

History 200: Doing History
Vietnam War Moratoriums at the University of Puget Sound
Eva Baylin & Jack Aldisert
with
Claire Foster and Rowan Coates

The late 1960s were a time of great political activism and protest in the United States, largely in response to the ongoing war in Vietnam and the conscription of young men to fight overseas. Moratoriums were one method of protesting the war - they served both to demonstrate its unpopularity and to educate people about it. The National Student Association (among others) organized a nationwide moratorium that took place on October 15th, 1969.¹ The participation of University of Puget Sound (UPS) students in this moratorium was as divisive an issue within the institution as it was nationwide. Those who supported the moratoriums were largely young people - many of whom had peers who had been drafted, sent to Vietnam, and killed, and many of whom were living under constant threat of being drafted themselves.^{2 3} Those who opposed the moratoriums were largely people who were too old to be drafted and who often represented the political establishment at both the national and university level.^{4 5} Therefore at the University of Puget Sound there was a disparity in support for the moratoriums between the student body and the administration, with the faculty caught in between.

¹ "Student Call for a Vietnam Moratorium," undated.

² Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Leads Attempt to Mute Criticism of War," *The New York Times*, October 1, 1969.

³ David E. Rosenbaum, "The Moratorium Organizers: Cluttered Precision," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1969.

⁴ James M. Naughton, "Nixon Challenges Protest Leaders," *The New York Times*, October 14, 1969.

⁵ R Franklin Thompson, "Thompson Histories, Historic Materials, Vol. 4," *University Historical Texts*, C.1978.

Students viewed protest via moratorium as a way to achieve peace, to “maximize public support to bring an end to the war in Vietnam.”⁶ The first UPS moratorium coincided with the national one on October 15, 1969. UPS also followed the national trend of monthly moratoriums - the length of which “increased one day each month.”⁷ ⁸ UPS students worked in collaboration with students from Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma Community College, and local high schools.⁹ Moratoriums were only one of many forms of protest used at UPS and across the country, which included “marches, teach-ins, mass rallies, debates and worship services.”¹⁰ But the common goal of each form of protest was to bring attention to the atrocities being committed in Vietnam, and to the senseless deaths of young Americans and Vietnamese civilians both. In the words of the UPS yearbook, *Tamanawas*, in its 1969-1970 issue: to “inform the public of the atrocities and illegitimacy of the war and provide a channel for peaceful demonstration.”¹¹ The October moratorium consisted of an “all day fast, reading of the war dead names, a march and memorial service at Wright’s Park, and an all day teach-in,” all peaceful methods.¹² Students at UPS saw a way to educate the community while peacefully standing up for their beliefs; the university’s administration saw things differently.

The October moratorium at UPS was planned by students, but had no official backing from the institution. The faculty were divided on the issue, and the administration was in

⁶ *Tamanawas*, 1969-1970 issue, pg. 32-33 re: Moratorium.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David E. Rosenbaum, "How Moratorium Grew into Nationwide Protest," *The New York Times*, October 12, 1969.

⁹ Toni Sowers, "UPS Observes Moratorium With March, Speeches," *The Trail*, October 24, 1969.

¹⁰ *Tamanawas*, 32-33.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

opposition to student protest. Publicly, the administration expressed support for the moratorium: on October 8, Dean Thomas Sinclair wrote in a memo to the faculty “The University of Puget Sound is sympathetic with those who wish to participate in [the moratorium]. Unfortunately certain classes are so structured that it is not practical to cancel all classes.”¹³ The administration left the decision whether to cancel classes to individual professors.¹⁴ There is no mention of the faculty’s stance on the moratorium or on the war itself. Privately, however, the administration had more to say on the subject. Then president of the University Dr. R Franklin Thompson wrote extensively in his private records on the subject of the moratorium, frequently criticizing and insulting activist students and faculty. For example, he writes that activist students in general, and specifically students who were at UPS to avoid being drafted were

... very recalcitrant, were very troublesome, were not interested in going to college but wanted the privilege of being deferred for four years. These people formed the basis of many of the problems... and many of the riots, the sit-ins, and the difficult times... If they didn’t make some kind of protest on the [UPS] campus, they would be considered dumbbells and would not have any status. For that reason they organized such things as peace vigils... in many ways the entire student revolution... was like the Children’s Crusades of the middle ages.¹⁵

He also criticizes individual student organizers, referring to them by their full names - in one case remarking “To this day David has not had a constructive life and still goes on the philosophy that someone owes him a living,”¹⁶ and in another: “Marsha was a most unhappy person and when she graduated she was still a person who felt very keenly that life held little future for her or for her student generation.”¹⁷

¹³Thomas Sinclair, memo to faculty, re: Moratorium affecting classes, October 8, 1969.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Thompson, “Thompson Histories,” 2-3.

¹⁶ Ibid, 12.

¹⁷ Ibid, 13.

Additionally, Thompson claims that student activists were attempting to create a “revolutionary fervor”¹⁸ and that students participating in National Student Association efforts were “militant and were indoctrinated by a number of extremist faculty members and older agitators...”¹⁹ and “many of [the protestors] were more or less immature... While I hesitate to say it, very many of them were what I thought of in terms of ‘losers.’ People who had no reality, no connection with the real world in which we live.”²⁰ Perhaps most tellingly, he wrote of National Student Association tactics: “This was what happened in Germany and for that reason the Nazi party had an ease in becoming strong.”²¹ It is also interesting to note that President Thompson claims he felt persecuted by war protestors, and that there was essentially an ongoing witch hunt for university presidents nationwide - but a week before the moratorium the presidents of 79 colleges signed a statement demanding an end to the war from Nixon.²² Including the president of Reed College, a roughly equivalent liberal arts university also in the Pacific Northwest, and similar to UPS in other ways - who signed the statement while Thompson did not. It was with this reactionary mindset that the UPS administration responded to protest of the war and the draft in general, and to the moratoriums specifically. The faculty’s response was intertwined with, but distinct from, the administration’s.

It wasn't until after the October Moratorium that faculty began explicitly supporting student efforts. On November 3, 1969 the UPS faculty senate passed a resolution supporting an end to the Vietnam War, and expressing that moratoriums were “a useful tool” in achieving this.

¹⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, 7.

²⁰ Ibid, 11.

²¹ Ibid, 8.

²² Ibid, 4-7.

²³ They went on to officially support the upcoming November moratorium, stating: “We... recommend that class sessions on November 13, 1969, be given over to discussions of the problem of the war [and] that class sessions on November 14, 1969, be canceled in remembrance of those who have died.”²⁴ Despite the faculty’s shift toward support for the cause of peace, the administration once again responded by expressing sympathy but allowing individual professors to determine whether or not to participate in the discussions and the cancelling of classes.²⁵ Additionally, President Thompson once again privately revealed the truer situation within the administration, this time in a letter responding to the complaints of Tom Milligan, the director of the School of Business Administration:²⁶

Thank you for your letter... concerning the resolution of the faculty senate. There are a number of you in the School of Business Administration who have written me concerning this. I strongly suggest you poll yourselves and frankly say to the Senate that you do not think this ought to be done and that you hope the Senate will not pass such a resolution for the proposed December moratorium.²⁷

Alongside the faculty Senate resolution, this quote demonstrates, first, that the administration continued to hold a private stance of opposition to the protests. Second, that the opposition from faculty members, while still present, had decreased dramatically in only a month’s time. This was the result of both great effort on the part of the students, and a national shift in attitudes toward the war.

The UPS faculty were in a liminal space between the students and the administration both generationally, and in their stance on the war and the moratorium - so it took changes in the

²³ Thomas Sinclair, memo to faculty, re: Moratorium affecting classes, November 7, 1969.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Interview with Dr. John Prins,” interview by R Franklin Thompson, *Sound Ideas*, April 3, 1979, 17.

²⁷ R Franklin Thompson, letter to Thomas Milligan, November 11, 1969.

national atmosphere to shift the balance. The young students were of an age that made them eligible for the draft, the administrators were of an age that made them ineligible, and the faculty members were somewhere in between. The faculty was divided between older, tenured, and more conservative faculty members such as Tom Milligan who were offset by a younger, more liberal segment of the faculty including TAs and recently-tenured faculty members.²⁸ According to President Thompson "...we had hired some of these people and they kept their feelings of anxiety and insecurity and their pressures against authority... and they were a constant source of agitation..."²⁹ This goes to show that the contemporary UPS faculty was heterogenous in age and in its views of the war and of authority, and its members fell neatly on either side of generational and political fault lines.

These lines shifted significantly toward activism and an anti-war stance throughout October of 1969. The faculty was swayed by both student protest, including the moratorium on the 15th, and national shifts in attitude. The month saw many reputable groups nationwide endorsing the students and participating in the moratoriums.*

²⁸ Prins, interview.

²⁹ Thompson, "Thompson Histories," 10.

* These included many antiwar groups,³⁰ prominent activists including Coretta King,³¹ a league of 159 college and commercial radio networks (who provided a 12-hour broadcast of the moratorium),³² a bipartisan group of 17 US Senators and 47 House Members whose ranks had snowballed from only 9 as they decided siding with the moratorium was no longer politically risky (and who staged an all-night vigil in solidarity the night of the moratorium),^{33 34 35} religious leaders,³⁶ students in the capitals of both North³⁷ and South³⁸ Vietnam, the American Jewish Congress,³⁹ the faculty Senates of several major universities including Harvard,⁴⁰ Princeton,⁴¹ and MIT.⁴² Even the Broadway stars of the day led a march on the day of the protest.⁴³

³⁰ "2 Antiwar Groups Join for Protest," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1969.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "War Protest on Network Set," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1969.

³³ John W. Finney, "Lawmakers Back Antiwar Protest," *The New York Times*, October 7, 1969.

³⁴ John W. Finney, "War Critics Plan to Force All-Night Session of House," October 10, 1969.

³⁵ Rosenbaum, "How Moratorium Grew into Nationwide Protest."

President Nixon himself also helped the moratorium gain popularity by making dismissive and generalizing statements about it.⁴⁴ A Gallup poll on the day of the moratorium showed that Nixon's approval ratings had fallen by 8 percentage points to a new low of 59 percent.⁴⁵ As the Nixon administration lost popularity throughout the month of October, the moratorium movement continued gaining it. So the presence of young "agitators" on the faculty combined with significant national influence meant that the UPS faculty's balance on the war was swayed by the political atmosphere more than the generational gap, and tilted in favor of the students and the moratorium.

One of the grassroots organizations that arose during this time of activism, protest, and conflict was a group called Students for Democracy, whose mission was "[to call] on students to work for a society where all... would more fully control their own lives and social institutions."⁴⁶ University students were under constant threat of being drafted to fight in a war that they did not support, and this frightening reality pushed them to fight for control of both their own right to live, and the to change the institutions that tried to take that right away. These protests were not merely political, they were deeply personal - a matter of freedom and of grief. In the words of

³⁶ Dugan, "Religious Leaders Endorse Vietnam Moratorium," October 11, 1969.

³⁷ Pace, "Hanoi Calls Moratorium 'Timely Rebuff' to Nixon," October 15, 1969.

³⁸ "Protest Begins in Saigon," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1969.

³⁹ Charlton, "Wide War Protest Here Set for October 15," October 4, 1969.

⁴⁰ Reinhold, "A Harvard Faculty Urges War Pullout," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1969.

⁴¹ "Faculty Dissent at Princeton," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1969.

⁴² "M.I.T. Faculty Votes to Hold Convocation on Protest Day," October 11, 1969.

⁴³ Raymont, "Stars Lead a Parade in Midcity," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1969.

⁴⁴ Rosenbaum, "How Moratorium Grew into Nationwide Protest."

⁴⁵ "Poll Finds Nixon Loses Popularity," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1969.

⁴⁶ Students for a Democratic Society, "Don't Mourn - Organize!: SDS Guide to Community Organizing," ed. Cynthia Rose, *American Decades Primary Sources* vol. 7: 1960-1969 (1968). <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3490201284/GVRL?u=taco25438&sid=GVRL&xid=cf0eb9ac>.

Toni Sowers of *The Trail*: “the demonstration was... that of the sorrow of the young for their friends’ deaths.”⁴⁷ The same article demonstrates the disparity between the young and the old: “the rest of the city in general was not involved... peace is desired - at least by those who have the most chance of dying.”⁴⁸ This kind of divide, this kind of activism, becomes inevitable when young people realize that they and their lives are pawns in a deadly game being played by the government and their own universities. In that moment when so many young men were sent to their deaths in a senseless war, the complacency of the old, the militant, and the conservative could not stand.

⁴⁷ Sowers, "UPS Observes Moratorium."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Works Cited:

"2 Antiwar Groups Join for Protest." *The New York Times*, October 5, 1969.

Charlton, Linda. "Wide War Protest Here Set for October 15." *The New York Times*, October 4, 1969.

Dugan, George. "Religious Leaders Endorse Vietnam Moratorium." *The New York Times*, October 11, 1969.

Sinclair, Thomas. "Re: Moratorium Affecting Classes." Memo to Faculty. October 8, 1969.

Sinclair, Thomas. "Re: Moratorium Affecting Classes." Memo to Faculty. November 7, 1969.

"Faculty Dissent at Princeton." *The New York Times*, October 9, 1969.

Finney, John W. "Lawmakers Back Antiwar Protest." *The New York Times*, October 7, 1969.

Finney, John W. "War Critics Plan to Force All-Night Session of House." *The New York Times*, October 10, 1969.

"M.I.T. Faculty Votes to Hold Convocation on Protest Day." *The New York Times*, October 11, 1969.

Naughton, James M. "Nixon Challenges Protest Leaders." *The New York Times*, October 14, 1969.

Pace, Eric. "Hanoi Calls Moratorium 'Timely Rebuff' to Nixon." *The New York Times*, October 15, 1969.

"Poll Finds Nixon Loses Popularity." *The New York Times*, October 16, 1969.

"Protest Begins in Saigon." *The New York Times*, October 15, 1969.

Raymont, Henry. "Stars Lead a Parade in Midcity." *The New York Times*, October 16, 1969.

Reinhold, Robert. "A Harvard Faculty Urges War Pullout." *The New York Times*, October 8, 1969.

Students for a Democratic Society. "Don't Mourn - Organize!: SDS Guide to Community Organizing." Edited by Cynthia Rose. *American Decades Primary Sources 7: 1960-1969* (1968): 158-61.
<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3490201284/GVRL?u=taco25438&sid=GVRL&xid=cf0eb9ac>.

Rosenbaum, David E. "The Moratorium Organizers: Cluttered Precision." *The New York Times*, October 9, 1969.

Rosenbaum, David E. "How Moratorium Grew into Nationwide Protest." *The New York Times*, October 12, 1969.

Semple, Robert B., Jr. "President Leads Attempt to Mute Criticism of War." *The New York Times*, October 1, 1969.

Sowers, Toni. "UPS Observes Moratorium With March, Speeches." *The Trail*, October 24, 1969.

Student Call for a Vietnam Moratorium. Undated.

Tamanawas. 1969-1970 issue, re: Moratorium

"Re: Moratorium." R. F. Thompson to Tom Milligan. November 11, 1969.

Thompson, R. Franklin. *Thompson Histories, Historic Materials, Vol. 4*. c. 1978. University Historical Texts. 8.

"Interview With Dr. John Prins." Interview by R. Franklin Thompson. Sound Ideas. April 3, 1979.

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwiT9qqIppqzeAhUmwMQHHcNrC4YQFjAAegQICRAC&url=http://soundideas.pugetsonund.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=3&article=1009&context=pugetsoundhistoricaltext&type=additional&usg=AOvVaw0yVvcJn9QBfecAtnFKcu9A>.

"War Protest on Network Set." *The New York Times*, October 8, 1969.