in order to effectively establish their grievances and causes. The students used alliances and compromise among groups that normally did not share the same philosophical beliefs to achieve a desirable result of changing their college administration. In many cases, the alliances did not remain intact.

This was especially the case for Columbia University when a split between the SDS and the SAS, then a further split between the white activists caused occupation of multiple buildings on campus. For the students at Columbia, the protest and occupation that went on for seven days reflected the views of the students ranging from concern for a new gymnasium that echoed earlier Jim Crow policies to the administration's role in the government policies of the Vietnam War to barring students from working on projects in campus buildings due to a curfew. The philosophical breaks among the Columbia students caused turmoil when negotiating an end to the occupation, but all the occupations ended after a police bust reunited the student body in a student strike against the university.

A similar situation unraveled in Paris at the Sorbonne and the University of Paris at Nanterre. Students from left and right wing groups united to protest the closing of the two universities and the subsequent arrests of activists. The Paris strike expanded beyond the student population that included blue collar workers and Parisians who backed the students. The groups also sought to change the policies of Charles De Gaulle and his administration who were perceived to be blind to the struggles of the workers. The result was a month long occupation of the streets in Paris, and a general strike.

Activists in the 1960s had visions for what the ideal society could look like. These ideals came alive at the University of California-Berkeley as they protested for free speech on their campus in 1964, and the increasing amount of protests against housing inequalities and the Vietnam War on college campuses and the streets. Movements like the women's movement and civil rights inspired people to become active and make changes in the places they saw societal ills.

By 1968, campus protests became commonplace and leaders like Mark Rudd, Cicero Wilson and Daniel Cohn-Bendit emerged and became the face of the protests. The strike in Paris was the ideal for the SDS activists at Columbia who dreamt the seven day occupation would extend beyond the university and include exploited workers and other activists. Since Columbia did not expand beyond the school and Harlem, the Paris strike caught the attention of the participants at Columbia and other schools around the country. However, the radicalism that inspired the students to protest in the beginning began to fade as

time went on at Columbia University and in Paris. In that sense, the protestors no longer embraced the original goals and the movements died out.

Activism did not only take place on the college campuses. In London, students protested the Vietnam War at the U.S. Embassy by storming the building and clashing with police in Grosvenor Square. Students also joined other protest groups like the Yippies and Black Panther Party in Chicago to protest the Vietnam War at The Democratic Convention. The protestors felt the war was wrong and the continued support and involvement went against their ideals of humanity.

All of the protests mentioned in this thesis, with the exception of the sit-in at Nanterre, ended in a violent clash with police officers and the mass arrest of the participants. The action the police took was not looked upon favorably as the observers felt the police had gone too far by beating and arresting the demonstrators. This feeling was prevalent especially at the Chicago Democratic Convention when the police continually used violence to attack the protestors and it caught the attention of television crews.

In conclusion, after the demonstrations, many changes occurred with the leaders of the respective protests and institutions that experienced disruption. The goals the students and activists set did not always come to fruition, but the tactics of their occupations and protests effectively attracted more participants and led people to examine their government officials and college administrators differently.

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