

Passive Protest:

The Vietnam Antiwar Movement at Eastern Illinois University, 1968-70

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On May 4 1970, the U.S. National Guard shot and killed four Kent State University students during a protest against the Vietnam War. Southern Illinois University students, reacting against the killings, shut down the school by setting fire to and destroying several campus buildings. Columbia University experienced similar uprisings, as did scores of campuses across the nation. In an era that appeared wrought with extreme campus unrest culminating at Kent State University, Eastern Illinois University's anti-war protests, though sometimes heated, never reached such cataclysmic proportions.

Unfortunately, few historical accounts examine smaller, less prestigious institutions and their reactions to Vietnam. The most notable works undertaken about this period usually analyze the larger universities and infamous student demonstrations such as those at Columbia University in 1968 and Berkeley in 1964. Such sporadic reactions, however, are unrepresentative of American students. Reading only these works (usually authored by those students that actually experienced the sixties) suggests that university violence was rampant. Similarly, these studies are "SDS-centered"—Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was the largest, most noticeable sixties student organization. Todd Gitlin, for example, a former SDS president, penned the popular and insightful *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. The focus, however, was solely on the SDS's eventual destruction, ignoring universities like EIU where such an organization was nonexistent. Former sixties radicals and SDS members Tom Hayden and David Horowitz also plummet into this pitfall. The SDS, while indeed crucial to understanding student sentiments, did not encompass all demonstrating students.

This study seeks to understand why EIU's reactions to national events between 1968 and 1970 were muted and reserved. Answering such a broad question requires examining the evolution of antiwar feelings and actions at EIU, keeping in mind that few universities experienced ferocious demonstrations were. Additionally, EIU President Quincy Doudna's ingenious decision to refuse to directly oppose student and faculty activism stifled reasons to violently rebel. Third, neither the faculty nor the students were completely unified. Faculty divisions over the Vietnam War's

righteousness created student rifts, and, among those students that did oppose the war, questions of sincerity created further splits. Finally, the changing nature of the university curriculum from science-centered to liberal arts-centered sowed the seeds of the “student power” movement thereby creating a rift between students and faculty. The faculty, supportive of Vietnam demonstrations, disapproved of “student power” demands, leaving the students to question the faculty’s sincerity regarding their antiwar sentiments. This shifted student emphasis and energies away from Vietnam, and towards issues directly related to students, including drugs, privacy issues, and gender equality. These factors divided the campus, weakened the anti-Vietnam movement, and prevented large gatherings or demonstrations that could spiral out of control.

Reaching such a thesis required digging into University Archives for memos, letters, and statements made by the faculty and administration regarding the Vietnam War. *Eastern News* editorials, articles, and student senate proclamations revealed student sentiment, while interviews with faculty and administration members were also conducted.

EIU, like most universities, did not even begin seeing significant antiwar activism until after the 1967 draft expansion. The *Eastern News*, for example, seldom mentioned the war. Consequently, gauging the EIU community’s (faculty, students, administration) attitude regarding Vietnam up to 1967 is difficult. Apparently, the EIU community never felt directly involved or threatened by the actions in Vietnam, thanks largely to EIU’s parochial atmosphere, relatively minute size, and insular geographic location in central Illinois. The fiercest demonstrations, after all, occurred at large, research-oriented institutions like Columbia, a school directly assisting the Federal Government by researching intelligence information used in Vietnam. This prompted anti-Vietnam students to react more angrily and violently since their tuition money contributed directly to the war effort. EIU students, by contrast, did not see their community directly involved or threatened by the events occurring halfway around the world.

The faculty was actually more involved in campus unrest than the students, though internal factions formed amongst both those opposed and those supportive of the Vietnam War. These professorate’s activism superseded that of the students because they more easily recognized the consequences of an extensive foreign war and, being slightly older, they had lived during either one or both World War eras and experienced war’s horrific effects. Additionally, some faculty members may have had ties to those universities where protests were more prevalent. Such faculty activism, however, was a common phenomenon according to historian Willis Rudy. Rudy chronicles university faculty opposition to the Vietnam War explaining how, in 1965, 66 percent of professors supported President Johnson, while by 1968, reacting to the Tet Offensive, such supporters were slinking into the anti-Vietnam camp.^[1] Nationally, Rudy found faculty responsible for organizing and supporting over half of all campus protests.^[2]

EIU was no exception. It was the radical faculty that insisted on EIU's participation in the 15 October 1969 Vietnam Moratorium, a peaceful, nation-wide anti-Vietnam campus protest. Theoretically, universities faced student and faculty pressure to cancel all classes and discuss the Vietnam situation.^[3] On-campus programs and lectures already had been approved, including planned discussion of the philosophy of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Vietnam's history and politics, and the culminating lecture by Students for a Democratic Society's (SDS) founder Thomas Hayden entitled "Human Values and Achievements: Capitalism or Socialism." The local Veteran's Association also organized a morning memorial service for U.S. soldiers killed in Vietnam, and several faculty members planned a half-hour faculty march.^[4] A Faculty Moratorium Committee, headed by Dr. Robert Barford, constructed an official faculty policy statement endorsing the Moratorium's activities and encouraging faculty involvement. It circulated a petition to faculty members imploring their support by either signing a letter to President Nixon denouncing the war, or by actively participating in the Moratorium. This could be done by joining the faculty protest march, devoting the entire class period to Vietnam discussion, or simply making an initial classroom statement regarding the Vietnam War, which was acceptable for professors as "citizen-professors."^[5] These radical professors, especially Barford, even initiated an underground newspaper, *The Fertilizer*. This publication, according to Dr. John McElligott, a member of the history faculty, included anti-Vietnam articles and propaganda, pro-marijuana articles, and pro-student rights editorials--but was primarily faculty-operated.^[6] The newspaper was so secret that current EIU President Louis V. Hencken, a resident assistant at the time, was unaware of its existence.^[7]

Yet, while some faculty supported protest, these radicals appalled others. Such opinions were more prevalent among older faculty members, as some had either served in a world war or at least remembered the war experience intimately. The older, more hawkish generation clashed sharply with their younger colleagues. Anthropology Professor Lloyd Collins, for example, opposed the moratorium, insisting that such action would provide the Viet Cong with psychological warfare and propaganda, possibly resulting in more U.S. casualties. He also feared active soldiers, upon hearing the anti-Vietnam actions back home, would be demoralized and thus have their survivability weakened.^[8] Sue and Pat Allen, chairmen for the EIU Youth for Nixon Organization, echoed Collins's argument warning such protests would rejuvenate the North Vietnamese morale and resolve, consequently lengthening rather than shortening the war.^[9] History professor Dr. Lawrence R. Nichols also opposed faculty participation, but on less openly political grounds than Collins; faculty, he argued, who used class time to discuss the incident, as Barford encouraged, violated the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) teacher responsibilities by wrongly using their position to encourage propaganda and indoctrination.^[10]

There was a third faction, the neutral faculty, who were fearful of then President Quincy Doudna's wrath. Retired EIU history professor Leonard Wood recalled that the old, hierarchical power structure allowed Doudna to appoint every administration member and department chairperson. Thus, if a chairperson failed to maintain the status quo, Doudna could easily replace them.^[11] Untenured professors faced possible reprisals. Furthermore, the absence of a teacher's union left professors completely unprotected and unable to file grievances against Doudna unless they wished to climb through the extensive hierarchy, a process that could last months.^[12] Regardless of these divisions, the Faculty Senate approved the Moratorium, stating that "a university is a place for legitimate expression of sincere convictions and that neither the administration nor the faculty should repress either activities or thought."^[13]

While the faculty undoubtedly led the Moratorium, the students were by no means silent. Many voiced their opinions both for and against the war, and editorials in the *Eastern News* reflected these student body divisions. Student H.O. Pinther, spoke for campus hawks, stating, "You, who choose not to fight for your country, put your tail between your legs, snap on your collar and whine loudly so all will know you for what you are. For those of courage and principal, who want to be free, stand up for total and complete victory."^[14] Winfield Nash, responding directly to Pinther's accusations of cowardice, argued, "I would say this is true, but even so, it is better than putting your country before your logic, and being led around by a leash of propaganda,"^[15] implying that the U.S. government was misleading its citizens about the war's conduct and progress in order to paint a rosier picture and boost public approval. An even harder stance came from Kenneth Midkiff, also responding to Pinther's editorial:

Every aspect of the Vietnam War is contrary to the American tradition. America has always represented freedom, independence, love and happiness, which are the very things the planners and participants of the moratorium are extolling. Ask yourselves then, you who are crying "traitor, un-American and un-patriotic," who is it that is unpatriotic, the opponents or the supporters of the War in Vietnam?^[16]

One student wrote an anti-draft play for the November 15 moratorium in which a young man talks to his parents, friends, and a police officer about his impending army induction.^[17]

Another division occurred not only along Pinther and Midkiff's polar disagreements, but also over student sincerity. Students wondered whether such fanatical protestors like Midkiff would fully support or actually participate in the Moratorium. The *Eastern News*' opinionated editorials expressed fears that students would interpret the class cancellation as simply a vacation, rather than attend the Moratorium activities and express genuine aspirations for total U.S. withdrawal. Concerned students claimed that since two-thirds of all EIU students were not in class at a given time, a better message would be sent if these students voluntarily gave up free time to attend Moratorium activities,

rather than musing it merely as an excuse to skip class.^[18]

Irrespective of these student divisions, radical faculty continued to support this Moratorium as tensions developed not only over whether or not the moratorium should occur, but also whether the administration or the faculty should participate, thus giving the protests official sponsorship. Fears also arose amid the community because several peaceful-turned-hostile campus protests had already occurred at several universities, including Columbia University, fueling the fear that EIU's protesting could lead to violence. Such worries struck Hencken who, while sitting down to eat at a local restaurant, had an unpleasant dinner companion--several Illinois National Guard trucks loudly rumbling through Charleston, destined for Southern Illinois University, where protests had turned ugly.^[19]

Violence did not occur, however, thanks mostly to Doudna's careful handling of the situation, avoiding clashes with student and faculty activists. His crowning achievement occurred over the question of class cancellation, a move vehemently opposed by many students, faculty, and administration. Doudna consulted his advisory council, consisting of faculty chairpersons and student senate representatives, about the Moratorium and the school's possible responses. They could cancel all classes, a few classes, or simply ignore it. Exhibiting faith in the students' peaceful intentions, the former President supported the Moratorium so much that he agreed to the cancellation provided a proper program was devised. The day's activities, Doudna insisted, had to provide calm, controlled educational sessions, and must not be merely an outlet for student discontent and agitation. The canceled class day would be made up at the semester's end by deferring final exams one day.^[20] Doudna's advisory council, echoing student fears, questioned whether students would take the day seriously, or simply perceive it as a vacation. It was the radical faculty, after all, that instigated the Moratorium, while the students had circulated no petitions and had not yet mustered a single public demonstration. Doudna eventually compromised. He canceled only 9 a.m. classes to encourage student attendance at the Vietnam Memorial Service, but supported any teacher's desire to use class time to discuss the day's activities. His campus community memorandum stated that traditional rules and regulations regarding class absences would be followed, meaning if a student missed class they would be penalized at the teacher's discretion. The faculty, however, did not receive such leeway. Doudna explicitly stated that "faculty members have the same obligation to hold their classes as students have to attend them, except that their obligation is contractual," implying that expectations for faculty to behave accordingly were higher.^[21] Doudna, by expressly following and citing standing university rules and regulations, and by remaining as neutral as possible about his opinions towards the Vietnam War, adopted a "don't give them (the community) a reason to rebel" approach. Any future violence, then, would have been unprovoked and unjustified, and would make the administration appear as the victim, rather than the culprit.

The advisory council's recommendations proved prophetic. Their concerns about student sincerity were

justified by the extremely low student turnout at the Eastern Veteran Association-sponsored Memorial Service. Student Clyde Fazenbaker attributed this disappointing attendance to EIU's students “who don't give a damn, or wear a False Façade” that is, articulate concerns about the welfare of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, yet fail to actually act on those emotions and beliefs. [\[22\]](#)

Accused of lacking conviction during the Moratorium, the 4 May 1970 Kent State shootings offered EIU students an opportunity to express their unity and dispel any doubts of sincerity. The prospect of being killed simply for protesting, for exercising first amendment rights to assemble, invaded and haunted the student body's conscious. The previously parochial EIU community felt, closer than ever, the shockwaves of the previously distant Vietnam conflict. No longer was campus violence confined to major research institutions such as Columbia University or Michigan State, but instead became a frightening possibility everywhere. Responding simultaneously to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the Kent State shootings, nearly 250 EIU students, the largest EIU peace gathering thus far, assembled at the university flagpole where Doudna had lowered the flag to half-staff *that day only* to honor all those hurt or killed due to campus violence. Students, however, wanted the flag lowered for the duration of the Vietnam War, insisting that college-aged U.S. citizen-soldiers were dying daily. Doudna, attempting to de-escalate the situation, wisely employed only a handful of police officers to disperse the protestors. EIU students never before, and never again, would come that close to violence.

Even though EIU did not respond violently, The Kent State shootings did mark an important turning point in campus antiwar activity. The students, not the faculty, took the torch of protestation and organized antiwar demonstrations in the wake of the Kent State incident. The reasoning for this shift is logical--students had been killed for protesting the Vietnam War. Other students, therefore, were both sympathetic towards the victims and fearful that such actions could occur. Additionally, students blamed the Vietnam War for the catastrophe, reasoning that if the U.S. was not involved in the foreign dispute, the killings would not have occurred. To other students, Kent State victims became martyrs symbolizing the tragedies that the Vietnam War wrought on American civilians as well as soldiers. Such sentiment resulted in a series of student-led events including a candlelight procession memorializing the victims and student editorials condemning the National Guardsmen who fired upon students. The Student Senate, reacting to the “atrocious” events at Kent State, issued a statement that “this country is quickly evolving into an oppressive, military state, aided and condoned by the President of the United States,” and actually called for a two-day student strike. [\[23\]](#) Student Geoffrey Pounds, in a rare display of discontent, was arrested and convicted of flag desecration by covering the stars of the American flag with a swastika and writing “Kent State” across the stripes,

which he then proceeded to hang from his dorm window.

Nevertheless, violence never occurred; Doudna's actions, community pressure, and students alike prevented its possibility. To ensure the administration reacted accordingly, the Mt. Vernon Chamber of Commerce circulated a petition on 26 May 1970 signed by 4470 citizens denouncing the "communistic tactics" employed by EIU students regarding flag desecration, and stated that each student's right to learn should not be infringed by such un-American zealots.^[25] The Rich Township Republican Organization similarly felt that it was every students' right to attend class as well as not attend, and the university should not contribute to "intellectual radicalism" by suggesting that protesting is more important than education.^[26] For the students, the charge of a "false façade," remained. Some students sarcastically referred to the protestors as "children of the apocalypse," and were convinced that the flagpole protestors gathered only because they were "looking for something to do on a nice Tuesday afternoon."^[27] Hencken supports this belief by pointing out that the protestors represented a numerical minority; of the 4000 total students, there were only 200-300 protestors that gathered at the flagpole.^[28] These divisions prevented widespread demonstrations across campus, and made it easy for Doudna to contain potential violence.

Besides student divisions over sincerity, other issues, just as much as Vietnam, galvanized the interest of students, such as drug problems and "student power," which diverted attention away from Vietnam. Hencken concedes that the clash between EIU's strongly traditional (i.e. old-fashioned) atmosphere and the introduction of a liberal arts curriculum contributed to the passionate student rights movement, agreeing with David Burner's analysis of Columbia University's violent tendencies. Both Columbia's and EIU's science and math-centered curriculum clashed heavily with the more liberal ideas of the student rights movement noted above, mostly regarding civil rights and feminism. This liberal arts curriculum encouraged self-expression (either through art or music) and launched discussions revolving around sociology and human behavior, which inevitably led to the questions of racism and equality. Combined with the increased study of history and government, students realized that questioning the government was a historical right. Reacting to the anti-authority sentiment unintentionally produced by the liberal arts curriculum, the students became estranged from the faculty, and everything for which the faculty stood, including Vietnam's importance. Consequently, students gradually moved away from the faculty's prime issue, Vietnam, and decided to attack issues directly affecting student rights.

Hencken, for example, recalls "hash Wednesday,"^[29] where all the students would gather at the library triangular area at high noon and openly and defiantly smoke marijuana.^[30] Similarly distracting, the "student power" movement, referring to increased student rights, mostly regarding dorm rules and regulations, began to take hold. This

national movement stemmed from domestic problems including environmentalism, civil rights, poverty, and feminism. Women's rights, for example, were a major conflict source as EIU females fought passionately to extend curfew hours beyond 10 P.M., and succeeded.

EIU's community perceived Vietnam as a distant problem, as evidenced by its lack of coverage in the *Eastern News*, an omission that may have acted as a calming effect that downplayed fears and tempers. The student body collectively reacted only when its own security was threatened, such as when draft expansion occurred, or when innocent students began being killed, like at Kent State. This pattern was similar to many universities, however, as there were few instances of campus violence that rivaled those at Columbia, Southern Illinois University, or Kent State. The most dangerous assumption regarding the 1960s is to view all universities as hotbeds of dissent and revolution. In fact, most colleges and universities mirrored Eastern; their anti-Vietnam protests were nonviolent and comparatively smaller than those highly publicized demonstrations at Columbia, Kent State, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. EIU's parochial community, strategic administrative decisions, and divisions within and between the faculty and student sectors all contributed to deflating a potentially violent situation.

Admittedly, much remains to be discovered about the motives and nature of the anti-Vietnam campus violence at smaller, regional universities. A study that would compare EIU's responses and actions to those at similar institutions would allow for superior generalizations about why such violence that shook the nation and rattled our resolve did not occur at most universities. Conversely, comparing smaller schools like EIU to larger research institutions might help explain leading factors that created such aggressive situations at certain schools, but only miniscule skirmishes at others. One thing is certain: if EIU was representative of most non-research oriented institutions, one can safely generalize that anti-Vietnam activity existed at nearly all higher learning institutions, and that, comparatively, the peaceful nature of those activities at Eastern Illinois University was not unique.

[1] Willis Rudy, *The Campus and a Nation in Crisis: From the American Revolution to Vietnam* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 169.

[2] *Ibid.*, 170.

[3] EIU eventually decided to cancel 9 am classes only.

[4] Robert Barford to Eastern Illinois University faculty, 15 October 1969, transcript in the Office of the President, Special Collections, Booth Library, Eastern Illinois University Archives, Charleston (henceforth Booth).

[5] Robert Barford to Eastern Illinois University faculty, 15 October 1969, Booth.

[6] Professor John McElligott of Eastern Illinois University, interview by author, 11 November 2002, Charleston.

[7] President Louis V. Hencken of Eastern Illinois University, Interview by author, 15 November 2002, Charleston.

[8] *Eastern News*, 13 October 1969.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Eastern News*, 14 October 1969.

[11] The "status quo" meant silencing all faculty opinions regarding the Vietnam War.

- [12] Leonard Wood, interview by author, 21 February 2003, Charleston.
- [13] *Eastern News*, 17 October 1969.
- [14] *Ibid.*
- [15] *Ibid.*, 21 October 1969.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 24 October 1969.
- [17] *Ibid.*, 14 October 1969..
- [18] *Eastern News*, 7 October 1969
- [19] President Louis V. Hencken of Eastern Illinois University, Interview by author, 15 November 2002, Charleston.
- [20] *Eastern News*, 10 October 1969.
- [21] Quincy Doudna to Eastern Illinois University community, 13 October 1969, Booth.
- [22] *Eastern News*, 14 November 1969.
- [23] *Ibid.*, 8 May 1970.
- [24] *Eastern News*, 8 May 1970.
- [25] Bob Poisall, Manager of Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce, petition to Quincy Doudna, 26 May 1970, Booth.
- [26] J. Devore, secretary of Rich Township Republican Organization, to Quincy Doudna, Eastern Illinois University President, 18 May 1970, Booth.
- [27] *Ibid.*, 15 May 1970.
- [28] President Louis V. Hencken of Eastern Illinois University, Interview by author, 15 November 2002, Charleston.
- [29] Professor McElligott describes similar events, though he refers to them as “token Wednesday.”
- [30] President Louis V. Hencken of Eastern Illinois University, interview by author, 15 November 2002, Charleston.