

HISTORY AT VANDERBILT

Vanderbilt and the Vietnam Crisis

This research examines the reaction of students at Vanderbilt University to the Vietnam War during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. Vanderbilt's student-run newspaper *The Vanderbilt Hustler* provides insight into the opinions of individual students and the details of both anti- and pro-war movements on campus. From the evidence, it is argued that although more Vanderbilt students supported the war than opposed it, those students in favor of the cause remained relatively silent. The small demonstrations and acts by the vocal war opposition outnumbered those of war supporters, and in the end, the majority of students remained apolitical, focusing instead on on-campus activities.

By Laura L. Grove '18
Vanderbilt University

What Vandy Thinks About The War...

Students Hawkish; Call For Defeat
By Phil Olson
Vanderbilt students are much more hawkish than the faculty in their opinions about the war in Vietnam, according to the results of a recent *Hustler* opinion poll. According to the poll, 53 percent of students and 24 percent of faculty members indicated that they favored a "complete American defeat of the communist forces in South Vietnam."
Of the students, 53 were women; 45 were independent men, 29 were sorority members and 26 were independent men.
In answer to the question, "What is your favor as a solution to the Vietnam conflict?" 77 per cent of the students and 37 percent of faculty members indicated that they favored a "complete American defeat of the communist forces in South Vietnam."
The most hawkish group polled was the fraternity members, 89 per cent of which preferred the new solution. In addition to 89 per cent of sorority members, 69 per cent of independent women and 65 per cent of independent men.
"I associated negatively with actual recognition of the Vietnam conflict," 77 per cent of the students and 37 per cent of the faculty favored it.
Favored Solutions
Their answers favored by the faculty included having the matter sent to the United Nations, 37 per cent; gradual withdrawal, 21 per cent; turning the war over to both Vietnamese, 21 per cent; immediate unilateral withdrawal of American forces, four per cent. Students expressed less than one per cent approval for all of these options.
Both students and faculty who chose a local American victory strongly favored a naval blockade of North Vietnam, with 75 per cent of the students and 67 per cent of the faculty supporting such measures. Support ran highest among fraternity and sorority members, both groups favoring it more than 100 per cent. Independent men and women, 75 per cent.
The second most popular measure favored by the supporters of a local victory was increased bombing of North Vietnam, called for by 78 per cent of students and 64 per cent of the faculty. Use of nuclear weapons was supported by over one-third of the students and faculty, ranging as high as 28 per cent in sororities.
Concerning initial American involvement in Vietnam, 59 per cent of the faculty were in favor, along with 100 per cent of sorority members, 82 per cent of independent women, 81 per cent of fraternity men and 70 per cent of independent men.
Commitment Favored
Of the faculty 57 per cent favored the present extent of commitment, 26 per cent favored a greater commitment and only four per cent favored a smaller commitment favoring the present commitment.
Percentages of students favoring the present commitment were:
Fraternity men 60
Independent men 32
Sorority women 74
Independent women 23
Total students 65
Percentages of students in favor of a greater commitment were:

Answer to War-Use Gem Warfare
Comments returned with the *Hustler*'s Vietnam opinion poll ranged from hilarious to very militant. Among them were the following:
"I'd love to see Phnom Penh said, 'If the communists are not stopped here, where will they be stopped?'"
"If Johnson wasn't such a trouble-maker, God might be President and we might be winning the damn war."
"Infiltrate North Vietnam, with South Vietnamese guerrillas."
"Use gem warfare."
"Go military! Beat Communist!"
"I think this poll could have been worded much better."
"The answer we kick the hell out of them the better."
"You people are fools. In Korea we threatened the use of the H-bomb and got the war to the conference table, and we should threaten it again."
"Dumbest, best China before it is too late."
"The Americans should not worry so much about the communists. Maybe the solution for these countries has to be this way."
"In designing questionnaires, there are a few things to be proceeding: posing questions or questions of questions."
"All you have done is ask questions, and you have done it all wrong!"
"The Americans should not worry so much about the communists. Maybe the solution for these countries has to be this way."
"In designing questionnaires, there are a few things to be proceeding: posing questions or questions of questions."
"All you have done is ask questions, and you have done it all wrong!"

Why It Affects...
Editor's note: The following remarks concerning the effects of the war on the Vanderbilt campus were made by Chairman Alexander Heard in a press conference held on Nov. 6.
"As you look at the situation in the country generally, it is hard to identify the effects of the war in Vietnam from other forces in the country... if the present logic depose between the President and Congress stems from the war, then Vanderbilt has felt several indirect effects: a delay of issues in the curriculum, a slowing down of training for the Urban Renewal projects, a slowing down of training and research grants and a threat to the building of economic program in Brazil."
"Some of our departments employing non-academic personnel have been affected by the draft."
"Liberalism about the draft has a clear consequence to students and our estimates of future enrollment. It appears possible that enrollment in the law and graduate schools will be affected."

the country, as liberal youths demonstrated their sentiments through both verbal and physical protests. While this was the case at many universities, southern and politically conservative schools like Vanderbilt were exceptions. There were students and faculty members at Vanderbilt who detested President Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War, yet most students supported his policies. However, support lay at a shallow surface level for the most part. Hence, Vanderbilt anti-war protests, while relatively small in scale, greatly outnumbered active efforts by the silent majority who supported the war.

The escalation of the war in Vietnam began in 1964 as President Johnson tried to secure re-election. After a successful attack by the Northern Vietnamese, Johnson drafted and Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the president the power to use military force in Vietnam without further consulting Congress.¹ A year later President Johnson, in hopes of avoiding a full-scale ground war in Vietnam, launched an intense eight-week bombing raid of Northern Vietnam code-named "Operation Rolling Thunder."² Despite his desire to avoid escalating the war, by 1966 he had found it necessary to place 385,000 troops in Vietnam and by the end of his presidency in 1969 over half a million.³ With the war intensifying and no end in sight, opposition among Americans steadily increased. College campuses throughout the northern United States erupted in protest, burning draft cards, and harassing industrial and military institutions.⁴ Similar demonstrations took place on Vanderbilt's campus, although on a much smaller scale, but as a whole the student body and administration remained apolitical.

Because the Vietnam War controversy was so prevalent in American society during Johnson's presidency, general information on the issue was readily available. However, because of Vanderbilt's limited role in the discussion, student and faculty opinions were much less accessible. Therefore, most of the information concerning Vanderbilt comes directly from the university's archives through the student-run newspaper *The Vanderbilt Hustler*. The paper provides a number of student and faculty opinions as well as reports of events on

"What Vandy Thinks About The War" (*The Vanderbilt Hustler*, November 17, 1967)

Source: Special Collections, Vanderbilt University

Controversy over the Vietnam War raged throughout the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. Shifts in public opinion became increasingly evident as the Johnson administration escalated the conflict. By the end of Johnson's presidency, it became clear there was great opposition to the war and the principles for which it stood. Such opposition arose especially on college campuses around

HELP STOP THE WAR IN VIETNAM

We see no gain coming from the war in Vietnam. We see only the growing victimization of the Vietnamese people, the erosion of a better society at home, and the clear possibility of a world conflict. We believe that our government has made a number of tragic mistakes in Vietnam, and we further believe that to perpetuate these old mistakes by continuing to escalate our military involvement in that country is, in fact, to make new mistakes.

Our government is a government of, by, and for the people—therefore, both as citizens and as members of the Vanderbilt academic community, we are responsible for our government's action in Vietnam. To be silent is to consent—to speak out is to make known our opposition to the war. We protest what our government is doing in Vietnam and will help in the general effort that is required to build the public understanding which will effectively challenge our government's policy in Vietnam.

Those of us who have endorsed this statement are united by our common opposition to the war. Beyond that, a wide range of opinion exists, from those who favor a bombing pause, to those who favor negotiations now, to those who favor immediate and unilateral withdrawal of our armed forces from Vietnam.

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Paul Massey, Grad., Phil. | Richard E. Earl, Jr., Divinity | Paul R. Casperson, Grad., Econ. | Rev. Robert Hofstetter, Newman |
| Mary Ellen Grossman, '69 | K. David Allen, Grad., Soc. | Randy Mader, Grad., Pol. Sci. | Foundation |
| Valerie A. Norris, '69 | Kenneth Warkins, Grad., Soc. | Benny Fisher, Grad. | Walter A. Leginski, Psych. |
| David I. Orndorff, '68 | Richard F. DeLeon, '70 | Rev. Maria Tarkenton, Psych. | Elliot Ward, Grad. |
| Stephen K. Parks, '70 | Robert Nash, '71 | Gail Pilley, Grad. | Dr. Richard Blanton, Psych. |
| John Batten, '70 | Michael A. Metzger, '71 | David Ward, Grad. | Samuel Rogers, Grad., Psych. |
| Philip Glass, '70 | Steven R. Parker, Grad., Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Dr. Roger S. Zimmerman, Psych. | Sam O. McFarland, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Joe Weil, Grad., Mat. Biol. | Robert E. Sawyer, '68 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Mr. Alan H. Dreyfus | Alex Shabinsky, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Edward Fricks, Divinity | James R. Sawyer, '68 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Roy Talbot, Grad., Hist. | K. Dwan McSpadden, '71 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Lorenza Wirth, '70 | Robert R. Appleton, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Craig L. Sprinkle, '70 | Wayne Christensen, Jr., '70 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Kenneth W. Christian, Grad., Psych. | James M. O'Keefe, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Mary C. Garrett, Grad., Psych. | James M. Rayson, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Michael H. North, Grad., Pol. Sci. | Dr. Richard D. Odum, Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| David Richter, Med. | Johnston Riddley, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| E. Phillip O'Hara, Grad., Pol. | Robert S. Riddley, Drama Faculty | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Andre P. DiGirolamo, Grad., Pol. | John Pigeon, Grad., Econ. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Frank Knudsen, '68 | Henry Sullivan, Law | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Charles A. Robinson, Grad. | Norman Schickman, Grad., Eng. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Elizabeth R. Post, Econ. Faculty | George Williamson, Jr., Grad., Pol. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Dr. Robert C. Mitchell, Soc. | Stephen G. Burdick, Grad., Econ. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Edward J. Higney | Tom W. Boyd, Divinity Faculty | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Dr. William F. Smith, Psych. | Dr. James T. Loney, Divinity | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Sally T. Kaplan | James S. Montgomery, Grad., Pol. Sci. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Dr. James H. Kaplan, Psych. | Dr. H. T. Freeman, Divinity | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Judy Lee, Grad. | Dr. Clarence J. Dora, Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| John Schell, Divinity | John H. Kiser, Grad., Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Henry Handley, Grad. | Arthur Rosenblum, '68 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Tom Strapp, '71 | Walter Wright, Grad., Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Laura Seely, '69 | Henry L. Fleming, Grad., Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Douglas Straley, '69 | Thomas Field O'Rourke, Grad., Phil. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Dr. Paul DeLeon, Grad. | Dylan Corbett, Med. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Omair E. Gault, Soc. Faculty | Sam W. Bonaldi, Grad., Eng. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Laura Karkov, '69 | Quill Crockett, '68 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |
| Houston J. Rabbitt, '71 | Thomas J. Brewer, '69 | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. | Don F. Pappano, Grad., Psych. |

ing an environment in which students were encouraged to think politically without itself taking a clear stance on the issue, and, initially at least, students took advantage of this opportunity to speak freely. In 1965, a small group of students founded the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Vanderbilt.⁶ The organization remained fairly small and ultimately dissolved after a few months, but its members attempted to spread their political views. They set up booths in Rand Hall and peacefully passed out fliers to promote the anti-Vietnam cause.⁷ However, typical Vanderbilt students of the time came from white, southern, conservative, affluent families, and thus unsurprisingly most favored the war.⁸ Such students created a petition advocating for the support of American troops in Vietnam and organized a blood drive to benefit U.S. soldiers in 1965.⁹ Recent alumni now serving in Vietnam had written to students emphasizing their need for support and blood, and these students seized the opportunity to help their friends.¹⁰ In the end, the petition received over 2,000 signatures and was accepted by a United States general in an on-campus ceremony that became a pro-war rally.¹¹ Shortly after the event, *The Hustler* published an editorial saying, “we support the soldiers fighting in Viet Nam, and to go even further, we favor President Johnson’s policy there.”¹² More than anything else, these two occurrences highlighted the student body’s overwhelmingly pro-war stance on the Vietnam issue.

In 1966, the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War was mounting, yet the majority of students at Vanderbilt were simply uninterested in developing and expressing their political beliefs. Dialogue continued through a new column in *The Hustler* that provided students of both liberal and conservative views with the opportunity to discuss their beliefs.¹³ The Student Political Education and Action Committee (SPEAC), one of the organizations that replaced the

“Help Stop the War in Vietnam” (*The Vanderbilt Hustler*, October 13, 1967)

Source: Special Collections, Vanderbilt University

campus concerning the Vietnam controversy. Therefore, *The Hustler* gives a good overview of the issues as perceived by the Vanderbilt community.

“[T]he majority of students at Vanderbilt were simply uninterested in developing and expressing their political beliefs.”

In 1965, the beginnings of an anti-war movement began to surface on Vanderbilt’s campus; however, this movement was still greatly overshadowed by the majority of students’ overwhelming support for the war. On May 7 Vanderbilt hosted its first speaker on the Vietnam issue: Norman Thomas, a Presbyterian minister and fervent socialist. He spoke to a crowd of 1,000 students in Neely Auditorium about the importance of making peace in Vietnam, and was subsequently met with a “mixed reaction of applause and subdued hisses.”¹⁵ This event was the first in a series of live debates and speakers on Vietnam that Vanderbilt would host over the next four years. This series was the university’s method of foster-

ing SDS, also came out with the University’s first radical political paper, *Prometheus*, to spread its views more effectively.¹⁴ Additionally, the Vanderbilt Committee For Alternatives to War in Vietnam attempted to foster a dialogue on campus by setting up a debate between the pro- and anti-war factions.¹⁵ The members of the student-run organization sent out handwritten letters to countless individuals and clubs around campus asking for volunteers to participate. However, out of the 2,000 people who signed the petition supporting the war months earlier, only 15 agreed to defend their views, while 35 out of the infinitely smaller number of students who protested the war came to share their views.¹⁶ This huge discrep-

ancy in numbers can be attributed to conservative students' lack of support for their arguments and general apathy toward the issue. The majority of pro-war students' beliefs were cursory, and therefore they could not defend them effectively in a debate against someone who passionately believed and supported their stance. The president of the Young Republicans Club confirmed this by stating, "many supporters are reluctant to put their views on the line when these views are not well grounded."¹⁷ Thus, even though students who favored the war greatly outnumbered students who opposed the war, anti-war students, knowing they were the minority, demonstrated their passion and zeal for the issue by expressing their views on campus. Specific opinions about what should be done in Vietnam among those who opposed the war varied, some favoring negotiation, others immediate withdrawal, but they all believed "to be silent is to consent," so they made their voices heard.¹⁸ However, the majority of students at Vanderbilt remained apolitical, focusing instead on academics and campus life.

Anti-war sentiment on Vanderbilt's campus peaked in 1967, as liberal students grew more vocal. In October 1967, a full page anti-war advertisement appeared in *The Hustler* advocating a swift end to the war and listing over 100 names of undergraduate, graduate students, and professors who supported the anti-war cause.¹⁹ While most people on Vanderbilt's campus supported the war, this advertisement highlighted the growth that the anti-war movement had undergone since its humble beginnings. This is also verified through the removal of advertisements for the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) in *The Hustler* as student protests, at Vanderbilt and other universities, often focused on objections to the ROTC program. In 1965, recruitment advertisements for Vanderbilt's ROTC program appeared frequently. However, after 1965 they disappeared completely from the newspaper, demonstrating the growing opposition. Not only did the number of protesters grow, but also the degree to which students were willing to speak up and physically act. For example, protesters picketed in front of Alumni Hall during a Naval ROTC drill, yelling at the students that they were making a huge mistake and needed to leave the program while they still could.²⁰ This was in sharp contrast to prior campaigns of quietly handing out pamphlets in Rand.

Protests also arose in the form of peaceful school-wide "teach-ins" in which professors or guest speakers would discuss the need for peace in Vietnam.²¹ Not everyone participated, yet publicity, both good and bad, increased in *The Hustler*. These protests were able to take place because the Board of Trust at Vanderbilt refused to take a position on the Vietnam War. Instead they opted to "skirt the issue" and allow students to debate and decide for themselves what, if anything, should be done.²² By the end of 1967, the liberal minority at Vanderbilt had taken advantage of the university's openness, while the conservative majority tended to ignore the anti-war protests, instead concentrating on their academic careers.

THE VANDERBILT An Independent Student Newspaper HUSTLER VOL. 79--NO. 12 NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, OCTOBER 24, 1967 PRICE TEN CENTS The Weather Windy and mild weather to continue, partly cloudy with a few scattered showers. Fall breaks loose over Washington.

Greek Houses Found Tax-Exempt Fraternity Tax Issues Face Chancery Court

Lopez Relates 'The UFO Story,' Offering 'Proof'

WVAC Rally Attracts Crowd; Talk, Songs, Poems Abound

Foster Miller Cites Interests in Slavic Areas

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"WVAC Rally Attracts Crowd..." (The Vanderbilt Hustler, October 24, 1967) Source: Special Collections, Vanderbilt University

In 1968, students' limited political interest shifted from the Vietnam War to the upcoming presidential election, yet even on this issue, opinions still remained poorly developed and surface level in depth. Those students who were opposed to the United States' intervention in Vietnam continued to voice their opinions, though with less frequency, hosting more "teach-ins" and writing articles for *The Hustler* on occasion.²³ For the most part, students began focusing on the upcoming presidential election as more students' political interests were too narrow to focus on more than one major issue. This was evident as the Vietnam issue greatly overshadowed the racial issue on campus. Even as Vanderbilt's administration made efforts to integrate, recruiting the SEC's first African American athlete Perry Wallace in 1966, students seemed rather apathetic to the issue. As the number of African American students increased, some administrators voiced concerns about those students finding social outlets on campus, but for the most part students seemed not to care.²⁴ There were very few opinion pieces published in *The Hustler* concerning the racial issue. If anything, *The Hustler* simply reported on what was going on in Nashville concerning discrimination, for most politically charged articles focused on the Vietnam War and later the election of 1968.²⁵

Vanderbilt and the Vietnam Crisis

In 1968, the administration continued to remain as neutral as possible amid the controversy. It declared that the university would not deny admission to a student based on his refusal to participate in the draft. Such an applicant needed to have settled the issue with proper authorities first, "but once that had been done, [the university] would not refuse him admission or judge him unfairly because of such a past record."²⁶ Thus it strove to make the Vietnam question a non-issue in campus affairs. The controversy of the draft itself never really took off at Vanderbilt, even among those who protested the war.²⁷ There was a small petition in 1968 that received 20 signatures from students who vowed not to honor the draft, but it received minimal attention as protests revolved around America's involvement more than anything else.²⁸ Moving away from the Vietnam issue, *The Hustler* began running numerous articles on student and faculty opinions of the candidates and election process. In March 1968, Robert Kennedy came to speak on Vanderbilt's campus shortly after he had announced his candidacy for president. He gave a speech to over 12,000 students and locals in which he highlighted the shortcomings of the current government, eloquently vowed to do something about them, and received a standing ovation.²⁹ While the great coverage and student turnout of the event seems to demonstrate a high degree of political interest among students, this interest was fleeting. Robert Kennedy's popularity among students rose dramatically following his speech only to drop later as the excitement died down and students reverted back to their conservative views.³⁰ Shortly after this event, President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection, yet somehow this major development was missing from the pages of *The Hustler*.³¹ This confirms the majority of students' lack of interest in political affairs. Thus Vanderbilt's campus and student body remained relatively inactive and quiet throughout this extremely controversial time.

While a liberal minority did vocalize discontent with the situation in Vietnam, most students supported the war and/or paid little attention to the issue. Consequently, demon-



“General Accepts Student Petitions During Campus Viet Nam Rally” (*The Vanderbilt Hustler*, December 10, 1965) Source: Special Collections, Vanderbilt University

strations on Vanderbilt's campus remained small in scale compared with the violent outbreaks and large-scale protests at colleges with more liberal atmospheres. Still, because of their vehemence, the students of the liberal minority made their voices heard and garnered some support during Johnson's presidency. They were able to lead Vanderbilt's limited political scene, hosting debates and "teach-ins," bringing in guest speakers, and dominating the columns in *The Hustler* virtually unopposed. In the country as a whole, focused as it was on the Vietnam War, this minority anti-war movement at Vanderbilt would have had little if any impact. However, strikingly enough, liberals were able to dominate the political scene within Vanderbilt's community because conservative students' interest in the subject remained on the surface level. 🏛️

Endnotes

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- [5] Frye Gaillard, "Socialist Thomas Calls For Peace" *The Vanderbilt Hustler* [Nashville] 7 May 1965: n. pag., microform.
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