

# WHAT STUDENT REVOLUTION?

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Many intellectuals sensed the dawning of a "new generation" in the activism, idealism, and moral pronouncements of the student movement of the 1960's. This movement seemed to be reaching fruition with the "revolutionary" tremors that the youth culture let loose on college campuses and throughout American society in the wake of Cambodia, Kent State, and Jackson State during the spring of 1970.

But less than six months later, the "sounds of silence" on the college campuses became deadening, and the savants of the "new society" expressed disillusionment and bewilderment. The "deradicalization" of the students led to a spate of articles in journals of all political persuasions which attempted to explain where the students were heading next. These explanations tended to fall into three major categories: *first*, those on the left are sure that the students are as frustrated and anti-establishment as ever, that they are in a period of retrenchment and are planning new strategies and tactics for radically changing society; *second*, many on the right remain convinced that the student movement was a figment and/or creation of the ultra-liberal media's imagination; *finally*, a third group of commentators is convinced that the love generation has left its frustrated activism behind, and is now on an extended pleasure trip with everything from pot to smack. Regardless of which group is most nearly correct, there is no doubt that there was a fundamental change in the mood, tempo, and actions of the students during the academic year of 1970-71. We need to analyze and understand the "whys" of this change, because the reasons for the changes will help to give a clearer picture of where the students of today and tomorrow are heading in terms of substantive issues, philosophical outlooks, and revolutionary doctrines.

*The Fear Syndrome:* Fear, more than anything else, seems to be the undergirding of the changed mood on the campuses today. Students are frightened! They are apprehensive of mass meetings or disturbances which might lead to "outside" intervention on the campus. Kent State was not the beginning of the revolution; it was the kiss of death to the fun and excitement associated with the incessant meet-

ings and rap sessions of the spring of 1970. "The System kills" became a stark reality, not only to radical leaders but more tellingly to the marginal activist who flitted around the edges of meetings, more for excitement than because of a deep commitment to their revolutionary or even reform potential. Kent State and Jackson State thus frightened the "marginal" student into inactivity, and correspondingly isolated the radical students into fairly controllable corners, making them visible and vulnerable to the legal and extra-legal sanctions and pressures of university administrations and faculties.

The fear syndrome permeates practically every aspect of the students' existence. The tentacles of fear have become so widespread that they have choked the idealism and camaraderie among the students. Even forces external to the campus began to interject fear into the students' hearts.

Parents, concerned with their "children's" safety, threatened to cut off funds or to transfer the student elsewhere if more confrontations occurred: lost friends, lost funds, lost loves. The university itself threatened to shut down and send the students home to live with their parents if more disruptions arose. "Please!" comes the cry, "keep the campus open, don't let anyone close it down." Corporations have threatened to stop interviewing on the "troubled" campuses where they say the quality of the institution's degree is in jeopardy because of the exodus of "good" professors and "good" students. In a time of recession, the students became excessively concerned about the ability of their "union cards" to admit them into middle-class America. State legislatures passed tough laws with heavy sanctions, so that the law itself became a deterrent force in which fear serves as a club against the disillusioned or disenchanting student. And finally, the premature and naive "violence game" of the Black Panthers and the Weathermen made the students suspicious of more radical leaders who might negate the very society in which so many students are assured of material success and status satisfaction. And, as the fear syndrome grows, students become more distrustful, pensive, passive, fragmented, and manageable, and fear for personal safety ultimately becomes the antithetical negation of the fellowship and community that so many of us thought we saw in the students of the 1960's.

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*The Fad Syndrome:* The process of "faddish thermodynamics" seems to be another explanation of why the revolution may be in its phase-out stage. Fads start at the prestigious universities and become extinct at the third- and fourth-line universities and colleges. For a school in the hinterlands to adopt a fad is its kiss of death, as happened in the spring of 1970. When schools such as Miami University, Moravian College, and Southwestern at Memphis began actively to get on the "protest bandwagon," that signaled the probability that another college craze was passing into oblivion.

Associated with the phase-out of the protest craze has been the noticeable downhill slide of the heavy rock music of the Woodstock generation. With the violent deaths of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, and the corresponding disillusionment of the "other" Woodstocks, there has been a shift away from the hard, revolutionary music of the 1960's toward a softer, quieter, more pensive music identified with the likes of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. This surely is related to the death of the hyper-activist thoughts of the students as they move into the 1970's.

*The Nixon Administration:* The Nixon Administration must be given much credit (or discredit) for attempts to "cut off the revolution at the pass." Nixon has not only isolated the radical student on the campuses, he has in addition emasculated the left-intellectuals and bought off the "idealism" of the marginal student activists with manipulative deftness.

First, he has shattered the unity that existed among the students with regard to Vietnam. He has moved to de-escalate the American presence in the conflict by withdrawing over 250,000 American troops. He has implemented new strategies which place the major share of ground-fighting in the hands of the South Vietnamese, thus leading to fewer and fewer American deaths in the conflict. And he has co-opted major portions of the suggestions identified with the liberal segments of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Hence, even though we are still there, Nixon has done enough to split the students among themselves; and he has clearly taken the primary issue away from the stances identified with L.B.J. which tended to give the leftist students all the marginal friends they needed during the Johnson Administration. In addition, the end of Vietnam as a unifying issue has led to splits among the most radical students themselves as they argue over what to do after Vietnam. For, as was clearly noticeable at the National Student Association Congress held in August, 1970, the radical students were "afraid" that Vietnam could not longer hold them together—they were sure the Vietnam Phalanx was shattered.

Second, the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, coupled with the "pullback implications" of the Nixon Doctrine and the moves toward an all-volunteer military force, led to the ultimate smashing of the fragile idealism that many sensed in the students' rejection of the Vietnam conflict. The idea of a volunteer military is very pleasing, safe, and satisfying to college students who were afraid and indignant about the possibilities that they might get drafted to serve as enlisted men, and perhaps face death in a foreign land. In other words, the self-interest of the students, which many disguised in a hypocritical idealism about the draft (it was, as they rightly argued, unfair to the low middle-class segments of our society), has been undercut by the Nixon "out," which surely is a tremendous improvement over the student deferment system.

Third, the Nixon Administration has criticized, blamed, browbeaten, and generally emasculated the left intellectuals with such regularity and in such volume that parents hate professors, hard-hats hate professors, taxpayers hate professors, the "silent majority" hates professors, and clearly liberal politicians have come to fear the assistance of professors. The 1970 Congressional elections were noticeable for three phenomena which support the aforementioned success of Nixon in isolating the left intellectuals and the radical students and professors: (1) The disinterest of liberal politicians in mobilizing student and academic help in campaigning was remarkable. (2) The lack of debate over the "social issues" during the campaign was almost a crime of negligence as liberal Democrats cut for the middle of the voter market and said little or nothing about Vietnam, law with justice, or students' rights. And, (3) the clear fact was that only the Nixons, the Agnews, and the Wallaces came out of the elections saying the same things that they said when the election period began.



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In terms of rhetoric and television advertising, there was a perceptible drift to the right—away from identification with students and student causes.

In essence, Nixon has done a masterful job in dismantling the unity of the students on substantive issues; in placing much blame for our social cleavages on the campus intellectuals; and in structuring the framework of political dialogue so that liberal politicians no longer want to be allied very closely with the youth culture and the campus intellectuals.

*The Changing University?* The ability of the universities themselves to make adjustments in terms of retrenchment and repression, and to show some genuine signs of creative flexibility, has in a sense fragmented the precarious unity that existed among students in the late 1960's. Not only have the universities removed the radical students and professors by legal and extra-legal means but, more affirmatively, they have made (and are continuing to make) vital changes that have fulfilled many of the demands that initially brought the students together. For example, students have been given voting privileges and at least the appearance of power on most university decision-making bodies; the archaic rules associated with *in loco parentis* have been banished or ignored; curriculum changes have been made; good teaching is being emphasized through awards and evaluation processes; communication channels have been opened; the blacks are appeased by course and organizational additions and/or changes; the "trouble-makers" have been suspended or expelled; graduate programs have been cut back; administrators have become more accessible; and the faculty itself has become more aware of its obligations beyond the classroom and the research functions. In essence, by a two-level approach, the university has obviated much of the revolutionary potential on its campuses. On the one hand, it no longer serves as the womb for radical students and professors it was once thought to be. Through the numerous instruments at its disposal, the university has banished the hard-core of revolutionaries from the physical environment. And, on the other hand, the university has become less openly rigid, dictatorial, and oppressive against the student body. Clearly, the radical leaders have been dispersed, and the student masses have been appeased and/or pleased, depending on the depth one attaches to the structural changes that have been made on the campuses today.

*America—the Assimilation Society:* Finally, there are fundamental aspects of the American cultural scene which should have hinted at the end of the uniqueness of the new culture and the viability of a separate youth movement.

*First*, the television tube legitimized and homogenized so many of the funky and novel elements of the student movement that soon it became next to impossible for the symbols and ideas of the counter-culture to retain any authentic meaning—hair grew longer, hair spray became a bathroom necessity, and *HAIR* became a must experience for middle-class America.

*Second*, the system has been able to market the love generation with such economic success that it is hard to tell the "good guys" from the "bad guys." Love beads, bell-bottomed pants, and the Laredo smoking machine have been adopted by so many "straights" that it is abundantly clear the love culture is now part of the standard norms of our assimilation society.

*Third*, the T.V. generation has been dealt a disastrous disfavor. It was led to believe that revolutionary change would come quickly. Too many students thought the world could be reformed in thirty-minute segments, and were ill-prepared for the long and difficult battles required to change a massive bureaucratic society. Consequently, many of the most ardent of the "true believers" in the new society quit the fight when it did not lead to results rapidly and easily enough.

*Fourth*, and finally, the technocratic society is a formidable opponent of the youthful idea of a counter-culture. The magic of technology and the comprehensiveness of its control over our lives in terms of educational training and psychological needs made the "deviants" on the New Left the enemies of the stability, predictability, and rationality required to keep our system functioning at a high level of production. New cars, new dishwashers, and new deodorants have become necessities, not luxuries. Ultimately, the counter-culture is relegated to the utopian realm—beyond the comprehension of the masses, and a target of ridicule for the conservative technocrats. In essence, the idea of a new society has become a romantic, harmless dream.

*Where to Now?* It appears safe to say that the student revolution is in its descent—maybe even in its death throes. I have mentioned some of the inter-related causes of the movement's rather sudden (generally unexpected) demise. And yet, the essential question remains: Where do the students and the youth culture go from here? I cannot answer. I'm over 35, and cynicism has blackened my soul and clouded my vision. The Don Quixotes to tilt with the technological world will have to come from somewhere else. But where this next set of utopian idealists will come from I do not know—maybe you do; God, I hope that you do!