5-2005

**History Through the Media Analysis of Media Bias and Public Opinion Toward Student Protest in the Vietnam Era**

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History Through The Media

Analysis of Media Bias and Public Opinion

Toward Student Protest in the Vietnam War Era

Caroline Therese Sarros

Senior Honors Project

Spring 2005
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I. Introduction

“History is written by the winners.” Throughout the ages of written history this saying has rung true. During the European conquest of the Americas, Europeans recorded the events. The history of the antebellum American South rarely comes from the perspective of the slaves, but rather from the wealthy whites that owned them. After the Second World War, histories came from the perspective of the Allies rather then that of Germany or Japan. While the winners still write history, one could argue that now the phrase “History is written by the media” would be more appropriate. Over the last century the reach and influence of the media has grown considerably. While early news publications addressed local issues and would have taken weeks or even months to cross the continent, modern media faces no such limitations. Newspaper and magazine circulations span the globe and reach millions of people everyday. One image on a magazine cover has the ability to influence an entire nation in one day. This phenomenon presents an interesting opportunity for historians. Rather than using original and secondary sources to explore new aspects of historical research and analysis, researchers are presented with the chance to use the contemporary media sources to investigate new historical links and perspectives. One perspective to consider when studying the media as an historical resource is that of media as a gauge of contemporary public opinion. News reports cover the facts, but do so through the lens of social context. Also, media coverage does not stop immediately after the event. Frequently newspapers and magazines run articles scrutinizing events of the past year or recent years. The events of September 11, for example, sparked articles and media coverage years after the original event. For this reason, I have chosen to research media coverage surrounding the campus protest movement during the Vietnam War era. Through newspaper and magazine articles published between the years of 1964 and 1973, the media displays first an
increasing sympathy towards student protesters and decreasing sympathy for Vietnam War supporters and the Johnson and Nixon administrations, then an increased apathy towards student protests. This trend in public opinion revealed through contemporary media also reflects the lack of progress being made towards the goals of military action in Vietnam and the growing frustration with the ever-increasing loss of life.

II. Historical Background – Vietnam

The first aspect of researching media coverage of Vietnam War era campus protests is understanding the events of the Vietnam War itself. Vietnam was the longest war in which the United States participated. The conflict ran from 1957 until 1975, but the United States did not become involved in terms of military force until 1964 and withdrew military forces in 1973.\(^1\) Prior to military involvement, the United States provided aid to the South Vietnamese government in the form of advisory personnel as well as financial aid and military supplies. This support came out of the Cold War policies of the 1950s and early 1960s.\(^2\) The United States supported the South Vietnamese against the North Vietnamese in an attempt to prevent the spread of communism in Asia. At this point in the war, the Viet Cong and the North and South Vietnamese fought each other with the support of China and Russia versus the United States respectively.

In 1964, however, uprisings in Vietnam had led to an overthrow of the government and the Viet Cong had seized the opportunity to take control of much of the South Vietnamese population.\(^3\) In early August of 1964, two United States military ships took fire from North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. In response President Johnson ordered immediate air strikes of North Vietnam and Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, allowing the president to use “all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of
the United States and to prevent further aggression.” This act gave first Johnson and then Nixon the authority to take military action in Vietnam and provided student protesters a major arguing point on the inappropriateness and injustice of United States involvement in Vietnam.

In March of 1965 the first United States troops, Marines, entered South Vietnam. Over the next four years troops in Vietnam steadily increased from 60,000 ground forces in 1965 to 543,000 in 1969. The drafting of young men to maintain the constant increase of troops in Vietnam provided another major protesting point on college campuses. Many young men turned in, ripped up, burned, and even mailed their draft cards to the president. From 1965 to 1967, the United States inflicted major damage on North and South Vietnam through both air strikes and ground action. The offenses, though, did little to diminish the numbers of the enemy. In 1968 the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive, hoping to inflict major damage on United States forces and spur a civilian uprising in South Vietnam. This action shocked much of the American public, because prior to the Tet Offensive military commanders and government administration had assured the nation that the war effort had been successful and that the enemy was nearly defeated. Though these attempts were unsuccessful, the Tet Offensive inflicted damage on public support for the Vietnam War in the United States and prompted Johnson to open peace talks in Paris and refrain from running for reelection.

In 1969 Richard Nixon took office and began scaling down troop numbers in Vietnam. Numbers in Vietnam began to decrease, but the draft did not end until 1973, though the system was revised to a lottery system without the old system of student deferments. In addition, the United States launched a military operation in Cambodia in order to clear out North Vietnamese weapon caches. Many Americans felt that this action, while successful in preventing further attacks on American soldiers, was a sign that United States military operations in Southeast Asia
were expanding rather than decreasing. Opening the Cambodian front brought a wave of protest across the nation, including the protest at Kent State that resulted in the death of four students. In June of 1970, following a month of protests over both the military operations Cambodia, Congress repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and Nixon announced his plans to complete troop withdrawal from Vietnam.  

Though the United States had begun pulling out of Vietnam, the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam in 1972 sparked a renewal of bombing against enemy troops and tanks as well as the placement of explosives in the port of Haiphong, North Vietnam’s primary military point. While the efforts were successful and the invasion was stopped, this final attack led to a cease-fire signed on January 27, 1973 and the withdrawal of the final ground troops on March 29, 1973. In mid-1973 military aid to South Vietnam was reduced and in 1975, though the South Vietnamese government was forced to surrender to North Vietnam, only emergency relief aid was sent.  

In total, 58,000 American military personnel lost their lives and 300,000 were wounded in the nine years of troop deployment in Vietnam. The United States dropped three times as many bombs on Vietnam than the US-British bombing of Germany in World War II. For the purposes of this research, the period of United States troop and aerial attacks, 1965 through 1973, will provide the time frame for examination of media articles, features and some photographs.  

III. The Nature of Protest  

The next factor in researching media coverage of student protests in the Vietnam era is gaining an understanding of the nature of student protest. While images and information about the 1964 free speech protests at Berkeley, the occupation of administrative buildings at Columbia
University, and the deaths at Kent State abound, student protests actually came in more varied forms. Peaceful protesters chose tactics such as demonstrating in silence\(^\text{17}\) or handing out leaflets\(^\text{18}\). Protests also took the form of teach-ins, in which students and professors would forego regular classes in favor of meetings and assemblies to learn more about the situation in Vietnam and raise student awareness.\(^\text{19}\) Perhaps one of the most inventive peaceful student protests involved young men from Philadelphia knocking on doors in the area and saying "Hello, Ma'am, I'd like to talk to you before I die in Vietnam."\(^\text{20}\) In other instances, students wore armbands or walked out at graduations to protest Administration and military leaders awarded honorary degrees and chosen as speakers. At Amherst in 1966, for example, nineteen students walked out and thirty-eight others wore white armbands to protest the honorary degree conferred on Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.\(^\text{21}\)

Though these examples depict peaceful or educational protests, other students chose more violent, dramatic, and often illegal means of bringing attention to their issues and opinions. Often the illegal actions centered on trespassing and draft card violations. Some students were arrested for trespassing during more peaceful demonstrations where the arrests were made simply to end the protest instead of as a means to restore order\(^\text{22}\). In more extreme cases of trespassing, like that at Columbia in 1968\(^\text{23}\) and Chicago in 1966\(^\text{24}\), students occupied administration and classroom buildings in an attempt to make their point. The other form of illegal protest favored by student activists involved draft cards. While some students merely turned in their draft cards at peace rallies, others burned and ripped up their cards. Some even went so far as to destroy their draft cards and mail the remains to the president.\(^\text{25}\) The most violent forms of protest shocked the nation and even some moderate student activists. At Fordham in 1969 students clashed with campus security officers while occupying administration
buildings on the campus. Connecticut students painted flowers and peace signs on the R.O.T.C. building and ransacked administration buildings as a protest. At Kent State in May of 1969, students protested the invasion of Cambodia by burning the R.O.T.C. building and the verbally abusing and throwing rocks at the Ohio national guardsmen brought in to control the campus. Student protests varied based on the situations and students involved, and understanding these differences in protest types is important when analyzing media coverage of student activism in the Vietnam era.

Though many representations emphasize the anti-war or anti-discrimination element of student actions, protests rarely targeted only the military actions in Vietnam. Often protests encompassed many different student issues that linked to Vietnam in various ways. For example, one of the earlier student protests to garner national attention focused not on Vietnam, but on civil rights and students' rights to freedom of speech on the campus of the University of California Berkeley. Many other students protested Vietnam, but indirectly through objections to the presence of various recruiters tied to the war. R.O.T.C. programs, CIA and FBI recruiters, and some corporations involved in weapons research or military supplies (Dow Chemical and General Electric for example) all became the subject of both peaceful and violent protests and picketings. In some cases students managed to end recruiting and interviewing sessions through protests. Another major opportunity for protesting United States military involvement in Vietnam indirectly arose out of the draft. In the earliest years of Vietnam, many campus protests focused on the draft as an affront to civil rights and unfairly biased toward minorities and lower income families who could not afford to send their sons to college and thus earn student deferments. Though these aspects of the draft garnered protester attention, often the primary reason for draft protest arose from the Vietnam War, which students saw as the
ultimate purpose for the draft and the destination for draftees.\textsuperscript{35} Even in cases where students directly protested United States military presence in Vietnam, it was often coupled with other campus issues. Students at Columbia University, for example, protested the construction of a gym, Columbia's affiliation and role in research for Vietnam, and the disciplining of leaders in an earlier anti-Vietnam protest.\textsuperscript{36} Overall, student protests rarely presented a neat and clean objection to the war in Vietnam. Instead, students protested the war through varied and sometimes confusing tracks and in conjunction with other issues like racism and dissatisfaction with university administration.

After establishing a basic chronology of the United States' involvement in the conflict in Vietnam and understanding the types of student protests and the reasoning for protests, one can begin analysis of media coverage of student protests in the Vietnam War era and public opinion toward protesters and the war in general. The attitudes toward student protests fall into three phases of public opinion. Articles written from 1965 to 1967 are largely critical, unsympathetic, or merely uninterested. From 1968 and 1970 media coverage is largely supportive of student protests and actions, but does express disapproval of destructive and violent actions. Finally, media coverage of student protests from 1971 to 1973 is largely neutral, apathetic, and decreased in overall volume. These trends, while indicative of public opinion regarding the war in Vietnam, also reflect the timeline of events discussed earlier.

IV. Criticism and Ambivalence – 1965 Through 1967

The first phase, 1965 through 1967, reflects the initial public support for the war in Vietnam and the ensuing displeasure at student protests against the government's actions. In 1965 media tone reflected the lack of sympathy of public opinion. An article referring to an appearance at Harvard by McGeorge Bundy, former dean of the Harvard faculty of arts and
sciences and Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, cited Mr. Bundy's speech in defense of the government's involvement in South Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic. Beyond citing Mr. Bundy's support of the government position, the article refers to the frequent applause by the audience and Mr. Bundy's easy, relaxed manner throughout the event. Finally, while pickets did march outside of the lecture hall where the event took place, the protesters were covered in only one brief paragraph and mentioned more in terms of what they had not accomplished than what they had. Another article written in April of 1965 describes the events surrounding a teach-in at Michigan State University. The opening statement of the article gives a general idea of the tone of the remainder of the article, "Bomb threats and pickets disrupted an all-night 'teach-in' tonight." The use of quotations around the phrase teach-in indicates a disdain for the event. Also, the word 'disrupted' to describe the result of bomb threats is a mild term to describe threats against the lives of two thousand students and faculty. In a final example of the ambivalent tone of some media articles, a June article discussed the changes in commencement addresses in the wake of the Berkeley protests. While the articles quotes one college president as welcoming student criticism, it quotes another university president, Dr Grayson Kirk of Columbia University, as saying that universities are "filled with young people whose natural idealism is as yet untempered by the patience and tolerance of maturity." While this quote is critical of student protests, it is not the most telling sign of the article's bias against student protesters. The article concludes with a student perspective on the changes in commencement addresses, but instead of speaking to a student protester, the kind of student referred to previously in the article, the article cites Columbia's valedictorian. The young man is quoted as referring to student political demonstrations as "'spiteful' and 'a waste
of intellectual resources.” These choices of sources to quote for the article reveal the media bias against student protesters without having to actually say it explicitly.

Also, several articles supported the pro-war demonstrations and the administration, while expressing blatant criticism of student protests. A New York Times article from October of 1965 reports on a pro-Vietnam parade with an expected attendance of fifty to one hundred thousand. While the subject of the article expresses a bias in favor of pro-war activists, the other topics covered in the article also express media bias and public opinion against student anti-war demonstrations. The writer chooses to use quotations from both sides of the Vietnam issue, but the quotations from the anti-war voices actually put forth pro-war viewpoints. A leader of a peace group that was unable to obtain bus drivers for transportation to their rally is included in the article, but his words only explained the reasons his group could not procure transportation. By including quotes from an anti-war source, the writer makes the article seem unbiased. In reality though, because the material from the anti-war source only reiterated the views of the pro-war faction, including the anti-war element in the article did nothing to change the support for the war expressed through this article and public opinion. Another example of the anti-protest biases in the media and public opinion emerges in a December article. This article recounts a speech made by C. D. DeLoach, assistant to J. Edgar Hoover, at a Chicago convention. In the article, the writer quotes Mr. DeLoach’s opinions that protesters are on the same criminal level as “racketeers, Communists, narcotics peddlers, filth merchants.” While Mr. DeLoach is further quoted in the same vein, the writer wraps up the article by reporting on a protest at a nearby cathedral against the silencing of anti-Vietnam priests. Though adding this subject to the end of the article softens the earlier bias expressed through Mr. DeLoach’s position, the emphasis on the small numbers at the protest and the silencing of anti-Vietnam clergy expresses
the pro-Vietnam public opinions in 1965. Through the choices of topic, sources, and vocabulary the media bias and public opinion express sentiments clearly against the actions and beliefs of student protesters.

During 1965, the media and public opinion expressed mainly negative biases toward student protests. In 1966, this negative slant softened into ambivalence and mild disapproval. A May 1966 article reporting the end of a student sit-in at the University of Chicago displays the softer criticism prevalent in articles of this year. The students staging the sit-in are referred to as "militant" and the reporter emphasizes the sharply dwindling numbers as the sit-in progressed. The reporter also highlights the lack of desired results from student protests. The students attempted to force the administration to end the practice of reporting grades and class rank to the Selective Service at the request of the individual student in order to further the student deferment process. The writer reported that the sit-in ended, however, when the dean of the undergraduate college "scolded, cajoled, and flattered the students to get them to end the sit-in." This description of the students makes them sound like petulant teenagers, rather than college students attempting to change a practice they find unfair. In another article, the opening line gives away the disapproving public opinion surrounding student protests. "A succession of leading educators warned today that the American university had entered a period of high peril that could lead to renewed student protest." This choice of phrase depicts student protest as a danger to be avoided. Later, the article cites Dr. Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California system, as referring to the student protests as "a limited crisis" and warning that "too often now this involvement takes the form of simplistic slogan and even occasionally that of violent or potentially violent action." These references to crises and possible violent action
discredit the student movement as a valid attempt at social change, the students’ purpose for protesting.

Student protests did manage to garner more attention from the public and the media in 1966, although the attention was still unfavorable. In November *The New York Times* covered Harvard’s apology to Secretary of Defense McNamara over students unruly conduct at Mr. McNamara’s question and answer session. The article described a crowd evenly divided between supporters and objectors yelling back and forth so loudly they drowned out the speaker.50 This article focusing on the steps taken to fix the students’ actions reemphasizes the public opinion that students are merely unruly children. Another example of the increased but still negative attention given to student protests appears in an August article entitled “New Look Campus Rebel.”51 This article focuses on analyzing the attitudes and actions of student activists, and comes to rather unflattering conclusions. One analyst describes the student activists as being “the new class of young intellectuals [who] assault the democratic institutions under the smoke screen of ‘participatory democracy.’”52 The article also describes the common theme among the various analysts cited, that radical students and junior faculty have rushed into the vacuum created by a lack of experienced senior faculty input. This article in particular shows the increased public attention focused on student protesters, but at the same time cuts any credibility students may have gained in their pursuits. Overall 1966 put slightly more attention on student protests, both through the subject matter and volume of articles published. This attention, though, did not reflect increased approval of student actions, but rather a continued disapproval.

In the final year of this opinion phase, the media began to report on the positive aspects of students’ activism and protests, but the overall tone remained skeptical and occasionally negative as in earlier years. In an article covering the cancellation of a graduation protest at the
University of Pennsylvania, an example of the shift towards positive attitudes regarding student protests emerges. The article cites the termination of two chemical and biological military research contracts that had elicited recent student and faculty protest. Though the article later cites the university provost explaining "it would not be quite accurate to conclude that the trustees had been motivated solely by the protests in voting to terminate the projects," by describing the protests early in the article and quoting a student protest leader later in the article the writer gives a much more favorable impression of student protests than observed in earlier years. This gradual upswing in media bias is also reflected in another article reporting a protest at Harvard in February. In this case students marched carrying signs and shouting anti-war slogans as Arthur Goldberg, United Nations Representative, attended a luncheon on campus. This article is largely supportive of the student demonstration, quoting student leaders and contrasting the peace of this demonstration to the protest in 1966 that brought an apology from Harvard. Despite the positive spin placed on the protest, the article returns to the negative tone of this phase by citing a comment from an administrator that the demonstration had not been noticed at the luncheon.

While some articles demonstrated the beginning of a positive shift, public opinion remains uncertain and distrustful of student activism. Student protests of naval recruiting officers drew media attention to Fordham University. The students concerned "heckled and yelled" at recruiters and were later dragged away after they sat in front of the recruiting table to block access. The Fordham dean of students also discounted any idea that the students affected naval recruiting by asserting that recruiters would return to campus as planned. By portraying the students as unruly and disruptive and highlighting the lack of results from the protest, the article once again displays the media bias and public opinion against student protests. Finally, in
an example of the continuing negativism of the first two years of this phase, an article analyzing student protests of 1967 opens with the title "The Student Scene: Angry Militants."59 The article goes on to describe student activists as "dogmatic, noisy, skilled at disruptive tactics, philosophically confused, and unwilling to compromise," while a liberal new chancellor admits, "I'm worried sick," and "they talk of tearing the society down and remaking it over. Nobody says how."60 While this article represents the more negative side of the public opinion of 1967, it still describes a segment of public opinion running consistently through this first phase of public opinion and media bias toward student protests.

This first phase of ambivalence and disapproval coincides historically with the beginning of the United States military involvement in Vietnam. While troop numbers on the ground had steadily increased, they had not yet reached the peak that would occur later in the decade. Many Americans also remembered the attacks on United States naval ships and felt that America was waging a war of liberation and self-defense. Also military actions had been largely successful in inflicting damage in Vietnam. Though the United States had not achieved any definite success in ending North Vietnamese resistance, this fact was not yet apparent to the majority of Americans. These historical factors, combined with the relative novelty of the more forceful and violent student anti-war protests, account for the bias against student activism seen in the above examples.

V. Interest and Support – 1968 Through 1970

In 1968, with the progression of the conflict in Vietnam and the continuance of student activism against the United States' involvement, the media and public opinion changed to express increased interest and new support for student protests. In March of 1968 The New York Times published an article reporting a boycott at Columbia University and Barnard College. The
new positive bias appears in the attention paid to the students' successes at halting regular classes and gaining support from the faculty. The article cites seventy-five percent of day classes cancelled on both campuses and quotes a university administrator as saying, “Goodness, I've never seen so many of them with ties and jackets. They are being gentlemen.” The choice to include this surprised comment from the administration not only shows approval of the students' actions, but also makes the administration sound slightly foolish. Another article from April of 1968 describes protests in cities across the nation. The protests began as student demonstrations but “snowballed into an international protest” involving ninety thousand protesters in New York City alone. Beyond citing the success of antiwar protests, the article also depicts the much less than expected attendance of simultaneously scheduled pro-war demonstrations. This article is one of the first since the onset of the war that not only supports anti-war student activism, but also belittles pro-war demonstrations. In another example of the change in tone toward student protests, The New York Times featured a piece focusing on student protests on a global scale. The title, “Students Become a Worldwide Force For Change,” exemplifies the new respect for the actions and efforts of students both from the media and public opinion. While the piece focuses on the international student protest scene, it mentions the successes student protests have won on a global scale as well as the new attention that the college group received from presidential candidates.

Many of the articles of 1968 express a positive tone towards students, but a few still carry some of the negative slant carrying over from the first years of the war. An article covering the New York State Psychological Association discusses a meeting focusing on why students protest. The first section of the article defends student protesters by quoting a Columbia faculty member as saying, “the students were merely following 'the longest tradition in American
history' and also 'the example of the President of the United States' in deciding that 'violence in the name of righteousness is permissible, indeed, when the cause is just, a duty.' The defense of students in conjunction with the inflammatory description of the military action in Vietnam is obviously both supportive of student protesters and critical of the Administration. Though the article begins with support, it also cites the opposing view of a faculty member at Cornell who "was afraid of the 'very seductive idea' that student violence is justifiable when dictated by private conscience." This article, though mostly supportive of student activism, demonstrates the remaining distrust and disapproval toward student protest.

In the following year public opinions and media bias toward student protests continually improves. This approval of student protests, while now uniform, is tempered by remaining disapproval of student violence and riots. An example of this split can be seen in an article published in March of 1969 regarding recent discussions about levels of federal and state government involvement in quelling student protests and punishing student protesters. The article focuses on the actions taken by Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame, after a November 1968 protest in which students staged a demonstration thwarting the recruiting efforts of the Central Intelligence Agency. After asking all those connected with the university for their opinions, Father Hesburgh issued a statement that anyone replacing rational persuasion with force might face expulsion or trespassing charges. This statement, while critical of some protesters, actually expresses approval of peaceful protest by exempting such actions from punishment. Later the article describes a resolution that failed to pass through the National Governors' Conference calling for an investigation to determine whether student protests were the result of a nationwide conspiracy. While this fact in itself expresses the positive public opinion toward protests, the article continues to comment that as the above mentioned resolution
was voted on, "club swinging highway patrolmen" were breaking up student protests on campuses in six states. In another example of the support of student protests, especially peaceful protests, an article describes the protests planned as part of Vietnam Moratorium Day on October 15, 1969. This article describes a variety of peaceful protests planned across the nation, ranging from candlelight vigils to cancelled classes to memorial masses. Throughout the article unexpected supporters of the nationwide protests emerge. Several U.S. Representatives promise to hold an all night vigil in the House, the Cardinal of Detroit declares the day of the protest a day of fasting and prayer for Catholics in the region, and in Chicago a businessman's rally is being held. These new supporters, along with the planning of protests in small cities previously untouched by anti-war demonstrations, shows the continuing shift in public opinion towards student protesters.

In a final example of the positive public opinion towards student protesters, The New York Times ran a story covering developments in the handling of draft card cases. This article demonstrates the shift in opinions toward student protests even on a governmental level. The article discusses the recent Supreme Court decision to hear the appeals of two men ordered to report for induction after throwing out their draft cards in protest in 1967. This article not only supports the draft protesters, but also uses rather critical language to describe the Selective Service System. The article cites the men in question arguing that draft boards that reclassify students who engage in disrupting anti-draft protests are punishing without due process of law and that the government is forcing students to surrender their rights to freedom of speech or risk punitive reclassification. This article expresses a marked change in the shift of public opinion towards the draft being used punitively against student protesters between 1967 and 1969, so
much so that the Supreme Court was willing to turn their attention to the matter and reverse aspects of an act of Congress.76

In 1970 the response to student protests remained much the same, but the criticism to administration and law enforcement within articles concerning student protests increased during the year. In an article following the fatal shootings of students at Kent state, the ensuing student protests are described as peaceful and constructive, including discussion seminars and petitions.77 Beyond this mild portrayal of student protests, the article recounts occurrences in which students were wounded by birdshot, dispersed with tear gas, and advanced upon with bayonets.78 The article even goes so far as to accuse National Guardsmen and state and local policemen at the University of New Mexico of lying to cover up injuries caused to students and reporters by bayonets.79 The more revealing aspect of the bias in this article, though, lies not in the descriptions of the injury-causing acts of law enforcement, but in the lack of description regarding the student actions that elicited these acts. By leaving out any information that might justify the actions taken against student protesters, the media is silently adding to their support of the students. In another article that discredits administration, President Nixon is described as “tentatively” offering to receive some demonstrators, and quotes him as referring to his efforts to communicate with young Americans as the necessary “‘safety valve’” that would prevent problems in the United States after the unpopular invasion of Cambodia.80 The choice of language in this article and the use of quotations expresses bias against Nixon by referring to him as nervous and tentative, not usually adjectives bestowed on those one feels confidence and approval towards. Also, by choosing to use safety valve as a direct quote, the article takes a sarcastic tone, which it enhances by describing the events that had just occurred at Kent State. There seems to be the suggestion that Nixon’s safety valve has failed.
While some articles expressed criticism of Administration and law enforcement, others avoided that subject in favor of simply supporting student protests. An article describing the wave of student protests and strikes following the invasion of Cambodia and the deaths at Kent state emphasized the positive actions of students while downplaying the negative aspects of the demonstrations. Student protests are largely described as constructive and peaceful, while smoothing over events that most likely resulted from protest actions. For example, the article describes a peaceful anti-war march in Chicago and another peaceful rally in Denver, but describes a fire at Colorado State University as believed started by arsonists. This refusal to link student protesters with an intentional fire contrasts to descriptions of protester initiated fires in earlier years. Another article supporting student protesters depicts student protests during a commencement address at Ithaca College. In this report, the protesters are described as peaceful, polite, and courteous and the article recounts the applause students received as they walked out in protest of the nation’s continuing involvement in Vietnam. Perhaps more importantly, though, the article quotes Governor Rockefeller, the commencement speaker, as supporting the students’ choice to protest the situation in Vietnam.

The second phase of media bias and public opinion occurred as many Americans realized the facts of the situation in Vietnam. As mentioned in section two, in 1968 the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive, proving that the United States’ military efforts had not been as successful in crushing the enemy as military and Administration leaders had suggested. In addition, troops in Vietnam reached a high in 1969. Finally, the United States expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia in April of 1970. These developments in Vietnam contributed to the shift in public opinion, but the final push towards positive opinion regarding student protests likely arose from the events on the campus of Kent State in the wake of the
expansion into Cambodia. The photographs published across the nation depicting students running from clouds of tear gas and crouched over the bodies of fallen friends created a powerful image in the minds of Americans. Overall, disillusionment with the war effort combined with the high toll taken on American youth both abroad and at home contributed to the shifting of media bias and public opinion from 1968 to 1970.

VI. Apathy and Weariness – 1971 Through 1973

In contrast to both earlier phases, the years from 1971 to 1973 show a marked decrease in concern with student protests. College students and the nation as a whole had lost interest in the radical protests of the late sixties. In 1971 articles covering current student protests became scarce compared with years like 1969. Those articles that did appear reflected the decreased interest in student protest even among students themselves. For example, an article from February of 1971 opens with, “Plans for teach-ins to rekindle student opposition to the war in Indochina are gathering steam.” This opening reveals the disinterest felt toward protests and opposition of the Vietnam War. The article also cites the teach-in organizers desire to prove through their planned actions that the war will remain a central political issue going into the 1972 presidential campaign. Including these quotations in the article reflects the public’s desire to simply move past both Vietnam and protesting. In another example of this, an article covering rallies and marches organized to protest military invasions of Laos shows the apathetic tone of media toward student protests in the early seventies. This article simply demonstrates very little enthusiasm. In contrast to earlier articles, only two sources are directly quoted, neither of which express any passion about the planned student protests. The chancellor of New York University is quoted as, “Everyone’s unhappy about it, but I don’t think there’s any reason to strike against the university.” The article also describes a growing tension between various activist groups.
perhaps conveying more moderate students' growing weariness with the constant fighting of more militant protest groups.

Another aspect of the disinterested media coverage of student protests in 1971 can be seen in articles focusing on improvements in student/university relations. An article published in June of 1971 demonstrates this new focus. This article describes new student governance procedures on campuses across the nation and cites the new involvement as the reason for decreasing protests.88 The article also demonstrates support for university officials and disdain for students who had been interested enough to protest, but now were not dedicated enough to exercise their new opportunities. The article quotes one young woman saying, "'I know how tough it is to be a college administrator. I can see that it is a lot easier to throw bricks than it is to accomplish something through hard work.'"89 It also cites administrators as declaring that students that find they cannot get their college to contribute money to militant political groups or close the university in protest of the invasion of Cambodia decide that governance bodies are obstacles.90 The inclusion of these perspectives in the article sets student protesters as rebels who are not willing to work with the system to accomplish their goals and expresses a weariness of radical student protests.

In 1972 media and public opinion paid more attention to student protesters than in either of the other two years in this phase. This probably resulted from an increase in bombings during 1972, but despite this increase in attention the tone remains disinterested and weary. In April of 1972 students at Columbia decided to protest increased bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong.91 The article reporting the protest refers frequently to the subdued nature of the protests and the lack of enthusiasm even among the protesters themselves, quoting one young man as saying "'So this is what the revolution is all about,'" with sarcasm in his voice as he fell asleep on a table in the
library after a day of being mostly ignored by administration and police. The article also shows indications that students realize the public is losing interest in student protests. In the beginning of the piece, a student protester is referenced; “bloody confrontations with the police – ‘taking the bust’ – have become so commonplace that they have ‘lost all symbolic value.’” In another example of the disinterested public opinion, an article on student protesters opens with, “So what if Columbia and Harvard and Yale are closed down forever? Who out there is going to care?” Students on campuses like Columbia were coming to the realization that most Americans did not care about protests. The article also demonstrates the apathetic public opinion by focusing more attention on the dilemma faced by Columbia’s president. Before the protests erupted Dr. Mc Gill had been a visible figure on campus, but after students seized campus buildings, he retreated to his office to find a solution without using the police. Both of these articles show that though increased protests drew more attention in 1972 than in 1971, the attention was apathetic toward protests.

Another sign of the apathy and disinterest regarding student protests manifested itself in the sense of routine involved. “The scenario was familiar. Once again the President appeared on nationwide television to announce a major escalation of the Vietnam war, and once again his words triggered the predictable sequence of event that have become a fixture of American life.” This paragraph opens an article describing the aftermath of Nixon’s decision to step up bombing of North Vietnam. The article goes on to describe the ensuing protests as simply a boring reaction to increased force in Vietnam. Later in the article, “weariness with the Vietnam issue that has afflicted the country” was cited as one of the major reason that the reactions to increased bombing in 1972 were so muted in comparison to those in 1970. Another article from May of 1972 describes the new understanding between police and protesters. The article retells a course
of events in which a student protest leader and a New York City police officer coordinated the protest efforts of a group of out of town students.\textsuperscript{98} The officer gives directions, answers various questions concerning the legalities of protesting, and even points students in the direction of television crews. One protest organizer told \textit{The New York Times} that he had met with police officials and the two sides had come to agreements for the protests.\textsuperscript{99} These examples of routine reactions and protest/police cooperation strengthen the sense of routine and boredom developing in the media and public opinion in 1972.

In 1973 indifference toward student protest is most obvious in the lack of protest related articles published. Of the articles published, most treated anti-war protests like historical events to be studied, analyzed, and cataloged. An article from July of 1973 exemplifies this trend by reviewing an art exhibit entitled “Up Against the Wall” displaying protest art from the Revolutionary War through Watergate.\textsuperscript{100} The reviewer evaluates student protest movements against the Vietnam War with the same attitude as posters from the Civil War. Another article that conveys a similar tone describes the Harvard commencement ceremonies for 1973, in which the faculty chose a young man who had been arrested and suspended in conjunction with earlier protests as the student commencement speaker.\textsuperscript{101} In covering the story, the writer barely mentioned the student’s record, and focused on the events of the day and the honorary degrees conferred.\textsuperscript{102}

Another indication of faded concern for student anti-war efforts appears in two reports of student protests concerning topics completely unrelated to the Vietnam War. At this point even students have moved on to other issues. In one article students protested the arming of campus security officers\textsuperscript{103} and in the other students presented a campus housing office with roaches caught in student housing.\textsuperscript{104} In the commencement article mentioned above the speaker, despite
his past involvements in anti-war protests, spoke of the disappointment involved with Watergate rather than any issues connected with the Vietnam War. Overall, interest in anti-war activities had completely died by 1973.

Historically, this final phase marked the end of direct United States involvement in Vietnam. In 1970 Nixon had announced plans for troop withdrawal and by March of 1973 all American troops had left Vietnam. Also, in 1973, the Watergate scandal had fully erupted and drawn the type of massive media coverage and public attention that Vietnam had garnered in past years. These events explain why most Americans were simply unaffected by any remaining anti-war protests, as well as why the student protesters had lost interest. The issue of Vietnam was no longer a bone of contention for American students, and thus protests no longer an issue of media or public interest.

VII. Conclusion

History is written by the media. Analyzing history through the media provides new insights and connections to consider and explore. While reading a textbook gives an understanding of the historical events, reading media coverage imparts an understanding of the feelings and opinions of the people who lived during the events. Some may find this type of research irrelevant for recent periods because historians still have the opportunity to interview people who lived during the events. Using media coverage, though, allows historians to analyze opinions and bias as they occurred instead of through the filter of time and later personal experiences. Through studying current media, one can find the trend of media bias and public opinion across the Vietnam War era. This type of research could produce similar results for other periods of history. Historians could shed new light on public opinion regarding the Great Depression, World War II, and so many other events by analyzing current media coverage.
Media coverage and bias opens a new research method for historians wishing to better
understand public opinion surrounding major historical events and periods.

18 DeBendetti, An American Ordeal, 152.
29 DeBendetti, An American Ordeal, 115.


Johnston, “3 Destroy Cards.”

Fox, “Columbia.”


“Pickets and Bomb Threats.”


Hechinger, “Education,” Sec. Education.


Robinson, “50,000 Expected.”


“New Look Campus Protest.”


“Penn Dropping 2 War Projects,” sec. Special.


“Rally At Harvard,” sec. Special.

“Students Heckle Navy Recruiters.”

“Students Heckle Navy Recruiters.”


Gansberg, “Columbia Boycott.”


Hechinger, “Students.”
68 “Psychoanalysts Differ”
70 Raskin, “Government Off the Campus,” sec. E.
71 Raskin, “Government Off the Campus,” sec. E.
72 “War Protest On Wednesday.”
73 “War Protest On Wednesday.”
78 McFadden, “Students Step Up.”
79 McFadden, “Students Step Up.”
83 Kovach, “Governor.”
87 “Protest Rallies.”
89 Maeroff, “Campuses Quieter.”
90 Maeroff, “Campuses Quieter.”
92 Darnton, “Scene at Columbia.”
93 Darnton, “Scene at Columbia.”
95 Arnold, “Less Inclined,” sec. E.
97 Smith, “Strong Misgivings,” sec. E.
99 Corry, “Police and Protesters.”


Reinhold, “Harvard Graduates.”
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"Was Violence the Only Way at Columbia?" *The New York Times*, 13 October 1968, sec E.