

A Rich Man's War and a Poor Man's Fight?
Historical Memory and the Class Dynamics of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement and
Antiwar Sentiment in the United States

by
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Abstract

“A Rich Man’s War and a Poor Man’s Fight? Historical Memory and the Class Dynamics of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement and Antiwar Sentiment in the United States”

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Adviser: Professor Stanley Aronowitz

This dissertation analyzes the relationship between social class, opposition to the war in Vietnam, and our collective memory of that opposition. It both refutes and contextualizes the myth of “worker hawks” opposing “elite doves” that dominates our collective memory of the period. Three central arguments are made. First, through archival research and secondary analysis, the dissertation argues that movement opposition to the war in its early years emerged mainly among middle-class students, privileged liberals and radicals, but as the war went on, this opposition was joined by working-class constituencies, including soldiers; veterans; African-American and Chicano/a movement activists; significant parts of the labor movement; and working-class students. Second, characteristics of the movement as it emerged limited its class base, a limitation amplified by inter-movement relations between labor, civil rights and antiwar forces in the period of 1965-1967. Finally, the antiwar movement’s later cross-class nature has been elided because of the conventions of historical story-telling and because it contradicts a longstanding social narrative of “liberal elites” and “conservative workers” that, while largely false, is culturally resonant and expedient for multiple political elites.

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I initially came to the CUNY Graduate Center on the advice of an undergraduate professor, who told me that the City University of New York was the place I'd find the greatest concentration of "public intellectuals" practicing in the United States. My first debt is therefore to CUNY, for its mission of educating "the children of the whole people," and providing a vibrant space for civic involvement. My committee members represent the best in this tradition, and I thank them for their guidance over the years, and the models of engaged intellectual work they have provided me and my fellow students.

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sustain in their lives; for the work they do to change the problems they find in their social world, both large and small; for finding beauty and humor in all circumstances; and for treating everyone in their lives with fairness, as equals. Their outlook and actions have strongly influenced the direction of this project, and made possible its realization.

A dissertation can take over your life. To the extent that this one did not take over mine, I have Steve Jenkins to thank. Steve has made it possible for us to have a family and a dissertation all at once, in the same household, without chaos, missed meals or bedtime stories. Beyond his concrete and painstaking help, I have relied on his calm, his organizational genius, his humor, his uncanny patience, his faith, and his love for me and for Clara at every stage of this project. I look forward to a lifetime of returning the favor. And, my final thanks goes to Clara, my greatest joy. As I was preparing this manuscript, she told me (and not for the first time), “I want to help you work.” I tried to explain that she does, every day; but what she was really interested in was putting the animals in the dollhouse to sleep, and needed me to get on with it so we could get to the real work of the house. “Are you done with your dissertation?” she asked hopefully. Yes, my sweet, I am.

I began this project soon after the United States went to war in Iraq in 2003. On February 15, 2003, millions of people all over the world protested that war before it began, and we had great hopes that the “worlds other super power,” as the *New York Times* dubbed the nascent movement, would, this time, derail a war before it began. The glory of that day was shadowed for me, however, by a terrible loss the day before: the untimely death of my other adviser, Robert Alford. Bob was one of the best teachers I had, and one of the most realized human beings I have ever had the privilege to know. We frequently (and fruitfully) disagreed, and I depended on the

careful attention and seriousness with which he engaged my ideas; I miss the joy and playfulness that he brought to sociological inquiry, and to life. Along with my family, this dissertation is dedicated to his memory.

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Chapter One Introduction

Forrest Gump won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1994 and grossed \$677 million at the box office. This crowd-pleasing, nostalgic film recasts the social conflicts of the sixties, seventies and eighties as periods containing within them the possibility of social cohesion and personal redemption, brought together through the whimsical character of Gump, a mentally retarded southern white man named after a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Gump's mother's explanation of why she named him after a racist terrorist—to remind him that “we all do things that just don't make no sense”—neatly captures the ethos of the film: people get worked up about all kinds of crazy things in this world, when it would be a much kinder and gentler place if we all just saw that precisely because “we're all different,” “you're just the same as everyone else.”

Gump is a simpleton who serves as foil to the complexity of the great events of the era—Vietnam, antiwar protest, race relations, Watergate, the “opening” of China, AIDS, and more. While the movie plays with questions of life's meaning—are we ruled by destiny, is our time here purposeful—it functions as a movie about healing, putting ghosts to rest, downplaying when not outright denying the fissures in the US social fabric. Gump is himself a liberal character, insofar as he is racially colorblind, non-judgmental regarding “social deviance,” and generous with his remarkable fortune (early investment in “some kind of fruit company,” Apple computer). But the film's historicity is remarkably conservative.

The trick of the movie, through the marvels of digital technology, is to insert Gump into the videographic historical record. We see Gump in footage from the 1960's White House, in the jungles of southeast Asia, etc.—canonical scenes we're familiar with, which in turn are spliced into the narrative of the film, creating a semi-seamless historical narrative. Watching the extensive archival inter-cutting, the

viewer is encouraged to understand that the background representations of the past are largely factual, even if the fictional Gump is suddenly given an outsized role as innocent catalyst of great events. Watergate happened, even if Gump didn't inadvertently bungle the burglars' efforts at the hotel; "ping-pong" diplomacy prevailed in China without Gump's wicked serve; the AIDS crisis reached far and wide.

What story does Gump tell us about the Vietnam War?

To begin with, Gump serves in Vietnam as a soldier. The movie implies that stupidity is an asset in the military: Gump "fits in the army like a round peg"; his best friend is a Black Gump, Bubba, who is similarly sweet and simple. (This interracial pairing obscures the extreme racial polarization typical within the Vietnam-era military.) Gump describes fellow soldiers as "some of America's best young," whose allegorical names in the movie include Dallas, Cleveland, and Tex. Soldiers and veterans are treated sympathetically, on the whole.

When he returns from the war abroad, Gump stumbles upon one of the massive antiwar demonstrations of the era while visiting Washington DC. Like many of the characters and scenes in the film, the antiwar protest is an amalgam, with elements from the November 1967 March on the Pentagon (complete with an Abbie Hoffman-ringer at the mike), November 1969's March of Death, and April 1971's heavy veteran presence. In uniform and randomly finding himself onstage, Gump is asked to speak to the crowd of hundreds of thousand protesters reaching back far into the mall.

But the war at home is the only conflict with which the movie cannot come to terms. Gump's presence has managed to bridge social divides stemming from racism, AIDS, even Communism. The movie indicates that there's some kind of resolution to the conflict in Vietnam as well, one answer, one unitary statement. When asked to tell the crowd about the war, Gump assures us, "there's only one

thing I have to say about the war in Vietnam.” But an older, distinguished looking officer has made his way to the controls, and he pulls the plug on Gump. Gump nevertheless speaks on for nearly a minute, while the audience in the crowd and the audiences in the movie theaters hear only the efforts of the protest organizers to get the mike turned back on. The sound returns as Gump says, “and that’s all I have to say about that.”

We can assume that Gump said something moving that didn’t alienate the protesters on stage, as the Abbie Hoffman character wipes away tears, offering the affirmation “that’s so right on, man.” And we see that the military brass was nervous about the content of a Veteran’s statement, as they are the one’s depicted as pulling the plug. But the movie does not take sides. It is vaguely antiwar, but not clear why it is antiwar. Unlike the other social issues he takes on, a simpleton like Gump can’t, it seems, make sense of Vietnam. It can’t be perfectly encapsulated, its divisiveness smoothed over.

Gump was made at the end of a prolonged period in which US popular culture repeatedly revisited the specters of the Vietnam War and antiwar protest. This isn’t to say that we stopped mining the sixties after the mid-nineties, but that there’s been much less attention to the era in our pop culture since.¹ Beginning in the late 1970’s and continuing through the 1980’s, the country was actively haunted by the lost war, though the nature of that haunting meant very different things to different people.

¹ The reasons for this may have to do with the age and life-place of the cultural producers, and the timing of subsequent historical events. The basic curve of Vietnam era historiography looks like this: repressed silence and anxiety reigned till 1978, during which time the homicidal/junkie veteran image appeared in films like *Taxi Driver* and the country seemed committed to forgetting; from 1979 through the Reagan years mainstream revisionism began in film in movies like the *Deer Hunter*, TV, and books like Norman Pohoretz’s *Why We Were in Vietnam* (1982), Harry Summers’ *On Strategy* (1982) and Guenter Lewy’s massive *America in Vietnam* (1978), alongside an outpouring of work from Veterans themselves; Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1987) marked a break toward the end of the Reagan era to a more antiwar, anti-revisionist position, coupled with a large number of new histories and collections of essays by historians and cultural critics critical of the war and more sympathetic to the movement that are discussed below. With the Gulf War in 1991, Vietnam returned front and center to public consciousness, and the question of the Vietnam syndrome re-entered public life. Histories, essays, movies, and TV shows on “both sides” came out. By 1994, with *Gump*, that had started to fade, leaving the ghosts of Vietnam to rest until the most recent wars being fought by the US have resurrected the period.

The first Gulf War of 1991 had brought the problem of Vietnam front and center, and had been credited with “curing” the country of its “Vietnam syndrome.” *Gump* therefore arrived after a long period of cultural revisiting, marking the culmination of a particular conversation. Yet *Gump*’s treatment of Vietnam did not end this conversation. Its own ambiguity instead underscored the incompleteness of any process of historical rendering, and the nagging uncertainty that the US was left with after that war.

In the wake of this uncertainty—resting in the shame, doubt, death, and divisions of the Vietnam era—some dominant myths have nevertheless developed that hold sway in our popular imagination as we remember the war abroad and the war at home. In the pages that follow, I will be making the case that a particular, dominant narrative of sentiment about and protest against the Vietnam War developed during and after the War itself, one which informs our contemporary understandings of class politics as well as the social sources of support for, and protest against, war in the United States.

Class Divisions During Vietnam and Historical Sociology

Our collective memory, or the story we tell ourselves and each other in this country about the social division over the war in Vietnam follows a particular, class-specific outline, fleshed out in numerous movies, TV shows, textbooks, journalism pieces, histories, memoirs, political speeches, and personal recollections. In these sources the war is typically remembered as having “split the country” between “doves” and “hawks.” The “doves” are most often conflated with “the movement,” and both are remembered as upper-middle-class in their composition and politics. The movement was the quintessential “New Left” movement, and a big part of what made the new left “new” was its break from the working-class politics and roots of the “Old Left.” Some of the individuals and groups we commonly associate with the era are Dr. Benjamin Spock, Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda, Eugene McCarthy and

George McGovern, Students for a Democratic Society, the various Mobilizations (or “Mobe”s) against the war, and Weatherman: intellectuals, professionals, celebrities; liberal or radical privileged elites. Historical treatments sympathetic to the cause range from being impressed by the strength and passion of the “antiwarriors” to more critical chroniclers, who portray them as possibly overly-radical and certainly overly-entitled—they may have been right, but they went about expounding it in the wrong way.

And what of the people on the latter side of this split? Beyond the predictable military brass, war-supporters are often imagined as “ordinary” Americans: white people from “Middle America” (a phrase coined in the 1960’s), who supported God, country, and “our boys in ‘Nam.” Soldiers and their families, veterans and their communities, these working-class patriots insisted that criticism of the war meant criticism of the soldier: “If you can’t be *with* them, be *for* them,” as the sign went. These workers, or members of the lower-middle class, are remembered for having supported George Wallace and Richard Nixon, and whose status as “Reagan Democrats” was immanent, even as early as 1968. Images of a more strident hawkishness flow directly from the labor movement. “Hardhats,” a stereotype based primarily on construction workers in New York City who assaulted antiwar protestors at a rally in downtown Manhattan in May 1970, are the iconic hawks. The most important working-class institution in the post-war era, the AFL-CIO, is remembered for being virulently anti-communist and vociferously pro-war: Big labor’s embrace of the Vietnam cause cemented the image of the working-class patriotic hawk.

Our collective memory of the social division of the Vietnam era thus rests on twin pillars: 1) The antiwar movement was an upper-middle-class social movement, led by privileged radicals, with college students serving as its troops, and supported by the sentiment of elite doves; and 2) The working class distanced itself from or

despised the movement, mostly supported the war and its makers, and was growing increasingly conservative during the era. But this memory contains only half-truths—and is overall a falsehood. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the reigning assumption of elite dominance within social groups opposing the Vietnam War has served to obfuscate a more complex story of the class character of this social movement and the antiwar sentiment of the era. I will show how, by and large, the greatest *support* for the war came from the privileged elite, despite the visible dissent of a minority of its leaders and youth. Working class opposition to the war was significantly more widespread than is remembered, and significant parts of the movement found roots in working class communities and politics. The country was divided over the war, alongside many other pressing social issues—but the class dynamics of those divisions were complex, contradictory, and indeterminate with regard to what the future might bring.

In this dissertation, I am both tracing our current collective memory of the class dynamics of the domestic response to Vietnam, and, through historical sociology, reconstructing those dynamics as they existed at the time. Robert Alford (1998) argues that historical sociology “combines a search for systematic patterns and an understanding of how contingent and converging events create different outcomes or make alternative scenarios plausible.” Written for his last work on sociological method, this appears to be a simple definition of a widely used method. But a number of assumptions about the nature of history and its study are buried in his assertion that deserve delineation. First, that there exist in history structured tendencies that reproduce themselves with some degree of causal logic over time. Second, that these “systematic patterns” exist in interaction with events that are external to them, events that are indeterminate—from the perspective of the patterns—in their substance, timing, and effects.

The distinction he draws here echoes Antonio Gramsci's (1971/1997) separation of "organic" and "conjunctural" "movements" of structure. In Gramsci's discussion of the two, organic movements, like systemic patterns, provide deeper and more complex elements to historical structure, and it is these elements that give rise to "socio-historical criticism," by which I believe Gramsci to mean dialectical analysis, in a Marx-inspired vein. Contingent events, or more "immediate," "occasional," "almost accidental" conjunctures, like persons or leaders, give rise to the lesser form of "political criticism"—criticism "of a minor, day to day character."

Much of what we've used to understand the class dynamics of Vietnam antiwar sentiment and movement has this character of "political criticism." This is mostly true of the more popular representations of the period, but even scholarly work is not immune to confusion between what is transitory and what is systematic. My hope, here, is to make sense of the systematic patterns at work in the development of the class dynamics of Vietnam antiwar sentiment and protest, and how such "organic movements of structure" interacted and continue to interact with the contingent, or "conjunctural" elements of our social life to fashion both the class dynamics of protest themselves and our collective memories of them. Our (mis)apprehension of the class dynamics of the period – of an inevitably conservative working class, and an ineluctably elitist progressivism – confuses what was structural and what was conjunctural, creating a myopic perception not only of the class dynamics of that particular period, but of the possibilities for social action in the United States today.

For Alford's distinction between these two levels of inquiry makes explicit what Gramsci's work in general implies: the interaction of patterns and contingencies opens history from the relentless, linear drive of *what happened* to the analytic imagination of *what might have been*—and for a revolutionary like Gramsci, *what may be*. It's not enough to recognize what is structural and what is contingent

in the unfolding of particular outcomes, or to trace the outlines of history's causal chains. Historical sociology asks a harder question: "how contingent and converging events . . . make alternative scenarios plausible." I am particularly interested in this last element of the method described by Alford. While organizing with other trade unionists against the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I began speaking with my fellow activists about their experiences within the Vietnam antiwar movement. They, too, remember the college students, the educated and religious pacifists, Eugene McCarthy and the Weathermen. But these colleagues, whose days in labor or movement politics spanned the three decades between the wars, remembered more: The high school kids from Brooklyn and the Bronx, for whom college was a remote dream, who left school by the thousands to protest the war. The unions—their own or others—who took out advertisements condemning the war, hosted labor education programs about Indochina and the US war, co-sponsored rallies, and started petition drives. The draft resisters, who were often as centrally concerned with the class inequalities of the selective service system as they were with the immorality of the war itself. The veterans, most of whom had never before protested, joining and helping to lead the movement when they returned stateside. The working-class GI's who refused to fight, and the deserters who walked away. This more full and complex history has been ignored or distorted, and it hints at "alternative scenarios" made "plausible." "Working class conservatism" and "liberal elitism" often have the ring of catechism in both the popular imagination and scholarly work. They are imagined as overdetermined phenomena. But our recent political history is more dynamic than that, and other paths and possibilities have been followed. In the following chapters, I hope to trace and account for this dynamism.

Questions and Arguments

Recent scholarship has begun to both fill in the gaps of our historical record as well as correct the misrepresentations that such gaps have helped create.² I draw on this work, and my own research, to address three related sets of questions.

I first take up the falsity and verity of the worker-hawk/elite peacenik image. My second chapter details the image as it has come down to us, through media, popular and academic discourses. Chapters Three and Four present a “counter-memory,” as Michel Foucault (1977) might describe it, one that both differs from and challenges the dominant discourse concerning class politics during the Vietnam era. Drawing from my own archival research and recent secondary literature, I tell a story of the sentiment and movement against the war that highlights the cross-class and multi-class nature of the response. Where we draw the borders of movements has a profound effect on our analytic appreciation of them, just as what we consider true opposition to a war matters for how we make sense of class attitudes. Typical scholarly tracts on the antiwar movement follow the shifting coalition of organizers and movement organizations that engaged in recognizable practices from identified social movement repertoires—rallies, marches, vigils, petitions, civil disobedience, etc. When analysts and historians explain who protested, and how or whether those protesters affected the end of the war, it is these social facts they observe.

But a broader view is available. It has been argued, for example, that it was resistance from working-class soldiers on the front lines of Vietnam and the resistance of working-class deserters that had as great, if not greater, effects on the US military’s ability to fight the war than did the more typical protest actions

² Levy (1994), Foley (2003), Franklin (2000), Appy (1993), Lewes (2003), Hunt (1999), Heineman (1993), Moser (1996), and Neale (2001) are among the authors who have either implicitly or explicitly explored the more complex class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and movement. Sexton and Sexton (1971), Cortright (1975), Levison (1974) and Taylor (1973), among others, provided contemporaneous criticism of the middle-class biases common to most analysis of the era. Many books address the discrepancy between our historical impression of class based sentiment and the reality in brief sentences similar to this one in the recent *Class Matters* (Leondar-Wright 2004): “Opposition to the war was in fact higher among lower-income than among higher-income Americans” (10). The turn of phrase, “in fact,” addresses the common misperception – but I have not read any account that systematically tries to explain why such a misperception exists.

studied by most scholars (cf. Neale 2001). Both the typical “movement activists” and the “GI resisters” opposed the war – yet only one group’s actions is registered as having done so in the proper social movement way. And how we define proper opposition has similarly narrowed our consideration of antiwar sentiment. The antiwar sentiment of the working class had its roots in both morality and pragmatism. As captured in news reports, surveys, interviews and memoirs, questions such as – Why our boys? Why our tax dollars? Given our sacrifices, why aren’t we winning? – dominated working class discussion of the war. Should such sentiment be “counted” as antiwar in the same way as those whose opposition was overwhelmingly “political” or more traditionally “moral”?³ Taking another tack, African-American resistance in the military and in the streets of the US directly hampered the war-making ability of the US government, whose troops were made unreliable and stretched thin by Black unrest. Urban rioters were not rioting against the war in particular, nor were the Black GI’s in Germany motivated solely by their concerns about Vietnam, but their disruptive actions served to constrain the war’s pursuit. Black revolt was rightly understood as concerned with race, but the vast majority of African Americans of the period were working class and poor, and many of the conditions they rebelled against concerned the effects of the class oppression they experienced as a result of ongoing racial discrimination. Our cultural and analytic separation of race and class obscures these connections. Where, then do we draw the lines around a movement? What happens when we define a movement beyond it’s own organizational borders, even beyond its own cognitive framework, and place it within a more dynamic historical and cultural context? My dissertation argues for a broader conceptualization of social movement activity, while also assessing the limits of such an approach.

³ See Chapters Three, Four and Six. For GI resistance, see Neale (2001), Ziegler (2006). See also Scott (1985). For the differences between morality and pragmatism, see Schuman (1972) and my discussion in Chapter Seven.

Second, what accounts for the persistence of the class divide in our collective memory of the attitudes and actions of Americans regarding the Vietnam War? The early sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992 (1950)) argued that our social “frameworks of memory” exist both external and internal to the passage of time. “Outside” of time, as representations of the past, their “stability and generality” are communicated to our personal and group recollections, serving to forge group identity and a sense of commonality. But the frameworks are also subject to the passage of time: we “frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it” (182). Our exaggerated perception of class polarization finds support in *stable* and *general* understandings of the nature of class and class politics in the US. This perception was not only prevalent in the years prior to and including the Vietnam War, but has been retroactively attributed to the period of the 1960’s and 1970’s from our present vantage point. As I will detail in Chapters Five and Six, the postwar political economy, personal expectations of movement activists, influential cultural reference points, and the media together anticipated and helped to sustain particular impressions of class divisions prior to and during the early war years. The composition and orientation of the early antiwar movement itself contributed mightily to perceptions of its elitist character.

1968 was a turning point in US attitudes toward the war and the movement itself. From that year forward, a majority of people in the US opposed the war, and wanted to see the troops come home. And yet, despite the change in actual sentiment, the media and politicians’ representations of antiwar sentiment and action continued to draw on, and in fact amplified, the earlier anticipations and experiences of class divisions. In my final chapter, which returns to many of the elements of our collective memory as sketched in the first chapter, I look at the period since 1968, as we have “distort[ed] the past in the act of reconstructing it” – and distorted the present in the act of living it. In this period, I argue that the

representations of the class divisions of antiwar sentiment and protest were subject to three main forces contributing to this distortion: Political manipulation by political elites and conservative intellectuals; academic frameworks that continually discover and predict this particular class polarization in the United States; and cultural and media representations that alternately underestimate the degree of class polarization that exists (in our “classless” society), or overestimate it with regard to political attitudes and behavior. My dissertation thus comes full circle, returning to the historical and contemporary production of our distorted collective memory.

Yet while our perception of the class nature of the sentiment and the movement against the war in Vietnam is half-falsehood, it is also half-truth: We can define the scope of each in such ways to show that workers played critical roles, but the movement, in the common and more limited way that we tend to understand it, *was* significantly middle class, and even arguably elite in its earliest days. So my third and final set of questions asks why did the “antiwar movement,” as classically defined, take on the class forms and dynamics that it did? Why was the movement initially dominated by upper- middle class activists? Why weren’t workers significantly involved in the earliest years of protest? Why, even in the latter period of the war, was “the movement” so unpopular among white workers? For academic analysts, the experience of the Vietnam antiwar movement has contributed to a rethinking of which groups best, or actually constitute “agents of social change” within the US and other industrialized societies.⁴ For movement strategists and participants, concern over working-class participation in and support for social movements has recurred since the 1960’s, today yielding urgent debates about how to create “coalitions across the class divide.” By tracing key moments and practices of the Vietnam antiwar movement, as well as the reactions among workers to these

⁴ With Marcuse (1964), Mills (1963), Williams (1961) and others as precursors, see Gitlin (1987), Walker (1979), and much contemporary social movement theory (such as Croteau 1995, Darnavsky et al. 1990, Jaspers 1997, Larana, Johnston & Gusfield 1994, Whittier, et. al. 2002).

practices, I hope to develop a more clear understanding of what allows—and prevents—wider working-class participation in social movements in our era. This set of questions is addressed in all of the chapters, but the Chapters Six and Seven are where it receives the most focused attention.

In sum, I hope my dissertation successfully contributes original answers to the following questions:

1. *What were the class dynamics of Vietnam antiwar sentiment and protest in the United States? Why did they take the forms they did?*
2. *How has our collective memory of the period represented these class dynamics? To the extent that this memory is distorted, why is that the case?*
3. *Has our analytic approach to the study of the Vietnam antiwar movement—and by extension, other new social movements of the postwar period—circumscribed our capacity for recognizing the complexity of class-based political behavior in the United States in the modern era?*

Literature Review and Theoretical Questions

In this dissertation, I am studying both a movement and its historical moment, as seen through the problem of class dynamics, and then I am tracing how we have remembered these dynamics in subsequent years. In doing so, my work draws from a number of literatures.

Studies of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement

To write about memory, one must also consider forgetting. The objective of this project is to compare the memories we have of the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and movement during Vietnam to the events at the time, and to make sense of their congruence and divergences. But this story needs to be told in light of another fact: that much of the movement against the Vietnam War has been forgotten. In 2001, a professor writing in *The Nation* recalled, “I showed [the documentary about the 60’s movements] *Rebels With a Cause* at the university where

I teach—Eastern Connecticut State, a working-class campus not at all known for student activism. As one might expect, reactions and interests varied. What I was most struck by was that while all the students had heard of the civil rights movement, many had not heard of the antiwar movement” (Russell, 3/5/2001). This has consistently been my experience as well – only a handful of the hundreds of students I’ve taught during my years at the City University of New York have known that there was a major movement in the United States against the war in Vietnam. And this relative lack of attention extends to scholarship as well. As much as one can find evidence of a particular class-polarized framework for the period, it’s within a general condition of relative quietude.

In “The Forgotten Movement: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement,” James Max Fendrich (2003) describes the “lack of analysis of the antiwar movement” as a “gaping hole” in the sociological literature. After detailing the resounding silence⁵, Fendrich very briefly lists possible reasons for the exclusion of Vietnam antiwar protest from scholarly consideration. Summarizing others, he hypothesizes that 1) internal and external constraints on academics limited scholarship on the antiwar movement (Jacoby 1987); and/or 2) there existed a “failure of the intellect” when theories of international politics were not rethought in the light of Vietnam (Petras and Davenport 1992). He himself adds that the hegemony of resource mobilization theory within social movement theory meant that its “focus on political inclusion in the polity and institutionalization of social movements” meant that “non-reform”

⁵ His description: “From 1951 to 1979, there were 1575 articles in the American Sociological Review. According to Petras and Davenport (1992), there was not a single article analyzing the Vietnam War, and only one research note (Hamilton 1968). Only one article on the Vietnam antiwar protest movement (McAdam and Su 2002) has appeared in the American Sociological Review since 1979. Two search engines—JSTOR and the ISI Web of Science—were checked for articles on the Vietnam antiwar protest movement. JSTOR has three article that mention the Vietnam antiwar movement on in passing while focusing on other theories and data. In contrast, it contains 322 sources on the civil-rights movement and 252 on the labor movement. . . . [The Web of Science contained no articles at all on the movement. Major social movement books, anthologies, review articles, and research monographs say little about the movement]. It is clear that the Vietnam antiwar protest movement has been understudied.” (2003; 338-39).

movements, presumably the antiwar movement, have not been adequately studied. This is a curious reduction of the antiwar movement, however, which could just as easily be seen as a reform movement that did demand polity inclusion. To the extent that it was a reform movement of organized constituencies who sought to force government elites to pay attention to them and change their ways, it could have been studied by resource mobilization or political process theory, the dominant models of social movement analysis in US scholarship. The problem is, that is not *only* what it was.

The Vietnam antiwar movement was a massive, sprawling, multi-headed phenomenon. Its scope was generally very narrow: For the most part, people were united, quite obviously, to end the war.⁶ Its overarching goal uniting its many incarnations was to leverage whatever power it had to pressure the US government to do so. But, short of a revolution, the timing of this eventuality was outside of the movement's hands – it could push hard for it to happen sooner, but it could not make the call. Very few activists had any sense that it would take as long as it did for the war to end. For many, the war appeared so untenable at its start that they thought it would be over within months or the year. The official political line on the war abetted this misapprehension of the war's durability: Every politician of the era, with the exception of Barry Goldwater in 1964, ran as a peace candidate of one stripe or another. The movement had a start-stop tempo to it that was largely outside of its control, with horrific bombing campaigns followed by “progress in the peace talks”; and an all-or-nothing character: either the war would end or it wouldn't, “no partial victories or breathing spaces could be won” (Isserman and Kazin 1989, 223).

⁶ I qualify this statement because at different moments the movement took on different demands, like, end the bombing or negotiate now. From 1967 onwards, the organized movement almost universally embraced an “Out Now” slogan. From there, the question became more complicated—was ending the war sufficient, or were the multiple problems with American society made evident by the war the real “grievance” of the movement, the real target? This line of reasoning, becoming more widespread after 1968, was usually viewed as the “revolutionary line,” certainly the radical line, and it became the basis for later fights over the “single-issue” versus “multi-issue” orientation of the movement that I address shortly.

This rhythm led to ups and downs of extreme excitement and agitation followed by extreme disillusion and disappointment, with waves of people feeling their power and then their powerlessness. The extent to which the movement did change foreign policy – and there are many moments at which it did – this was mostly invisible to the participants themselves (Wells 1994; DeBenedetti 1990).

For all of its focus, the movement was internally riven, with revolutionary non-reformers battling those who would work within the Democratic Party, proponents of a single-issue orientation fighting those who would broaden the objectives, and full of heated disagreements about demands, audience, and especially tactics. The meaning of the movement's primary grievance – what it meant to be opposed to the war – could range from those who opposed this particular war at this particular time, to people who opposed all wars; from believing the US *made* a mistake to believing the US *was* a mistake; and so on. Similarly, the movement's "framing" processes were so varied and divergent that one can at best use this conceptual tool as something through which to descriptively list moments, often overlapping and transitory, of movement self-identity and external presentation. Mobilizing structures, too, can be denoted – and I use this particular concept to make sense of college and military mobilizations later in this work – but they served to bring people into a patchwork of organized and disorganized dissent. The antiwar movement suffers, at once, from providing too much evidence for the available academic theories and not enough for a neat encapsulation. It's not a satisfying example of any particular model.

This is to be contrasted with the other major movements of the 1960's and 1970's, the civil rights/Black power and feminist movements, which have not similarly suffered from scholarly inattention. They were indigenous movements that sought to fundamentally transform social relations and institutions in this country. Their grievances and demands had enormous breadth and depth, their targets were many

and had varying degrees of power, and their goals could span from small reforms to revolution. Over time, they accrued victories that helped to institutionalize their effects on the country's culture and policies. As movements of oppressed peoples, there already existed strong social bases for collective identities, despite the difficulties that they also faced in maintaining unity and inclusiveness. They are rightly viewed, by most scholars and people concerned with social change, as the most important movements of the period – but as a result of being so, they are also the prototypes for the types of scholarship that would be created about the nature of movements.

Fendrich is therefore right about the antiwar movement's ill-fittedness for recent theories of social movements, and this is largely because these theories were precisely making sense of other movements. The Vietnam antiwar movement didn't fit the type. It was not identity based, or rights-based; it did not draw on any necessary group. The theoretical developments that account for more modern social movements – starting with resource mobilization, political process, and the European-based turn to culture – all “work” to varying degrees with Vietnam, but their own partiality is pointed up by the vastness of the movement. The sheer eclecticism of the movement, its de-centered quality, duration, and multiple forms makes it resistant to sociological study.

Most exploration of the movement has thus been historical. A number of book length studies of the movement have been published. These study the movement's groups and leaders as a whole (DeBenedetti 1990; Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984), particular groups within the movement (Gitlin 1987; Foley 2003; Halstead 1978; Hunt 2001; Foner 1989; Moser 1996; Cortright (1975) 2005; Heineman 1994; Koscielski 1999) or the movement and its interactions with political elites (Small 1988; Wells 1994). There are, of course, many other books about the movements or New Left of the sixties that focus on the antiwar movement as part of their overall

analysis (e.g. Anderson 1995; Brienes, 1989; Sale 1973; Young 1977), or compare the antiwar movement to other movements (Hall 2006; Levy 1994). Numerous anthologies have also been directly concerned with the movement, or have considered the movement in light of larger studies of the Vietnam period or the other movements of the 1960's (Gettleman, et al. 1995; Katsiaficas 1992; Sayres 1984; Small and Hoover 1992). Some cultural criticism has been written about the movement as well, from sympathetic and unsympathetic viewpoints (Beattie 2000; Franklin 2001; Garfinkle 1997; Hellman 1986).

Studying the Antiwar Movement through the Lens of Class

One way to analytically approach this vast movement is to do so from another vantage point, or a particular question in mind. The closest thing we have to a book-length study of the antiwar movement in the sociological literature, Todd Gitlin's *The Whole World is Watching* (1980) (more about SDS and the new left than the antiwar movement *per se*), studies the role of the media "in the making and unmaking of the new left," so that what is uncovered about the movement's dynamics is largely related to its connection to media practices. Using the lens of class will, I hope, similarly sharpen my focus as I navigate the terrain of the Vietnam antiwar movement, and bring analytic discipline to a subject whose scope may otherwise be too vast.

The social class dynamics of the antiwar movement, as well as those of most other movements of the 1960's are usually addressed tangentially in the scholarship, with the overwhelming consensus being that they were largely "middle-class." Feminism, environmentalism and peace movements are the prototypes of these middle-class "new social movements" most often studied in the social movement literature (see characteristics of "new social movements" in Larana, et al. 1994). The civil rights and antiwar movements, while less typical of the "new social movements"

in general, nevertheless had middle-class leaderships for the most part, and addressed concerns that were not class-specific.

As far as workers went, the “new social movements” of the 1960’s and forward were a far cry from the specifically working-class-based politics that had dominated western social movements for the preceding hundred years: “class analysis was challenged by most of the progressive upsurges of the 1960’s and 1970’s” (Epstein, et al. 1995). “Class analysis,” here, refers the classical Marxist expectation that workers would be at the forefront of struggle – which, for generations, they had been. Labor organizing and syndicalism, socialism, many forms of anarchism, and communism explicitly addressed exploitation and engaged in class struggle. While middle-class leadership was common in some sectors of these “old” movements, working-class constituencies and concerns were dominant. As Barbara Epstein writes, the “movements of the postwar era . . . seemed to provide evidence for the view that the working class was no longer an important source of movements for social change. Of course many people who made up these movements were of the working class, especially if it was broadly defined; but these movements did not put themselves forward as specifically representing the working class or its interests” (1990, 44).

Those studies that do examine the class dynamics of the movements focus on these differences between the old and new social movements—the shift from earlier working-class concerns to concerns either specific to middle-class and elite groups, or to universal problems that are unspecific with regard to class. Why did such a shift occur? Looking at the relative quiescence of the postwar American working class, the dominant answers fall into a few overlapping categories.

The first flows directly out of a postwar tradition of the study of working-class affluence, but finds deeper roots in the United States in the “American exceptionalism” question first fielded by Werner Sombart (1905) in the early part of the 20th century. This argument is that working class people have achieved such

levels of economic stability and political incorporation that they no longer have the grievances that once propelled them into movement action (see Lipset 1997, for a compendium of views). Related to this are schools of thought that could be said to be influenced by Perelman's (1928/1979) understanding of "job conscious unionism" as the natural and appropriate expression for labor organizations in the US context (Kornhauser 1954; Shostak 1968). In this framework, it is only economic grievances that successfully propel union action, and the modern labor movement's business turn reflects this orientation, making explicit political action unlikely, and certainly unwise. Another category also takes its cues from early theorists, such as Lenin (1904/1950), and concerns the "labor aristocracy." The problem of affluence may not be a problem for the class as a whole, so this argument goes, but the relatively privileged and co-opted nature of some of its members, such as those with craft monopolies, or members of the trade union leadership, is a problem for the political activity of the class as a whole. This aristocracy serves as a conservative pole in the working class, retarding militancy or radical politics that might otherwise be expressed among workers. A version of this analysis became quite popular in the late 1960's and particularly 1970's with the rise of Maoist politics and analysis (Elbaum 2002). Those influenced by Robert Michels' (1915) argument concerning the "iron law of oligarchy" within organizations scrutinize a tendency towards conservatism in the trade unions as a whole. The very development of the highly organized labor movement—its institutionalization, bureaucratization, and attendant tendency towards oligarchy—is forwarded as an explanation for the decline in its protest potential and activity (Piven & Cloward 1977), while the particular "vertical" forms that it took are singled out by others to explain the decline of "horizontal" solidarity (Lynd 1996).

My own understanding of the decline of working-class-based social movements in the postwar era follows Davis (1986), in seeing their relative political

disorganization and demobilization as the “cumulative effects of defeat” (8). Davis (1986) and Aronowitz (1974) point to the “negative integration” of the working class into the social and political order of US capitalism. Rather than finding a predominantly positive attraction for the economic and political system, as affluence or exceptionalist theorists might, or an inevitable complacency or conservatism based on purely structural or historical factors, as many of the theories described above do, such an approach takes particular problems such as racial, ethnic and gender stratification; job segmentation and craft exclusionism; privatized consumption; and the lack of meaningful class-based political representation as each negatively contributing to working class political expression. Combined with the orientation effects of the trade union bureaucracies and mainstream political parties, working class movements were made unlikely.

But others focus at the other end of the spectrum: Rather than asking, what happened to working-class movements, they ask, why have the middle-class and elite become so dominant in today’s movements? There are two dominant approaches to this question, which are also directly related and highly overlapping. Some argue that the professional managerial class represents a new, if flawed, universal class in relation to the economic and cultural conditions of post-modernity (Gouldner 1979). Whereas workers reacted to the problems of developing capitalism, and successfully fought for redistributive and regulatory social policies, the professional managerial or “new class” are best suited to confront the problems of late capitalism, which stem from patterns of consumption, identity, cultural and symbolic issues. This approach focuses on the changing nature of the political economy, but also on the nature of the new class itself. The second approach foregrounds the features of the new class that make its members more likely to become social movement activists (Rose 1997, 2000; Croteau 1995). The cultural capital and “class culture” of the PMC is credited for their availability for, and expertise and interest in social

movements. Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979) straddle both of these approaches, and these observations of Rose and Croteau play a prominent role in my later analysis of the antiwar movement. For, in partial agreement with those who locate a relatively elite base to contemporary movements, I too find a fit between relative privilege and the early antiwar movement.

Social class, with a focus on working class

Christian Appy's 1991 historical study of the men who fought in Vietnam, *Working Class War*, was the first to bring the question of class to the center of the discussion of the war itself. Appy argues that the overwhelmingly working-class background of the US armed forces is critical for understanding not just the experience of the war for its soldiers, but their homecoming and the overall historical comprehension of the war. But this impressive book only briefly considers the class dynamics of the homefront, as it is primarily concerned with the military and battle experiences of those who fought.

Following Appy, I bring the experience and problems of the US working class to the forefront of my analysis. Because of the perceived elite and middle-class bases to Vietnam antiwar sentiment and movement, workers are often absent or marginalized in the studies described above. I will show that antiwar sentiment and movement in this country was structured by class relations, but not according to the mythic lines of worker-hawk and elite-dove. Rather, working class people were more likely than middle class people or elites to be skeptical and opposed to the war for much of its duration, and working class protest was central to the active opposition. That this was the case is overlooked or veiled by the approaches to class dynamics listed above. In the following two sections, I will further explain my own understanding of the class dynamics of the period, and explain why I consider this to be an important question to study.

Conceptual framework for understanding class

Class is a notoriously slippery sociological concept, whose definition often appears self-evident, when in fact multiple and contradictory meanings are often in play. The classical split in the sociological literature occurs between the different concepts developed (or underdeveloped) by Karl Marx and Max Weber and worked out in the numerous traditions that have developed in their wake. My own use of the concept of class owes its greatest debt to the Marxist tradition, but is somewhat eclectic in its forebears.

Marx, who himself never explicitly defined the concept of class, made a suggestive distinction between class “in itself” and class “for itself,” which has continued to frame much of the Marxist and post-Marxist literatures on class.⁷ The distinction is often summarized as referring to an “objective” sense of class—one’s relationship to the means of production; one’s economic and social power—versus a “subjective” sense of class. Class “in itself” includes myriad aspects of one’s material existence, as their structure and content is mediated by the particular place and economic system within which one lives. What you own and don’t own; what you do every day; whom you do it with and how much power you have in doing it; how much power others have over you; how you do what you do; and what kind of life all this affords you – all of these factors are the grounds of class “in itself,” the material basis for comprehending class positions, and, in the Marxist tradition, relations. Class conflict is thus a necessary correlate – the exploitative opposition of workers and owners guarantees that class struggle, “now hidden, now open,” will fundamentally shape society. Class “for itself” is commonly understood as “class consciousness,” or the self- or collective consciousness of not only belonging to an objectively defined group, but the development of an understanding of, capacity for, and a desire to act

⁷ In the early attack on Proudhon, the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx wrote, “Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends becomes class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle” (Marx & Engels 1976, 211).

upon, the social power that attends that group.⁸ These two understandings of class represent a tension between what class “is” and what class “becomes,” or what classes can become, through both knowledge and action: The first does not cause the second, but rather creates conditions for its possibilities and proclivities.

This distinction has been rightly interrogated by later authors who are grappling with the interplay between class in its structural sense and class in its self-conscious sense. As Gramsci (1971), Nicos Poulantzas (1975) and others point out, the economic predictors of class are situated within political and ideological fields that co-determine class formation (which in turn affects the political-economic-ideological frameworks within which the emergent classes are situated). The relationship between the objective, structural sense of class as place and conditions, and any forms of knowledge and behavior we may associate with such objective positioning is therefore always mediated. Classes are groups who, due to their economic lives and livelihoods, occupy similar structural positions, who *may* share common understandings, and who *may* take similar actions—but who may not, for within and between these levels of class are these competing, and often overriding, sociological considerations. Or, as EP Thompson (1966) observes, “We can see a *logic* in the responses of similar occupations and groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any *law*. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way” (10). Race, ethnicity, gender, geography, community history, union association, and the nature of the work performed are just the most obvious sociological factors that co-determine the self-conscious sense of class that might develop within a group, or that might allow for outsiders to recognize a collection of individuals as a class. Dominant social discourses concerning the very nature of classes, institutional recognition or silences

⁸ Hechter (2004), following Stinchcombe (1986) and others, argues that class for itself is dependent on three variables: the impermeability of boundaries, the salience of group/ class consciousness, and the organizational capacity of the group.

regarding class fractions also shape how classes are identified from within and without. Class, in this sense, is a highly situational cultural and ideological construct. It is these levels of class that are best explored within the Weberian tradition, and incorporated in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990 (1970)) adds another dimension to this consideration of class. For Bourdieu, economic and social capital are joined by cultural capital in his consideration of where individuals may be grouped and how they might interact in the field of class positions.⁹ Cultural capital consists in part of the knowledge and cultural values that individuals both inherit from their families and acquire over time. One's cultural capital thus situates you in relation to others in a manner similar to, and in tandem with, one's economic capital.

Following from the above, my understanding of the concept of class is that it first explains and makes sense of much of what we live every day as our material reality, and that broad categories of relative material scarcity and affluence, constraint and leisure, control and freedom shape class categories. Class thereby also explains a structural potential for social cleavages of power and identity, and serves as a definitive organizing principle for social divisions and conflict. But in its empirical instantiations, it is best understood as a contingent and dynamic process, whose particular formations are subject to a host of sociological pressures. Of these sociological pressures, the cultural capital inherited and achieved within one's class culture plays a significant orienting role for individual and group interaction. Taking this approach to the question of class formation will help us to "dispense with essentialist conceptions of working-class identity and recognize that there is no

⁹ Elliot Weininger (2005) offers this helpful definition of field: "The concept of field is intended to foreclose an overly structuralist interpretation of social space – that is, one in which the individuals who "occupy" the various positions are reduced to the role of mere "bearers" of the structural relations that are encapsulated in them(...). In this context, the term is meant to recall a battlefield or a playing field, and more specifically, the fact that the individuals who confront one another will enter into conflict or competition with one another, each from a more or less advantageous position" (95-96). The field is not therefore without structure: power dynamics are its point, interaction is opposition; however, the processes and game-plans are dynamic.

single route decreed by history, God, or any other force” (Reed 2004) to explain how workers – or, for that matter, other groups – act or think. There are, however, likely routes that class formation will take, predicated on specific historical social conditions. It is to this that much of my dissertation is addressed, but here I would like to lay out in summary how I see class formation taking place during the Vietnam era.

Everything I’ve discussed above is like the ingredients that go into class, as well as the structures and forces that help cook it. But what happens, how class acts, is the final and for some theorists the most important consideration of all. Class, is, ultimately only a useful sociological category if it can at some level describe or predict social action. Fantasia’s (1989) work on “cultures of solidarity,” which he described as cultures emergent within periods of labor unrest and strife, indicates that class consciousness does not necessarily precede collective action, but that radicalism and collective identity emerge out of struggle. Thus the action itself is what gives rise to the consciousness. Similarly, Przeworski (1977) helpfully echoes Marx’s original concept, and situates classes as “effects of struggle,” inherent to this combative, interactive process: Classes arise from the frictional relationships.

These studies raise ontological questions about the nature of class. Do they exist in any meaningful way if they are not acting “as” a class? Aronowitz (2003) pushes this question to a logical extreme. He also describes classes as emergent forms, but extends the concept of class to arguing that “classes” are best understood in terms of their formation as cleaving groups—they exist only insofar as they act like a collective group, engage in collective and focused struggle, and change the nature of the social whole of which they are a part. Class works insofar as a class cleaves society. For Aronowitz, the civil rights and feminist movements, therefore, acted *as* classes during the 1960’s and 1970’s, effectively splitting society and forcing a

reconstitution of its basic relations. Classes *are*, but perhaps more importantly, classes *do*.

(What) were classes doing during the period of the US involvement in Vietnam? The left, looking for a “revolutionary agent,” was certainly not finding one in the working class, as traditionally conceived and as self-identified, in the pre-Vietnam period. It is to this problem that C. Wright Mills in part addressed his “Letter to the New Left,” in the pages of *New Left Review* in 1960. In it, he famously wrote,

I do not quite understand about some New-Left writers is why they cling so mightily to “the working class” of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation. Such a labour metaphysic, I think, is a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic. It is an historically specific idea that has been turned into an a-historical and unspecific hope.

Mills predicted that, for the time being, the western working class would not act as the transformative class that Marxist theory had predicted. He was clear that he could not speak to the future, but also clear that he thought it unlikely that the “social and historical conditions under which industrial workers tend to become a class-for-themselves” were unlikely to be created any time soon. This understanding of the collapse of the working class’s historic role tended to open the door for many analysts and activists for either an over-correction in analysis (workers were not revolutionary so workers were reactionary), or a “throwing out the baby with the bathwater” reaction (workers were not revolutionaries therefore workers were inert, to be ignored or forgotten). In a related fashion, the very material progress currently experienced by many workers enabled a new common sense among many liberals and leftists that “post-scarcity” conditions obtained. The economic conditions faced by workers, by not propelling them into revolutionary action, became irrelevant. “Class in itself” seemed to disappear along with “class for itself,” and classes became categories of culture. It is these interpretations that shape much

of the dominant discourses of working class political action in the Vietnam period and it against these interpretations that my own is forwarded.¹⁰

But Mills was quite right, in the limited sense. The working class did not act as a revolutionary class in the way that parts of Marxist theory would predict, or in the way that other social movements at the time, following Aronowitz, did: They did not collectively contest social power. Working-class consciousness was neither strong as such, nor unified as such in any one particular direction during most of that period. In fact, working class political attitudes and action – to take one part of class consciousness, but the one I am most interested in – were all over the map. Davis describes the postwar working class as “disorganized and increasingly depoliticized” (1986; 8).¹¹

Why, then, are we left with the story of the working class *hawk*? Why has our inheritance from this era been one of a perception of this particular class polarization?

The first reasons have to do with the sites of “negative integration” I described above – stratification in the class and the job, and alienated consumption. The problem of political representation, however, stands out most acutely in my eyes, in explaining the distorted insistence that the working class was, and is, peculiarly conservative. Bourdieu (1991) argues that on the whole, the working class has very little cultural capital, and that its capacity for self-representation is therefore consistently entrusted by its own members, or assigned by others, to the various bodies that represent the class, such as labor unions or political parties. Bourdieu writes “[t]he ‘working class’ exists in and through the body of representatives who

¹⁰ See Chapter Five.

¹¹ This is not necessarily inconsistent with Marxist theory – class struggle is “now open, now quiet”; the complexities of class action and attitudes were well understood by many in the tradition. Yet, the more simple expectation of a “worker’s vanguard” was completely disappointed, and it was in the realm of more simple expectations about class behavior that most people lived.

give it an audible voice and a visible presence” (1991, 251; see also 173-4).¹² These labor parties, socialist parties, and trade unions had the “authority to speak for the class—to articulate its history, political opinions, needs, and demands” (Wright 2005, 104).

Bourdieu is writing in the context of Europe, whose class-as-status system was arguably more explicit and entrenched (given the history of aristocracy), and whose working-class “plenipotentiaries” were much stronger and well organized than what is true for the US context: They were “collective, self-formed institutions” (Davis 1986, 9). On the one hand, this means that, perhaps, while the cultural capital of the US working class as a whole is undoubtedly low, and that most individuals no doubt also doubted their own capacity for making public judgments (along the lines of, “it’s not my place”), other competing ideologies – or individualism or meritocracy, for example – do sufficiently suffuse the US working class that many individual members and groups do in fact feel powerful enough to express themselves. But, on the other hand, the lack of social institutions of the class as a whole (“class conscious” unions or parties) also opens the possibilities for the representations of class attitudes, needs, and demands, to be more wholly in the hands of groups that do not represent workers, such as either the Democratic or Republican parties, or the mainstream media.

During the Vietnam era, the dominant institutions that “spoke” for the working class were the labor unions. These unions, as we will see, were espousing and helping organize a reactionary foreign policy on the one hand, and “managing discontent” of workers on the other. Secondly, the Democratic Party had successfully positioned itself as the party of the common man, most especially since the New Deal. With regard to labor, the DP was divided in the Vietnam period

¹² Bourdieu finishes this sentence arguing “and in and through the belief in its existence which this body of plenipotentiaries succeeds in imposing. . .”, which I think takes it too far.

between those who either shared the cold-war liberalism and anti-communism of the official labor movement or those, turning against that trajectory, rejected labor and workers as reactionary.¹³ Of course, there were also the reactionary Dixiecrats who were anti-labor, and to the extent they worked with workers it was to organize along racial and racist lines, which furthered both the impression and reality of conservatism. The intelligentsia and media developed specific narratives about the nature of working class political attitudes. And finally, the Republican Party was attempting to attract the white working class to its electoral base. The GOP's framing of class polarization was extreme, and played a major role in the images inherited from the period. The combined efforts of these groups created a representation of a conservative, if not reactionary, working class. Reed (2004) explains this well this in the following passage:

working-class identities . . . are shaped partly through the efforts of activists who project and agitate for certain possibilities that are available and against others. The case of "working-class conservatism" is instructive. Wallace and Nixon took postwar liberalism's stereotypes of an element of the white working class and revalorized them, offering them as the basis of a coherent, affirmative political identity.

The "elite doves" were not so hamstrung, culturally speaking. Following Rose and Croteau, emergent institutions of social movement action reflected the cultural practices and capital of the middle class. Thus the institutional representations of politics appeared for all sakes and purposes to be divided according to class, regardless of the actual sentiments or actions of the people involved.

Just as the working class was increasingly understood in light of conservative frames, the entire notion of what it meant to be "elite" was transformed from one end of this era to the other, and made similarly cultural. The Mills-ian notion of a "power elite" contrasted with workers along political, economic, and militaristic

¹³ There were of course exceptions to this sweeping statement. Bobby Kennedy of 1967-1968 was seen by many as the possible bridge between workers and a "progressive" turn for the party – but the very way in which Kennedy supporters saw a dichotomy between the two camps underscores the basic split.

measures: the elite had structural power and authority. The “cultural elite,” of rarified WASP’s or east coast aristocracy, ran the political gamut from conservative values to progressive bohemian, with a concentration in the former. But new conservatives in the 1960’s, from Goldwater through Wallace to Agnew and Nixon, turned the popular understanding of elite into a purely cultural and liberal group. This too was enabled by the declining emphasis on economic relations as being at the center of class in the prevailing ideology’s sense of class, and the rise of classes understood as cultural groups.

Race and Class

The final ingredient that must enter this analysis is the inextricably racial understanding and experience of class that we have in the United States. In this dissertation, when I discuss the working class response to the war, I am talking about white workers unless I indicate otherwise. I am not doing this because the “working class” was white in that era, but because the social image of the working class in the period, and, I will argue, before and since, is usually a racial one. Over these post-war decades, the “working class” and “the white working class” were often redundant terms—class was definitively raced.

“Working class solidarity has been most effective and durable when it has also been infused by other solidarities” (Zachary Longman, as quoted by Neslon, 2001, 293-294). But race has been a particular arena in which such solidarity links have *not* often been forged in the American context. This is not a new phenomenon. Class formation in the US context has depended to a large degree on racial differentiation: Herbert Hill among others, argued, “the historical development of working class identity [is a] racial identity”(1996, 189).¹⁴ For the European-descended workers and

¹⁴ The role of race in class formation has been discussed since the end of slavery in the United States, if not before. WEB DuBois in the early 20th century, and Herbert Hill in the latter part, are perhaps the sharpest analysts of the relations between race and class in the U.S. More recently, Noel Ignatiev (1995), Robin Kelley (1996), George Lipsitz (1998), and David Roediger (1991) are among the scholars who have explored the development of the white racial identity, and its role in class formation. Bruce

artisans of the nineteenth century U.S., the definition of “worker” created in the US system of racial domination was often rhetorically counterpoised to being a “slave.” For much of that time, such an ideological juxtaposition enabled white workers to accept horrific conditions that paralleled those of African Americans. “The existence of slavery . . . gave working Americans both a wretched touchstone against which to measure their fears of unfreedom and a friendly reminder that they were by comparison not so badly off” (Roediger 1991, 49). As class consciousness among white workers grew, demands for higher wages, greater control, the rights of association and union were demands made by self-proclaimed “free workers.” The workers’ movements of the mid-nineteenth century often self-consciously refused the treatment received by African Americans, and becoming a self-conscious worker – for many, at many points – meant becoming “white”: demanding rights afforded you in part because of your superior position in the racial hierarchy. Historians of “whiteness” describe the gradual incorporation of ethnic groups into this racial hierarchy, with Irish and German workers joining the “native” English in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Of course, this bigoted focus was also challenged by workers’ movements at the time, most notably by the interracial and inter-ethnic Knights of Labor.¹⁵ The past century of working class organization in the U.S. offers many other counter examples in which white and African American workers found common cause. Given their exclusion of domestic and agricultural work, the policy gains of the New Deal disproportionately helped white over African American workers, but *in toto* the 1930’s stands out as a significant period in which the self-definition of what it meant to be a worker, as well as the public’s perception of the class, looked most inclusive.

Nelson (2001) and Michael Goldfield (1997), among others, have specifically considered the implications of the racial divide for the US labor movement.

¹⁵ The “whiteness” scholars tend to play down the challenges to racism, again, I think, in an over-correction to the blindness to race of some of their fellow historians. The Knights of Labour were not, either, simply anti-racist. Their support for Chinese exclusion undercut their otherwise clear understanding of the pitfalls of racial division within the class.

But even when their rhetorical commitments lay with equality and justice, the CIO unions that were created during that era had a contradictory experience with racial politics; writing of the AFL, Aronowitz (1974) argued, “the rise of Blacks within industry took place despite the trade unions.” In the postwar period, segregation within the working class—within and between workplaces, within and between unions, and between communities—was challenged by a number of specific unions, such as the Transport Workers, the Packinghouse Workers, the West Coast dockworkers in the International Longshore Workers, and their brothers in the National Maritime Union: mostly in the CIO, and mostly under left-leadership. Labor’s early embrace of civil rights was a critical source of solidarity, resources, and legitimacy for the young movement (Carson, 1981; Branch, 1988). Yet in the years before Vietnam, labor’s overall record on race was mixed.

After World War II, African American soldiers returned from a savage war for democracy to a US south of legal segregation, racial totalitarianism and terror, and a country as a whole that offered limited economic and social opportunities. The civil rights movement enabled a forging of a strong “Black” identity for all African Americans—poor, working-class, middle class and elite. It was in the name of this identity and the fight for social justice that African Americans acted in this era. During those same years, to be sure, within black labor organizing, class identity did take on a primary role. And in the late 1960’s, with the emergence of the Revolutionary Black Workers, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, the Black Brothers, and other militant African American working class organizations, class-based demands and struggle intensified in the black community.

On the other hand, to the extent that the “working class” was even seen as a distinct economic group – which, as I’ve pointed out, was not very often during the heyday of the postwar boom – it was a white, and often white-ethnic group: a racial and cultural construct. Historically, white ethnics faced similar though significantly

less intense forms of discrimination as African Americans—exclusionary rules regarding jobs, schools, and other private spaces, though only Blacks faced the public exclusions of Jim Crow; they also faced prejudice from the white Anglo-Saxon majority. But these white ethnics who fought within the labor battles of the 1930's were also incorporated within the US body politic as part of the unionized workforce and the “greatest generation,” while their Black comrades came home to legal segregation and limited economic opportunities. Specific “ethnic” identities persisted for many “hyphenated” American Jews, Slavs, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, etc., but many entered the “white middle class” as well. This uneasy and partial assimilation helped to account for, on the one hand, an erasure of class during much of the boom – “everyone” was white and “middle” – and then a complete turn-around after 1968, when white workers burst on the scene as the “angry ethnics.”

It was specifically against the social movements of the period that this white working-class identity was reignited in the popular imagination. I focus in the dissertation on the antiwar movement, but it was against the civil rights and Black power movements that the bigoted image of the white working class was formed. Blacks were organizing, against incredible odds and opposition, for “more than a hamburger”: for dignity, for equality, and ultimately, for power in the US. White workers often and visibly resisted these efforts, as documented in struggles over housing, school de-segregation, and hiring practices. The causes of this resistance are discussed in Chapter Seven, but racist “backlash” does not adequately explain it. The fact that white workers felt like they were making accommodations for Black progress while middle class and elite whites did not made them angry – a displaced class anger, therefore, as much as a racist one. And white workers, according to most polls, were actually equally or less racist than their middle-class counterparts. They were just more visibly so.

In short, because white workers were defined, internally and externally, as a cultural group, rather than an economic group undergoing its own contradictory development; because African Americans were seen, internally and externally, in terms of cultural identities as well; and because of the real world segregation of Black and white working class communities, the common breadth of working class issues shared across racial lines was not consistently or meaningfully foregrounded, despite many campaigns to the contrary.¹⁶

Finally, the cultural modes for thinking about race and class often precluded collective recognition that by the 1960's a "New Working Class" had emerged. Cobble (2004) argues that the "old working class," the prototypical white workers being discussed here, was fading during this era, and a new working class was being created: Increasingly female, public and service sectors, and people of color. Much of the service economy was not organized. Yet because of the nature of the jobs, and the preponderance of women and people of color in the fields, this "new working class" was not consistently recognized as such, with exceptional moments like the 1970 Postal Strike. The "old working class" was often called "middle class," and the new working class was often inside other identity groups. The new working class had very little political vocabulary making it into a class as such.

Racial and ethnic divisions have therefore deeply compromised the development of a strong class-based identity in the US context. White workers also engaged in racist and reactionary resistance to African American gains. And racial limits to common understandings of who constitutes "working class" also lead to blindness regarding class-based political activity by non-white workers; specifically, for my purposes, sentiment and activity that opposed the war from non-white workers, who were often part of the "new working class."

¹⁶ Fights to raise the minimum wage, for occupational safety, and health insurance are important examples of such interracial class-based demands during this period.

Note on Definitions

An important question for making sense of my empirical research is what, concretely, I'm talking about when I talk about classes in the US. For while I am skeptical of the stratification model that places classes on a ranked continuum, it's difficult to escape pragmatic organization offered by this system. In the discursive context of the period, nearly everyone I'm writing about was called "middle class" at one point or another: everyone was seen as middle class if they weren't poor or rich – it was the kitchen sink of class categories. Using this framework, my argument is that antiwar sentiment and movements were generally ascribed to the upper edge of that middle class, while pro-war sentiment and action was generally ascribed to that lower rungs of the middle class, while the true "middle" middle class was generally seen as overwhelmed by the changes taking place in society, and alternately viewed as resembling elites in their supposed liberalism or workers in their supposed conservatism.

In general, I will be using the terms upper-middle-class, or elite, to refer to educated professionals, or the children of educated professionals. This group is itself quite diverse, depending on its work in the cultural or technocratic realm, and its location in the public or private sector. In general, their economic and cultural privilege, high levels of education, and relative autonomy at work distinguish them from the middle and working classes. Those who are associated with sociocultural production, and who worked in the public sector, are generally the people who are most associated with the social movements of the era (Jenkins and Wallace 1995).

Interrogating exactly what constitutes the working class is part of my whole project. But, again following the cultural stereotype prevalent in our political discourse, the group I'll be describing when I write about "the working class," unless I indicate otherwise, is the traditional white, male working class, located in craft jobs and industry. These "blue collar" workers are the members of the working class who

were singled out as particularly antipathetic to the movement, patriotic and war-supporting.

Relevance of the Project

While this is itself an academic project being written towards the completion of a graduate degree, I hope that it will become a project that is relevant to people interested in making social change. In thinking about making this project “relevant,” I thought a lot about the method I would be using to investigate my questions, and the theoretical and methodological tools available within sociology that would best explore the problems of perceived and real class polarization in ways that could connect to the kinds of problems and questions we have today.

In recent years, in response to perceived limitations of academic social movement analysis, there’s been a call for “movement relevant” theory, which can be defined as “useable knowledge for those seeking social change” (Flacks 2004, 138, quoted in Dixon and Bevington 2005). It’s a sign of the gulf between academic and actual-movement theorizing that such a call is being made, and ironic that a field whose forebears includes Karl Marx no longer, generally speaking, theorizes with agitation, let alone social change, in mind. While the causes for this separation are many,¹⁷ many critics point to the content of the work produced in the context of academia, with a particular focus on the dominant “American” model of social movement analysis, the “political process” model. The strengths of this model, and academic theorizing more generally, are that they allow for “broad conceptual” framings of many social movement processes – what Lofland (1996) also terms “generic propositions” (cf. Cox and Barker 2004). Such generic propositions allow for consistent descriptions of social change processes. Some of the helpful propositions developed within the political process model include concepts that help to explain

¹⁷ The constraints offered by disciplinary, theoretical and stylistic expectations; protocols for journal articles; and academic career aspirations can all be understood as contributing to the gulf, in addition to other factors outlined by Dixon and Bevington, such as the decline in movement activism for much of the 1980’s and 1990’s.

the genesis, growth and operations of social movements, such as “mobilizing structures,” “frames,” and “political opportunity structures”; more recently, other movement “mechanisms” have been explicated, such as “brokerage,” “category formation,” and others (cf. Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam 1982; McAdam et al. 2000; Tarrow 1998).¹⁸ But these propositions frequently suffer from “over-extension” (Goodwin & Jaspers 1999), or being so widely applied as to lose their specific meaning; and a related illusion of universality, an inflated sense that what happened in one or a few places at one time is true for all places at all times. Social movements encapsulate all of the complexity of their sub-elements—the individuals, groups, ideologies, emotions, networks, tactics, strategies, and resources that “make up” the movement—while necessarily, even essentially, grappling with the “extra”-movement world of opponents, allies, culture, populations, media, location, technologies, and more. It seems almost too obvious a point to make when Jaspers and Goodwin argue, “the search for universally valid propositions and models at least for anything so complex as social movements is bound to fail” (1999, 51). Yet the field is filled with claims that raise the modest observations of particular movements to the status of general theory.

Contrast this to the work of movement-based intellectuals, who, argue Cox and Barker (2004), are primarily interested in “case propositions,” that “take the form, in essence, of practical proposals, i.e. propositions that “This is what we should do” (2).¹⁹ When generic propositions are put forward by movement intellectuals, they

¹⁸ The later mechanisms introduced by McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow (2000) (“brokerage” etc.) were developed in part to correct the problems implicit in some of their earlier concepts (“political opportunity structure,” etc.).

¹⁹ Making “movement relevant theory” rests in part on the realization that social movement participants themselves theorize their own movements. This, by the way, is something that has always irked me about social movement theory. Having read a lot of the Marxist tradition in college and beyond, it seemed to me that what Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Lukacs, and the many less-famous others were doing when they wrote about capitalism, the working class and revolution *was* social movement theory. They were asking, who makes change, under what conditions, with what success; what groups are allies, what foes; what role does the state play; how do groups in action understand their own identities, and how do they represent these identities to others, etc., etc. Among the earliest progenitors of social movement theory stand many in the Marxist,

are “subordinate” to the case – they make practical sense in relation to the events at hand, whether or not they make persistent sense in transhistorical cases. In other words, for theorists working within the movement – whom Gramsci would call “organic intellectuals” – the focus is always on the movement inside its real world conditions, affected by its real world context, with an eye to change.

What the critics of academic theorizing point out is that even in their most specific and modest use, the attempt to simply make generic propositions is an academic one, which serves the intellectual field of “social movement studies,” for instance, but does not necessarily translate into successful propositions for making sense of movements from the perspective of people who make them. This kind of academic theory is often a taxonomic enterprise,²⁰ one which yields another related and troubling aspect of the academic project of movement investigation. The dissection of a given movement’s “political opportunity structure”, “frames,” “mobilizing structures,” etc., is very helpful in understanding how movements happen, grow, operate, and fade. But such a perspective runs the dual (and related) risks of both isolating the movement from its specific structural and cultural contexts and privileging the self-identified (or analyst identified) “movement” as the only legitimate institution of social change within that given context. In other words, academic analysis can lead to reification, within which the more grounded and intricate relations and mutually constitutive nature of movement and broader social field are elided in favor of a reductive antipathy between “movement” and

anarchist, and syndicalist traditions – among many more – whose written and oral work was a contribution to the manifold dilemma, what is to be done? Yet most social movement analysts within academia seem unaware of these long traditions (my advisors, Frances Fox Piven and Stanley Aronowitz are among the more obvious exceptions to this tendency).

²⁰ McAdam et al’s *Dynamics of Contention* (2000) explicitly distances itself from the kind of “all places at all times” theory that (they admit, even their own) earlier theory was often guilty of, yet it is precisely the form of taxonomic enterprise I am describing here.

“non-movement” actors or organizations.²¹ Anthropologists Marc Edelman and John Burdick make a similar point:

The tendency of collective action scholars to focus on groups and organizations with explicit programs for change is, as Burdick suggests, in effect an acceptance “of the claim of the movement to be a privileged site in the contestation and change in social values. . . that social movement organizational action is the only, or best, social change game in town” (Edelman, 2001, 311, quoting Burdick 1998, 199-200)

What many of these criticisms begin to raise, indirectly and directly, is the extent to which social movements or collective action be investigated as “ideal types” outside of a larger field of social structure and action. A similar query is made by Louis Maheu (1995). Maheu, writing of the prevailing norms in the field, argues that “by isolating collective actions from larger conflict-laden issues and structural grievances, these approaches are unfortunately revising a sectorial sociology of collective action” akin to the “collective behavior” approach that radically demarcated collective behavior from “normal” social behavior (21).

But it is within that field of “normal” social behavior that social movement activists move. The people who participate in movements have other lives as well: They’re immersed within their personal relationships, their jobs and families, their social and cultural backgrounds, and future aspirations. The sites in which their movement activism takes place – work, school, community, party, or social movement organization – is similarly rife with “normal” emotions and relationships, of like and dislike, repulsion and attraction, excitement and boredom. The social roles that people otherwise occupy don’t disappear when they’re also working for social change, even though they might often take back seat.

The extent to which considerations of these real world identities and interactions inform movement work is not completely ignored by social movement

²¹ While I’ve thought this for a long time, find for its proximate inspiration Cox and Barker, though it’s not exactly their point; Jaspers and Goodwin (1999) also make similar argument. See also Lichterman (1996) for work that questions the boundary of “movement” and “non-movement.”

theory, particularly theory that addresses itself to the so-called “new social movements,” and it is also considered in the concept of “framing.” Yet, again, the focus of even these more culturally-sensitive orientations tends to limit consideration to the process of creating collective identities, or the shaping of movement grievances in such a way that they resonate within the group or intended audience—in other words, because the object of study is almost always only the movement itself, the contextual questions only figure insofar as they directly relate to movement activity.

On the one hand, this can often lead to a rather anemic level of grappling with the cultural influences and interactions with a movement. Jaspers and Goodwin (1999) provide a very helpful expanded way of thinking about cultural influences on movements in this table:

Table 1: “Cultural and Strategic Factors” regarding capacity for movement actors to affect change (from Goodwin & Jaspers 1999)

	Can movement actors affect it?	
Time-scale	Usually not, or marginally	More often, or more powerfully
Longer-term factors	"Plausibility structures" Institutionalized news media routines Standard cultural repertoires of images, tropes, language, assumptions Tactical repertoires, "know-how" Master frames	Slogans, policy proposals Affective bonds within movement Movement identity, pride Skills of particular leaders, recruiters
Shorter-term factors	Fashions in media attention events Opponents' efforts to affect public opinion, sensibilities, media Governmental efforts to influence opinion, sensibilities, media	Symbolic effects of protest Arguments, rhetoric that attract attention Outrage, indignation over opponents' policies Credibility of opponents Frames Strategic choices about timing, style, application of tactics

The elements in this table indicate the strategic limits and possibilities that movements encounter as they maneuver within the cultural realm. Full attention to the dialogic nature of the “movement” versus “outside culture” relationship certainly would go a long way in helping to make any study of a movement more concrete and useful to its practitioners. In my discussion of the movement in the chapters that follow, I try to take note of many of these levels of cultural interaction.

Yet the problem is deeper than this. Perhaps studying a movement, taken outside of its social field, does damage to one’s ability to really study that movement at all. Perhaps, movements should *always* be studied as thoroughly immersed in their broader social fields, as special but entirely connected forms of social action, rather than as fully separate objects of analysis. This is the reality for people making movements, and the kinds of dilemmas and opportunities they face. For “movement relevant” analysis to take place, perhaps it needs to apprehend its subject in a similar fashion. Dixon and Bevington absolve “historical studies” of movements from the

roster of relatively useless contributions being made by social movement scholars, based on the fact that activists tend to like such studies and learn from them. They go on to argue for a movement relevant theory that “locates the issues and questions of most importance to movement participants,” engages directly with the movements being studied, and offers analytic expertise to compare or summarize the successful tactics or theories generated across different movements. Following from this, I think that the direction that sociological studies of past movements should move is towards the kind of model offered by history, in which any theoretical musings are grounded in contextual discussion that takes the problems as seen by the movement as a primary focus. This is not new, after all. It is typical of the Marxist tradition, and found in contemporary works by numerous social movement scholars.

Moving towards “movement relevant” theory would, then, also entail taking the movement’s degree of social embeddedness into account, and recognize that the clear distinctions that academic analysts might make – between movement and non-movement, activist and non-activist, action and theory, grievance and satisfaction – are useful but possibly limiting for understanding the interactive and dynamic relationship between the broader social field and social movement. My focus on “sentiment” *and* “protest” makes this tension explicit. The vast majority of Americans opposed the war in Vietnam by its conclusion, the movement, while mass, was always a minority movement. What happens at the borderline between feeling and protest is precisely the borderline where a broad understanding of “contentious politics,” “protest” or “movement action” can be developed.²² Burdick, an ethnographer of social movements who explicitly seeks to make his observations useful to the activists with whom he works, argued that the most useful way to do this was “reporting the patterned testimony of people in the movement's targeted

²² See Hollander and Einwohner (2004) for a useful synthesis on the conceptual use of the notion of “resistance.” Among the “core elements” agreed upon within a diverse definitional field, “virtually all uses included a sense of action ... resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behavior, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical” (538).

constituency who on the one hand held views and engaged in actions very much in line with movement goals, but who on the other hand felt strongly put off, alienated, or marginalized by one or another aspect of movement rhetoric or practice” (Burdick 1998, 191).²³ Examining the tensions between the antiwar movement and the broader social field within which it moved, I intend to do in history what Burdick does through ethnography. Here, I will explore the distrust and dislike many felt for the movement, and the extent to which and how the movement itself exacerbated, recognized, or mollified these concerns.

This friction at the borders of “movement” and “non-movement” does not only occur at the moment of movement making. In an historical study such as this one, the “broader social field” in which I make sense of the sentiment and protest against the Vietnam War now extends to our collective memory of this movement. I am examining our collective memory of the movement precisely because of its relevance to social movements today. The dominant, exaggerated and distorted memory of class polarization has meant that antiwar activists today, and people who desire social change, have not understood our history – its shortcomings and its achievements, its solidarities and its divisions.

Perhaps more critically, the collective memory we share of who supported the Vietnam War has allowed war makers today to claim support for their policies that is weak at best, or fictional. The fiction, today, that white workers support the war has allowed supposedly antiwar politicians to hide behind the idea that being too aggressively antiwar would somehow alienate the working-class public. The fact that the white working class to this day lacks an effective and independent political voice—a problem only compounded by the labor movement’s near complete abandonment of educational programs, anemic level of class-based political

²³ Commenting on this method, Edelman (2001) notes, “In order to accomplish this, though, it is not the movement itself that becomes the object of study, but rather the broader social field within which it operates” (311).

mobilization and a political program that is almost entirely concerned with the election of Democrats—means that all kinds of people can still “speak for” workers in ways largely disassociated from what workers might say for themselves.

Unlike Vietnam, the labor movement has quickly and forcefully, in some instances, condemned the current war in Iraq. Polls today indicate that white workers are opposed to the war, along with the majority of their fellow Americans. But mainstream politicians, labor, and the antiwar movement itself have been extremely reluctant or ineffective in garnering and mobilizing this sentiment. Charges of elitism still have people running scared. I hope that my discussion of our recent past will contribute to a critical understanding of our present.

Overview

The dissertation as a whole is structured in two parts. Part One, Chapters Two, Three and Four, discusses the image of the class divisions of the Vietnam period that resonates in contemporary US culture, and then traces a more nuanced, and I argue, more true and realistic, picture of the class dynamics of antiwar opposition. In Chapter Two I study movies, television, and other cultural artifacts; political and media discourse; academic representations (including textbooks); and personal memoirs to sketch our collective memory of the period. For Chapters Three and Four, I make use of numerous primary and secondary sources to sketch a “counter-memory” that more accurately depicts the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and action. These chapters are largely empirical, but are framed by a theoretical critique of how we typically understand and study social movement behavior, the implications of which I make explicit in the final section of the dissertation.

Part Two takes up an historical chronology, beginning with the years before the Vietnam War (Chapter Five), moving through the early years of the movement (Chapter Six), and finally looking at the later movement and the immediate post-war

years (Chapter Seven). Through this historical narrative, I follow the complex dynamic of class and culture (and “class cultures”) of postwar US society, as seen through the problem of US intervention in Vietnam. The period I therefore focus on most intently is 1960-1975, with the central years of the antiwar movement itself spanning from 1965-1973.

At the conclusion I come back to many of the overarching questions of the dissertation as a whole, specifically returning to the implications of how we study movements for our ability to really understand them. Here, I set forward my own ideas about class and social movements in the contemporary era.

Chapter 2 Collective Memory of Vietnam Antiwar Sentiment and Protest

This first thing you notice about the antiwar movement is that it isn't your father's. It has a populist, womanly flavor. In the Vietnam era, the male elite were at the head of the parade—Uber-pediatrician Benjamin Spock, Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin, Harvard intellectual Daniel Ellsberg, and barefoot poet Allen Ginsberg. The campuses were on fire, and *The New Yorker* had editorials every week telling the privileged how to think.

This time around, the movement's one household name is a mom in straw hat and white shorts, Cindy Sheehan. "In Crawford, you could drive from the [pro-war] rally at the stadium to the [antiwar] rally at Bush's ranch and not be able to tell which one you were at," says David Swanson, and activist with Progressive Democrats of America. "Red-white-and-blue banners and clothing, SUPPORT OUR TROOPS everywhere. It's no longer the good workers of America against the crazy liberal elitists."

Philip Weiss, "How the Antiwar Was Won," *New York* magazine, October 5, 2005

Lies My Teacher Told Me, a 1995 bestseller, explored the deplorable state of history curricula in secondary education, detailing "everything your American History textbook got wrong." The bulk of its chapters are devoted to how particular episodes, people and themes of American history, such as "discovery," Native Americans, racism, and "progress," are discussed in a selection of history textbooks. Throughout, author James Loewen offers multiple interpretations as to why some facts are valued over others, why some distortions are rampant, why certain stories are absent and others universal. He devotes his concluding chapters to answering, in more general terms, the questions that are implicit throughout: "Why is History Taught Like This?" and "What is the Result of Teaching History Like This?"

Loewen addresses the title-question of this last chapter by choosing as emblematic a "Vietnam exercise" he conducted with "more than one thousand undergraduates and several hundred non-students" over the course of a decade.²⁴ In these experiments, he gives his class or audience a chart that shows the public's overall response to a Gallup Poll question of January 1971: "A proposal has been made in Congress to require the US government to bring home all US troops before the end of this year. Would you like to have your congressman vote for or against this

²⁴ I first came across Loewen's exercise in an article by Loewen in *Teaching Sociology* (1979) and then again in H. Bruce Franklin's article, "The Antiwar Movement They'd Like Us to Forget" (2000). The themes I raise in the dissertation echo those briefly raised there, and in Franklin, Gittleman and Young's introductory articles in their reader *The Vietnam Reader* (1995). These essays encouraged me to dig deeper into the problem.

proposal?” Excluding “I don’t know”s, seventy-three percent of respondents answered “yes” for withdrawal, while twenty-seven percent answered “no.” Loewen left three columns preceding this overall breakdown blank, except for the headings of adults with “grade-school education,” “high-school education” and “college education.” He asked students to fill in how they imagined these opposing attitudes about the war broke down according to education, which, as discussion made clear, could be understood as a proxy for class. By a margin that approached 10-1, students consistently indicated that the college educated would have been most critical of the war, with non-students agreeing at the only slightly less-overwhelming margin of 9-1. A “typical response” allocated the preponderance of withdrawal sentiment to the college educated (90-10), the high-school educated close to average (75-25), and the grade school graduates least likely to call for withdrawal (60-40). Students explained their interpretations in varied but related ways: the better educated someone was, the more critical and liberal they were likely to be; working-class people in the United States had a self-interest in being pro-war, as their jobs were more likely related to war-making (in factories or the military); other responses indicated that the “archetype of the blindly patriotic hardhat” was alive and well. Antiwar sentiment, the great majority of these college students and non-students agreed, was the province of the privileged; the lower down that ladder you were, the more likely you were to have supported the Vietnam war.

But, as Loewen showed these students after they’d made their speculations, the education/class breakdown of the “withdrawal” respondents was the opposite of what they’d hypothesized. Answering his own question, he argues that the result of teaching history the way it’s taught is that we get it wrong—we misapprehend and distort our past. The actual polls look like this:

Table 2: Antiwar Sentiment, 1971 (from Loewen, 1995)

Adults with:	College Education	High School Education	Grade School Education	Total Adults
% for withdrawal of US troops (Doves)	60%	75%	80%	73%
% against withdrawal of US troops (Hawks)	40%	25%	20%	27%

These poll results were surprising to the respondents in Loewen's experiment. He noted that they "surprise even some social scientists," who should, he seems to imply, know better. But should they? On a smaller scale than Loewen, I have similarly encountered surprise as I describe my project to others, who often ask me to explain, again, *how* did the sentiment against the war break down? Because wasn't it the college students who marched against the war? Wasn't it the elite and well-educated—intellectuals, peace activists, creative artists, and eventually prominent political leaders—who led the antiwar movement? Didn't workers *support* the war? Weren't the labor unions especially vocal? Didn't workers beat up activists, proudly display American flags, oppose the students with forceful advice to "love it or leave it"?

More recently, a *Law and Order* episode titled "Veteran's Day" (screened 2/18/04) echoed these sentiments. In the episode, a Gulf War veteran, who is grieving over his son's recent death in Afghanistan, kills a young antiwar activist. Brian, the activist, is from a wealthy family, is "good at pushing other people's buttons," and comes off as a real jerk: blindly moralistic, self-righteous, out of touch with the "real" world that most ordinary people live in. We are told that Brian combatively argued against a community board proposal to rename a street after the veteran's son, saying that streets shouldn't be named after "murderers." His girlfriend Rehana Khemlani (who, while American, is by name and appearance seemingly of Middle-Eastern or South Asian descent), defends Brian's outrageous tactics, saying

“sometimes you just have to make a lot of noise to get people to listen.” Brian’s privileged WASP-y family, depicted as emotionally out-of-touch with their son, nevertheless firmly defends his activism.

Meanwhile, the accused and bereft Gulf War veteran is a letter carrier for the US postal service. His friends, other veterans, are similar working-class figures who collectively question Brian’s patriotism and priorities. “Guys like Brian Tighe make me sick—driving around with picket signs in his Daddy’s SUV, calling us murderers,” explains one friend of the accused. Matt, his son, “could have been the first person in [his] family to have gone to college,” but chose to be a “soldier like his father” instead. The father explains: “I love my country, and I raised my son to love it, too.”

While the possibility is raised that Brian the activist “was against the war, not soldiers,” the City’s prosecutor himself asks, “Is it the truth – or is it just what we learned to say after Vietnam?” Brian’s antiwar activism is used against him in the trial, which turns on whether his behavior caused the veteran father “extreme emotional disturbance,” thereby mitigating the charge of murder. The jury is deadlocked, and a mistrial is declared. Commenting on the jury’s clear identification with the accused, the prosecutor notes there were “too many blue-collar people on the jury”: “The same people that get out of jury duty get out of serving in the army.”

Law and Order regularly plays on populist, often conservative, cultural tropes in its storylines, and offers a consistent focus on class. Like the responses of Loewen’s students, this *Law and Order* storyline is based on a dominant cultural narrative that makes sense of the relationships between antiwar activism and class, and, relatedly, activists themselves and “regular people,” especially soldiers. And while *Law and Order* addresses contemporary issues—“ripped from the headlines” is its motto and *modus operandi*—Vietnam was the clear subtext in this case, serving as a touchstone for the narrative. The figure of the veteran on trial here evoked the hardhats of 1970, whose violent rampages in lower Manhattan became the focus of

the nation's anxious response to the war and protests against it. *Law and Order's* fantasy trial parallels the conservative mainstream's response to the hardhat riots and demonstrations of 1970, where the violent aggressors become the righteously aggrieved victims. Prominent ideologues argued throughout and since the Vietnam war that the protesters "stabbed us in the back," sapping the government of the will to keep fighting, turning the public against the soldiers when they came home. This campaign to discredit the movement, placing the US defeat and the problems of veterans on its shoulders, has found fertile ground in charges of elitism. Those kinds of people—who are cowards, who don't send their sons to die, who live in ivory towers—they don't deal with the muck that the rest of us are in.

The storyline shared between these events, real and unreal, contains these common elements: Protestors are elite, unsympathetic, bombastic, insensitive. Working class people are reflexively patriotic, and support the country when at war. Soldiers are working-class victims of both the wars they fight and a culture at home that doesn't respect them, economically or personally. Privileged youth do not carry their weight as citizens, while regular citizens view these activists with skepticism and hostility, seeing their anger as incongruous to their advantages. Antiwar protesters single out soldiers as the objects of their ire, not the war itself. If antiwar protesters are hurt in the pursuit of their goals, they probably deserve it.

In short, Loewen's students' perceptions and NBC's popular series together provide a basic outline of conventional thinking that pervades US popular and academic culture regarding the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and protest in the Vietnam period (and beyond). This conventional thinking was significantly shaped by the conservative revisionism of the Vietnam period, but has other roots that extend back further, and has in turn been nourished by subsequent events.

Many authors have written many books about the war in Vietnam and the struggles at home. Their titles are often partisan: *Out Now!* (Halstead 1978) , *Who*

Spoke Up? (Zaroulis & Sullivan 1984), *Give Peace a Chance* (Small & Hoover 1992), *Antiwarriors* (Small 2002); while others evoke a rent social cloth that resulted from the period: *An American Ordeal* (DeBenedetti 1990), *The Wars We Took to Vietnam* (Bates 1996), *The Scar that Binds* (Beattie 1998), *The War Within* (Wells 1994). Again and again, among the “wars” we fought during the Vietnam period, “the class war” figures with varying degrees of prominence. The central argument of this dissertation is that this historical memory of the class dynamics of domestic response to the Vietnam War misapprehends the complexity of the class make-up, culture, sentiment and action of the antiwar forces in the United States. It is this distorted memory, embodied in the students polled by Loewen and Law and Order’s “Veterans Day,” that is described here. I begin by relating the sociological meaning of “collective memory,” and explaining its relevance for how we think about the class dynamics of Vietnam antiwar sentiment and movement. Looking at film and television, history textbooks, academic studies and within mainstream political discourse, I then trace the collective memory of the class dynamics of the period that is with us today.

Collective Memory

“Collective memory” is a concept used to indicate the social nature of our capacity for mnemonics at both the individual and group levels. Maurice Halbwachs (1992 (1950)) provides the classical formulation of the relationship between this individual ability to bring the past to mind, and the social interactions and group-belonging from which it springs:

Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs. . . . [My memories] are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them. . . . It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection (38).

Our interactions with and affirmations from the group not only substantiate the memories we hold, but make possible their recollection. Beyond the commemorations and rituals that Halbwachs invokes to show how these frameworks are sustained, later students of collective memory have argued that collective memory is created through multiple sites, including a society's educational system, art forms, subcultures, and media (see Bodnar 1993; Zerubavel 1997, among many others). It is, in fact, critical that one locate these specific instances of memory-creation and -inscription, as Halbwach's discussion of "a" collective memory could too easily lend itself to reification, making memory a stable and complete object hovering outside specific social action and interaction. Memory is created through a process checked by some objective criteria, with periods of relative congealing – but it is ultimately fluid and open to interpretation, reinterpretation, and contestation. Who represents what, where something is said, defended or refuted, all matter when it comes to constituting memory.

Like history, memories take on narrative form, and are embedded within stories we tell ourselves and each other. In addition to considering the *content* of the memories we have of Vietnam—through their embodiments in political discourse, popular film, and historical narratives—it is necessary to pay attention to the *forms* these narratives take. Conventions of filmmaking, story structure, and historical narrative all contribute to the shape of our memory. In the following discussion, both form and content will be considered as we make out the contours of the collective memory of the period.²⁵

I don't intend to make too rigid a break between history and memory, however. The two have been traditionally counter-posed on the basis of reliability,

²⁵ The formal aspects of media and academic representation that I consider here are still, however, formal aspects of the narratives themselves. While a study of the technical composition of the films or TV shows would certainly yield some interesting ways in which class and protest are represented, given the broad brush nature of a collective memory I have, for the most part, not considered more subtle readings of the films.

history being considered the more reliable of the two, while memory is seen as more apt to discoloration or distortion. This distinction is less secure in recent years, in light of the many critical claims made on history's truth claims, particularly within the fields of social or "bottom-up" history, and the terrain covered by "memory studies" and history is becoming less distinct. I am, nevertheless, using the idea of memory in this more traditional way to underscore its potential for distortion, which I relate to the relatively more alive sense that memory brings to our sense of ourselves – the active, emotional, and embodied ways that the past affects the present.

Politics of Memory

The first President Bush referred to Vietnam in his inaugural speech, arguing, "that war cleaves us still. But, friends, that war began in earnest a quarter century ago; and surely the statute of limitations has been reached. This is a fact: The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory" (1/20/1989). For the past three decades, memories about the United States war Vietnam have served as the ground for substantial levels of discursive conflict.²⁶ Because our collective memories actively constitute our sense of ourselves, they serve "orientational functions" (Schwartz 1996) showing us both what we are and what we might be. First and foremost, memories of Vietnam have oriented American foreign policy: With the "Vietnam syndrome" and conservative efforts to cure it, and more recently in the debates over whether Iraq is a "quagmire," a "mistake," etc., how and in what context we remember Vietnam has set the tone for domestic debate about military intervention. In the case of the "syndrome," the very framing of the problem indicates the ideologically charged terrain of competing memories. This syndrome was first named by neoconservative Norman Podhoretz, who described it as a "sickly inhibition against the use of military force" (Peters 1992, 56). In Podhoretz's view,

²⁶ For more on memory as a site of contestation, see for example Lipsitz 1990.

memories of Vietnam caused the US to be gun-shy in the face of legitimate threats to its interest and power. The neoconservative mantra, “No more Munich’s!”, was thereby challenged by the experience of Vietnam, and conquering that “appeasement” tendency has been their project ever since. On the other end of the political spectrum, Noam Chomsky named the Vietnam syndrome as part of a larger crisis of legitimacy for U.S. elites, as it represented “the general unwillingness of the population to bear the material costs and the moral burden of aggression and massacre” (1980, 4).²⁷ For Chomsky and opponents of the war, the experience and memories of Vietnam served as a brake against imperial adventure, and forced the use of covert operations during the 1970’s and 1980’s. As a test of the Vietnam syndrome’s resilience, the first Gulf war was the ultimate remedy, according to conservatives. In its aftermath, President Bush declared, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all!” Yet the specter of Vietnam was not put to rest. Since the US invaded Iraq in March 2003, comparisons between the two conflicts have been legion. Predictably, contemporary war supporters have generally tried to distance themselves from these comparisons, while the war’s critics have often pointed to the similarities between the two.²⁸

In short, in the case of Vietnam, the orientational functions served by our memories point to other political alignments, and opposing ideological ends are served by the particular memories recalled. Was the war a “mistake,” or a “noble cause,” or “fundamentally wrong and immoral”? Did the Vietnamese “win” the war,

²⁷ It was not only the left that argued this. Nathan Glazer, writing in *Commentary* in 1971, said “the experience of Vietnam has turned Americans into haters of war.”

²⁸ Among many other articles connecting the two, see “The Vietnam Syndrome Mutates,” *The Atlantic* 4/25/2006. There are exceptions to this, of course, given the revisionist and distorted interpretations the Vietnam war has been subjected to: for those who would argue that Vietnam was a “noble cause,” comparisons with today’s debacle are welcome. In April, 2007, President Bush argued for US troops remaining in Vietnam by invoking the conclusion of that war: “One unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America’s withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our vocabulary new terms like “boat people,” “re-education camps,” and “killing fields.” (NYT, August 22, 2007). As nearly every expert asked explained, this comparison is historically specious—correct in its description the trauma of the Vietnam war for Asian civilians, incorrect in its causal logic (Thom Shanker, “Historians Question Bush’s Reading of Lessons of Vietnam War for Iraq,” NYT August 23, 2007).

or was the US “betrayed,” “stabbed in the back,” in its efforts? And this is the primary context in which our particular memory of the class dynamics of the period has developed as well: in a terrain marked by extreme ideological strife.

Another set of “orientational functions” of our memories of the war is related to the extreme ideological strife revealed in these foreign policy debates. “Which side were you on” in the era – with the “good workers of America” or the “crazy liberal elitists”? How we remember the class dynamics of our national response to the war helps situate our political analyses of 1) who participates in social movements, particularly antiwar or peace movements; 2) what kinds of political attitudes can be predicted of people based on their class and educational background; 3) the extent to which cross-class political action and coalitions are possible. These memories also shape our understandings of the current natural constituencies of the Democratic and Republican parties, the end of the liberal “consensus,” and the rise (and possible fall) of conservative politics in the United States since the 1960’s.

Yet unlike questions over foreign policy, the effects of the antiwar movement, or other controversial elements of the Vietnam experience, the memory of its class dynamics is remarkably non-contentious. It’s as if the left and right disagree vehemently over most elements of the Vietnam period, save one: That the war was opposed by elites; supported, with ambivalence, by the white working class; etc.— the memory sketched above. Unlike the more obviously polarized or polarizing debates about the war and the movement against it, there’s an unusual degree of consensus surrounding the nature of the class response to the war. It is not simply a conservative consensus, though it has been largely shaped by conservative elites, as I explore in my final chapter. It’s a consensus that liberals embrace as well.

Film and Television evocations

The first sites of memory I'll explore are mainstream TV and film representations of Vietnam. In the realm of cultural production, the years immediately following the war were marked by a collective silence, and references to Vietnam were rare.²⁹ Beginning in the late 1970's, and picking up steam through to the mid-1990's, Vietnam emerged as a central site for cultural work. Many of the students Loewen polled were the right age to have seen or heard about the Hollywood blockbusters that had brought the war back to popular consciousness: the *Rambo* series (1982, 1985, 1988), *Platoon* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1990), or *Forrest Gump* (1994); perhaps they had seen *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Hair* (1979), or *The Deer Hunter* (1978). *The Big Chill* (1983) reintroduced the veterans of the antiwar movement (and their music) to the younger generation; "M*A*S*H" was a mainstay of their childhoods³⁰; Vietnam veterans played central roles on shows like the "A-Team" and "Magnum PI"; "China Beach" had been a hit.

The specific films and TV shows that I discuss in this chapter are significant for their popularity and/or critical acclaim. As I am interested in popular perceptions of the war, I have purposefully limited my detailed discussion to mainstream films that reached a mass audience.³¹ While these films and shows—and there are dozens more—fall all over the political spectrum, their representations of class are fairly consistent. Questioning the war's purpose or morality is an elite profession: College students, intellectuals and the upper-middle class are the war's critics (*Platoon*, *Big Chill*, *Hamburger Hill*, M*A*S*H). Most soldiers are working-class

²⁹ See Samuel G. Freedman's interesting article on this, "The War and the Arts," *NYT*, 3/31/1985.

³⁰ MASH technically took place in Korea, but it was a film and series about Vietnam, as I discuss further, below.

³¹ Hundreds of documentaries and films were made about Vietnam. In this section I am considering a selection of the best known and most widely seen. "Law and Order" and MASH are two of the longest running and most popular TV shows ever. *Rambo* became a massive cultural phenomenon, and *Apocalypse Now* was a critical and popular hit. *The Deer Hunter*, *Platoon*, and *Forrest Gump* all won Best Picture in the year they were released and received multiple other awards and nominations; *Born on the Fourth of July* was nominated for eight Academy Awards and received Best Director, among others; *The Big Chill* was nominated for three Oscars and did well at the box office. *Hair* the movie reached fewer people, but is included because of the centrality of the original Broadway musical to the antiwar period. See the website, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/>, for historical box office data.

“grunts” (*Platoon*) or “niggers” (*Hamburger Hill*), whose loyalty is first to each other and then to country (*Deer Hunter, Hill, Rambo, “A Team”*); when they show ambivalence about the war their feelings are subsumed by the pressing and concrete circumstances they face (*Full Metal Jacket*), or they are rising above their group or class (*Hair* and *Born on the 4th of July*). With the exception of the two films explicitly about the movement (*Hair* and *Born on the Fourth of July*), the antiwar movement is singled out for scorn or remembered with ambivalence.

Films about the Vietnam era have received a great deal of critical attention (cf. Dittmar & Marchand 1991). Commentators note that the films contemporaneous with the war were often critical of the war and sympathetic to the movement (with the obvious and sole exception of *The Green Berets*, the 1968 John Wayne film that attempted to place Vietnam in the tradition of heroic wars). These critical films gave way to “revisionist” narratives by the late 1970’s. By the mid-1980’s, a shift occurred again, and more “realist” films picked up the burden of representation. *Platoon* was one of the films lauded for its realism.

Genre constraints and Middle-class narrators

It is the middle-class narrator of *Platoon* who explores the ambiguity of the war, expressing his personal uneasiness and considering its contradictions. College-bound, from the suburbs, Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) defied his parent’s aspirations and enlisted. In a voice-over letter to his grandmother that opens the film, Taylor describes the typical soldier: “guys nobody really cares about,” from the “end of the line,” “small towns”; “two years of high school,” “job in a factory if they’re lucky,” “poor and they know it.” He concludes, they’re the “best I’ve ever seen—the heart and soul.” He hopes that “maybe from down here in the mud I can be something to be proud of.” Taylor is talking about the mud of Vietnam, but also the mud of his poor and working class compatriots—their genuineness and grounded-ness is contrasted with his being, as he puts it, a “fake human being”—middle-class,

inexperienced, someone who lives in abstractions rather than reality. Later, in an exchange with other soldiers, Sheen asks, “Why should the poor kids go to war and the rich kids always get away with it?” a fellow soldier points out, “You gotta be rich in the first place to think like that.” The soldier continues, “Poor always been fucked over by the rich. Always have, always will.” Middle-class people ask the abstract questions, working-class people live the concrete realities. Theirs really *is* not to question why, but rather, simply, do-or-die.

Platoon is thematically organized around the conduct of the war itself. Stone focuses on US troops, those who commit or condemn barbarism, and is thus taking up transhistorical questions about the nature of warfare, and man’s inhumanity to man (cf. Klein, in Dittmar & Marchand 1991). Though this theme is apparent throughout the film, a Taylor voiceover again spells it out for the audience: “We did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves, and the enemy is in us.” Two middle-class characters—first the super-warrior and heroic officer Elias (Willem Dafoe), then Taylor himself—lead the fight against corruption and barbarism (embodied in the character of another officer, Barnes, played by Tom Berenger). Elias is killed by Barnes, and Barnes is eventually killed by Taylor. The showdown between these three iconic figures is literally a showdown between elites, all of whom basically support the war and its aims but who differ about the excesses to which it was permissible to fight.³²

³² In limiting the dramatic storyline to conflict between individual warriors, Stone makes use of a common device in military films here. Cultural critic L. Cawley wryly notes that in watching Vietnam films like this, or more notably the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* series, “we should not underestimate the extreme effort of imagination and will that is necessary to come up with plots that allow military men to undertake these solitary missions in total opposition to the doctrine and practice of the United States military” (Dittmar & Marchand 1991, 71). This observation could be taken further, to note that this individuation specifically obscures the group dynamics not only of making war, but of the resistance and questioning of the war that commonly took place in the latter days of US involvement in Vietnam. Soldiers relied on each other in incidents of refusing to fight or challenging their officers, disobeying orders, protesting general conditions, and even fragging. Denying the social aspect of the war also denies the social aspect of resistance to the war. The inverse is also true. One of the main ways that soldiers fought against the war was to desert and go AWOL. While they basically never had solitary missions in the battlefield, they disappeared by the hundreds of thousands into civilian life. So for most, the only solitary mission of the war was escaping it.

As an immanent critique of war, *Platoon* largely bypasses any concrete criticism of the particular war in Vietnam. Taylor is the obvious character who could have brought such a particular critique, and his early voiceover ruminations about the war imply that he might have brought a critical perspective with him. But the movie seems to make the case that Taylor gives up this power of political critique when he decides to become part of the “mud” of the war. Stone dodges the problem of antiwar sentiment in this way, but implicitly makes the point that asking such political questions comes from outside the experience of the war, from the college-educated or those “rich” enough “to think like that.” Yet, by choosing as his protagonists officers and the exceptional (that is, upper-middle class) grunt, Taylor, Stone reaffirms the idea that it is middle-class individuals who both question they ways things are and effect change.

Such individualism is common in the Vietnam films. This is not overly surprising, as it conforms not only to the “individual warrior” trope, but also to the norms of classical coming-of-age narratives. As a genre, the *bildungsroman* journey of self discovery by a young man striking out on his own does not necessitate a particular class background for its protagonist, but it implies an ideal-typical middle-class free-agent. Such a narrative works on the main character to transform him into a man who retains his individuality while conforming to more universal social norms, norms that could be best understood as middle-class insofar as they are not the particular norms of community or group but rather norms of the dominant society as a whole. This transformation is obvious in Stone’s other Vietnam film, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and is also true in Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter*.

Born on the Fourth of July is the story of one man’s transformation from gung-ho marine to antiwar leader. Working-class Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) signed up to go to Vietnam believing in the mission: “Communism has to be stopped” and “I love my

country” are his articulated motivations for enlisting. As the real-life Kovic’s memoir makes clearer than the movie, Kovic, like Taylor of *Platoon*, also went to Vietnam to “make something of [his] life.” In Kovic’s case, though, this was not a spiritual journey, but one of climbing out of his class: “I didn’t want to be like my Dad, coming home from the A&P every night” (Kovic 1976, 73). But Stone’s depiction of Kovic glosses over his working-class roots, making him more like any middle-class guy from the suburbs.

The dramatic tension of the film version of *Born on the Fourth of July* turns on two related axes. First is the question of patriotism, evident from its title, and what it means to serve one’s country. The second is the question of what constitutes manhood. Kovic’s decision to join the marines is framed against his patriotism, his love of war games, and his desire to prove himself a real man to his friends and love interest.

At war, he sustains devastating injuries that permanently disable him, confining him to a wheelchair. The first shot hit him in the foot, but rather than lie down, he got up, trying to be “the hero,” trying to be “John Wayne.” It was this effort that paralyzed him, and functionally castrated him.³³ Despite the generational and collective trauma experienced by Vietnam soldiers and veterans (a collective experience repeatedly underlined in Kovic’s memoir), as filmed his struggles are personal, emotional, and intellectual. His exposure to the antiwar movement’s ideas comes from TV, discussions with orderlies in the hospital, and most importantly, his first girlfriend’s college activism.

But for Kovic in his memoir, it is attending antiwar demonstrations, speaking out at high schools, and attending his first Vietnam Veterans Against the War meeting that together bring him into political activity. He has no girlfriend in this

³³ Stone emphasizes this point, that it was precisely the effort to be like the fake heroes of the movies that got us into trouble to begin with.

period, and he leaves the college he attends on the GI bill to better pursue his activism. He describes the movement as the way in which thousands of his brothers can collectively redress the wrongs they both committed and experienced. Writing of the minutes in which he and others successfully disrupted President Nixon's acceptance speech at the 1972 Republican National Convention, Kovic explains:

. . . this was it, all the pain and the rage, all the trials and the death of the war and what had been done to me and a generation of Americans by all the men who had lied to us and tricked us, by the man who stood before us in the convention hall that night, while men who had fought for their country were being gassed and beaten in the street outside the hall. I thought of Bobby [Muller] who sat next to me and the months we had spent in the hospital in the Bronx. It was all hitting me at once, all those years, all that destruction, all that sorrow (182-183).

But the movie deemphasizes the relationship between personal and collective transformation described in the book, and spends the bulk of its development on Kovic's isolated battles with his personal demons. It moves rapidly over the antiwar activism which was a focus of the memoir, using it thematically as an answer to the problems of patriotism and manhood faced by Kovic: Being a leader against the war is the best way for him to fulfill his earlier identity objectives of outstanding citizen and real man.

Working-class Stories

Cimino's working-class characters in *The Deer Hunter* are similarly de-classed and individuated through their experience in Vietnam. The movie begins by situating its main characters within a tightly knit, Eastern Orthodox, working class community in Pennsylvania. These white ethnic steelworkers are each other's best friends, hunting companions, and they sign up together for Vietnam. Like the idyllic beginning, the film takes a mythic approach to the war itself, placing its main characters in historically inaccurate and highly improbable situations—such as running into each other, repeatedly, in Vietnam. This fable-like, heavy-handed story-telling signals that the film is operating on the level of metaphor rather than

reality. Enormously popular at the box-office, and awarded Best Picture, its symbolic storyline appears to have resonated deeply with the American public.

The character with the greatest individual identity, Mike (Robert DeNiro) – the true “deer hunter” of the group – rises above his comrades to become a member of the Special Forces. It is Mike who manages to rescue his friends when they encounter each other in National Liberation Front, or “Vietcong,” custody. Yet by the movie’s harrowing end, Mike avoids the homecoming party planned for him, and we never see him working in the mills again. By then, each character has at some level broken his ties to family or community. The film is book-ended by opposing visions of community: opening scenes leading to a massive jubilant wedding filled with Russian and Ukrainian dancing is replaced by a small gathering of some of the broken men and their friends at a bar, singing “God Bless America.” The movie narrates a fall from grace, stipulating a romanticized working-class community at its outset that is shattered by the experience of the war. But it, equally romantically if also tragically, reintegrates the characters into a national community that transcends the particularities of their locale. Their story becomes “America’s” story.

While *The Deer Hunter* does not directly take up the movement against the war, it does make important statements about the working class and Vietnam. Leonard Quart and Albert Auster argue that the working class characters within *The Deer Hunter* are “politically unconscious men and women” (Beattie 1998, 51). They are not people who make things happen, but rather people *to* whom things happen, who are played upon by larger social forces. Like many of the films of the era, the working class is depicted as victims of social change. And while the men and women of *The Deer Hunter* are not reactionary (as, say, the characters Travis Bickle in *Taxi*

Driver, or Joe of *Joe*, are), by the movie's end they are positioned much farther from the war's critics than they are from its supporters.³⁴

The Deer Hunter was noted at the time for initiating a revisionist interpretation of the events in Vietnam (Freedman, *NYT*, 3/31/1975; Dittmar & Marchand 1991). The US troops, here, were the victims of atrocities; it is the US culture that has been warped and destroyed by the Asian, whose people are depicted in an excessively racist fashion in the film. This is a direct reversal of one of the antiwar movement's main claims, that the Vietnamese were victimized by the US war and had their culture savaged by us. Much of the potent imagery coming out of the war, including the iconic images of children fleeing a napalmed village, the tiger cages of Con Son prison, or the assassination of an NLF prisoner by a South Vietnamese officer allied with the US, makes clear that the US and South Vietnamese were primary sources of brutality. But in *The Deer Hunter*, it is the Vietcong, with their (entirely fictional) Russian Roulette and underwater cages, who are unspeakably brutal, and the Americans who are terrorized. Following *The Deer Hunter*, multiple films reversed the narrative of victim-victimizer, underdog-bully, which had developed as a result of antiwar critique. As H. Bruce Franklin later points out, the manipulation and wholesale creation of the "problem" of prisoners of war was the vehicle through which much of this reversal was effected (Franklin 1993). Going back for "our guys," who were "betrayed" by the country, is the premise of *Rambo*, and the *Missing in Action* series.

These films, and others, obscured the antiwar consensus achieved in this country by the war's end. The vast majority of people in the United States opposed Vietnam long before its conclusion, and had come to agree with many of the main critiques of the war made by the movement—specifically, that the war was "fundamentally wrong and immoral." But in the revisionist telling, the movement

³⁴ See Bodnar (2003) for a full discussion of working-class victimization in film.

was made foreign or vilified, and the attitudes of typical Americans were made to seem more ambivalent. *Rambo* refers to antiwar activists who he describes as having spat on him at the airport upon his return as “maggots”; returning soldiers are menaced by antiwar protesters in the (mostly liberal) film *Coming Home*. Jerry Lembcke’s *The Spitting Image* (1998) details the absolutely mythic nature of these tales, but they persist to this day.^{35,36}

³⁵ During the 2004 Presidential campaign, a prolonged exchange took place on the blog, “Talking Points Memo,” between some Vietnam veterans and other readers/writers about the reception that vets received upon returning to the US. One writer wrote about a relative who had been spat upon, and a number of other writers then added other second hand tales of abuse at the hands of antiwar activists. Many posts in, someone wrote about Lembcke’s findings—he was unable to find one instance of spitting from the contemporary news reporting, or a single reliable case, and concludes that the spitting story was like an urban myth. The discussion thread exploded with debate, with dozens of writers lining up on either side of the “fact or fiction” debate over the spitting incidents. (From author’s printed record, TPM October 7-11, 2004.)

³⁶ The phantasmagoric *Apocalypse Now* (1979) also serves a revisionist project, even though it is an antiwar film. The wanton destruction of Vietnam and its people is stunningly depicted in the film, as is the casual violence of the US military leadership. But the central story, of Captain Willard’s trip upriver into the “heart of darkness,” represented by Colonel Kurtz, is a more ambivalent one. Again, the problems of the war are largely confined to a struggle between individuals, and even more so than *The Deer Hunter*, the symbolic nature of every individual – of nearly every action in the film – is relentlessly underscored. Willard (Martin Sheen) is trying to solve the puzzle of Kurtz (Marlon Brando), an outstanding soldier and leader who joined the Green Berets at the age of thirty-eight after returning from an advisory trip to Vietnam and making a classified report that Willard does not see. Kurtz thereby took himself out of his military career ladder so that he might get on the ground to fight and lead. Kurtz, it seems, thought that the US was fighting the war the wrong way – and it appeared he had a better one. He scored consistent victories, but did so outside of the chain of command. His “methods were questionable.”

From Willard’s point of view, we discover a war where insanity rules where there is leadership, and chaos where there’s not. People are fighting desperately, and for no good reason: one company destroys a town to surf at its beach (though, for good measure, the town contains “Charlie,” and even the women villagers are NLF). Kurtz has followed the logic of war to its irrational end – “the horror” – and is ultimately a sympathetic anti-hero: he knows why does what he does, his mind is brilliant but “his soul is sick” with where his mind takes him. “Destroy them all” is his final scrawled command, but he clearly wants himself killed before he can do that. The antiwar critique is delivered, as usual, by elites, though in the form of anti-heroes; the grunts are victims of a bad war and bad circumstances.

This parable of the inescapable horrors of war, *apocalypse now*, condemns wars, but is strange in its condemnation of this particular war. The best and the brightest have lead the United States down the path to either mass murder or suicide: The film implies that the United States could have won the war if it had taken the gloves off – according to Kurtz’s logic, the war was being fought poorly by the Americans because someone was judging and reigning in the actions committed therein, not because of the actions themselves. And who was doing the judging and reigning in, in Vietnam? Though the antiwar movement is not specified, it is implied that the war was fought with a restraining conscience, and that Kurtz saw that it could not be won with a conscience, thereby echoing the Generals who pushed for extreme measures to assure victory. It is implied that there was a happy medium reached at some point, where Kurtz was winning the war his way without stepping over the line more than anyone else. After all, what got him in trouble was not that he was too brutal, but that he was that he was too brutal without permission, and it was only when he fully broke away from the army that he became truly dangerous and deranged. His collapse was therefore not, perhaps, inevitable, though the movie implies an inescapable logic to all wars – to win, you can’t take half measures, which means you will end wholly corrupt. But like *Platoon*, this ahistorical morality tale erases the specificity of this war. Vietnam was a monstrously brutal war, and victory was *not* assured had the brutality been even greater. The US lost the war because of the level of resistance it

Antiwar Movement in Film

It's not surprising that the movement was eventually portrayed in a negative light by most mainstream Hollywood films. Even while the media became more critical of the war itself, the movement never experienced especially positive coverage. In Mel Small's exhaustive account, *Covering Dissent* (1994), he sums up:

From the first major demonstration in April 1965 to the wild Mayday activities of May 1971, the media framed their stories in terms of the size and composition of the crowds attending antiwar events, and especially the absence of presence of violent, bizarre, or countercultural behavior. Aside from reporting that the protesters wanted out of Vietnam, the media virtually ignored the political discourse that served as the centerpiece for most antiwar activities. They rarely exposed casual readers and viewers, who constituted the bulk of their audiences, to the rationales behind protest activities (161).

Forrest Gump's portrait of the left fits Small's synopsis. In one scene Gump finds himself at a "Black Panther Party" (his understanding), with Black radicals barking stereotyped jargon and "No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger" signs all over the walls. The white left gets the worst treatment. As Jenny, Gump's friend and future wife, leads him into the room, she is accosted by her abusive boyfriend. "Who's the baby killer?" the boyfriend asks, gesturing at the uniformed Gump. She proudly introduces her boyfriend to Gump as the "President of the Berkeley Students for a Democratic Society" just seconds before we see him hit Jenny across the face, presumably for bringing a "baby killer" into their midst. These are the violent antiwar protesters, filled with rage.

A more quiet contempt for the antiwar movement is registered in the depiction of these activists in *The Big Chill*. Here, college veterans of the movement gather fifteen years later for a friend's funeral: Alex, who committed suicide. Alex appears to represent the spirit of "the sixties" for the group – he is described early in the film as being both the personification of hope, and yet also its failure. During his

encountered by the Vietnamese, and then because of the resistance it encountered from its own soldiers and citizens: the problem *was* first in the stars, and then in ourselves.

funeral the challenge is set for the group of friends, whether they can “regain that hope” in the face of its dissolution.

The characters are fantastically – absurdly – ideal-typical of the yuppie, “me” generation. *The Big Chill*'s conceit is that these former radicals have all transformed into apolitical, status-, success- and money-seeking individuals, albeit with some ambivalence about their newly “evolved” state: The film explicitly uses the metaphor of evolution, thereby underscoring this progression as a natural one. It should be noted, though, that such a direct transformation was actually unusual for the “sixties generation.” Most people who were heavily involved in the movements of the sixties maintained their commitment to social justice, with a disproportionate number staying involved in movement-type work.³⁷

In the movie, however, it is only the successfully-suicidal Alex, and the drug-dealing and impotent Vietnam veteran Nick who are depicted as still caught in the sixties, quite obviously to their detriment. The rest of the very successful group – consisting of a *People* magazine reporter, business owner, doctor, corporate lawyer, affluent housewife, and TV star – are to varying degrees uncomfortable with their new status. They joke about how “property was theft” back then, or how they wanted to “go to Harlem to teach the kids,” or how one became a public defender thinking she’d be defending “Huey and Bobby.” But this lawyer’s turn-around explains that of the whole group: “I didn’t realize how guilty [my clients] would be.” Their earlier rebellion is framed as idealistic, but also inauthentic and immature. Ultimately, it’s okay to live for oneself and one’s family, to the exclusion of nearly everyone else (except your old college friends), the movie seems to say. If the characters in *The Big Chill* are to be believed, “the sixties” really was no more than adolescent rebellion by a bunch of privileged youth.

³⁷ See, among others, Braungart and Braungart (1991), Jennings (2002), Marwell and Aiken (1987).

Hamburger Hill, released a year after *Platoon*, is the movie that contains the most potent, sensational and stereotypical tropes of the collective memory I'm tracing here. *Hill* is also the film that best represents the "realism" of the films made in the late 1980's, and its myth-making is all the stronger for claiming the narrative space of historical truth. The action of *Hill* is based on the actual battle at Dong Ap Bia in May 1969, a strategically insignificant spot that the US soldiers got "chewed up like hamburger" to take. It is told from the perspective of the "grunts" in the war—or, as one soldier remarks, "blood-and-soul types." While it does faithfully represent the working-class status of the typical soldier, and is a scathing antiwar film, the selective views attributed by the film to these soldiers fall completely within the revisionist project. The fact that the film was critically and popularly embraced for its realism despite its distortions indicates how sedimented the collective memory had become.

The film is unsparing in its contempt for the movement. The soldiers going home are cautioned not to wear their uniforms when they get back, as they may be the target of "dog shit," among other things. Unlike the action of *Platoon*, pre-Tet, *Hill* takes place when the domestic sentiment against the war had shifted, and the country had turned against the war. Symbolizing the lack of domestic support for the fight, the movie depicts the antiwar movement as having brainwashed their women. Speaking of one man's girlfriend, another soldier says, "Some hair-head has her on her back right now and is telling her to fuck for peace"; another laments, "My girlfriend said she's not going to write anymore—friends at college told her it was immoral to write to me." The antiwar movement demoralizes them. An officer shouts to the new arrivals, "Some of you think you have problems because you're against the war, you demonstrated in school, you have peace symbols on your steel and you have attitudes." He continues, "When you get home, grow your beard and become a goddamned hippie protester," but no complaints here. And, from there on

out, there are no explicit critiques of the war by any of the soldiers—just the overall, meta-critique of the war made by the meaningless slaughter itself. Finally, the antiwar movement even uses their women to demoralize them. Talking about the North Vietnamese radio broadcasts they pick up, one soldier explains, “Sometimes they get American assholes to tell us what assholes we are . . . No lie man, it’s a trip.” We then hear an American woman’s voice coming over the radio, saying “Embrace the heroic people of Vietnam like so many of your heroic countrymen.”

Hill makes the clear case that the war was a working-class affair. But, as such, the collective identity of these workers is created against the rich kids who aren’t there. Much of the dialogue within the troops establishes their common identity as working stiffs who at least “showed up” for the war, in contrast to the “long-haired faggots” who didn’t. Such negative class-consciousness even unites Black and white soldiers, as in the following exchange:

White soldier: “The smart white people go to college.”

Doc (Black soldier): “You people must be aware that the brothers are here because they cannot afford an education?”

White soldier: “What am I doing? Sitting in some fucking country club sipping on 7s and 7s and eating a steak? I see all kinds of white faces here.”

Doc: “OK, the war started for you when you farted and said Good Morning Vietnam. You see now I was born into this shit.”

White: “And they pulled the gold fucking spoon out of my mouth so I could come here and see how you low-class [bug-a-boos] live? Is that it?”

Doc: “Brother. . . [they shake hands]. . . We all no-good dumb niggers on this hill, blood and soul types.”

This particular exchange is interesting for its simultaneous truthful and mythic elements. The solidarity achieved within the troops during Vietnam was similar to that of other wars – men report they were fighting for each other, more than they were fighting for anyone or anything else. But Appy (1993) points out that unlike other wars, the solidarity “was shaped not only by the common dangers of war but also by a common sense of the war’s pointlessness” (243). The instances of troop cohesion stressed by Appy in the post-1968 period of the war were a collective feeling that survival was the only point, which over time gave way to collective combat avoidances and combat refusals. But he argues that “we must resist

romanticizing” the unity, for it was “a solidarity dependent on the danger and violence of a war that itself had no meaning the soldiers could embrace.” The movie’s depiction of a class-based identity overcoming the racial divisions that existed between the African American “Bloods” who were increasingly outwardly antiwar and disobedient, and the white “Heads” (drug-taking hippie-like whites) and “Juicers” (hard-drinking and usually more conservative whites) in the increasingly balkanized Army and Marines is precisely romantic, and while not impossible, quite unlikely (see Appy 1993; Moser 1996).

In *Hamburger Hill*, when one soldier ventures to defend people who resisted or dodged the draft—“Some guy doesn’t go – you gotta respect that,” he is quickly put in his place: “No way. You don’t want to pull on the little people, no sweat, don’t use your weapon. All I want from anybody is to get their ass in the grass with the rest of us. You don’t have to like it but you have to show up.” This sentiment is not unrealistic—many soldiers and returning veterans felt this way about the young men who didn’t serve. But, the point is that this is not the *only* way they felt. The movie also does not reveal one of the more striking facts about the outcome of the fight at Hamburger Hill: that the surviving soldiers put a \$10,000 price on the head of the officers who ordered the attack (Neale 2001, 135).

Sympathetic Representations

Some mainstream representations of antiwar attitudes and action were more genial. The television show *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) and *Hair* (1979), while filmed in the 1970’s, are products of sixties’ sensibilities: *M*A*S*H* is based on Robert Altmann’s 1970 film, and the stage musical *Hair* was originally produced in 1967. Their generally positive rendering of antiwar sentiment and movement was in part a product of this earlier genesis, as well as their explicitly liberal orientation. Yet they too reproduce a class-based representation of antiwar sentiment and action, and tend to soften the antiwar messages of their original versions. Perhaps indicating an

ambivalence about Vietnam soldiers, and certainly to give it greater artistic license, *M*A*S*H* distanced its critique from Vietnam by placing the action in Korea. The TV show's dissidents drank homemade hooch instead of smoking dope (or anything stronger), and tended to be aggrieved and annoyed by their superiors, rather than murderously angry. As doctors and officers, Hawkeye Pierce, Trapper John, and B.J. Hunicutt certainly stood in well for the liberal elite, who could have fun with Charles, the Boston Brahmin, or Frank Burns, the incompetent lifer who continued to support the war. Colonels Blake and Potter were each easygoing in their own ways, and were oblivious to (Blake) or generally tolerant of (Potter) the shenanigans of their camp's leaders. In *M*A*S*H*, "the resentment of military bureaucracy in the main characters is a trivializing surrogate for the rebellion and antiwar feeling of the Vietnam years" (Cawley, in Dittmar & Marchand 1991, 72). *M*A*S*H* offered a tamped down, polite and humorous vision of an antiwar army, and (very) inaccurately confined its critiques to the officer class.

Hair, the film, also plays down its antiwar critique by focusing its narrative on the would-be love story of Claude Bukowski, an Oklahoma cowboy, and Sheila, a Short Hills debutante. This unlikely pairing, among others in the film, helps to convey the message that the divisions within the country at the time were generational and cultural, and helps to sustain the focus of the film on the counterculture rather than the antiwar movement. In this, the movie substantially departs from the original stage "American tribal love rock musical" first performed in 1967, which then ran on Broadway for four years following its opening there in 1968 and met with international acclaim. In the original stage production, the members of the tribe were all non-elite hippies—Claude, a hippie in the play, was from Queens, and Sheila a commuter student at NYU—and the unity of "the tribe" was political: they were united in their opposition to the war. For four years—from 1968-1972—*Hair* was an international phenomenon, playing in numerous locations around

the country and the globe. *Hair's* "tribe" regularly performed at antiwar rallies, including the largest of the decade, and many of its songs became anthems of the peace movement.

The movie's first scene in New York has the hippie, Burger, burning his draft card with three of his friends looking on. They laugh and run away, beginning one of their carefree romps around Central Park. This marks the movie's overall trivialization of the movement, replacing the gravity with which the original production took up the question of the draft and the war. In the original production, Claude's decision whether or not to burn his card, and to accept his induction, is the only coherent narrative thread of the musical, with the bulk of its second act taken up by representations of the horror of the war. *Hair* the musical also turns the *bildungsroman* narrative on its head. When Claude wonders "where do I go?," and seeks an answer in Vietnam, he is killed. The original production makes the stark political point that war is personal and cultural suicide. In the movie, however, the character Burger (Treat Williams) is casually opposed to the war, and interested in personal rather than political rebellion. At the end of the film, he is accidentally shipped to Vietnam and killed, in place of the cowboy Claude (John Savage), who is improbably coupled with the rich Sheila (Beverly D'Angelo). This singular, random loss, reinforces the message that the war was a containable, and tragic, mistake.

Each of these representations serves to tell a story that minimizes the extent of real social conflict that took place as a result of Vietnam. And to the extent that such conflict did take place, it happened, in these stories, between opposing social classes. This ideological framework extends beyond the cultural production of the post-Vietnam period. Scholarly considerations also follow its basic outline, as the next section details.

History Surveys

Historical surveys are by nature condensations, shorthand narratives. They are also the primary way in which people are taught history in the US secondary and post-secondary educational systems. The following discussion is based on an analysis of thirteen US history surveys, nine of which are currently among the most common textbooks assigned in college history classes (see note on selection, below).³⁸ While some of these texts are fairly nuanced in their discussions of Vietnam antiwar protest and the class dynamics of the domestic response to the war, many of the stereotypical storylines described thus far appear in their pages.³⁹

The majority of these textbooks overstate the extent to which affluent youth served as the movement's base, and understate the breadth of opposition to Vietnam, particularly the eventual dissent appearing within the armed forces and veterans' communities. In almost all the textbooks studied, the last items are simply

³⁸ I chose a selection of the most commonly used multiple-author textbooks based on a recent study of college syllabi (Daniel J. Cohen, "By the Book: Assessing the Place of Textbooks in U.S. Survey Courses," *Journal of American History, Textbooks and Teaching* 2005). Some of the editions I used were more recent than the ones cited in the survey. The textbooks discussed are: *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, Fourth edition. Alan Brinkley (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004); *Nation of Nations: A Concise Narrative of the American Republic*. Third edition. James West Davidson et al. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002); *Out of Many: A History of the American People*. Revised third edition. John Mack Faragher et al. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2003); *America: A Narrative History*. Sixth edition. George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi. (New York: Norton, 2004); *America: A Concise History*. Third edition. James A. Henretta et al. (Boston: Bedford, 2006); *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States*. Sixth edition. Mary Beth Norton et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); *The American Story*. Third edition. Robert A. Divine et al. (Penguin: London and New York: Longman, 2007); *The American Nation*. Tenth edition. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes. (New York: Longman, 2000); *America's History*. Fifth edition. James A. Henretta et al. (Boston: Bedford, 2004). I also chose three college-level narrative histories written by single (one pair) authors: *A History of the American People*. Paul Johnson, New York: Harper, 1997; *The American Dream*, Volume 3, *From Reconstruction to Reagan*. Esmond Wright (London: Blackwell, 1996); *The Story of America: Freedom and Crisis from Settlement to Superpower*. Allen Weinstein and David Rubel (London: DK; 2002). Finally, I chose one textbook that had a number of editions in an earlier period (from 1977 to 1992), which appears to have fallen out of use: *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*. Fourth edition. Bailyn et al. (Boston: Little Brown, 1992).

³⁹ There is one exception to this rule, which is the discussion of the period in the American Social History Project's second volume of *Who Built America?* (2000), a social history of the United States. This excellent textbook argues that "although the antiwar movement was initially based in the middle class, it won thousands of working class recruits after 1968," and describes how "the radicalization of working class youth had a direct effect on the military, where internal conflict undermined the morale of many Vietnam combat units." The tensions between the New Left and labor are also underscored, as well as the apprehension by many new leftists that the "white working class had bargained away its radical potential" (576-578). The authors also point to the limited reality of the Archie Bunker stereotype, and the resentment felt by white workers against what they saw as affluent college students (605).

omitted. Some also overstate the conservatism of the white working class, while others do not discuss class politics at all.

Anticipating the “triumph of conservatism” and the “end of liberalism,” many of these books use stereotypical, iconic images to foreshadow rifts that were to develop in the coming decades. The splits within the Democratic Party between its “liberal” and “mass” bases, and the rise of the working-class “Reagan Democrat” are unproblematically predicted by the responses to Vietnam and other political behavior of the Vietnam period. One could call this the “inevitability fallacy.” As we now know what came of the era, it is easy to find the inevitable signs of the future in the past. Digging up and highlighting these precursors makes for a more successful, linear historical narrative of clear, causal relationships.⁴⁰

These books also serve to underscore the “forgotten” nature of the Vietnam antiwar movement. With only one exception (Henretta 2004), the antiwar movement receives no investigation of its internal dynamics as a movement from any of these books. This is in contrast to the attention received by both the civil rights/Black power and feminist movements, both of which are described in relation to their leaders, organizations, and specific grievances and goals. Most of these books invoke the antiwar movement in relation to their discussions of Presidents Johnson or Nixon (as felling Johnson; frustrating or being frustrated by Nixon) or in relation to student protest—but almost never as a movement unto itself. Again, with the same exception, the movement also receives considerably less page-space than feminism or civil rights (anywhere from one-quarter to one-tenth the space), and often equal or less space than the other influential movements of the period,

⁴⁰ It’s not only textbooks on the more sensationalist or conservative end of the spectrum that do this. The textbook whose sympathies most clearly lie with the antiwar movement, *Out Of Many*, is similarly myopic in what it relates about the early years of the US war in Vietnam. Its initial story of the war itself (highlighting its brutality and futility) is told very much from the perspective of what everyone came to know in later days, and its foreshadowing of massive antiwar sentiment in the 1965-1967 period distracts attention from the fact that the country was largely supportive of the war until 1968’s Tet offensive.

including gay liberation, the Chicano/a rights movement, and the American Indian Movement. Without taking issue with the primacy of civil rights and feminism – textbooks have to make choices – the relative lack of attention to the antiwar movement is nevertheless pronounced.

Most often, the Vietnam antiwar movement is conflated with the “student movement.” Demonstrators are referred to as “student demonstrators” and attention is paid to campus unrest at the expense of nearly all other sites of protest. The elite nature of the protester, usually student but in some cases non-student, is repeatedly underscored. One book begins its discussion, “Many college students and other opponents of the war . . .” (Weinstein 2002, 615). Another relates the image, “Children of affluent middle class families. . . . burned their draft cards, grew their hair long and joined free living communes where drink, drugs, and sex were readily available” (Wright 1996, 379).⁴¹ “Well-to-do white youths . . . hippies and flower children . . . became the bulwark of the marching, chanting, peace movement” (Bailyn et al. 1992, 1235). After writing persuasively about the political aspects of “the student revolt,” these authors make the kind of stereotypical slippage seen elsewhere:

The meteoric career of the SDS symbolized the turbulence of the 1960’s. For a brief time, it seemed as though the nation’s youth had gone berserk, indulging in a wave of experimentation with drugs, sex, and rock music. Not all American youth joined in the cultural insurgency; the rebellion was generally limited to the children of the upper middle class (Divine et al. 2007, 803).

The New Left is seamlessly collapsed into the counterculture, and its early upper middle-class cast is projected onto the entire era, despite all findings to the contrary (see Chapter Three). Divine, et al.’s study also limits Vietnam protest to the youth:

⁴¹ [The hysteria in this particular coverage is heightened in the next sentences: “Some of the members of this (so-called) family were devil-worshippers, and some were murderers. Much of their language was incoherent.” (Read against his argumentative logic, an ironic observation indeed). The next paragraph gets even stranger: “Some saw these “high’priest of this cult as Charles Manson . . . But the society in which he caused so much alarm was torn not only by the fear of a race war, but the reality of the war in Vietnam . . . and where drugs were easily available.”]

“the most dramatic aspect of the youthful rebellion came in opposing the Vietnam war,” whose “climax came in 1968.” However, “the *students* failed to stop the war” (804, emphasis mine).

Davidson et al., here, describe 1968 as the peak of antiwar protest, and most books limit their discussion of the movement to the Johnson presidency, implicitly marking that year as its final meaningful moment. In this, they are following certain historiographic norms. From a mainstream perspective, the greatest “achievement” of the antiwar movement was Johnson’s decision to abandon the race for a second term in office. This in part helps account for the 1968-as-peak argument.

Furthermore, perhaps the dominant way of periodizing the “long” sixties begins roughly with third world anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles of the late 1950’s—and the US’s civil rights movement—and extends to the end of the Vietnam War, the fall of Allende in Chile, and the oil shocks of 1972-1974 (cf. Jameson 1984).

Within that long trajectory, 1968 is the standout year, particularly from the perspective of the US, but arguably on a global scale as well. Tet, the assassinations of King and Kennedy, the Paris May, the Columbia takeover, the Chicago protests at the Democratic National Convention: 1968 was undoubtedly a watershed. So the story of a “peak” of “the movement” writ large is echoed in many historical framings of the antiwar struggle in particular.

But there is another contributing factor to the 1968-as-peak framework. The historiography of the Vietnam antiwar movement is often structured with an emphasis on the ascendance and decline of the youthful new left. The Vietnam antiwar movement is correctly understood as the dominant movement expression for the white and middle-class New Left, usually seen as synonymous with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In a faulty inversion, however, the implosion of the new left appears to stand in for the end of the antiwar movement. Todd Gitlin’s *The Sixties* could be taken as emblematic in this regard. His book, which he describes as

“at the edge of history and autobiography,” takes the analytical perspective of the latter, and devotes much of its critical attention to why “middle class kids from the fifties” became the radicals of the following decade. As an early president of the SDS, Gitlin’s *Sixties* predictably exist within the confines of the life span of that organization, beginning with its iconic and visionary Port Huron statement of 1962, and ending with its sectarian split in 1969. For Gitlin and his immediate contemporaries, the end of SDS brought disillusion and dissolution, and, more importantly, the end of the thing called “the sixties.” SDS and the new left produced a truly stunning number of (mostly) men and (some) women whose stories have been told publicly in memoirs, histories and films, or who have helped to shape the stories that are told. To make an obvious point, middle-class activists are more likely than their working-class comrades to tell their stories, and are more likely to land in professions where they tell such stories and make interpretations of the past for a living. So the perspective from which Gitlin’s story is told is therefore typical of the genre.⁴² Albert and Albert’s *The Sixties Papers* (1984), Sayres/Social Text’s *The Sixties Without Apology* (1984), Miller’s *Democracy is in the Streets* (1987), all generally follow the same vein. For these authors and collections, it’s not that nothing happened after the new left was broken, it’s just that that their particular story is over. But to the extent that the antiwar movement is linked to the new-left youth movement, its own historical arc gets cut short.

The implications of this break for historical renditions of the movement are twofold. One, the initial character of the antiwar forces overshadows what eventually developed within the growing movement. That character—largely

⁴² Brienes (1989) makes a similar point about the preponderance of SDS-based histories, told by men. Anderson’s *The Movement and the Sixties* (1995), which explicitly limits itself to the revolt of the youth, breaks out of the early-peak norm (and the SDS myopia) of many of the other texts cited above. He sees the movement itself as being comprised of two waves. The first went to college in the early sixties, and were “intellectual, idealistic, and ideological.” SDS is the prototype here, and SNCC as well. The second wave was their younger siblings, who graduated after 1968, who agreed with the first wave about the corrupt nature of the system, but who were then a part of a movement so broad that you didn’t have to join an organization to be a part of it.

youthful, solidly middle-class and elite, limited to campuses, concerned with intellectual and policy debates, increasingly radical and sensationalist—has undoubtedly become the dominant image of the movement as a whole. Exploration of the long arc of the movement has been left to a few titles dedicated to the subject, few of which are referred to in the historical surveys being discussed here.

Two, in related fashion, the great diversity of the movement, and the extension of its claims and influence in the years after 1968, are largely erased. Post-1968 is the period when the movement forms deeper roots among people of color, in religious communities, labor unions, the armed forces, among veterans, and on second, third and fourth-tier college campuses. Post-1968 rationales for opposing the war shift from the more historically-minded policy critiques and moral condemnations of the early years to include grounded criticisms of the varied domestic repercussions of the fight. And, after 1968, for all of the movement's unpopularity, the majority of people polled echo many of its arguments when asked about the war.

Some of the survey books evoke a more broad movement, but focus on its typically middle-class constituency. Davidson, et al. (2002), for instance, assert the 1968-peak argument, and use the campus and intellectual bases of discontent as their case study for the movement. Enslow Publishing, specializing in K-12 library books, publishes a series called "In American History" within which "The Vietnam Antiwar Movement in American History" was printed as a stand-alone volume. The movement's middle-class base is summed up up-front, despite the inclusive "every walk of life" description: "College students made up a majority of the protesters. But the antiwar movement included people from nearly every walk of life. Many college professors, businesspeople, parents of draft-age youth, religious leaders, doctors, lawyers, politicians and entertainers also voiced their objections to American involvement." Henretta et al.'s (2006) textbook similarly details early antiwar

protesters, as consisting of “students, clergy, housewives, politicians, artists, and others” (891).

Some statements are simply misleading. For instance, the argument that war “emphasized the generation gap” (Wright 1996, 387). More accurately, protest emphasized the generation gap, and the counterculture did as well. But polls show that there was no meaningful generation gap in attitudes about the war, except the counter-intuitive one that younger, better-educated people tended to support it more often than their elders. Strangely enough, suburban high school students are singled out as bastions of antiwar protest (Bailyn 1992; Divine 2007), while my research finds urban high school students much more visibly radical and engaged (Tamiment; DeBenedetti 1990). But by bringing attention to suburbia the books underscore the premise of a privileged youth falling apart, the collapse of a vital center.

Others assertions, while based in the truth, exaggerate the extent of polarization. The war’s national unpopularity is generally framed against the even greater unpopularity of the “affluent students” who “had no right to insult their nation or squander its educational privileges.” Invoking the supremely iconic “hard-hat” rallies of New York City in 1970, this textbook argues, “NY police who cracked heads . . . or the construction workers who roamed lower Manhattan beating up longhaired youths were expressing the feelings of innumerable fellow citizens” (Bailyn 1992, 1239). Yet the actions of the hardhats were in fact condemned by a majority of people, including the majority of union households (see Chapter Seven). Another implies blue-collar support for the war, stating that “northern blue collar workers . . . smarting from the repeated setbacks the country had experienced in Vietnam and resentful of what they considered the unpatriotic tactics of antiwar protesters, also approved of Nixons’ refusal to pull out of Vietnam” (Garraty 2007, 852). Nixon, of course, refused to pull out *immediately*, but he consistently promised

to end the war, so the plan these workers approved was actually a “peace plan.” These same Northern blue-collar workers agreed that the war was a mistake, a point obscured by the book’s emphasis.

Not every book looks explicitly at the class dynamics of the domestic response to Vietnam. Yet, when it is discussed, the working class is often evoked as conservative.⁴³ For example, the conservative populist third party Presidential candidate George Wallace’s main base of appeal was lower-middle-class Southerners, and in 1968 he eventually received 8% of the Northern vote. Yet early in his campaign he was polling much higher among northern blue-collar workers. Because this is seen as anticipating the eventual support received by Nixon in 1972 and Reagan in 1980 from blue-collar workers, these early polls are emphasized in a number of the books. Analyzing Humphrey’s challenges in his presidential run in 1968, Divine et al. (2007) write that George Wallace “cut deeply into the normal Democratic majority” (809); specifically, the group the book sets up as these Wallace supporters is the “urban working classes.” While the authors soon recant this statement – Wallace’s “following declined,” and “Humphrey held on to the urban Northeast” – the book leaves intact the impression that the urban working classes were particularly conservative. Wallace’s appeal among blue-collar workers is also unproblematically linked to his social conservatism in some discussions: “Wallace, whose calls for victory in Vietnam and ‘law and order’ at home appealed to many northern blue-collar Democrats” (Weinstein 2002, 614).

⁴³ Norton (2001), Henretta (2004), and Tindall (2004) do not take up the issue of class, an ellipsis that both avoids distortion but misses part of the story of the social dynamics of the period. Two others are generally accurate. Faragher’s *Out of Many* (2003) does not discuss blue-collar conservatism, and finds the roots of “the Conservative Ascendance” in white, middle-class Sunbelt communities such as Orange County, CA, and the rise of evangelical Christianity. Davidson, et al. (2002), is by far the most nuanced accounting of the class politics of the time. George Wallace’s political appeal, for example, is described not just in term of his pro-war racist overtures, but his economic populism. The return of white workers to the Democratic fold by the 1968 election is attributed to Humphrey’s late antiwar tack, in September 1968. And the frustrations felt by the white working class are summed up in this way: they were antiwar but infuriated by the protesters, suspicious of the “establishment” that held power, worried about their own children, and by and large abandoned by the New Left.

Investigating the events of 1970, Paul Johnson (1997) makes the hardhats emblematic of blue collar sentiments: “And Nixon’s contrast between privileged students engaged in nihilism and hard-working kids from poor families getting on with life struck home. On May 7 in New York a crowd of construction workers stormed City Hall and beat up students who were occupying it—the first hard-hat demonstration against the New Left. This was Nixon’s ‘silent majority’ beginning to react, adumbrating his historic landslide victory of November 1972” (894).

Using the hard hat as typical of blue-collar sentiment, or the rich hippie as the typical antiwarrior, is not limited to broad-brush surveys of “American History, 1865 to the Present.” In their recent book, *The Right Nation* (2004), *Economist* contributors John Micklethwait and Adrian Woodridge’s provide a version of the period that is similarly rife with stereotypes:

Another divisive force was the antiwar movement. For many activists, the Vietnam War was the greatest evil of the day—and the counterculture was a natural accompaniment to a life of protest. For many rank-and-file Democrats, however, the antiwar movement was an abomination. What did the average workingman have in common with hippies who spent their time taking drugs and squandering their families trust funds? Or with students who desecrated the American flag? The antiwar protesters, most of whom would be given student deferments rather than being sent to fight, were even more unpopular than the war itself. Far too many of them seemed not just hostile to this or that American policy, but to America in general. The shooting for hour students at Kent State in May 1970 may have inspired Neil Young to song, but a week later blue-collar America cheered when a group of hard-hat union construction workers in New York beat up a group of antiwar demonstrators (66).

Blue-collar America, in fact, disapproved of the hard-hat attacks, and other authors argue that it was precisely the over-the-top actions of the construction workers that catalyzed greater antiwar involvement from the official labor movement (Foner 1989, Levy 1994).

But the challenge of the stereotype is that it is bigger than the sum of its parts. “Working class conservatism” and liberal elitism on questions of war and peace contribute to a larger narrative about “class polarization” along “cultural” or

“social” issues today. While it is important to empirically rebut the content of our distorted memory of the class dynamics of the response to Vietnam, it is the overall memory frame that is harder to dislodge. The following two chapters turn to the former project, while the latter is in the hands of the larger forces that shape our collective memory.

Chapter 3 The “Counter Memory”: Working Class Antiwar Sentiment and Action

I had tended up to that point to take peace activists to be more like Bob Scheer was then. You know, kind of academic lefties who were not very practical and so forth. But when I really began to get a look at people like that I saw that [the antiwar movement] was quite a different thing from what I had imagined. . . by getting out and getting into those campaigns. . . I began to get a look at the actual composition of the peace movement, and saw that it was a very, very broad spectrum of the public, even by 1966.

Tom Wicker, on reporting on the 1966 Congressional elections and antiwar movement
(quoted in Wells 1994, 86)

At this point I should make it clear that while I have tried in these last few minutes to give a voice to the voiceless in Vietnam and to understand the arguments of those who are called enemy, I am as deeply concerned about our own troops there as anything else. For it occurs to me that what we are submitting them to in Vietnam is not simply the brutalizing process that goes on in any war where armies face each other and seek to destroy. We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create a hell for the poor.

Dr. Martin Luther King, April 4, 1967 at Riverside Church, New York

Elite and idealistic, radical and naïve antiwarriors with the most privileged youth leading the charge, opposed by hard-working Americans: when asked about the movement to end the war in Vietnam, this is the image most commonly evoked. But a close examination of the extent to which working class people opposed the war in Vietnam, acted on that opposition, or joined the movement to end the war reveals a significantly more complex class dynamic, which at points is starkly different from the received wisdom concerning the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and action. In fact, if you ask a different set of questions, a nearly opposing set of answers emerges. Who opposed the war? Who took part in actions either directly or indirectly against the war? Who caused the greatest disruption to America’s capacity to fight in Vietnam? In answers to these questions, working-class people are at the forefront.

In this chapter I will detail a “counter memory,” one that differs from and challenges the dominant discourse regarding opposition to the Vietnam War in the United States (Foucault 1977; Olick and Robbins 1998). Sociology often details the

complexity in what appears simple on the surface, and this counter-memory does just that: rather than overthrowing the controlling narrative, I hope to expand, question, reorder, and re-prioritize its main patterns and threads.

What we will find is that sentiment against the war in Vietnam had its strongest and most sustained roots among working class and poor people in the United States. The movement's leadership in its early years, from 1965-1968, was solidly middle class, with peace activists, old leftists, intellectuals and students serving as the principal streams of the movement in its early years. The initial "action frames," mobilizing vehicles, and perceived political opportunities of the movement reflected the middle-class culture and milieu of its early leadership. But even in the early years, participation in movement events was more diverse than is commonly recognized. And from 1968 onwards the movement increasingly reflected the sentiment of the country, with more participation from "ordinary Americans" – working-class individuals, groups, and organizations. Some of this action is not typically "seen" by social movement theorists, as it took the form of negative rather than positive resistance, as in the case of draft "dodging" and desertions. Yet "typical" movement events still reached into working class communities, and over time the make-up of movement organizations and protests on-campus and off-campus became more heterogeneous with regard to class. Labor, veterans, and GI's became increasingly active, and it could be argued that the rebellion of the latter group affected the course of the war more than the entire civilian movement combined.⁴⁴ In addition, the movement itself was increasingly, though unevenly, aware of its own class-based limitations. A number of efforts were made over the near-decade of its existence to change the early movement's middle-class nature. As one activist put it, "We need to talk to people who work for a living because this is where it's at."

⁴⁴ GI's were affected by the social movement at home, of course, so the powerful results of their rebellion should be seen in relation to the power of the domestic struggles against the war. See discussion in Chapter Four.

Middle class [people] won't end the war."⁴⁵ Some of these efforts date to the beginning of the movement itself, but they were more common in later years, when much of the new left was "discovering" the working class.

Below, in the next two chapters, I marshal empirical evidence for a counter memory of a more economically diverse antiwar movement than the dominant memory we are more familiar with allows. I will repeatedly point ahead to future chapters, where I will take up more analytic questions about what allowed for and prohibited greater working class participation in the movement as a whole. In those chapters, I go back to ask, why was the movement as middle class as it was? For, these next two chapters show, working class people were opposed to the war, and numerous sites existed where their participation was significant if not essential.

US Involvement in Vietnam and the Early Peace Movement

Before turning to the domestic response to US involvement in Vietnam, a brief synopsis of the early days of the US presence in Indochina, and the early peace forces already mustered, is in order. Active United States involvement in Indochina began during the French colonial war in 1950, when the US committed itself to military and economic support for France in their effort to maintain their colonial rule. It intensified with the Geneva cease-fire accords in 1954 signaling the end of France's colonial rule, at which point the country was partitioned along the 17th parallel. The Communist Viet Minh government of Ho Chi Minh was granted the "North," and the French-supported Emperor Bao Dai, and his chief of state, Ngo Dinh Diem, were given the "South," with the assurance that national elections were to be held in two years as a step towards unification. However, by 1956, Diem, who was by then the President of South Vietnam, refused to hold elections, which all signs indicated would have given victory to the Communists. The Communist-allied National Liberation Front (also known as the "Vietcong") was founded within South

⁴⁵ See the NCCEWV Papers, minutes from Standing Committee meeting, January 1966 (SHSW).

Vietnam, and began its long guerilla war in the South against the Diem regime (Mydans & Mydans 1968; Young 1991).

With the French defeat, the US had taken over the role of military training in the South, helping the government build its army and then fight the insurgents. A “slow, but inexorable” increase in involvement ensued (Mydans & Mydans 1968, 407). Over the course of the decade leading to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution of August 1964, which gave Johnson the Congressional authority for the war, the United States pursued containment through increasingly active support for the non-Communist regimes of the South. China’s influence was the primary perceived threat, as was the fear of a “domino” effect of Communist victories.

Charles DeBenedetti (1990) locates the beginnings of the Vietnam antiwar movement in 1955, following the Geneva accords, with critical peace advocates seeking mutual disarmament and an end to the Cold War. Zaroulis and Sullivan (1984) mark the “teach-in”s of March, 1965 as the watershed event; Tom Wells (1994) attributes the flashpoint to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) rally in Washington DC, one month later. Certainly, Vietnam was only just appearing on the radar screen for a very small minority of Americans before the summer of 1964. Before the Johnson administration’s manufacture of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and Congress’s subsequent authorization for Johnson’s expanded military action, only a few were raising the alarm about the US involvement in the small southeast Asian country.⁴⁶

The first organized response to the war came from American peace movement groups and individuals. DeBenedetti identifies these activists as a loosely

⁴⁶ Chandler Davidson, a sociology graduate student in Princeton (and now a Professor emeritus at Rice University), wrote the SDS national office in July 1964, a month before the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, urging SDS to get involved in the growing problem of Vietnam. He sets forward exactly what he thinks might happen in the future—escalation and a possible “no-win” situation. Paul Booth, later to lead SDS’s Vietnam work as well as its retreat from such work, writes back, “I agree with you almost completely. I, however, don’t believe that we will affect our policy makers on the Vietnam issue” (Booth Papers, Box 33, series 2C projects, related groups, and Peace Education Project, SHSW).

coordinated coalition of “liberal internationalists” and “radical pacifists” (1990, 13). The former were identified with figures like IF Stone, Norman Thomas and Norman Cousins, familiar magazines like *The New Republic*, *Saturday Review*, and *The Nation*, and organizations such as SANE, United World Federalists, the Federation of American Scientists, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. The latter drew their numbers from Quaker-oriented groups like the Nobel-Prize winning American Friends Service Committee, conscientious-objector organizations like the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Catholic Worker Movement, and the anarchist War Resisters League. Abraham, known as “A.J.” Muste was the initial de-facto leader of this wing till his death in 1968, with David Dellinger (who founded the journal *Liberation* in 1955) providing continuous guidance throughout the Vietnam years.

During the 1950’s and early 1960’s, issues such as the arms race, disarmament, and the threat of nuclear war animated these peace groups. The peace movement rallied support for test-ban treaties, and criticized civil defense programs. Agreeing on these large issues, liberals and radicals tended to diverge at the central political fault-line of the era, Communism. Cold-war anti-communism was central to the liberals’ platform and politics, and their critiques of US military and nuclear policies were leveled despite their general enthusiasm for “containment” strategies. Liberals also accepted the loyalty-oath ethos of the time, often openly refusing to work with Communist individuals or communist-tainted groups. For radicals, this policy of Communist exclusion, and the allegiance to US government positions that such a policy directly or indirectly entailed was increasingly unacceptable.

These divisions heightened at the decade’s close. When SANE responded to government pressure in 1960 by taking an explicitly anti-Communist stance with regard to its own membership, a number of prominent members resigned in protest. AJ Muste wrote that SANE’s actions indicated that it was unable to undertake

“radical criticism of the US political economic regime” that would be necessary for a clear position against militarism: “They do not fully and clearly accept the thesis that ‘war is the enemy’ and must be resisted in all its forms in every land.” (DeBenedetti 1990, 48)

This split—between moderate and radical critiques of US foreign policy—would shape the organized domestic movement’s response to Vietnam. But at the time, their points of agreement around the irrationalism of nuclear build-up and testing overwhelmed their differences. Measured by the preceding, more dormant years, the early 1960’s saw impressive growth in the US peace movement. The Student Peace Union attracted thousands of members on campuses by 1960. Turn Towards Peace, a coalition effort launched in 1961, which Michael Harrington called a “politically responsible movement for peace,” united figures like Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers, Martin Luther King, and Eleanor Roosevelt, thereby bringing together various elements of the liberal coalition into one peace tent. Women Strike for Peace was founded in 1961, along with Physicians for Social Responsibility. In 1962 Dr Benjamin Spock joined SANE, and the famous advertisement “Dr. Spock is worried” ran in national newspapers and magazines. Four thousand students demonstrated in 1962 in Washington DC against nuclear proliferation (DeBenedetti 1990, 54, 57).

Despite this growth and activity, these peace groups were small, and relatively isolated as military escalation in Vietnam began under the Kennedy administration, when the number of US military advisors serving Diem’s government in South Vietnam increased from a few hundred to over sixteen thousand, with their mission considerably expanded. The US was now committed to “nation-building” in the South, fortifying “strategic hamlets” against the National Liberation Front—insurgents in support of the “democratic” Diem regime, in what *The New York Times*

called in 1962 “a struggle this country cannot shirk” (Karnow 1981, 255). The Johnson administration continued Kennedy’s policies after his assassination.

High-level critics, such as Walter Lippman, Hans Morgenthau, and Senators William Fullbright and Ernest Gruening, began to publicly voice their reservations about the war. Women Strike for Peace, the American Friends Services Committees, and the Fellowship for Reconciliation began giving the situation organizational attention, hiring staff to work on the issue or conducting office visits on the hill. I.F. Stone dedicated multiple issues of his *Weekly* to the problem of Vietnam (Stone 1968). Some radical pacifists began anti-conscription campaigns. Parts of the old left joined the response. Student activists spearheaded demonstrations on May 2 1964 at Yale and other schools, creating one of the first student antiwar groups known as the May 2nd Movement (M2M), dominated by the left group Progressive Labor. The Socialist Workers Party also began to focus on the war, which over the course of the decade became its primary area of work. The new left became active: SDS sponsored protests against Diem’s wife, Madame Nhu’s visit to the United States. In March of 1964, five thousand people marched in New York to protest the war, calling for a negotiated settlement and attention to domestic reform. Later, that summer, a rally sponsored by the WILPF and Fellowship of Reconciliation was held across the street from the White House at which James Baldwin was the invited speaker. It was considered a great success at 300-400 people (Heath 1976; Halstead 1978; SDS Papers (SHSW); *NYT* 1964).

None of these efforts showed any sign of breaking through the consciousness of the general public, let alone instigating its involvement. (Neither did their dissent register among the powers that be, nor provoke their response, though Johnson was concerned about the defections of liberals who supported his domestic agenda. See Wells 1994.) Most Americans were not following the war, and Johnson’s actions with the Gulf of Tonkin events of August 1964 had received overwhelming support.

It was not until President Johnson began the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, dubbed “Operation Rolling Thunder,” in February 1965 that the issue of the war began to catch fire on the campuses, and to a lesser extent, off. The teach-in’s of March and April were the movement’s opening salvo, and its first innovation. At over one hundred campuses, beginning with University of Michigan, thousands of students and hundreds of faculty, grappling over the causes and implications of the bombing, vigorously discussed and debated the history of US involvement in southeast Asia, the cold war, the draft, and other relevant topics. The teach-ins indicated a concern and thirst for knowledge on the part of students and faculties about the war, and their tenor and analysis indicated that an antiwar critique was developing on the campuses.

Almost by luck, SDS had called a national rally against the war in Washington DC at its December 1964 meeting in New York City, when the motion made by a “liberal” SDS-er to have a national march “squeaked by,” against the opposition of the community-oriented ERAP-ers who dominated SDS at the time (Wells 1994, 15; Halstead 1978).⁴⁷ Until the bombing and the teach-in’s, no one in their right (or in this case, left) political mind expected many more than the 5,000 marchers who had come to previous Easter’s peace rallies to show up on April 17, 1965. Yet twenty-five thousand came: Mostly students, but also including many members of peace and left groups that had given—in places enthusiastic, and in other instances reluctant—un-

⁴⁷ ERAP was SDS’s Economic Rights Action Project, their effort to reproduce SNCC style organizing in the Northern inner cities. Many early SDS leaders were first direct participants in or inspired by SNCC in the early sixties, such as Tom and Casey Hayden, Rennie Davis, Sharon Jeffries and others. SNCC’s historian Clayborn Carson argues that the southern movement provided a “model of activism” that was critical for the northern movement’s development: “Without the nonviolent tactics and organizing techniques developed by SNCC in the South, white student activism would probably not have expanded as quickly as it did” (1982; 53). The hallmarks of this model were its participatory democracy, deep community organizing, and audacious militancy. White student activists found that it was not easy to translate these forms to the fight against the war, and some of the important arguments that took place within SDS about the extent to which the war should become their main focus played out against their desire to build a SNCC-like “beloved community” in the movement in the North (see Miller 1987, Sale 1973).

official co-sponsorship for the event.⁴⁸ This was an unprecedented size for a peace rally in the United States. Groups who had been working on Vietnam and related issues for years were surprised and excited—some even flabbergasted—by the turnout (cf. Sale 1973). And this was a sign of things to come. In nearly every year of the movement from that point forward, rallies broke records for their sheer size. Soon afterwards, AJ Muste would write, “I am not at the moment sanguine that *the* “movement” is about to come into existence. . . . But I am convinced that movement revolt cannot be suppressed” (Muste 1966).

Who opposed the war? The Polls

When one combines the nationwide polling data from the large agencies, such as Harris and Gallup, with the university polls and community studies conducted during the period, a clear trend emerges. Howard Zinn calls it “the most surprising data”: *Throughout* the Vietnam War, Americans “with only a grade-school education were much stronger for withdrawal than Americans with a college education” (Zinn 2003, 241). In fact, the more education one accrued, the more likely one was to support the war, and vice versa.

I will go through the numbers in depth.⁴⁹

From August 1965 to May 1971, Gallup consistently asked, “In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the US made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?” This question is usually used as measuring basic support for the war. Its first poll showed the greatest support for the war, with 61% responding “no.” This number steadily declined to around half of all respondents by November 1966, where it then plateaued through the first half of

⁴⁸ SDS had not sought coalitional endorsement for the march, but did invite the other groups to attend. Liberal peace groups like SANE objected to SDS’s official policy of non-exclusion of communists and socialists—SDS had recently become independent of its initial organizational sponsor, the League for Industrial Democracy, over exactly this issue.

⁴⁹ The information from Gallup polls is drawn from numerous articles cited in the text above, but cf. Converse and Schuman (1970); Lurch and Sperlich (1979); and contemporaneous *New York Times* reporting

1967. That period in 1967 was during the war's most intense escalation, as well as the rapid growth of public antiwar sentiment, culminating in October 1967 with the "March on the Pentagon." By October, the "no" respondents had dropped to 44%, and with some slight fluctuations continued to shrink for the remaining years of the survey, dropping ten percent in 1968, and nearly an additional ten by the last time the question was asked.

Simultaneous to this steady erosion of basic support, conflicting trends emerged regarding the support for the actual policies being pursued by the administrations pursuing the war.⁵⁰ According to Gallup polls, during 1966 and especially in 1967, increasing numbers of the polled believed that the war effort should be escalated. In May, 1967, support for immediate withdrawal of the troops reached its nadir at 6%, with support for "escalation" reaching its all-time high of 80%. Measured against the mistake questions, it is therefore important to note that many who believed the war was a mistake believed it should be fought *harder*. But opinions about policy changed slowly over the following year, and more rapidly following the election of President Nixon in late 1968. By the end of 1968 a majority of Americans wanted out, and by September 1970 a majority of Americans wanted *immediate* withdrawal, regardless of the outcome.

Disaggregating the data, Lunch and Sperlich (1979) found that "war supporters tended to be concentrated among the younger, white, male and middle-class respondents. And this is one of those instances in which reversing the categories does provide virtually the maximum change in opinion. A typical war opponent was older, black, female, and of lower-class background" (34). Another

⁵⁰ It's important to point this out, because Johnson's disapproval rating might be misconstrued as opposition to the war at all times, a mistake some historians fall into, such as Levy (1994: 57), who uses disapproval of Johnson's policies to rebut George Meany's claims that peaceniks were "communist dupes" and represented only a fraction of labor. To make this point, Levy refers to a figure that shows national, manual workers, and youth discontent with Johnson's handling of the war in near lock-step from 1965 to 1968. While Meany's paranoid red-baiting was misleading and contrary to the facts, public disapproval of Johnson did not prove that this is so: Many disapproved of Johnson for doing too little, rather than too much. See also "Poll Finds Labor Split on Vietnam," *NYT*, 1/3/1968.

“surprising feature” of the polling data, discovered by Converse and Schuman (1970), was that “national surveys did not yield [until the May 1970 college explosions] any distinct relations between age and attitude toward Vietnam. The ‘generations gap’ that one would have expected, wherein the young oppose the war and the old support it, simply failed to appear,” and, as of June 1970, “even now it is not very large.” They concluded, “(among whites) college-educated people in their twenties were more likely than older people of grade school education both to justify the war and to favor an intensification of it. The differences are substantial, running to 20 percent or more” (22).

In 1967 a referendum in Detroit white suburb Dearborn Michigan found 41% supporting withdrawal, “with blue collar workers more disapproving of the war than professionals and managers” (Wells, 1994, 112). By January 1968—before the Tet offensive, which soured millions more to the war—the *New York Times* reported that “the solid support given President Johnson and his Vietnam policies demonstrated by the heads of organized labor [at its convention the week before] is not in line with the views of rank-and-file union members” (1/3/1968), who, like the country as a whole, were evenly split on the “mistake” question about Vietnam. In February, after Tet, pollster George Gallup reported that the public at large was feeling confused, disillusioned, and cynical and “wants desperately to find a way to respond to international problems without going to war” (NYT 2/10/1968). By August, Gallup found that 52% of Americans found the war to be “the most important problem facing this country today” (NYT 8/4/68).

In an article for the *American Sociological Review* in 1968, Richard Hamilton reported that “preferences for ‘tough’ policy alternatives are most frequent among the following groups: the highly educated; high status occupations; those with high incomes; younger persons; and those paying much attention to newspapers and magazines” (439). Similarly, Harlan Hahn (1970b), writing in the *American Political*

Science Review of community antiwar referenda (including the Dearborn, MI, mentioned above), observed that “disapproval of the war appeared to be related to working class rather than high status characteristics. In most communities as the proportion of voters possessing lower status attributes grew, the vote against the war continued to mount” (1190; the exception was Cambridge, Massachusetts). In May 1970, following the infamous hard-hat riots in New York City, 53% of unionists disapproved of the hard-hat actions, with 30% approving (Levy 1994, 61). In December 1970, a Detroit referendum calling for immediate withdrawal passed with its greatest support from Blacks and labor unionists (Hahn 1970a, 204). A student survey in 1972 showed virtually no difference along class lines among students holding pacifist views (Handberg 1973).

James Wright directly addressed the problem of working class support for the war in his article, “The Working Class, Vietnam, and Authoritarianism.” He found “no support for the theory of authoritarianism” in the survey data (1972, 148). Using the University of Michigan’s Survey Research Center data from 1964 and 1968, he correlated various background demographic data with policy preferences. Race correlated most significantly with policy preference, with non-whites half as likely to prefer escalation in both 1964 and 1968, and nearly twice as likely to call for withdrawal in 1964. But class significantly correlated as well, with workers, the less-educated, and those with smaller incomes more likely than those at the higher end in the early year to support withdrawal.⁵¹

Converse and Schuman (1970) argue that over time, as the war progressed, public opinion became increasingly “crystallized,” as a result of cumulative “individual experience, information, and motivation.” At the beginning of the war, the greatest obstacle to firm opinions was the general lack of knowledge that people

⁵¹ Choosing to compare these two years, however, leaves out the “years of the hawk,” 1966 and 1967, when increasing numbers of Americans supported escalation, after Johnson’s steep escalation in 1965 and while the troop levels were high.

had. Lurch and Sperlich (1979) examine this and show how public opinion, in those early years, tended to follow what government leaders – in this case, President Johnson – had to say. For example, there were extreme changes of opinion in 1966 responding to bombing and then the end of bombing, which hinged on a speech of Johnson's: Before the speech the bombings were happening and people supported them, after the speech which explained the end of the bombings people supported the end of the bombings. But, Converse and Schuman point out, by 1970 “experience has mounted steeply in terms of deaths, taxes and soldiers not home for Christmas” (21). Opinions became harder, and the antiwar position was the clear majority.

A general picture emerges from all of these surveys and studies: Working class people were never more likely than their middle class counterparts to support the war, and in most instances they were more likely to oppose it. As far as war policy went, Johnson and Nixon found their most consistent support among more affluent and educated groups. Working class people formed opinions of the war that increasingly doubted their leaders, even when they were often willing to give them more chances. “Opposition” to the war meant different things to different people, and it took different forms in different contexts, as later parts of this project will take up. But the myth of the worker-hawk should clearly be laid to rest.

Taking part in the Movement: Vectors of Working Class participation

Sentiment and action are two very different things. People do not take social action based on their feelings without a number of other reasons and supports for doing so. An individual will take action when 1) social issues seem relevant, somehow wrong or unjust, and can be traced to some kind of source; 2) there's some kind of plan in place about what can be done about it that makes some kind of sense (as Rose says, “a sense of efficacy” is attained); and 3) a connection is made to other people who are engaging in the action – through a collective identity or group

solidarity (Piven and Cloward 1977; Rose 1997). In short, one considers: Am I angered or upset? Is there someone or something to blame? Can I do anything about it that works? Do the people doing anything about it gel with me?

Social movement activists, needless to say, are quite concerned that large numbers of people will answer in the affirmative to all of the above questions. Much of the theorizing that goes on within movements, therefore, concerns how to “frame” the issues so that people will both feel that the issue is immediately relevant (establishing a “grievance”) and that the target of his or her action is both know-able and reachable. Movement activists, ideally, theorize about the tactics and strategies that will best help them to achieve their goals. And they pay attention to the people they’re working with – their actual, ideal, potential and probable audiences and comrades.

During the antiwar movement, different movement organizations made different levels of progress convincing (either directly or indirectly) working-class Americans to answer “yes” to the questions. By and large, workers did see the issues as relevant and important, felt divided about who was to blame, and were similarly divided as to what, if anything, could be done about it.⁵²

There are two sets of questions that are critical for examining working class movement participation in the movement. The first stems from the last question concerning action: do the people look like me, do I feel connected to the activists? On these, the macro response from workers looking at the antiwar movement writ large was “no,” and in some instances, a violent or angry “no.” The extent of this rejection has been exaggerated, but it was also real.⁵³ However, in many particular

⁵² Arguably, middle-class and young people tended to have greater senses of “efficacy”; cf. Croteau 1995, Sennett and Cobb 1993, Jaspers 1997.

⁵³ This is taken up in Chapters Five and Six. In addition to the many cases sketched in Chapter Six, see Carter, Welch on the class composition of the New Left in *Beyond Labor and Capital* (1979).

cases, including large organizations and within the particular context of many mobilizing vehicles, the answer was “yes,” and it is those that I explore below.

The next question involves what gets counted as protest. Jaspers (1997) observes, “there is protest . . . even when it is not part of an organized movement. Most scholars have define this kind of action as outside their interests, preferring to examine full-fledged, coordinated movements. This choice renders invisible all the ways that individual acts of protest do or do not feed into more organized movements” (5). In a similar vein, Mayer (1990, 1991) points out that resource mobilization theorists construct a definition of what a social movement is that excludes many forms of movement. Rationality, formal organization, resources, and professional organizers characterize the ideal-typical social movements for the RM school, such as labor or civil rights. The success or failure of these social movements (which become synonymous with social movement *organizations*) is measured through their ability to affect policy changes that, (Mayer quoting Jenkins) “culminate in distributional goals.” Mayer argues these “tacit assumptions about the polity narrow the scope of movements, which can be perceived as just one type, making others invisible” (1990, 8).

Within the broad field of antiwar protest were numerous actions and types of organizations that do not, therefore, typically register as “social movement” activity, given the definitional terrain of many observers who later examine them. Charles DeBenedetti, for instance, whose *An American Ordeal* (1990) is rightly held to be *the* outstanding history of the antiwar movement, takes a classical definition for his own investigation, writing at the outset of the book that “This study assumes that the antiwar movement was a social movement, [using Tilly’s definition], ‘a sustained *interaction* in which mobilized people, acting in the name of a defined interest, make repeated broad demands on powerful others via means which go beyond the current prescriptions of the authorities” (1). “Sustained,” “mobilized,” “defined interest,”

“repeated” and “broad” point one’s attention to the visible organizations of self-identified activists with articulated grievances who engaged in protest over significant stretches of time – in fact, precisely the “movement” studied by DeBenedetti and the vast majority of other books written on the subject. Among the categories of movement action I consider that receive almost no attention from DeBenedetti are veterans’ participation and GI dissent; astonishingly, the Chicano moratorium movement gets no mention at all.

While it is undoubtedly true that many factors combined to make large-scale working class participation in the organized antiwar movement less likely, less visible or less easy, as far as non-students go, workers were not only as likely to protest, but in fact did protest, as much as other groups. And, similarly, as far as students go, economic class was itself not an independent determinant of social movement participation after 1965.

Marches and Rallies: The Mass Movement

The antiwar movement is known for its mass marches and rallies. Beginning in 1965, nearly every fall and spring of the war’s duration saw major marches in Washington, New York, or San Francisco (often on each coast simultaneously), and every year saw hundreds or thousands of smaller demonstrations at many places between. Figures for the major marches range from the breakthrough SDS-sponsored gather of 15,000-25,000 in April 1965 to the million-plus who came to Washington in April 1971, as hundreds of thousands gathered on the West Coast as well. “Local” events included the largest demonstrations US cities had ever seen, including multi-hundred thousand marches in New York and San Francisco, a hundred thousand in Boston, tens of thousands in Los Angeles, similar numbers at various points in Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago and Detroit—and these were not the college rallies. College rallies of thousands, smaller local vigils, rallies, marches and other gatherings took place in every state in the country. Nationwide, it is estimated

that over two million, and possibly as many as three million, participated in the October 15, 1969 Moratorium events. Overall, it's estimated that tens of millions of people in the United States at some point participated in the antiwar movement, making it, overall, among the largest social uprising the country had ever experienced (DeBenedetti 1990; Anderson 1995).

As sections of the movement radicalized, the mass march was increasingly contrasted to forms of non-violent (and eventually, violent) civil disobedience against the war. The tactic of the mass march was often defended by its supporters as the best form in which “regular,” working-class people might participate in the movement—they did not have to risk arrest or take a position that might make them stick out. Whether or not this was true—a question I will take up in a later chapter on the movement—it was clearly the case that thousands of workers took part in the marches, rallies, and other peaceful gatherings.⁵⁴ Beginning with SANE’s Washington DC march in 1965, union delegations attended every mass mobilization in the nation’s capital, growing each year until the April, 1971 march that brought “tens of thousands” of unionists to Washington DC, in addition to the thousands of veterans, working-class African Americans, Latinos, and more (DeBenedetti 1990; Foner 1989). But workers’ presence was probably felt more in the events outside of Washington DC. In New York City in 1967, when trying to estimate the crowd (the police’s conservative estimate was 100,000 to 125,000), the *NYT* noted the difficulty in doing so saying, “it was also almost impossible to distinguish the demonstrators from the passersby and spectators” (4/16/1967).

⁵⁴ Good arguments were made against the march-orientation of the national antiwar coalitions that were similarly based on class diversity grounds. College students are most likely and able to pick up and go to a demonstration in another city. Long bus rides, sleeping on the floor of a gym or camping out, scrounging for food and the like—these are not attractive options for people with families or inflexible jobs (Halstead 1978). Although Harrington made this observation for opposite reasons – not to increase class diversity in the movement but to discourage mass marches in lieu of electoral work – he was not completely off base when he referred to the Washington marches as “middle class picnics” (“Peace Movement Using the Wrong Strategy,” *NYT* May 30, 1971)

This mass movement did not, in any straightforward way, catalyze or coordinate the majority antiwar sentiment that existed for much of its duration. The much larger antiwar group did not participate in minority movement, but the mass movement did influence sectors beyond its initial base. It did so by in part creating a pole of attraction and polarizing the political discourse.⁵⁵ Throughout, the GI's in Vietnam and who were still stateside kept up with the movement, and over the course of the war were increasingly influenced by it. Those sectors of the labor movement that did organize against the war often did so at the prodding, direct or indirect, of movement activists, or did so with the understanding that the movement was on the right side, and their official labor leaders on the "wrong" side of the question. Vietnam Veterans Against the War, for another example, was mostly moribund before the Moratorium of 1969, discouraged by the failure of Eugene McCarthy's Democratic Party nomination quest and turned off by the more violent turn the country appeared to be taking. But the Moratorium offices contacted them in the days following the October events, with the news that veterans were coming to them from all over the country to see how they could get involved. Similarly, the shootings at Kent State in May, 1970, had a cathartic effect on many veterans, and a number of VVAW's future leaders joined the group that week, while the overall active membership of the organization grew to 2,000 – this while it was still a speaker's bureau, whose members went out to speak at schools and other venues (See Hunt 1999, 33, 42-43; Kovic 1976).

Actions by groups such as Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam also pointed up the degree to which the organized movement had reached ordinary people. In 1971 CALCAV started a "set the date" campaign for withdrawal of troops, to try to hold the Nixon administration accountable to its promises. "One of

⁵⁵ Polarization can be defined as "widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors towards one, the other, or both extremes" (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2004; 322).

the program's more unusual actions" was Minnesota's CALCAV's peace walk through 53 towns, 440 miles, in 30 days. Local newspapers gave the march advance press, and most editorials were supportive of their action. The marchers "faced only minimal opposition during the journey," and "for the most part" they found "receptive audiences who walked with them, offered them food along the road, and seemed surprised that so many were not students. What they also found was a great deal of discouragement and frustration growing out of the deception of politicians and their own [personal] inability to end the war." According to the special report issued by the Minnesota group, "The arrival of visible support from CALCAV brought together people who discovered, often for the first time, that there were others in their own town who felt as they did" (Hall 1990, 113-114).

The presence of a mass, visible antiwar movement helped create the cultural space in which millions of people came to criticize the war, and its relative porousness and sheer size enabled a smaller but substantial number, to take action on their concerns as well. This was not an elite phenomenon, it was a mass phenomenon.

Student activism

During the 1960's, the college population in the United States more than doubled, from less than four to more than eight million students, with most of that growth taking place in the public universities, colleges, and particularly public two-year colleges.⁵⁶ Tuition rates for public schools averaged between approximately \$250 to \$350 a year during the 1960's and early 1970's (with universities topping out at over \$400, and two year schools at under \$200), while at private schools the range was substantially higher—between \$1000 and \$1800 over the course of the decade, with

⁵⁶ See National Center for Education Statistics Table 175: Total Freshman Fall Enrollment, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d95/dtab175.asp> and Table 3 Enrollment in educational institutions, by level and control of institution: Selected years, 1869-70 through fall 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_003.asp

a similar divide between universities and two year schools. Average dorm and weekly board rates were very similar at all of the schools, with private schools being only moderately more expensive – around \$100 more, each, per year. Total college costs came to the following:

Table 3: Public and Private Universities Total Costs, 1964-1972 (in 2005 dollars)⁵⁷

Public institutions	Total tuition, room, and board
1964-65	950
1965-66	983
1966-67	1,026
1967-68	1,064
1968-69	1,117
1969-70	1,203
1970-71	1,287
1971-1972	1,358
Private institutions	Total tuition, room, and board
1964-65	1,907
1965-66	2,005
1966-67	2,124
1967-68	2,205
1968-69	2,321
1969-70	2,530
1970-71	2,738
1971-72	2,917

The class composition of the campuses had changed dramatically since World War II. Colleges went from being elite to being mass institutions. The GI bill was the first, and most sweeping, of funding opportunities offered by the government which grew to include grants, loans, incentives and tax breaks; the community college system was considerably expanded in the postwar era, providing low-cost open admissions coupled with articulation agreements with four year schools; and school missions were crafted that aimed for equal access to higher education for all who desired it (Bastedo and Gumpert 2003). During the period of 1960 to 1976, the entrance of working class students into college increased. According to Karen (1991), “because of increases in rates of high school graduation and because top socioeconomic groups reached a ceiling in their rates of college entrance, it appears that class differentials in access to higher education . . . diminished” (214). Yet the system remained highly stratified, with access to elite schools limited in terms of

⁵⁷ See National Center for Education Statistics, Table 312. Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting institutions, by type and control of institution: 1964-65 through 2004-05

class; in fact, it became more stratified as access opened up. For example, at “at private universities, students from families with incomes less than half the median were 8 percent of all students in 1966 and 7 percent in 1975,” while “At the other end of the higher educational spectrum, at public two-year colleges, the students from poorer families increased their representation from 17 to 20 percent in this period” (220). So as the overall number of poor and working class students increased – some estimate that around a third of all college students were from working class backgrounds in the period – the distribution of these students across the college system remained uneven.

The first organized actions in response to the war that gained national attention were the spring 1965 “teach-ins,” which began with an all-night, 3,000-student event at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Michigan’s example inspired other schools across the country to hold similar events, including Columbia, Harvard, and most famously Berkeley—all moderately to highly “selective” campuses associated with the campus-based ferment of the decade. But Ann Arbor had more local effects as well, and both Michigan State and Flint Junior College hosted teach-ins in the weeks that followed. Other land-grant institutions that held teach-ins included Illinois, Rutgers, and Oregon. In fact, a look at the early days of antiwar protest indicates that it was precisely the issue of the war that brought the burgeoning student movement to lower-ranked, and relatively more working-class, campuses.⁵⁸

Later that spring, on April 17th, Students for a Democratic Society sponsored a march on Washington to end the war, which drew crowds estimated at 25,000. This march is widely credited with making the growing antiwar sentiment visible on

⁵⁸ The college rankings I use here are based on Cass and Birnbaum’s *Comparative Guide to American Colleges*, which is what was used by David Karen (1991) in his research on working class enrollment in schools where he compared selective colleges with non-selective colleges. Lines of demarcation within the stratified college system “remain fairly constant” (Karen, 212), due to the combination of funding source, historical status, and mission.

a mass scale for the first time. Until that march, the largest peace rally in the country had been a couple of thousand strong. After the SDS march, antiwar forces recognized there was a base to draw from, people who could be mobilized to act.

Throughout this period following its incredible April success, SDS was tentative about giving its official endorsement to many Vietnam-related actions, as it was ambivalent about its new position as the magnet for student antiwar activity. In June, at their meeting in Kewadin, Michigan, the organization decided not to focus on antiwar work. Yet the national office used its extensive contacts to build for the major antiwar events of 1965, such as the August Assembly of Unrepresented People in Washington DC, and the October “International Days of Protest.” Typical of much of its correspondence during the period, the SDS national office wrote to the Swarthmore chapter urging it to “publicize [the AUP] to local groups and encourage them to send small contingencies to attend. We really think this is an important idea in terms of beginning to set up lines of communication for building a mass, broad-based social movement. We hope that you will be able to send a few members from various constituencies from the Philadelphia area.”⁵⁹ In this way, SDS probably helped to bring hundreds of the two thousand people to the Assembly of Unrepresented People (and many more to the 5,000 person march on August 9), where the first national antiwar coalition, the National Coordinating Committee to

⁵⁹ This is from a letter to Harsh Pittie, Swarthmore College, July 18, 1965, from Dena Clamage (Vietnam papers, Folder 14, Box 8 National Office 62-65, SDS papers, SHSW). However, a week later, mailed on July 28, an SDS worklist “carried a statement dissociated SDS from the Washington assembly and discouraging attendance at it” (Halstead 1978, 68). This statement “came too late to halt the work of the city committees [to end the war in Vietnam] and many SDSers simply ignored it, so there was a respectable enough turnout of five thousand on August 9; but the N[ational] O[ffice]’s gratuitous attempt to stifle the just-born antiwar movement rankled many activists, and feeling ran high against its ‘irresponsibility’ and ‘divisiveness.’ Stanley Aronowitz, for one, was livid: ‘He never forgave SDS for that,’ Paul Booth said” (Sale 1973, 220). Every SDS letter from this period in its archives “stresses” the importance of the AUP Conference without endorsing it. This is probably due to the fact that there was some division in the office: Dena Clamage and Mel McDonald supported the idea of SDS working on Vietnam, while the official organization and many of its main leaders – Gitlin, Booth, Webb, Hayden – did not. Paul Booth and Lee Webb wrote an article titled “The Antiwar War Movement: From Protest to Radical Politics,” which argued, among other things, that “the issue of the war in Vietnam cannot involve masses of people here in the United States” (Halstead, 97). Gitlin later called this a “failure of leadership” on their part (Sale, 214), while Booth looked back on his article with Webb and said “It’s an embarrassment to me” (Wells 1994, 47). Booth and others later saw SDS’s failure to lead on Vietnam as their greatest mistake.

End the War in Vietnam, was founded. But SDS played little organizational role in that or future meetings of this group that, in one iteration or another, became the dominant antiwar organization of the period: the “Mobilization.”

Despite SDS’s official decision to remain “multi-issue” and not focus on antiwar organizing, it was opposition to the war among students that swelled its numbers and helped transform the nature of the organization. Before the April rally, SDS had just over 1000 dues paying members in over 40 chapters. Early SDS members were “young intelligentsia,” “bright,” “aggressive,” “elite,” who saw themselves, in Todd Gitlin’s words, as the “voice, conscience, and goad of its generation” (Anderson 1995, 61-65). These members were concentrated on the east coast in elite, liberal arts schools.⁶⁰ Judging from the copious SDS correspondence in the weeks following the April rally, schools with few of the cultural and economic resources of the early SDS strongholds were reaching out to SDS and forming chapters. These included SUNY Buffalo, Iowa University, Wayne State, Indiana University, Central Missouri State, and the University of Florida at Gainesville. They were joined by Adelphi, Arizona State, Brooklyn College, City College NY, Kansas, Long Island University, North Texas State, SUNY Plattsburgh, Queensboro Community College and San Diego State—schools with relatively economically diverse student bodies—as well as new comrades from more elite schools, such as Amherst, Bard, Columbia, Oberlin, Princeton and Stanford. By the end of the year, after playing a large role in the “First International Day of Protest” against the war in October, SDS’s eighty chapters had grown to 124. Of the fifty-nine college-based chapters that were either new or renewed in the months since the April rally, one-third were based at lower ranked “state” schools or community colleges, one-third at

⁶⁰ Just listing the first dozen college chapters alphabetically gives a good sense of the rest: Berkeley, Boston University, Brown/Pembroke, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, University of Chicago, Cornell, Duke, Grinnell, Harpur, Harvard/Radcliffe, Illinois. According to Kirkpatrick Sale, only “six of the chapters [were] west of the Mississippi, eight below the Mason-Dixon line” (Sale 1973, 161, footnote).

more competitive and expensive public university systems, and one-third at private colleges with varying degrees of prestige (ranging from NYU to Yale) (see National Office 62-65, B8F14, SDS Papers, SHSW; Sale 1973, 247; Cass and Birnbaum 1975).

Though it is rarely described in this way, the first break within the SDS leadership that arose as a result of this changing base can be understood through the lens of class. The new students came to be known as the “prairie power” generation of SDSers, who were to dominate the organization in the coming years as SDS, and much of the movement, turned “from protest to resistance.” They were quite different from the “old guard” members of SDS, who were generally from the East Coast, attended liberal arts and elite private schools, came from solidly middle class and liberal families, and were disproportionately Jewish (Heineman 1994, Sale 1973). The first generation of SDS leadership, which remains the generation that wrote the books and taught the classes, fits the privileged, academically-proficient profile: Todd Gitlin, Paul Booth, Paul Potter, Lee Webb, and Richard Flacks are prominent figures from that time, all of whom were either in the media spotlight or writing influential pieces about the movement. Tom Hayden, principal author of the New Left’s *ur* document, *The Port Huron Statement* of 1962, was a partial exception, having grown up middle-class in a predominantly working-class milieu (Miller 1987). The new group came from the Midwest and West, as likely attended state schools as private universities, and more often hailed from Catholic and Protestant families who were less likely to be supportive of their current political work. Additionally, they often came from working and lower-middle class backgrounds, including most of the new national leaders, like Carl Davidson, Greg Calvert, Jeff Shero, and Carl Oglesby. Jeff Shero, who came from a military family, and was elected as Vice President at the first convention after the April march, argued

We were by instinct much more radical, much more willing to take risks, in a way because to become a part of something like SDS meant a tremendous number of breaks. If you were a New York student and became a member of

SDS, it was essentially joining a political organization, which was a common experience. In Texas, to join SDS meant breaking with your family, it meant being cut off . . . and the break was so much more total. . . you had to be much more highly committed, and you were in a sense freed, 'cause you'd get written off." (Heineman 1994, 82)

SDS historian Kirkpatrick Sale describes this new generation as more "alienated" than the first SDS leaders; student movement scholar Ken Heineman stresses its more working class roots. Their emergence clearly indicated that the heartland was affected by the war, and that movement culture and concerns were being experienced outside of the original corridors of the student movement—the civil-rights struggle in the south and the culturally liberal and more elite northeast (cf. Breines 1989).

Some of the strife in SDS leadership around "intellectualism" and "speechifying" in the 1965 summer national committee meeting at Kewadin was undoubtedly a reaction to this change. Heineman makes the observation, "In New Left circles, these [working and lower-middle class] activists often found themselves condescended to and ridiculed because they were unfamiliar with the jargon employed, and authorities cited, by middle and upper middle class students" (1994, 81). Sale documents many of these kinds of fights in 1965-1966, before the "old guard" is finally routed (1973, 223-297).

Undoubtedly, the combined influence of the teach-ins at leading universities, the over-achieving first generation of SDS, and the Port Huron Statement helped to create an image of student protesters as an elite group. Richard Flacks' essay, "The Liberated Generation: Roots of Student Protest, A Revolt of the Advantaged" argued explicitly that "the current group of student activists is predominantly upper middle class, and frequently these students are of elite origins" (1967, 52). This article has been cited in hundreds of books and articles, and it is cited close to six times more than a later article co-written by Flacks that observes a different social base for

the student movement.⁶¹ “The Liberated Generation” was a highly impressionistic account that captured the flavor of early SDS – Flacks himself joined in 1963 – and its argument fits the stereotype of the “elite New Left” that has been subsequently promulgated. The problem was that by 1965 it was no longer true.

Flacks’ later article, “The Changing Social Base of the Student Movement” (1971), written with Milton Mankoff, corrects the arguments made by Flacks in the initial article, showing that the student base was actually much more diverse than he originally described, even at the time that he wrote his first essay. Mankoff and Flacks describe this as a change that takes place over time in the movement itself—that as the movement changed, different students were involved. Careful histories note this change, though many imply that 1968 was the turning point (cf. Anderson 1995). But 1965-1966, the first full academic year of the antiwar movement, is when the base of the antiwar movement on the campuses began to change.

Contrary to the stereotype of elite student protesters, little empirical research backs it up for the period of the antiwar movement, 1965-1973.⁶² In *Campus Wars* (1994), Ken Heineman profiles the antiwar movement at four non-elite schools, Kent, Penn and Michigan States, as well as SUNY Buffalo. Based on his own survey data, he concludes that “activists from the less prestigious universities drew upon a diverse membership of red diaper babies, upper middle class secularized Protestants, and working and lower middle class Catholics and Protestants” (125). Multiple studies of college students from the period indicate that, at least by 1966, the socioeconomic background of student protesters was not different from the student bodies as a whole when the quality of the school is controlled for. In other words, it was more likely that elite schools were engaged in protest as a whole, but no particular economic group of students was more likely to engage in protest. As one

⁶¹ Citations based on Google Scholar and JSTOR citation searches, March 27, 2007.

⁶² I take up the stereotype of the elite protester in my final chapter.

such study concluded, “since about the middle 1960’s, socioeconomic family status does not predict student leftist political action” (Tygert & Holt 1971, 127).⁶³

By the end of the decade, even the singularity of elite, or level 1, schools, had nearly disappeared. College culture as a whole had changed. The great student strike of 1970, of which 50% of US colleges took some part, was a sign that the movement had spread to every corner of the country’s higher education system.⁶⁴ A more recent (Sherkat & Blocker 1994) study of “the political development of sixties’ activists” that looked at a longitudinal data of a cohort of high school students and their parents in 1965 and then 1972 found that having gone to college was the critical factor in whether or not a young person became an activist, but not the class background of the student: “The effect of income falls to non-significance once college attendance is controlled” (827).⁶⁵ So while it is true that the first student activists to get the ball really rolling in an antiwar direction were generally from elite backgrounds, that changed immediately as the momentum of the movement grew. As the decade progressed, antiwar students’ class diversity increased.

Race and Class: Antiwar Action in the Anti-racist Rights Movements

⁶³ See also Kahn & Bowers (1969); Flacks and Molotch (1971); Converse and Schuman (1970). I look at the issue of colleges as mobilizing vehicles in more depth in Chapter Six.

⁶⁴ Interestingly, at this point, the SDS leadership was once again an elite group, who in 1969 largely became the Weatherman faction. Students from very privileged backgrounds dominated this small group, only a few hundred strong. But the infamy of Weatherman and Weather Underground helped to sustain the image of elite student protesters. In fact, Weatherman was an exceptional grouping, distinct from the diverse student movement as a whole.

⁶⁵ This article is interesting for the way in which it begins with the following stereotypes, which it never directly refutes, even though its findings do not support them: “In the late 1960’s, the class participation of the student movement was abundantly clear: Participation was concentrated in the upper-middle classes. Movement activists have been shown to come predominantly from upper-middle class backgrounds and to have higher levels of education than non-participants” and “while the privileged students protested the war, the working classes fought the war abroad and the protesters at home.” They actually set out to explore how “social class might structure participatory behavior through its influence on values, orientations, and social psychological dispositions.” (825). In other words, because they initially accept the myth of significant class differentiation in social movement participation, they set out to explain why such a class differentiation would exist, along the lines of, what makes these upper middle class kids so special? They even go so far as to initially reject the idea that colleges themselves acted as mobilizing vehicles, instead hypothesizing that the more social psychological and network aspects of class acted indirectly through the colleges. They are therefore surprised by the results of their study, but they do not go back and question the premise of their question. In short, their work simply refutes what they should have seen, from the beginning, as a strawman.

There has been limited attention to “inter-movement” relations in the sociological movement literature (Isaac & Christenson 2002). For political process/resource mobilization theorists, this is largely a result of their focus on the mezzo levels of protest—the resources, frames, “political opportunities,” etc., or particular episodes of contention. For those who look at a larger social context, a lot of attention has been paid to overall cycles of protest (how particular movements change over time in relation to the world in which they grow and develop), or to the forces of long-term change that give rise to particular modes of social struggle.⁶⁶ But the “long sixties” offers up a different kind of analytical challenge for researchers as an epoch of social change. Terry Anderson writes “one could argue that the most significant aspect of the sixties was social activism” (Preface, 1995). It was the era of “the movement”—“almost a mystical term, [implying] an experience, a sense of community and common purpose” (Anderson, quoting Sara Evans). *Demystifying the “movement”—disarticulating its common causes and separate threads—has largely been the work of historians rather than sociologists.*⁶⁷

The civil rights movement was the prime engine of all other sixties movements: it was where the issues of the decade(s) were first defined, where the first disruptive actions began to shake—and more importantly, *change*—society, where activists were born and cut their teeth. It served as an inspiration to a generation: this movement won real gains, transformed the lives of thousands, created new conditions on local and national scales. Without its experience and example it is difficult to imagine the other movements growing (even starting) as they did.

⁶⁶ The works of Charles Tilly and Alain Touraine are particularly relevant examples.

⁶⁷ It’s notable that *The Sixties* (1987), written by sociologist Todd Gitlin, is largely a memoir. His theoretical contribution to understanding “the movement” is “zeitgeist”—that it reflected the “spirit of the age.”

How did the inter-movement relationships between the civil rights, and later Black power and other identity-based movements, and the antiwar movement, affect the class character of the latter? Overall, in contradictory ways. Here, I take up a one-sided line of analysis that traces the extent to which working class people of color came to oppose the war and actively fight against it – responses that were largely a result of interactions with the civil rights and social justice movements, less than the antiwar movement *per se*.⁶⁸ US society’s racially distinct understanding of a (white) working class has precluded recognition of this important wing of working-class opposition, while our limited understanding of the antiwar movement has elided the powerful contribution made by the various domestic rights fights to the antiwar cause. Taken together, while the organized antiwar movement remained largely white, the non-white working class and the organizations that offered leadership in that milieu were overwhelmingly opposed to the war.⁶⁹ With the notable exception of Chicano organizing, the war did not become a primary focus for anti-racist struggles. But the hegemony of antiwar sentiment within movement communities of color contributed to active and passive opposition to the war.

Civil Rights and Black Power, at home and abroad

African American opposition to the war was at all points of the war ahead of that of other groups, and Vietnam continually ranked at or near the top of Black concerns for the duration of the war. Blacks were more in favor of withdrawal, and considerably – by ratios of two and three to one – more opposed to opposition. Like other groups, African Americans opposed the war because they did not want to see soldiers killed, because it deflected resources from problems at home, and because the overall rationales for the war did not seem convincing. In the early years of the

⁶⁸ Later, in Chapter Six, I explore how the inter-movement relationships helped to increase the middle class orientation of the antiwar movement.

⁶⁹ It was, in fact, the most “middle-class” groups within the civil rights coalition, such as the NAACP, that were the least likely to actively oppose the war. See Chapter Six for a discussion of the inter-movement relations that gave rise to a more middle class antiwar character.

war, African Americans suffered a disproportionate number of casualties as well, a fact widely publicized in African American communities. But the breadth of African American opposition to the war is most understandable in light of the movement activism in the Black communities that encompassed the issue of the war, and how Vietnam was directly related to African American life in the United States.

The civil rights movement made much of the hypocrisy of US society, and the example provided by Vietnam was an early rhetorical riposte for its leaders. Many in the civil rights movement made rhetorical use of the hypocrisy of this country's stated freedoms and standards of justice against its practices of *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination and segregation. The logic followed these lines: "You say this is a free country, but are we free to sit where we want to sit, to go to school where we want to go to school, to live where we want to live? You call this a democracy, but can we vote?"

War policy underscored these domestic contradictions. On March 7, 1965, when Governor George Wallace ordered state troopers to stop the Selma to Montgomery march, injuring eighty-six marchers, SNCC chairman John Lewis addressed marchers seeking sanctuary in a church: "I don't see how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam . . . to the Congo . . . to Africa and can't send troops to Selma Alabama." The next day, NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins (who supported the war), referring to the landing of 3,500 US marines in Vietnam, said at a press conference, "Dammit, they can send somebody to Alabama and defend the government right here" (Halstead 1978, 256-7).

A petition circulated by the McComb branch of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in July 1965 was the first—and highly controversial—civil rights statement that took the hypocrisy frame a step farther. This petition was written after a young civil rights worker was killed in Vietnam. Elucidating "five reasons why Negroes should not be in any war fighting for America," the petition called for draft

resistance, explaining that “no Mississippi Negroes should be fighting in Vietnam for the White man’s freedom, until all the Negro people are free in Mississippi,” and that “we don’t know anything about Communism, Socialism, and all that, but we do know that Negroes have caught hell right here under this American Democracy” (Zinn and Arnove 2004, 422-3). This petition precipitated a major fight within the MFDP and SNCC as a whole, one which was resolved six months later when, in January 1966, SNCC became the first civil rights organization to officially oppose the war. Calling the US “deceptive” rather than hypocritical, the SNCC position paper asserts that “the United States government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens and is not yet truly determined to end the rule of terror and oppression within its own borders.” It accused the US of “pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law,” and says forthrightly, “The US is not a respecter of persons or laws when such persons or laws run counter to its needs and desires” (Carson 1981,188). “Freedom” and “democracy” are used in scare quotes when discussed in relation to the United States.⁷⁰ Six months later, the Congress for Racial Equality also came forward in opposition to the war and calling for immediate withdrawal.

Among those in the sphere of the civil rights and new Black Power movements in 1966 – 1967, other arguments resonated as well. The civil rights movement had preached non-violence while Blacks in the South had been subject to terrible violence and terror. As the African American movement increasingly called the violence in Southeast Asia racist violence, and pointed out its indiscriminate and brutal nature, it found sympathetic ears among African American: The United States appeared willing to commit racial terrorism across the globe. This strain of

⁷⁰ As if to confirm SNCC’s analysis, the Georgia legislature denied SNCC member Julian Bond his democratically elected seat a month later for refusing to distance himself from this antiwar position. Bond’s race and general politics were undoubtedly the Legislature’s main objections, and the Supreme Court, finding for Bond later that year, noted, “We are not persuaded by the state’s attempt to distinguish between an exclusion alleged to be on racial grounds and one alleged to violate the First Amendment” (Branch 2007; 563).

solidarity with the Vietnamese was greatly amplified in the nationalist wings of the African American and other movements of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the civil rights movement drew inspiration from global movements of self-determination, and extended solidarity with people of color throughout the world. A minority in the United States, movement activists hailed a worldwide network of brothers and sisters—they were not a “minority” in the global sense. Thus international solidarity helped to pave the way for the early and strong criticism of Vietnam policy voiced by radical and national African American groups, as both a war against people fighting for self-determination and a war against people of color.

In these early years, Vietnam proved to be a fault-line along which moderate and radical civil rights organizations would split. When the McComb Mississippi petition first circulated the MFDP was also in the process of trying to seat its congressional delegation. It came under criticism from groups ranging from the American Legion to Congress to the NAACP for advocating draft evasion. Like labor, many civil rights leaders were close to the Johnson administration and for years were reluctant to take a position that would put them at odds with the President or his party. (The NAACP did not take a position against the war until the 1969 Vietnam Moratorium (Hall 2006, 168).) With the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, leaders like James Bevel and Martin Luther King initially envisioned the reinvigoration of their movement in the possibility of a strong coalition between peace and civil rights groups (*NYT* 8/15/1965; Branch 2007, 286-7). But fears of alienating their liberal base (and funders), provoking (greater) red-baiting and repression, and losing their domestic focus forestalled active participation among more moderate groups, such as King’s Southern Christian Leadership Council. After a failed educational mission to the US Ambassador to the UN in September 1965, King told his advisers “I really don’t have the strength to fight this issue and keep my civil rights fight going” (Branch, 330).

By the time King joined the antiwar fight in 1967 the African American movement was divided over the question of Vietnam, with no group holding it as a priority. The Nation of Islam made non-participation a norm, and in 1967 NOI member Muhammad Ali was stripped of his title and fined for refusing induction. The Black Panthers had formed, and joined SNCC in their condemnation of the war; both groups were regularly participating in antiwar marches and demonstrations. But the focus of the radical end of the movement remained the problems at home, with Vietnam another example of US racism and exploitation, but not one that was going to become the focus of their energies. Liberal groups, on the other hand, were still a part of Johnson's coalition. The "establishment" came down hard on King after his speech at Riverside Church in April, 1967. Nobel Laureate and United Nations diplomat Ralph Bunche, NAACP director Roy Wilkins, NY's Freedom House, the *New York Times*, and Vice President Hubert Humphrey were among those who criticized his embrace of the peace movement, a move the critics claimed "confused" his message about civil rights. King persisted, and helped launch Vietnam Summer that year, and continued to speak out against the war until his death. Even without the active support of most civil rights organizations, King's stand had an enormous impact on sentiment against the war, legitimizing dissent possibly for millions (Branch 2007). With tragic irony, King's death, in an immediate sense, also constrained the war-making abilities of the US government. As Colonel George L. Jackson detailed in the *Naval War College Review* in 1970, "[d]uring the fiscal year 1968, 104,665 National Guardsmen were called upon to quell civil disturbances, many of which were precipitated by the assassination" of Dr. King (322).

Despite the growing connection between the movements, "arguments about emphasis and multi-issuism, the cultural and 'intellectual' barriers between white student antiwar activists and black civil rights workers, and interracial tensions,

would, throughout the decade, plague efforts to build a broad, radical, multiracial, multi-issue antiwar coalition” (Hall 2006, 33). Many African Americans criticized the movement for not taking anti-racist work seriously enough, and this criticism did help to move the antiwar movement towards a more consistent anti-racist politics in its later days. But for the most part, a racial divide persisted between the movements. That is, in the civilian movements. In the military, Black Power, nationalism, and the fight for equality combined with antiwar critique to give rise to extraordinary antiwar action.

In 1969-1970, Wallace Terry surveyed and interviewed hundreds of African American and white soldiers about their attitudes about the war and movements at home, comparing the results to earlier interviews he had conducted in 1967. The soldier, he found, had dramatically radicalized in the intervening years. “A large majority of enlisted men agreed that black people should not fight in Vietnam because they have problems of discrimination at home” (in Taylor 1973, 203). More than half, again, believed the war to be a “race war.” Forty-five percent of the Black soldiers, compared to fifteen percent of the whites, thought that the war should end immediately, and forty percent of Blacks believed that Vietnam was a civil war in which the US had no place. In other words, among enlisted African Americans fighting in Vietnam, support for immediate withdrawal exceeded the sentiment at home, and some of the main arguments of the movement found an audience with nearly half of the group. It is not surprising, therefore, that Terry also found that a majority of enlisted African Americans supported antiwar protest at home, either along the more moderate “they have a right to protest” line or more outright positive support (see Taylor, 200-220).

This relatively greater degree of disagreement with the war, and overt resistance, among African American soldiers made a lot of sense. These soldiers were coming to Vietnam having witnessed or participated in the ghetto uprisings of

1965-1968, having seen most of the leaders of the Black movement come out against the war, having heard about the early high casualty rates among their brothers on the home front, and then came to fight in an oppressive military system. This growing antiwar feeling meant that African American re-enlistment rates – as high as two-thirds in 1966 – had fallen to thirteen percent in 1970. Evasion and desertion rates, as we shall see shortly, went through the roof. And increasingly, African American protest over unequal treatment in the armed forces escalated in tandem with antiwar sentiment. On July 4, 1970, in Heidelberg Germany, a meeting of (mostly) Black soldiers drew one thousand participants. The demands of the group included equal promotions and family housing for all Black GI's, a committee of enlisted men which could veto sending any GI into the stockade, college preparatory classes for all GI's, and immediate withdrawal of all American forces from southeast Asia and all US forces from Africa (Neale 2001, 128).

In Vietnam, their nationalism and militancy made African American soldiers the least trustworthy group on the frontlines from the perspective of the “brass.” The unreliability of these soldiers meant they were pulled out of the fighting (i.e., Blacks received fewer frontline duties), and the casualty rate fell from 25% Black in 1965, to 13% in 1968, to 7.6% in 1972 (Neale 2001, 87). Fighting against racist treatment and refusing to obey orders meant that there was often open warfare between the troops in Vietnam, concludes Cortright, destabilizing the entire war effort (1975, 43). Much of the GI resistance described in the next chapter came from African American soldiers. Black resistance in the armed forces had direct repercussions on the home front as well. In August 1968, African American National Guard units refused to go to Chicago to police the convention, and their rebellion at Ft. Hood sparked a greater protest, such that the cherry-picked troops who were eventually sent to Chicago were not actually deployed at the protests because it was not clear which side they'd fight on (Zieger 2005).

Chicano organizing

Chicano organizing in the late 1960's made antiwar work a focus at the grassroots, much more so than was the case among the African American groups at the time, suggesting how antiwar activism could find a working class base. Beginning in 1969, inspired by the working-class Brown Berets who had begun working with West Coast antiwar organizers, other Chicano/a activists joined together to create the National Chicano Moratorium Committee, taking the National Moratorium as their model. "Once introduced to center stage, the previously untapped power of the war issue became an extraordinary powerful organizational catalyst," observes their historian (Oropeza 2005, 115). The Chicano movement explicitly linked its domestic concerns – the lack of education and opportunities for college, extensive poverty, and police brutality – to the Vietnam war machine. Young men joined the military, they argued, because they were escaping lives of misery and repression, without other prospects. At the twenty-odd demonstrations across the Southwest called by the Moratorium coalition from late 1969 through 1970, they honored the war dead, aware of the pride many Mexican Americans took in having served in the US Armed forces. Appealing to "Aztlán" nationalism, organizers then went to the community to argue that it was better to fight for your own people than to fight for Uncle Sam. Making use of the grievances in the community, demonstrators "offered a twist on tradition by point out that dying in Viet Nam and previous conflicts had not ensured Mexican Americans equal treatment" (141). Courted by the organized antiwar movement and widely admired on the left, the Moratorium was touted as the "most dramatic and successful movement of Third World people against the war" (*The Militant*, 5/22/1970).

The Moratorium movement climaxed on August 29, 1970, in a mass march in East Los Angeles. The 25,000 participants made it the biggest Chicano demonstration of the period. Severe police repression at the march resulted in the

deaths of three participants, including journalist Ruben Salazar. Though this repression demobilized the movement, antiwar sentiment became mainstream in the West Coast Chicano community from that point on (see Chávez, 2002; Oropeza 2005).⁷¹

The movements of oppressed people in the United States brought greater depth to the opposition domestic opposition against the war, highlighting the connections between repression at home and war abroad, racism and imperialism, poverty and military spending. At a peace rally called by the Assembly of Unrepresented Peoples, which met in Washington DC in early August 1965, the same week that the Voting Rights Act was signed and the week before Watts erupted, former SNCC leader Bob (Parris) Moses made a speech, his third public statement against the war. “Negroes better than anyone else are in a position to question the war. Not because they understand the war better, but because they understand the United States” (Branch 2007, 279). By identifying the problems faced at home as the same problems represented and exacerbated by war, the rights and nationalist movements of the 1960’s solidified, and radicalized antiwar sentiment, and brought thousands of working class people of color into the movement to end the war.

⁷¹ Due to limitations of my own research time and budget, I was unable to pursue original inquiry into the Chicano Moratorium movement, and hope to address this subject further in future work based on this project.

Chapter 4
“A Rich Man’s War and A Poor Man’s Fight”: Labor, GI’s and Veterans join the Struggle

General, your tank is a mighty vehicle.
 It smashes down forests.
 And crushes a hundred men.
 But it has one defect:
 It needs a driver.

General, your bomber is powerful--
 It flies faster than a storm.
 And carries more than an elephant.
 But it has one defect:
 It needs a mechanic.

General, a man is very useful.
 He can fly and he can kill.
 But he has one defect:
 HE CAN THINK!

Bertolt Brecht, quoted in Movement for a Democratic Military pamphlet, 1970

In 1970 . . . Vice President Agnew said, ‘Some glamorize the criminal misfits of society while our best men die in Asian rice paddies.’ . . . His statement is a terrible distortion from which we can only draw a very deep sense of revulsion . . . because those he calls ‘misfits’ were standing up for us in a way that nobody else in the country dared to; because so many of us who died would have returned to this country to join the ‘misfits’ in their efforts to ask for an immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. . .

VVAW member Lieutenant John Kerry, Senate Foreign Relations testimony, April, 1971

In August 1965, Jesse Olsen, a vice president of Local 1199, Drug and Hospital Employees Union, spoke to Congress during hearings on Vietnam about his union’s antiwar activity: “On April 17, 100 members went to the march on Washington to end the war in Vietnam. On June 8, 500 members participated in the largest peace rally in the history of the City of New York” (FBI, LLAP, SHSW). A few months later, another 1199 official, Moe Foner, was preparing an advertisement that 1199 took out in the *New York Times*, the first of such antiwar ads that were to become common in the years to come. Over 1,000 members lent their names to a statement that read, “Negotiate-Don’t Escalate the War in Vietnam,” predicted that “there can be no military solution to this war,” and called on the government to “stop the bombings, seek and immediate cease-fire, negotiate and international settlement” (Foner, viii). On November 8, 1965, Foner wrote Robert Gilmore of Turn Toward Peace, “We at 1199 have been deeply concerned at the labor movement’s passivity

and downright hostility on the Vietnam issue. We have therefore initiated a rank-and-file statement to be inserted as an ad in the NYT.” He went on to argue, “We do not believe that our ad will attract nationwide significance, but we do feel that it will encourage others in the labor movement to speak out on this issue. And it will at least demonstrate to the public that there are trade unionists in our city who do feel strongly about a peaceful settlement” (LLAP).

The first unions to come out against the war were 1199; United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE); the International Fur and Leather Workers; Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers; and the International Longshoremen Workers Union. These organizations, most of whom were “independent” and outside of the AFL-CIO, fit a pattern specific to antiwar unions in the first years of the war. Broadly speaking, they were influenced by their continued ties to the old left or invigorated by the actions of the new, including the civil rights movement and the upsurge of college-educated youth (Halstead 1978, 240-241; Foner 1989, 54). Public sector, service sector, unions with “new working class” members and left-led, these unions were exceptional, in other words, representing a small fraction of the organized working class. These antiwar unions joined two other, more dominant models of labor’s response to the war.

Labor liberals, exemplified by the behemoth United Auto Workers, supported anti-communist militarism, but sought to balance the fight for freedom abroad with international and domestic commitments to core liberal values and economic measures—guns *and* butter. During the war in Korea, Walter Reuther addressed the 1951 UAW convention with the argument, “the struggle between tyranny and freedom, between Communism and Democracy, is a struggle for men’s minds, their hearts and their loyalties, and you cannot win that struggle if you fight only on the battlefield. If we are going to make freedom secure in the world and really stop the forces of Communist tyranny, then we have to fight against poverty

and hunger and insecurity in the world with the same devotion with which we fight against Communist aggression on the battleground” (Fousek 2000, 183). Over time, this position was elaborated, with greater emphasis placed on the responsibilities on the home front matching responsibilities abroad. On a rhetorical level, liberal labor leaders set themselves up for a response to Vietnam that neatly paralleled Johnson’s own belief in the possibility of simultaneous victories in Great Society and Vietnam.

At the conservative end of the spectrum, labor leaders invested heavily in a form of jingoistic anti-Communism that would profoundly color labor’s response to Vietnam, as well as public perceptions of that response. George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, and most of the heads of international unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO were aggressively pro-war (or at least pro-government policy) (see Halstead 1978 for distinction). Their allegiance to the Johnson administration was strong, as was their anti-Communism, with the *Wall Street Journal* wryly noting that even the labor peaceniks recognized “it would be easier . . . to convince Mr. Johnson to change his mind on Vietnam than it would be to convince Mr. Meany to change his” (11/9/1967, quoted in Foner 1989, 56). The AFL-“CIA” both employed US agents within its ranks and acted directly on behalf of the CIA and other government agencies during the post-war period. The AFL-CIO supported efforts to tamp down movements for socialism or social democracy across the world, particularly in Latin America, and helped to destabilize or overthrow democratic or regimes abroad, such as in Brazil in 1964 and the Dominican Republic in 1965 (Radosh 1969). This official anti-communism and conservatism at the top had intimidating effects, delimiting antiwar expression—or even open questioning or skepticism—at all levels. Additionally, some labor leaders openly viewed the war as good for the economy, and advocated pro-war positions as pro-employment positions.

Even among more liberal labor leaders, like Walter Reuther of the UAW, the pressures to support the Democratic administration’s war policy were extreme, and

the rewards for doing so not incidental. Among other advances for working people won during the period was Medicare, signed into law in 1966, which probably helped to neutralize possible labor defections to the antiwar camp. Overall, big labor worked against the antiwar movement, tending to retard or discourage involvement. Insofar as it served as a conduit for its members toward political action, rather than apathy, that action tended to be pro-war.

But, contrary to popular representations of labor during the period, it was never a monolith. And despite pressures that I will show to have been extreme, antiwar voices emerged and grew over the course of the Vietnam War. Antipathy to war and militarism had surfaced repeatedly within labor's ranks, against its leadership's frequent support for US foreign policy. Sections of labor had actually opposed war after war over the course of the century, beginning before its start with opposition to the Spanish American War and the invasion of Panama in 1898 from the likes of none other than Samuel Gompers, who at the time considered himself a "pronounced pacifist." At the beginning of the 20th century in a time of violent state repression against workers movements, the army and militias were redundant with strikebreaking, and the AFL took the position that workers should not participate in the state militias. Foreshadowing the re-organization of the armed services that was to take place in the Vietnam era as a response to popular opposition, the "Dick Military Law" was passed in 1903 to specifically challenge labor's recalcitrance, and called for universal male service in a national guard.

During the first years of World War I, against the urging of the no-longer pacifist Gompers, "a number of valuable labor men" were "caught in the net" of the peace movement, with Peace Labor Councils established in Baltimore, Washington, and Chicago, and labor leaders speaking out actively against the war all over the country (Gompers 1925, 324-349). Despite the AFL's strong cooperation with President Wilson and its no-strike pledges, the war years saw an unprecedented level

of turbulence among workers, with strikes doubling between 1915 and 1916, reaching a record 3,789 that year. This strike wave intensified in 1917 after the US entered the war, to grow to a million workers out and 4,400 strikes called (Dubofsky 1994, 62-63). The syndicalist International Workers of the World was the only labor federation in all of the warring Western countries to remain opposed to the war, and until it was brutally repressed it made enormous gains during WWI itself. It was for making an antiwar speech that Socialist Party and trade union leader Eugene Debs was arrested in 1918 and later sentenced to jail; imprisoned he still received a million votes for President in 1920. The speech explained to the crowds in Canton, Ohio,

The feudal barons of the Middle Ages, the economic predecessors of the capitalists of our day, declared all wars. And their miserable serfs fought all the battles. The poor, ignorant serfs had been taught to revere their masters; to believe that when their masters declared war upon one another, it was their patriotic duty to fall upon one another and to cut one another's throats for the profit and glory of the lords and barons who held them in contempt. And that is war in a nutshell. The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. The master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, while the subject class has had nothing to gain and all to lose—especially their lives.

Debs articulated a class-based rationale for refusing to fight, and an analysis of the capitalist goals of war. He was echoing decades of class-conscious common sense as he did.

Precisely because of the extreme social instability unleashed during the previous wars in the century, war was also the time in which government repression intensified dramatically. Curtailments on speech and assembly were common, and the greatest “red-scares” of the century happened in the wake of the world wars. During WWI, thirty-two states in the United States made it illegal to conduct political strikes under new “criminal syndicalism” statutes (Montgomery 2006). For the labor left, these repressive measures were both reasons to resist militarism, as well as effective tools used by the state to restrain their militancy. Industrial peace was also essential during war, and mainstream labor federations were both able to exercise effectively militant bread and butter campaigns during war while also

making some kind of peace relationship with the state so that production would not be overly threatened.

Close collaboration between official labor and the Democratic Party had begun before WWI, but the advances of union recognition and other (briefly held) promises of the War Labor Board confirmed for moderate labor leaders like Gompers that state support was necessary for labor's advance, and the Democratic Party was the vehicle for that progress. On the other side, the labor left had been jailed, deported, fired, harassed: labor's radical forces were even more alienated from state collaboration or support for war. The contradictory "lessons" of mainstream labor's experience during WWI were thus that war years were an excellent opportunity to gain leverage over the state and ally itself with Democrats, but that war also gave rise to extreme reaction and repression.

In the build-up to WWII, these contradictory lessons again divided the labor movement, made even more complicated by the peculiar positions of the Communist Party, then the largest and most influential left tendency in American labor (Cochran 1977). Socialists and radicals had a long tradition of pacifism and anti-militarism, and even (still Socialist) Walter Reuther was skeptical of intervention even as war broke out in 1939 (Lichtenstein 1995, 156). After many years of forceful anti-fascist mobilization, most notably during the Spanish Civil War, the CP's observance of the Hitler-Stalin pact and subsequent non-interventionist stance disillusioned many of its supporters and added a large dose of cynicism to the case against war. But CIO President and Mineworkers leader John L. Lewis also spoke against war in October, 1940, speaking to an estimated 25,000,000 to 30,000,000 Americans via radio, publicly denouncing Roosevelt's war plan and the possibility for "hysteria" and repression that might come with it. Lewis's antiwar position reflected the antiwar and isolationist feelings of most US workers at the time,

though the conservative answer to the problem he outlined – support for the Republicans – did not yield him much support (Preis 1992, 80-81).⁷²

After Pearl Harbor the unions universally backed the war effort, and once again worked closely with the Democratic Party. But the no-strike pledge that was – again – negotiated by labor leaders was defied – again – in record levels of strikes in the last two years of war. Unlike the return to the open-shop that followed WWI, labor’s pre-war and wartime gains were not immediately reversed, and unions in most places retained bargaining rights. But, in the familiar repression of the post-war period, labor’s arsenal was radically depleted with the passage of the Taft Hartley Act, whose many odious elements included forbidding secondary boycotts, outlawing the closed shop, restricting the pool of workers who could be organized, authorizing greater employer rights with regard to union elections, mandating anti-Communist pledges, and allowing “right to work” laws to be passed (cf. Cochran 1977; Dubofsky 1994).

In the years before Vietnam, then, labor’s response to war was somewhat mixed. For the most part, labor leaders supported wars, worked closely with the government to maintain production levels during war, and allied themselves more closely with the Democratic Party. Yet at the level of the rank-and-file, patriotic service was far from assured. Certainly, American workers were generally patriotic and supported their government in times of war. But there existed traditions of anti-militarism and isolationism in the working class that did not yield to their leader’s pro-war positions. Workers appreciated their wartime power and exercised their leverage through strikes despite extreme pressure to “do their duty.” And the experience of repression militated against other gains that could be made during times of war.

⁷² Preis argues that this was one of the best possible moments for the formation of an independent labor party, in part on the basis of this anti-militarism espoused by Lewis, and that Lewis’s refusal to break from the main parties was a “great” tragedy.

The postwar era also ushered in a period in which US labor would play a central role in US foreign policy through buttressing the fight against “world communism.” In the postwar era, anti-communist political orthodoxy helped guarantee that “the range of public debate concerning US foreign policy ... narrowed considerably” (Fousek 2000, 186). But Vietnam marked the beginning of an open debate on the merits of staunch anti-communism, and the breakdown of the more cozy state relations created in the post-war period. Beginning with 1199’s actions in 1965, and culminating in Meany’s own renunciation of his pro-war stance in 1974, the period of the antiwar movement marked the time in which US labor largely shed its cold-war conservatism, and began to flex more militant muscles in directions both economic and political. Though labor’s involvement in the antiwar movement as such was uneven, it grew consistently over the course of the decade. And while union members, like workers and the country as whole, were moving in heterogeneous (and sometimes opposing) directions, significant numbers actively joined the struggle to end the war.

Like its pro-war stance, the most influential peace initiatives from the labor movement during the war’s early years flowed from the union’s leading bureaucracies. The earliest efforts to bring labor into the peace camp took place within the networks of Labor for Peace, also called Trade Unionists for Peace. By 1962, progressive labor activists recognized that without some cover from the unions themselves, union members *would* not, and in many cases perceived they *could* not, join efforts for peace. Peace did not yet mean antiwar—few people had recognized the Vietnam situation as one that might be as large as it became. Peace meant an end to the cold war, nuclear disarmament, a critical eye at the ever-expanding military industrial complex. Taking such a peace position meant challenging the anti-communist orthodoxy of the labor movement, which had direct implications in those days for one’s livelihood and reputation (Foner, 1989; Leopold 2007).

The networks created by the early Trade Unionist for Peace became the same groups that started the Trade Union Division of SANE, which was formed in 1966, followed shortly thereafter by 1967's Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace. As I explore in greater detail in Chapter Six, the leadership orientation of labor's peace forces reflected certain realities of the sixties trade union movement—the concentrated power of the bureaucracy, the intimidating presence of anti-communist leadership, and the limited involvement of the rank and file. At a strategic level, too, these leadership groups gave cover to rank and file members who could then participate within the antiwar movement without fear or reprisal from their unions. These were limited incursions against the pro-war direction of the rest of labor officialdom, but nevertheless represented a growing trend in labor as a whole as the war wore on, one which is usually ignored or forgotten.⁷³

The Trade Union Division of SANE was formed on May 3, 1966, with 173 union officers and staff members present from 30 local unions in the New York metropolitan area. *The Nation* commented on the New York meeting, “No high union officials were among them, but many represented not only themselves but the officers and rank and file of their unions” (6/27/1966). That December, Chicago followed suit, and the following January, California unionists created their chapter. This effort emerged from small signs of unrest at union conventions, including the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Packinghouse workers, Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union, and the United Auto Workers, all of which passed resolutions critical of the war at their 1966 conventions. These resolutions all called for negotiations, with the Packinghouse workers most explicitly calling for an end to the war, and the UAW being the most sympathetic to Johnson while coming out against escalation (TUD letters, SHSW).

⁷³ See Foner, Levy, Halstead, and Koscielski (1999) for coverage of the antiwar labor movement. Most histories of the period don't mention it (e.g. Gitlin, Anderson, or Sale) or do so in very brief passing (e.g. DeBenedetti and Wells).

The Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace convened in Chicago on Veterans Day in 1967. Its four main sponsors came from AFL-CIO unions, including the UAW's secretary treasurer, Emil Mazey.⁷⁴ 523 trade union leaders from 50 international unions signed on to a statement of policy that condemned the war on moral and pragmatic grounds, and called for an end to the bombing and negotiations. Norman Thomas (in his last public appearance), Dr. Martin Luther King, John Kenneth Galbraith and Retired Rear Admiral Arnold True were among those who addressed the meeting, as well as Eugene McCarthy (*Washington Post* 11/12/67). Solidarity greetings were sent from Abraham Heschel, co-Chair of CALCAV, Mark Hatfield, Ernest Gruening, John Wesley Lord, and George McGovern (B2FI, LLAP Papers). The LLAP was, in this way, aligning itself with the liberal end of an increasingly radical antiwar movement. For all of its relative mildness, the LLAP represented a significant break within the house of labor, one which many observers noted at the time. "Wobble in Labor's Pro-Vietnam Stance," wrote the *Wall Street Journal* (11/9/67), "Labor's 'Doves' on a Warpath," declared the *Christian Science Monitor* (11/4/1967). Stanley Aronowitz, writing for the *Guardian*, called it "the most important anti-war expression by sections of the trade union movement" thus far and a "legitimate vehicle from which to depart from labor officialdom," noting that it was a "little bigger and a little broader than past efforts," and not "a hopeless exercise in liberal futility" as some radicals might conclude (12/23/1967).⁷⁵ The *New York Post* wrote it was "the ultimate triumph of the new generation's rebels: they have created an ordeal of conscience for may elders tempted to sit things out, elude controversial issues and deplore 'excesses' of protest" (quoted by Foner 1989, 56).

⁷⁴ The others were Patrick Gorman of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, Al Hartung of the International Woodworkers, and Frank Rosenblum of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (in the "Program for LLAP," Box 2, Folder 9, LLAP Papers, SHSW).

⁷⁵ Meany, for his part, allowed the statement of the LLAP to be read by a lower state federation official at the AFL-CIO convention a month later in Miami, but said, "he didn't have to read it for my benefit because I read it some time ago. I read it in the Sunday Worker two weeks before this meeting [of the LLAP] took place" (AFL-CIO Convention Proceedings (Miami 1967), 280, in LLAP Papers).

Art Gundersheim, acting as the Executive Secretary for the LLAP, explained to an AFT Local president in a letter,

Do not be disturbed by our use of the word “leadership.” Certainly our major interested is in educating and changing the attitudes of rank and file unionists. We only use that elitist word because in some of our major cities, it is necessary to further our group’s prestige and respectability. In operating within the national political arena such as it presently exists, you must make some minor compromises with the status quo.⁷⁶

Some of the early efforts went beyond leadership assemblies. San Francisco TUD SANE made use of a November 1967 local referendum to reach out to union members. The referendum stated, “It is the policy of the people of the City and County of San Francisco that there be an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam so that the Vietnamese people can settle their own problems.” SF TUD SANE wrote a pamphlet asking, “Why do trade unionists have a stake in peace?” They answered this question by articulating what would become elements of the dominant frame through which movement organizations sought to include working people over the coming years. The list of “stakes” is particularly nuanced and exhaustive, and indicates careful consideration of a rank-and-file audience.

Working people pay for war

- Their sons do the fighting and dying
- Their paychecks are being cut by higher taxes and prices
- Their children are being brutalized by the horrors of war
- They are being asked to be the world’s policemen.. . spending billions abroad and pennies at home
- The war economy endangers the trade union movement by proposals of compulsory arbitration and laws denying the right to strike.

(TUD Files, SHSW)

Few attempts like this were made to directly involve rank and file workers in its first years. Yet as the war dragged on, the rationale for active working class

⁷⁶ This is from a letter from Art Gundersheim to Robert Atkins, December 5, 1967, B2F10, LLAP, SHSW. It should be added that Atkins, a philosopher at Berkeley, had written in his letter that “It has been the experience of Local 1570 . . . that a trade union can participate in political dissent without harming its economic interests.” The preposterous projection of political and economic circumstances at Berkeley and those facing the labor movement as a whole was rather gently handled by Gundersheim, marking the nimble line that many labor leaders walked negotiating their position between the labor and antiwar movements.

opposition to the war spelled out in this leaflet proved compelling. In the weeks following the LLAP in late 1967 and the weeks before Tet, the Gallup organization polled union members, and reported that they were “closely divided on the President’s handling of the Vietnam situation.” Forty-three percent thought that Vietnam was a mistake, which was just under the national average of forty five percent. In the period after Tet, union member’s disapproval of the war outpaced the national average (B2F10 LLAP). By the end of the decade, labor’s antiwar activity had outgrown the leadership assemblies, with much greater direct rank-and-file participation in and collaboration with the movement. A draft flyer written in March 1970, enunciated the reasons for a “Labor Assembly for Peace” being planned in the Bay Area that would target rank and file workers:

We have worked hard all our lives, trying to make a home for our families,
 assure our children the chance for a better future, and provide security for our
 old age. Now we see these dreams being shattered by the war. Working
 People are hit hardest by the war.
 The Working Person must pay for the war
 Last five years \$150 billion—10% surtax and withholding doubled
 Profits of the largest 500 corporations up 50%
Who profits, who pays?
 Inflation threatens our future
 Our sons die needlessly—we never voted to get involved in the first place, nor
 did we vote to send our boys there to die protecting some corrupt dictator
 (Antiwar National, C4F6 Bancroft)

The increasingly apparent senselessness and horror of the war itself played a major role in the broadening participation in the movement. By the end of Johnson’s administration, over 35,000 American soldiers and at least half a million Vietnamese had been killed, with hundreds of thousands of more wounded (Hirschman et al. 1995). The US still had half a million troops in Southeast Asia, without having made any “progress” on its explicit goal of “defending South Vietnam” from communism. The Tet offensive of January 1968 gave lie to the assertions made by General Westmoreland and others that the North Vietnamese were in retreat, the South Vietnamese army in ascendance. Mainstream media increasingly acknowledged the

anti-democratic, intolerant and vicious nature of the various South Vietnamese regimes propped up by the US.

Labor's restiveness could be partially attributed to the war, but was a result of other factors to which the war and the movement were themselves proximate causes. In 1970 unemployment began to rise dramatically. Unemployment rates do not capture the seasonal and unstable nature of working class employment, as many who are unemployed for months are then working again, in erratic cycles. But in 1970, nearly one quarter of operatives were unemployed for an average of three months. Nearly 20% of craftsmen, 25% of laborers, and 30% of construction workers had similar stretches of no work (Levison 1974, 81-2). Inflation was on the rise, and profits on the decline. A far-seeing SDS member wrote Paul Booth in 1970 correcting his theory that "corporate profits have been standing still along with real wages . . . [in fact] in terms of real money, they are down, not just standing still," and went on to ask "who would recover lost ground first?" (3/39/70 F3L Booth Papers, SHSW).⁷⁷ For many more, the connection between inflation and war was becoming more clear. The research director for the AFL-CIO told *Fortune*, "The non-supervisory employee has been getting the sort end of the stick all through the 1960's, and now the pressure from the membership is on."⁷⁸

The unions were making efforts to recover the ground, by rejecting contracts at record levels and engaging in wildcat strikes that paralleled the upsurge of 1945-1946. 1970 alone saw 5,600 work stoppages, with about 6.2 million lost worker days (Foner 1989, 74). *Fortune* magazine reported in October of 1969 that labor was "aggressive, active, and acquisitive." Standard Oil, Ford, General Motors, and

⁷⁷ This letter from Bob Weissman to Paul Booth was one of many among the older generation of SDS-ers who had become involved with the labor movement – they were working on a "labor project" at the time, attempting to create progressive networks among rank-and-file and lower-level-staff.

⁷⁸ In the previous decade, over a million and a half unionized workers had lost COLA's in their contracts, while others, like auto and electric, had negotiated "caps" on their escalators. Inflation, therefore, was hitting workers hard (Armstrong 1969, 96.)

General Electric were among some of the largest and generally successful official strikes. And on top of that, postal workers and teamsters carried off some of the largest wildcat strikes of the era. “You can sign a decent contract with the international and still have half your operation closed down by strikes,” complained a GM executive (Armstrong 1969, 94).

Wildcats, like those of previous decades, were recognized as a serious threat to government, business and labor leaders – signs that the rank-and-file might get away. Rank-and-file challenges to sitting leaders had in fact spread from industry to industry: I.W. Abel replaced David McDonald at the Steelworkers (in what was essentially a “palace coup” but with with rank-and-file support) in 1965; the International Electrical Workers got rid of their longtime leader James Carey in 1964; the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, intimately connected to the US State Department and CIA came under new leadership in 1964, as did the Rubber Workers in 1966 (Leopold 2007; Levison 1974; Matles & Higgins 1974). Later in the decade the Teamsters and Miners would join the rank-and-file rebellions.

Starting with the General Electric strike of 1969-1970, which the *Guardian* called the “opening round in one of the most intense periods of labor struggle in recent history” (12/6/69), concerted efforts were made by movement activists to bring together the struggle against the war with labor’s struggle against their employers. General Electric was the fourth largest corporation in the US, and the second biggest defense contractor. GE was also renowned for its anti-union bargaining strategy, known as Boulwarism (after the GE official Lemuel Boulware who perfected the approach), which exploited the balkanized workforce—thirteen unions in the company—through encouraging intra-union competition, and eschewed the “partnership” rhetoric (and limited reality) of postwar labor relations for open hostility to the presence of any unions in its plants. In 1969, however, all thirteen

unions created a coalition to bargain against this behemoth, and commenced what was to become a 122-day strike with 133,000 workers off the job (Matles & Higgins 1974).

The *Guardian* urged radicals to seize the GE strike as an opportunity to “redirect the antiwar movement toward reaching new constituencies and making its protest more germane to social reality” (Aronowitz, 12/6/69). Protesters, Aronowitz and others argued, were not sufficiently connecting the demands that they made against the war with the lived reality that most people in the United States were facing, a reality that included direct conflict with the “masters of industry” who profited mightily from the war. But many activists began to follow the advice. Movement papers detailed the military contracts held by GE and other companies, and raised the problem of “conversion” (to peacetime manufacturing) facing US workers (Tamiment). Student support for the GE workers was unusually strong, with nationwide solidarity efforts launched by a number of organizations, including former SDS members, other unions, and antiwar groups. “They’re doing a hell of a job for us,” reported one striker. “They give us food, money, help out in the boycott. They’re the leaders of the future” (“GE Fiddles While Workers Burn,” *Guardian* 12/17/69).

The antiwar movement was directly responsible for some of this solidarity. A group organized under the name, “Movement to Support the GE Strikers” was formed out of the New Mobilization Committee’s “Who Pays, Who Profits” subcommittee, comprised of veteran SDSers such as Paul Booth, Prue Posner, Carl Ogelsby, and Nick Egelson in early 1970. Support committees had been formed in Syracuse, Newark, Boston, Los Angeles, Elmira, Louisville, and Bridgeport (Minutes 1/3-4/1970, B4F3 Booth Papers SHSW). The group pledged material support to the strikers, and coordination of the solidarity efforts around the country.

Students had come out to support OCAW workers in early 1969 in California, and had seen their struggles at San Francisco State backed in turn by the local (Foner 1989, 74-76). GE strikers rallied with students repeatedly in Boston and Philadelphia. One UE flyer read, “‘Welcome to the struggle.’ We are glad to have you as brothers, sisters, and allies” (82). The strike wave of the time was clearly transformative for the many thousands of workers who participated in it. One UE union representative from Eastern Massachusetts commented, “There area lot of fears of opposing capitalism in the United States. I think it will ease off the large part of the population the same way the fear of being opposed to the Vietnam war eased off. There is an element in the US which is not afraid; that’s the students and the black people. As these people carry on the fight they’re doing, it makes it a lot easier for other sections of the population to do the same. The students had to show us the way.” (*Guardian* 2/7/70). Regardless of the May, 1970 attacks by construction workers in New York, this period saw greater student-labor solidarity than any previous part of the decade (Foner).

Thus the final years of the war witnessed an upsurge of labor militancy and a greater willingness of many workers to question the status quo. In Washington DC and Madison Wisconsin regular antiwar labor groups met, while in New York City the first peace rally called by the official labor movement convened in May, 1970, in the weeks following Kent State and the hardhat attacks downtown. Central Labor Councils nationwide adopted resolutions against the war. The Alliance for Labor Action, a break-away federation led by the massive United Auto Workers and Teamsters, came out against the war. UAW President Walter Reuther’s last official communication before his death in 1970 was an antiwar statement sent to President Nixon (Lichtenstein 1995).

Washington DC Labor for Peace distributed thousands of copies of a book it had compiled, “A Rich Man’s War and A Poor Man’s Fight: A Handbook for Trade

Unionists on the Vietnam War,” which both echoed and altered presiding reasons for opposition to the war. Close to one hundred pages in length, “Rich Man’s War” included a summary of the history of US involvement in Vietnam, and then took up issues like the war and the economy, the tax burdens of the war, the class-discriminatory nature of the draft, the hardships facing returning veterans, the profits of the military industrial complex, and the (mis)allocation of public funds. They wrote, “We’re a little behind schedule. But that union train’s a-coming” (1970, 2).

The labor activists who wrote this handbook anticipated these issues as those most pressing for workers, and after addressing them in down-to-earth language, turned to “hard questions” that workers might raise. These included: Don’t we have an obligation to help Vietnam? Doesn’t the President have more facts than we do? Isn’t Vietnamization really ending our involvement? Why should the US lose a war for the first time? And finally, “isn’t the peace movement just a bunch of freaks and subversives?” The handbook offered answers to these questions, and then turned to an annotated list of thirty strategies and tactics for antiwar union members to consider pursuing.

Labor for Peace, the final large-scale antiwar initiative of the labor movement brought over 1200 labor leaders to St Louis in 1972. Its endorsers included the leadership of nineteen international unions, representing four million unionized workers. This effort was similar to the Trade Union Division of Sane, as well as the LLAP in that it was leadership-heavy. But the leaders of Labor for Peace spoke openly for their members, not only for themselves as dissidents, signifying their comfort in marking a break of behalf of nearly a quarter of organized unionists from the AFL-CIO pro-war line. Reflecting the changing tenor of the times, Labor For Peace’s gathering was also the first to experience a serious challenge of its leadership

strategy, and a prolonged debate over whether a work stoppage against the war should be called (See Foner 1989; Levy 1994).

In November 1974, on the Dick Cavett show, George Meany expressed some regret about his hard-line approach. He said, “If I knew then, what I know now, I would not have backed [Nixon and Johnson] . . . When you’re wrong, you’re wrong and I’ve lived a long time and I’ve made a lot of mistakes” (Foner 1989, 152).

For many, this was clearly too little and too late. Official labor’s obstruction had held back a critical force that might have changed the course of the war much earlier. In December 1966, A.J. Muste wrote:

There is no current evidence that millions could be brought into the streets at one time to demand an end to the US role in the war. For that to happen, large numbers of labor unionists would have to be involved. This may some day happen, but not very likely by April 15, 1967. On the other hand, if it were to happen that tens or hundreds of thousands of labor unionists appeared on the streets in an anti-war demonstration, it would not be true, as some tend to think, that this would not make an appreciable impact on the Administration either. In such a case, for example, strikes in war industries would become possible, even likely, and that would take the protest out of the ‘token’ or symbolic category.

Labor’s response to the war in Vietnam never approached this threshold. Yet given the strength of Cold war anticommunism in the US labor movement, the breaks made by significant minorities of the unions were impressive, and paved the way for the more progressive foreign and domestic policy positions that the US labor movement would increasingly embrace in the post-Vietnam era. And labor’s restiveness, particularly in the rank and file, indicated the continued militancy of the very “bought-off” white workers that too many analysts and activists had written off.

Resistance and Dissent within the armed forces

Alongside the college campus, the military itself must be seen as the other great mobilizing vehicle through which antiwar sentiment and action was stoked and unleashed. Richard Moser (1996) and David Cortright (1975) both conclude that close to a quarter of all service personnel participated in the antiwar movement as soldiers or veterans – these were mass movements. The significance of these

numbers, Moser emphasizes, is that they equalized the peak proportion of student activists and exceeded the percentage of all activism among youth (132). The other significant aspect to these numbers was the working-class character of the revolt.

The military is the closest thing the United States has to a totalitarian institution (outside of its prisons). The authority of leaders is absolute, decision-making entirely top-down. The culture of the military encourages a contradictory mix of intense group solidarity with complete obedience. When operating smoothly, groups engage in horizontally solidaristic offensive and defensive actions subordinate to commanding authorities (Grossman 1998; Neale 2001).

“Smoothly functioning” was perhaps the last way one would describe the Vietnam era military. Simply put, over the course of the war, increasing numbers of young men (and some women) did not agree with the mission they were ordered to undertake, and, more importantly, they resisted the efforts made to force them. This disagreement took the form of outspoken dissent or more private doubts; this resistance took multiple forms. The breakdown in the armed forces occurred at all levels – draft and recruitment, basic training, deployment, combat: perhaps the only moment where chaos did not reign was at the end of the tour of duty (though what awaited the returning veteran, particularly the wounded veteran, was a kind of chaos all its own). The Vietnam era military was internally riven and over-extended, and by the end of the war, seen by many as nearing its breaking point (Heinl 1971; Summers 1982). This has had structural and ideological implications. At the end of the war, and in the following years, the US military was substantially re-organized so as to forestall the possibility of another such breakdown occurring. And military commanders have advised civilian leaders to avoid committing US forces to any engagements whose mission might incur large-scale resistance among troops.

In “Weapons of the Weak” (1985), James C. Scott described the “ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups” as including “foot dragging, dissimulation,

desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage” (29), which he nicely refers to a “Brechtian forms of class struggle.” This arsenal is used in response to conditions in which direct confrontation carries relative or absolute risks for the protester sufficient to militate against it. Scott describes the common aspects of these forms of struggle as follows: “They require little to no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid and direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms” (29). While Scott has been criticized for overestimating the structural nature of power and underestimating the perceptions of power that groups inside of such structural conditions actually have (eg Miller 1997), the structural power of the US military and government was and is overwhelming. The risks of insubordination in the military, or disobedience to the laws governing the armed forces included upgrading of draft status, arrest, imprisonment, less than honorable discharge, undesirable transfers, and, in the case of combat troops, retaliatory measures that could end in death or charges of mutiny that could likewise do the same. One small example used by the GI movement underscores the differences between participating in the GI and the civilian movements: the penalty for sitting-in at Berkeley’s Sproul Hall was \$100, while the original sentence of the Presidio 27 (see below) for protesting inhumane treatment in the stockade was 14-16 years hard labor (Antiwar National File, Bancroft). Potential and actual draftees and enlisted soldiers might imagine themselves quite powerful, but that imagination would only get you so far when you’re fighting Uncle Sam. But despite the high levels of possible retaliation, the dissent and resistance in and against the military took the forms of both “weapons of the weak” while also going further and directly confronting both “authority and elite norms.” Scott, when reflecting on the efficacy of these tactics concludes that, in the case of the peasant communities he studies, “they are unlikely to do more than marginally effect the forms of exploitation” experienced by his

subjects. What is remarkable about the “soldiers revolt” is how effective such measures were in both their goals of “self-help” and within the context of antiwar goals: their rebellion was so successful that the military changed its internal organization as well as its war strategy as a response.

The statistics compiled by David Cortright (1975) in the immediate aftermath of the Paris peace accords, and collected later by other scholars and the Army itself, present an incredible picture of the breakdown of the armed forces in the last years of the war. With only one exception, none of the history textbooks most frequently used in colleges even allude to this breakdown, and the one that did does so in a paragraph whose main focus is the “deterioration” of “morale and discipline,” typified by the My Lai massacre and subsequent conviction of William Calley. *The Unfinished Nation’s* author Alan Brinkley (2004) concludes the paragraph by saying, “Less publicized were other, more widespread problems among American troops in Vietnam: desertion, drug addiction, racial bias, refusal to obey orders, even the killing of unpopular officers by enlisted men” (861). Brinkley is accurately touching on the most famous instance of the perceived problems with the US military in highlighting My Lai. But in pairing the indiscriminate killing of Vietnamese civilians with the refusal to kill Vietnamese or obey military command—a common theme linking all of the “problems” he lists, excepting “racial bias”—he obscures the story of the soldiers’ resistance.⁷⁹

Cortright’s book *Soldiers in Revolt* places the problems listed by Brinkley into a context appreciated by the military’s own leadership during the war—the breakdown of the armed forces. In a famous and oft-quoted article, Marine Colonel Robert Heintz argued in 1971 in the *Armed Forces Journal*, “the morale, discipline and battle-worthiness of the US armed forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower

⁷⁹ By associating My Lai with a breakdown of morale and discipline he also implies that such a massacre was an exception to the normal operations of the war, an argument vigorously challenged by many soldiers and antiwar groups.

and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.” Over the course of the war 27 million men came of draft age, and 40% of them served in the military. Of that group, one quarter—2.5 million—served in Vietnam, joined by another half million older soldiers for a total of nearly 3 million men serving in South East Asia during hostilities (Appy 1993, 18). Active duty military strength peaked at close to 4 million for 1969, and had fallen to 2.2 million by the war’s end, while the largest number of soldiers deployed to Vietnam reached a height of close to half a million in 1968. Against these large numbers are some other extraordinary rates of resistance to service, creating what Cortright (1975) describes as a “manpower crisis” whose roots were “unprecedented opposition to military service among young people” (4).

College, draft-exempt occupations and graduate school were the first line of defense for the more affluent young men, along with service in the National Guard. After receiving draft notices, millions of American men were successfully exempted, deferred, or successfully sought methods of disqualification—the famous stories of weight loss, psychiatric illness, “phantom disabilities” and other means of escaping eligible classification. Conscientious objection began as a rare and difficult-to-obtain status. But after prolonged movement pressure the Supreme Court considerably expanded the CO guidelines, and during the last three years of the military draft, almost 145,000 people successfully applied for CO status, with 1971’s sixty-one thousand representing a one-year record. In 1972, amid full “Vietnamization” and as the war was in its final stages, there were more conscientious objectors than draftees (Cortright 1975, 5). In addition, tens of thousands overtly refused induction, facing (although, similarly as a result of the movement’s pressure, infrequently serving) jail time for their resistance. Many early draft resisters had asked the question, “what if you called a war and no one came?” By the end of the US war in Southeast Asia, that question was becoming more than a coy slogan.

Working-class men did not participate in self-proclaimed draft avoidance and refusal at nearly the same rates as their middle-class peers. This was the case for a number of reasons. The most important was the class bias of the Selective Service system itself, which made draft avoidance for study and high-skill occupations relatively easy for the first and heaviest years of the draft. Graduate school exemptions were sharply restricted in 1967, college deferments became more rigorous as draft calls increased, and a lottery system was introduced at the end of 1969 that was more democratic (though college deferments did not end until 1971). Altogether “millions of men used college deferments to postpone their confrontations with the draft” (Baskir & Strauss 1978, 281). When the laws changed or deferments expired or low lottery numbers were unluckily assigned, middle class draft-age men were still significantly more likely to get and accept the kind of counseling, medical, and legal representation that nearly assured them a way out of the draft. Similarly, applications for CO status were lengthy and difficult, well-suited for teenagers with access to educated parents or lawyers and nearly beyond the reach of working-class and poor draftees. As I will explore in later chapters, the movement’s own strategies and tactical decisions sometimes counteracted this middle-class bias, but in other cases reinforced it.

Another reason for a lesser degree of draft avoidance among working class youth, particularly through 1968 when the draft calls were running 30,000-40,000 a month, was the particular social context of the call. “[Middle-class men] wrestled with the moral dilemma of whether or not to avoid the draft, but most working-class draftees did not see the matter as open to debate. For them, the draft notice represented an order, not a dilemma” (Appy 1993, 51). For many, seeking out a way of avoiding the draft was betraying family and friends who had served or were serving. As a medical professional who assisted draft evaders explained, “The people we saw were all middle class. It wasn’t that the others didn’t have the money. They

just never thought of going for professional help.” Baskir and Strauss point out that “even at the draft-counseling medical clinic of predominantly black Fisk university, walk-ins were overwhelmingly well-educated, middle class whites” (1978, 48).

Early efforts to increase draft avoidance and overt resistance among working class youth were only marginally successful. The Boston Draft Resistance Group made some headway in 1967-1969, as did the Wisconsin Draft Resistance Union. And groups in urban centers, like New York City, Detroit, San Francisco and Oakland also had greater luck reaching more working class youth. Over the course of the war, this form of resistance had penetrated many working class communities, particularly communities of color. As previously noted, draft resistance was advocated by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as early as 1965, and SNCC, the Panthers, and Afrocentric nationalist were united in the slogan, “Hell No, We Won’t Go.” In 1970, Mexican American mothers embraced their own slogan, “I’d rather have my sons die for La Raza than in Vietnam” (Antiwar National File, Bancroft).

Other forms of resistance and delinquency were explicitly taken by working class youth. From the beginning, non-registrants and deserters were “disproportionately black, poorly educated youth from low-income families,” while delinquents were from varied class backgrounds (Baskir & Strauss 1978, 11). By the end of the War, over 200,000 men were no-shows—reported as “delinquent” by the Selective Service to the Justice Department. The government additionally estimates that 360,000 men were never formally accused (AFSC, 2008). In Oakland, CA, a mostly Black and working-class city, “50 per cent of those called failed to report, and 11 per cent of those that did show refused induction” during the six months of October 1969-March 1970 (Cortright 1975, 5). Another way to get out of the draft was to fail to register for it. In small towns draft boards used high school yearbooks to ensure compliance, making non-compliance quite difficult for any rural youth;

white, middle-class children were likely to be informed of and intimidated by the risks involved in non compliance with Selective Service, which included prison and risk for future employment. The same was not true for those who were more anonymous or invisible to their draft boards, or whose future careers did not predictably hinge on compliance with the Selective Service laws. According to Baskir and Strauss's survey, "almost half the non-registrants were black, and most had low incomes and little education" (1978, 86). Furthermore, non-registrants were clearly influenced by the mood against the war, as their survey also found "that almost all black non-registration offences occurred during the latter half of the war." They conclude, "Apparently, rising black consciousness and the plight of black veterans made many inner-city youths reluctant to join the military." Similarly, of the over eighteen hundred convicted draft resisters whose cases were reviewed by the Clemency Board in 1975, "an unexpectedly large percentage came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds" (91).

Yet millions of men were successfully drafted, and the majority were from poor and working class backgrounds. Surveys of volunteers reported that nearly half were "draft motivated," and of the soldiers who served in Vietnam over the course of the war, one third were true volunteers, one third draft-motivated volunteers, and another third were drafted. Over the course of the war, draftees were increasingly sent to Vietnam over enlisted men, and were increasingly used in combat (Appy 1993).

Unsurprisingly, it was only after becoming part of the military that many young men came to despise it, and/or the war. Over a million and a half incidences of absenteeism (being "AWOL") were recorded over the course of the war, a half million of which became official desertions. According to all studies done, deserters were significantly more likely to be from working or lower class backgrounds, and were also more likely to come from rural backgrounds. This was the case in the

larger deserter communities in Sweden and Canada as well (Surrey 1982; *NYT* 7/15/1968 and 2/4/1973). The rates of desertion in Vietnam were higher than those during World War II and three times Korea's – and WWII desertions generally took place under fire, while the opposite was true in Vietnam.⁸⁰ In the Presidio stockade in San Francisco in 1968, a guard killed a prisoner being held for having gone AWOL. The other prisoners “tore it apart,” and charges of mutiny were brought against the group that came to be known as the “Presidio 27.” The mass support for the soldiers, including demonstrations of thousands at the gates of the Army base, was a major impetus to the growing alliance of antiwar GI's and civilians.

These record levels of avoidance and desertion convey part of the instability created by an unwilling populace and army during Vietnam. But ultimately, much of the fight against the war took place by those actually fighting the war, or getting ready to do so. The army contracted two reports in 1970 and 1971 to study this unrest, and found that 37% of the soldiers surveyed had engaged in either “dissent” or “disobedience,” with a third having done so repeatedly—figures that do not include drug use (Small & Hoover, 1992). Dissent was understood as typical movement-style participation—attending a demonstration, working on the GI press or spending time at a GI coffeehouse. Disobedience included the more physically resistant acts of sabotage, refusing orders, and general insubordination. The surveys – mirroring the impression that many activists themselves had gained – indicated that there was generally a class division between these two kinds of rebellion. The more educated and middle class soldiers engaged in dissent; the more working class and less educated in disobedience. Reviewing similar data, John Helmer argued that “defiance of the military system was predominantly the working-class soldier's

⁸⁰ Significantly, in the fights over amnesty, it was only occasionally recognized that the class base for deserters would be predictably lower than the background of those who overtly resisted the draft; Carter's amnesty in 1977 only fully covered the “dodgers,” while deserters received conditional clearance dependent on their own efforts to initiate it. See Surrey, 1982.

protest, and that it is at least as high in numerical terms as the level of resistance to the war expressed as draft resistance by middle-class youth at home” (1974, 51).

The “GI Movement” usually refers to the organized, dissenting types of actions and organizations that proliferated in the latter half of the war on and near military bases in the US and abroad. The constraints on such efforts were vast, of course: leaders were constantly being transferred; papers confiscated; meetings busted up; activists harassed. Some of the relative stability and continuity of the GI movement can be traced to its connections to the civilian movement, most notably in the form of GI coffeehouses, which started with the opening of the “UFO” in late 1967 near Fort Jackson, South Carolina and the Oleo Strut near Fort Hood, Texas. GI coffeehouses became places where soldiers could read the GI press, talk politics – but also just hang out, listen to music, and escape army life. Coffeehouses were also places where returning soldiers could talk to departing soldiers, giving them the “real story” of the war that they weren’t going to hear from the brass. The late Veterans for Peace activist Dave Cline described as “subversive” the roles played by these veteran soldiers (Zeiger, 2005). A pamphlet distributed in 1970, “Free the Fort Ord 40,000,” described the function of the coffeehouses well:

It was crucial to find a way of countering the attempt of the military to isolate GI’s from the ‘real’ civilian world – a world which was and still is a serious threat to maintaining a ‘disciplined’ army. At the coffeehouse GI could talk to people about their experiences in Nam and their lives in the military, they could eat good food, and essentially reinstate their identity as human beings after a day of mowing lawns with razorblades for punishment, or of practicing on the rifle range where a 40 foot billboard taunts them with the orders to ‘kill, kill, kill.’ (Movement for a Democratic Military, C2F5, Bancroft)

By 1969 the coffeehouses were themselves the target of government repression and other attacks, with arrests, closures, and raids becoming more common, as well as, in one case, a firebombing.

GI’s created dozens of their own organizations, such as the American Serviceman’s Union (started 1967), the United States Serviceman’s Fund (started 1969), GI’s United Against the War in Vietnam (started 1969), the Movement for a

Democratic Military (started 1968), and the Black Brothers Union (1971). These organizations were directly linked to the civilian movement (through the coffeehouses, movement organizations, or organized left groups) and served a variety of functions, ranging from fundraising to political mobilization and agitation, and from providing legal advice to organizing entertainment and cultural events for soldiers on bases around the country. There were officers organized against the war, such as the Concerned Officers Movement, and as the years went on, Navy and Air Force chapters of antiwar organizations began as well.⁸¹ Two thousand GI's overseas joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War before their return (and VVAW office workers remember with horror getting their correspondence returned, unopened, stamped "person deceased" (Hunt 2001, 68)), and thousands of others stayed active through the GI movement upon their return. The GI press was run out of the bases and the nearby coffeehouses, and represented GI organizations or just particular locales, including many from bases abroad. It totaled at least 300 individual papers, some of which – like *Vietnam GI*, *The Bond*, *Veteran Stars and Stripes for Peace*, *Bragg Briefs* and *FTA* – had nationwide readerships and circulations that went from the thousands to the tens of thousands.

The draft resistance movement itself had "strong relations with servicemen and veterans" (Foley 2003, 309) years before many of these organizations came to be. By the fall of 1968, the New England Resistance was focusing on GI outreach and creating sanctuaries for men who had gone AWOL. Deserters were aided by official and unofficial "underground railroads" of sorts, which helped bring men to Canada,

⁸¹ As the ground war gave way to an air war (supported by Naval aircraft carriers), the dissent, disobedience, and desertions shifted from their strongholds in the Army to these other divisions. Heintz (1971) wrote of the officers, "Only a short time ago, for example, a dissident group of active-duty officers, members of the Concerned Officers' Movement (COM), filed a sweeping lawsuit against Defense Secretary Laird himself, a well as all three service secretaries, demanding official recognition of their 'right' to oppose the Vietnam war, accusing the secretaries of 'harassing' them, and calling for court injunction to ban disciplinary 'retaliation' against COM members."

establish other identities, or facilitate their own “underground” existence in the States.

Resistance Overseas

Cortright makes the argument that “for soldiers already in the combat zone, there was little point in anti-war protest action. Opposition to the war was not a matter of politics but of survival; signing petitions or attending rallies was less important than simply avoiding personal injury” (1975, 33). Many men took the perspective that they would get through the fighting and fight against the war when they got home. A few typical protest actions did occur over the course of the war, including demonstrations, picketing, and one rally; petitions circulated and publicized; and leafleting. But survival and resistance were the focus of antiwar GI’s in Vietnam.

Direct disobedience started early, but grew much more slowly than the stateside GI movement. Some early cases, such as Howard Levy’s, a doctor who refused orders to continue training others in Vietnam, and the Fort Hood Three, who refused to depart for war, garnered a lot of attention, but were seen as isolated events. Similarly, in the frontlines of Vietnam itself combat refusals began quietly and sporadically. In 1969, when platoon Sergeant Bill Short refused to continue providing “the body count” to his superiors, he did so ignorant of the extent of the opposition that had already begun in the Armed Forces, and was shocked to find out he was not alone (Zieger 2005). But from 1969 onward, through the GI press and the infusion of movement-aware servicemen the ranks, increasing numbers of soldiers were aware of the resistance of others.

Cortright details a dozen cases of mass mutiny in the Army and describes them as “the tip of the iceberg.” Early on, in 1968, “sandbagging” was common, where soldiers would “sit and avoid” rather than “search and destroy,” or otherwise duck the (often suicidal) missions on which they were ordered. One veteran,

recalling such orders, remembers, “we really were lower than whale shit at the bottom of the ocean to those people” (McFerrin 1999). Soldiers and officers commonly “worked out” the orders that came in to minimize confrontation and casualties. An infantry officer in Vietnam told Heintz (1971), “You can't give them an order and expect them to obey immediately . . . [T]hey ask why, and you have to tell them.” This practice was common enough – Heintz called it “virtually a principle” – that it was widely reported, and was even broadcast on a news segment on *ABC* in 1970. The culture that developed among US ground soldiers in South Vietnam appears to have been one in which it was expected that officers would “work it out”: A necessary correlate, therefore, was that there was no guarantee men would fight (Heintz 1971; Zieger 2005). Large scale mutinies did occur, only some reported, when working out failed or was not an option. Different troops and companies refused to invade Cambodia and Laos, and their reluctance in the latter case in particular may have cut short those operations. The mutinies that were reported in 1969, 1970, and 1971, received almost no retribution, even though such actions were technically punishable by death.

A popular alternative to mutiny was “fragging.” Heintz, again, reporting: “Word of the deaths of officers will bring cheers at troop movies or in bivouacs of certain units. In one such division—the morale plagued Americal—fraggings during 1971 have been authoritatively estimated to be running about one a week” (1971). Given the widespread availability of guns and chaos of combat conditions, it is likely that thousands of officers were attacked by their own men over the course of the war, with at least hundreds of resulting deaths. In a radio interview in 2000, historian and Vietnam veteran Terry Anderson explained, “During the years of 1969 down to 1973, we have the rise of fragging – that is, shooting or hand-grenading your NCO or your officer who orders you out into the field. The US Army itself does not know exactly how many...officers were murdered. But they know at least 600 were

murdered, and then they have another 1400 that died mysteriously” (Biewen 2000). It was not uncommon for companies to place bounties on the heads of particularly hated officers, which were rewarded to the soldier who did the deed. In the last years of the ground war, the “lifers” were locking up the guns to make sure that the regular soldiers couldn’t kill them – that is, taking guns away from men who were supposed to be fighting a war (Geier 2000; Moser 1996).

Heinl (1971) wrote, “Nowhere, however, in the history of the Armed Forces have comparable past troubles presented themselves in such general magnitude, acuteness, or concentrated focus as today.” Historians and participants in the GI movement conclude that the mutinous conditions of the army as a whole made it impossible for the brass to fight the kind of war they wanted to fight. Antiwar veterans frequently refer to the “genocidal” plans of the US, an assessment reached through their participation and observation of the bloodbath. Their refusal to continue such participation helped to end the draft, and certainly expedited the withdrawal of ground troops from Vietnam, while the brass intensified the air war in the final years of the war (Zieger 2005).

During the Army’s worst year of decline (1971), Cortright summarizes, “we find seven acts of desertion, seventeen incidents of unauthorized absence, two disciplinary discharges, twelve complaints to congressmen, and eighteen non-judicial punishments for every one hundred soldiers; at the same time, 20 percent of the men smoked marijuana frequently, while 10 percent used narcotics on a regular basis.” He concludes, “Such figures suggest that as many as one fourth of all Army enlisted men engaged in some form of rebellion against military authority. In an organizational environment requiring intense interpersonal loyalty and a high degree of cooperation, defiance of this magnitude necessarily exerted a profound influence on operational effectiveness. No armed force can function properly when faced with such internal disruption and resistance” (1975, 24-25).

To what extent were these “movement” actions? I would argue that one can’t separate the actions of the two, stateside and frontlines. The problem with morale in the Vietnam era military was directly related to the doubts and criticisms that soldiers had concerning their “mission,” and the problems with the mission were highlighted among the public largely by the actions taken and educational practices of the antiwar movement. Men in any war receive orders that seem wrong, unclear, or unjust. The movement’s sustained attention to the overall problems with the war in Vietnam helped soldiers, on one-year rotations, connect the dots, and experience their own disagreements with the war in a less isolating way. The divisions at home played a massive role in GI’s self-perception. And as the war progressed, and more soldiers rotated in and out in their one-year stints, the new enlistees and drafted came out of a domestic milieu saturated with antiwar opinion and unrest. Even when the actual critiques made by the movement were not embraced—and there’s good evidence that they were not necessarily embraced, even by soldiers who opposed the war—the large scale presence of debate opened questions that silence could have helped conceal.

Role of Veterans in the movement

John Helmer (1974) cites a 1969 Nielson study of veterans that found that only ten percent supported the purpose and tactics of the war they had just left. The plurality, forty-four percent, said it was a mistake, with forty percent saying it had been fought the wrong way. If there was one section of the “official” movement that was prototypically “working class” in composition, culture, and orientation, that was the Veteran’s movement, which was exemplified in the organization Vietnam Veterans Against the War. This group, which grew to 30,000 active members by the war’s end, provides a template on what to do right if you want an active working-class base for a social movement organization, and how to make working-class audiences to take you seriously. VVAW, while never completely comfortable inside

the mainstream movement, served as a critical bridge between veterans, active GI's, and the organized protests of the mass movement. Perhaps more importantly, their protests reached the hearts of the general public in a way that no civilian protest ever succeeded in doing. In 1971, the day before the largest antiwar demonstration of the war, hundreds of VVAW members spent hours lining up by the steps of the capital building, and one by one (and then later, in groups) throwing their medals back at the government that had issued them. This scene, broadcast on the major networks, is one of the most remembered of the era, and came to define the tragedy and waste of the war for a generation (Small and Hoover 1992).

As Christian Appy (1993) has documented, Vietnam was a “working-class war.” Eighty percent of the soldiers who fought in the war were from working or lower-class families. The antiwar veterans did not have to go to the working class to recruit—they were already there. VVAW members came to their political and moral stances against the war through the experience of going through it, and having gone through that hell, veterans had an authority in the movement unmatched by any other group. In 1971, as the organized movement elsewhere faltered, VVAW emerged as the most influential – one of its historians writes, “venerated” – organization against the war. It “filled a leadership vacuum” (Hunt 1999, 2).

VVAW got its first start at the October 1967 “5th Avenue Peace Parade” in New York City, when six veterans marched behind a ready-made banner, Vietnam Veterans Against the War. (Apocryphally, the banner had been prepared by the Communist Party, ready for anyone to pick it up at the Parade offices (Halstead 1978).) With the hard work of early antiwar veterans like Jan Barry, through word of mouth members trickled in to the nascent organization. Most antiwar veterans were distrustful of the left in the early days of the movement, and dressed in conservative fashion to distinguish themselves from the counter culture. While reports of protester hostility were wildly (and widely) exaggerated, it remains true that some

early movement activists called the vets “baby killers,” and insulted them (Appy 1993; Lembcke 1998). When VVAW first began, its then mostly middle-class members organized themselves as a speakers bureau for veterans who could talk to groups in schools and other gatherings about why they opposed the war. Their base was veterans who had returned to school on the GI bill. Like many in the movement, the election of 1968 became VVAW’s main focus in that year, and presidential politics split the vets movement. Some were for more radical anti-electoral actions, like Jeff Sharlet, editor of *Vietnam GI* and close to SDS in politics. Most supported Eugene McCarthy, and a number left VVAW to go work in his campaign. VVAW organized antiwar veterans in every state to lobby Chicago convention delegates to adopt an antiwar plank in the Democratic Party platform. Their failure there, combined with the other events of Chicago (see Chapter Seven), were completely demoralizing for the Vets, along with many other parts of the movement, which went into a period of relative quiet for the following year.

This was VVAW, phase one. Its more moderate politics reflected the educational aspirations of its middle class demographic as well as the anti-counter culture suspicions of the group as a whole. But the organization changed dramatically after its growth spurts following the Moratorium and Kent State. In its later incarnation, the majority of VVAW members were from working-class backgrounds. John Kerry emerged for a few months in 1971 as the nationwide image of the group, but his patrician background was exceptional (and cause for much consternation in the group). In *The New Soldier* (Kerry, VVAW, Thorne & Butler, 1971), the results of a survey of VVAW members who participated in the events of the “Dewey Canyon III” Washington Mall encampment, lobbying, and medal return are detailed, and over three quarters of the men described their families (father’s occupation) as working class.

This composition helped lead the group to focus on issues pertinent to their lives, including conditions at veterans hospitals (also a major recruiting ground for the group); exposing the atrocities they witnessed and participated in during the war (VVAW publicly exposed the extent of such war crimes in the Winter Soldier Investigation of December, 1970); collectively helping each other with their memories and the experience of PTSD (VVAW pioneered the first “rap groups,” peer counseling sessions reproduced across the country for the rest of the decade because of their effectiveness); and the problems of joblessness among returning soldiers. Decisions made about where to locate their actions reflected the base they hoped to reach. The Winter Soldier Investigation was held in Detroit as opposed to the more obvious choice of Washington DC to reach the working class Detroit audience; their major New York event in June 1971 in was in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, over Manhattan’s movement center, Central Park; and their first storefronts for “rap sessions” and “draft counseling” were set up on Brooklyn’s then working-class Fifth Avenue.

Where other groups engaged in “pig-baiting” with police officers, before their major protests VVAW wrote letters to the police (many of whom were Vets like themselves, as they were given incentives to join the force), explaining,

The violence of Vietnam is something we vets understand because we were the ones who performed that violence. And, having that experience, we are totally committed to non-violence in our actions. We have been through one war and we don’t want another one. So, we are writing this letter to you, the “pig”, the “cop”, the “bull”, because we understand what it is like to wear a uniform. We understand what it is like to wear a gun and be placed in situation where there is paranoia and fear. We understand these things and we want to reassure you that we do not want to place you in that position (B13 F10 VVAW Papers, SHSW).⁸²

VVAW had almost no trouble with the police in DC, despite the fact that they were camping on the mall without a permit for doing so; threatened mass arrests never

⁸² Similar letters were written to NYC cops for a demonstration that summer in Brooklyn, and to Miami National Guard at Fort Campbell in anticipation of the Republican National Committee convention in August 1972.

occurred, with police from top to bottom refusing or evading orders to clear the encampment. In a similar letter to National Guardsmen before the 1972 Republican National Convention, they wrote, “if they call you down to Miami, don’t worry, we won’t consider you the pigs. We know who the pigs are—lifers, politicians, and big business men” (Extension Kroll B1 VVAW Papers, SHSW).

One story, related in a history of VVAW, indicates the possibilities opened up by having a working-class culture created inside of a movement organization. Among the many government infiltrators dispatched during the war years to gather information about, and derail, the movement was a former air force medic name John O’Connor, who had joined the Washington police department upon his return and was immediately assigned to infiltrate the newly formed National Peace Action Coalition (part of the Mobe split after May 1970). He told VVAW’s historian Andrew Hunt that he generally disliked the activists he met, and that he “cheered the hardhats when they smacked them around” (1999, 85). Working in the office, he met VVAW organizers, who asked him to help out. “These guys were different. They had paid their dues. They earned the right to say what they were saying. And they were good guys. It was interesting to hear their story. I started to have different outlook on the war,” he said. O’Connor moved in with some of the VVAW guys, and later explained that “we were the core of the [DC VVAW].” O’Connor continued to report to the police, but he mostly provided “invaluable” support for the organizing of Dewey Canyon III. One of his housemates, a VVAW organizer named Tim Butz, later told Hunt: “Contrary to the image of a police officer as an agent provocateur, John. . . . really helped lessen the tension, and did whatever was asked of him. He could’ve fucked us up good on several occasions, and he didn’t do it.”

VVAW was “[o]ne of the few white antiwar groups that backed up its words with actions,” in the words of former activist Mary Treadwell, and who gave “active

support” to “black peoples struggles against repression” (Hall 2006, 179). Treadwell is referring, in part, to the “Cairo Campaign” VVAW embarked upon in 1971 in the immediate aftermath of Dewey Canyon III. VVAW gave direct support to the besieged African American community of Cairo, Illinois, whose boycott of white-owned businesses had provoked a murderous response from white townspeople. Their “Lifeline to Cairo” collected food and supplies from all over the country and delivered them to the town (Extension Boxes Cairo VVAW). Echoing the Black and Chicano organizers of the period, one VVAW leader said, “The government of this country has . . . [said] that we are fighting for freedom and equality and self-determination for the Vietnamese, and yet here in our own country people are denied that right and are involved in a struggle to obtain that right” (Hunt 1999, 125). Many in VVAW were “making the connection” between war, racism, sexism, and the economy, following the same general radicalization that was occurring in the movement as a whole. VVAW publications, like *First Casualty*, had articles that went beyond strictly military concerns (VVAW Papers).

VVAW was also not immune to the fractures that plagued the movement, though its real dissolution occurred after 1973. But during its three years at the center of the antiwar movement, VVAW, like the Chicano Moratoriums, showed the possibility for reaching and retaining a committed mass of working class Americans. The primary identity of these activists was not working class, but neither was their class identity subsumed or negated by the identities of Chicana, veteran, soldier, etc. Rather, their experiences as working class people directly contributed to their opposition to the war, and their opposition to the war was in turn understood through their particular class-based experiences. These groups provide a model for what an antiwar movement based in working class issues could, and did, look like.

Chapter 5 Anticipation of the Class Divide

Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past.

Stuart Hall, in Olick and Robbins 1998, 122

They call my people the White Lower Middle Class these days. It is an ugly, ice-cold phrase, the result, I suppose, of the missionary zeal of those sociologists who still think you can place human beings on charts.

Pete Hamill, "Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class," *New York*, 1969

Given the class diversity of the antiwar response in the United States, what accounts for the stereotypical image that we've received since the Vietnam War was over? Given the fact that the image of a hawkish working class and elitist movement is not right, why do we retain it; why is it so powerful? The next three chapters explore why this image of class polarization has resonated in our collective memory. I begin by looking at the period before the war, from, roughly, World War II to the early 1960's. In this chapter, I will review post-war class formation and politics in the United States alongside academic and cultural apprehensions of the class divide that developed during that era. The post-war boom and its attendant affluence; changing racial demographics, politics and identities; the defeated specter of fascism and looming threat of communism; "consensus" politics and the widespread acceptance of pluralism; and theories of "mass society" together contributed to both material and ideological changes in what it meant to be working- or middle-class in the United States. Who and how many people constituted which classes, and how such groups might act in what circumstances, were questions visited in the years following World War II, the answers to which gave rise to a new common sense about class relations, class cultures, and agents of change within US society. Together, the stage was set for a divisive reaction to Vietnam, yet these conditions also assured that the anticipation of political class polarization would exceed its actuality.

The Affluent White Working Class?

The “post-war boom” is by now a cliché, rosily invoked, or recalled with some bitterness in light of the volatile, insecure and more ruthless economic climate of recent decades. During the period of 1945-1973, dates that are conventionally used to demarcate the boundaries of the boom, the US experienced unprecedented economic growth, including mostly proportional income gains up and down the income ladder: a rising tide did lift nearly all boats. The “middle-class” grew rapidly, with service sector and office jobs outpacing growth in other sectors, and salaried employees increasing as a share of the workforce. Post-war government support for housing and immense outlays for highway infrastructure development encouraged suburbanization, while the GI bill swelled the colleges.

The reasons behind the boom—America’s lack of foreign competition, expansive government investment in foreign aid and military spending, increasing consumer capacity—were unique, though it was not the first time the US had experienced a booming economy. Part of what made this boom unusual was its duration. Even with a number of short recessions, most acute in 1954-55 and 1969-70, real growth continued through the decades. Another, and for this project, more important aspect of the singularity of this boom was how it affected, and was affected by, working people. Income distribution stabilized, real living standards rose. Even in the bust times, the relative security achieved by industrialized workers during this period was unprecedented in the industrial age. Economic prosperity was a necessary factor determining this new situation for workers, but the sufficient condition for this security and growth was the strength of the labor movement.

Unionized workers comprised over 30% of the private sector workforce and over 50% in many of the core industries for much of this period, and the terms and conditions of their employ set the standards for workers in similar non-unionized jobs. What the unions got, however, varied across industries. Beginning with UAW’s “Treaty of Detroit” in 1950, autoworkers saw cost of living increases in their

pay regardless of the raises they won in contract negotiations. Steel workers also got COLA, but this did not become a norm in the unionized sectors. By the end of the 1950's most unionized employees had both health care and pension plans as part of their contracts, and were successfully fighting for earlier retirement options, like the UAW's "25 and out" campaign. Increased wages and benefits were combined with concessions—and ongoing contestation—over work rules and "management rights" in the workplace (on which, more below). But the "bread and butter" victories were real, and helped to change the society's ideas about what it meant to be "working class" in America.

As Jack Metzgar, the son of a steelworker, remembers it, and as most historians describe it, there were real grounds for optimism in the period: "There were choices. There were prospects. There were possibilities. Few of these had been there before. Now they were" (2000, 39). What a remarkable change from just two decades before, when the economic system appeared on the verge of collapse, the economic problems of the working class were front and center, and class struggle the political fulcrum of change. With the post-war boom, it increasingly appeared to many that workers were no longer a "class apart," but rather incorporated into the fabric of the "American dream." Labor was a politically potent force; many workers had sufficient disposable income to own consumer goods similar to those in the middle class; home ownership was on the rise. In the eyes of mainstream culture, economic growth and its attendant optimism transformed workers from being oppositional figures to mostly integrated figures. The "New Deal" orientation of the Democratic Party spoke to working-class concerns, and labor had a seat at the table. From a liberal perspective, the "problem" of the working class had been largely solved, through strong unions and Keynesian economic policies.

Limits to the Boom

The problem with this story is that it did not correspond to the full reality of working class lives. The true security and something close to affluence that was achieved during the boom existed among a growing middle-class of upper and lower level professionals in the expanding salaried economy. It's not that workers were excluded from the boom, but their gains were significantly more circumscribed.

The gains that were made went overwhelmingly to white, male and unionized workers; many workers were excluded from these arrangements. In the wake of their postwar migration from the south to the industrialized north and west, African-American workers were beginning to join unionized industries in significant numbers, but they tended to be hired in the lowest rungs of job classifications, whose levels were often "safeguarded" along ethnic and racial lines, with white "hillbillies" from the south often sharing a similar experience (Aronowitz 1973,180). More frequently, African Americans held jobs in non-unionized shops or non-union sectors, including government, service, agricultural and domestic work.⁸³ They were joined in these capacities by Chicano and Puerto Rican workers, and together faced direct discrimination from employers. Women fared little better—although their workplace participation increased by one third during the post-war era, these women were confined to sex-segregated occupations with lower pay. Women's class status, however, was overwhelmingly linked to that of their families, and during the post-war boom the "family wage" won by many male workers assured lifestyle changes for many women (Cobble 1991; Rosensweig, Strasser & Lichtenstein 2000; Sugrue 1996, cf. 93).

Among even the better off workers, day-to-day life was mixed, and at times and in many places, more harsh. As we have just seen, the working class was itself stratified, with a minority of skilled and unionized workers doing significantly better than the majority. Trade unions were at times actively complicit in the arbitrary

⁸³ Government and service workers were only at this time becoming unionized.

classification schemes that encouraged racial, ethnic and gender stratification, which served to benefit management with their divisiveness and, in the narrow sense, skilled craftsmen and longtime white workers with their exclusiveness: “the social divisions within the factories based on ethnicity, race and sex were even more rigidly enforced than previously” (Aronowitz 1973,180-182). Unfortunately, progressive policies like seniority lists, which derailed management favoritism and improved the chances of both job security and opportunity in the workplace, simultaneously contributed to this stratification, favoring (white and male) workers who had held their jobs longer than the more recently-hired Blacks, or women. Overall job security was good, and much better than it was during the depression. But seasonal shutdowns and recessions were hard for workers without seniority—unemployment benefits had to be extended a number of times throughout the period, for as long as a year in the middle of the fifties. The ongoing problem of unemployment sparked a rank-and-file movement for the shorter work week in auto – “30 for 40” – which the more conservative Reuther leadership countered with rhetoric about (and little progress on) the “Guaranteed Annual Wage” (Lichtenstein 1995; Preis 1992). Wage-wise, workers were not gaining against other groups, and therefore their relative affluence as measured by distribution of wealth was not increasing. So while for white workers, the rise in living standards meant a better diet that could more regularly include meat, and increasingly homeownership (60% of Americans owned their homes by 1960), there were serious limits to this economic prosperity and cultural assimilation (Metzgar 2000; Milkman 1997; Rosensweig et al. 2000). Life was significantly better than it had been during the Depression, but it was still a tenuous experience, often only a few paychecks ahead of debt. The Bureau of Labor Statistics suggested a “minimum budget” in the late 1940’s Metzgar recalls “almost perfectly described my immediate family’s situation in 1959”:

This budget envisioned a family of four, living in a rented apartment, consisting of a kitchen, bath, and three other rooms. The family had hot

running water and owned a washing machine [a wringer-washer, not an automatic]. On the budget “it should be possible to serve meat for dinner several times a week, if the cheaper cuts are served.” Each child could have a bottle of pop every other day, and one beer a week could be consumed. Three shirts and two pairs of pants could be purchased each year for the growing boy. The family did not own a car and there was not money in the budget for any vacation ever, but every three weeks the family could afford a movie, if they bought no food at the theater. (Metzgar 2000, quoting McColloch, 41)

As a son of a skilled, and unionized steelworker, Metzgar’s experience was close to the top of the heap. In 1959, the “modest but adequate” budget for a family of four was \$5,180 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an income level at which people could be said to have achieved “health and decency,” or what labor leaders called “shabby, but respectable” living (Johnson, Rodgers, Tan, 2001; Levison 1974, 31). Not, it is important to emphasize, affluence, or anything approaching it. Census income statistics indicate that this modest budget was just below the median budget for all white families in that year (Census, 2008). Later studies showed that, in the 1960’s, at least 60% of the working class lived at or below the “shabby, but respectable” life sketched by the minimum budget for a family of four, while nearly a third lived at or below the “poor” level of minimum income. In those same later studies, by 1970 only 15% of workers were, by income, within the levels considered “affluent” according to the BLS’s understanding of family budgets (Levison 1974, 12). Given the steady rise in real income that attended the boom, the number of workers who actually achieved “affluence” during the post war era appears to have topped out at that 15%, and, in the earlier years, when “affluence studies” were all the rage, was probably closer to a tenth of all workers.

“Everything stops today, and I mean everything.”⁸⁴

The 1950’s marked a period within which the more militant and democratic rank-and-file upsurges of the 1930’s and to a lesser extent 1940’s were largely put down through a combination of factors including government repression and state

⁸⁴ 1946 Oakland picket captain quoted by Lipsitz (1994, 149).

regulation of labor, attacks on the political left, “business unionist” practices on the part of labor leadership, and sufficient wealth in the system to provide the economic gains made by workers described above. Immediately after the war, wildcat strikes over disciplinary firings and workrules broke out, along with a strong push for greater wage gains. General strikes broke out in cities around the country. In Rochester, New York, city workers struck for union recognition, creating a cascade of solidaristic work stoppages that ended in complete victory for the strikers. In Pittsburgh, thousands of workers joined the strike of an independent union defying a no-strike injunction, often in defiance of their own union leaders, and succeeded in nearly shutting down the city in late September and early October of 1946. Oakland workers shut down their city for a few days that December. These workers were learning the value of “political action through public disruption” (Lipsitz 1994; Weir 2004).

Radical and militant workers were up against enormous odds throughout the era. When the east coast longshoremen went back to work in October, 1945, the rank-and file negotiating committee explained, “We make this recommendation because the continuance of the trike in the face of [ILA President Joseph “King”] Ryan’s gangsterism, the strike breaking of [the Seafarers Industrial Union], the lies in the anti labor press and the active collusion of the shipowners with Ryan. . . convinces us that the unity of the ILA rank and file might suffer” (Lipsitz 1994, 106).

These repressive factors only intensified in the following years. Taft Hartley, described in the last chapter, shackled labor, and the red scare divided the labor movement, with eleven CIO unions purged from the federation, raided, and largely destroyed as a result. The merits of Communist trade unionists aside, progressive and political unionism of the Depression was directly challenged, and an environment was created in which dissent would be punished severely both within

and without the labor movement. A number of radicals kept their jobs if they were good trade unionists – but left wing or “class conscious” political unionism was largely silenced. Most union leaders embraced “business unionism,” in which internal democracy was limited, labor leadership positioned itself as a broker between its workers and capital seeking contracts that would cause the least conflict on either side, and power shifted from the shop floor to the increasingly “expert” union staffs (See Goldfield 1987; Moody 1988; Weir 2004).

Such labor expertise was in part needed because of the expanded arena of bargaining, which beginning in the 1940’s came to include the vast area of “fringe benefits.” Unlike unions and labor parties elsewhere in the world, US unions did not successfully pursue national welfare-state policies, accepting instead a private model of collective bargaining for benefits, a decision made by labor during this period that would have fateful repercussions on its long term-political incorporation and future class solidarity.⁸⁵ Unions such as the powerful Mineworkers and Autoworkers viewed the unions’ capacity for providing benefits as a major draw for organizing and sustaining union membership, which, in face of anti-union measures like Taft-Hartley appeared otherwise threatened. The privatized welfare state that was set up in the postwar era had a number of long term effects on the internal solidarity of the class – workers in unions were significantly better protected than those outside; government welfare programs were similarly sectional rather than universal – and on its political orientation. Working class gains were not incorporated into the public arena, making the public arena of elections less central for unions than they might otherwise have become under a more social democratic arrangement. Without significant national programs beyond Social Security, neither party was ultimately identified with economic redistribution, despite the Democratic party’s clear “fair

⁸⁵ Nearly the entire labor movement preferred national health insurance, and improved social security, to the private arrangements that were made, so this “decision” took place in the realm what they understood was possible rather than what was ideal.

deal” support for national insurance, pensions and housing support. Because such programs were not created, the DP could not, in the future, be held accountable to maintaining class programs in the same manner as Labor and Socialist parties of Europe could be (See Piven, 1991; Quadagno, 2005).

That workers achieved any affluence at all was in part traced to the fact that labor leaders and business focused almost exclusively on promoting wage and benefit gains during this period. Yet increased wages were not the sole, or in many cases, most important, demand of workers, and the emphasis on monetary compensation came at the expense of the vast panoply of working class demands regarding basic rights and rules over the terms and conditions of work. On the other hand, worker control was the central target for postwar business; the laws they supported such as Taft Hartley, and major contracts they signed, were directed at its limitation and erosion. “Give the union the money, the least possible, but give them what it takes,” said one General Motors Executive. “But don’t let them take the business away from us” (Lipsitz, 1994; 230). But the work itself that was performed remained onerous, dangerous, and often filthy; the stretch out (additional tasks) and speed up (faster work) remained central points of contention; automation was often making work faster and workers redundant.

A tension, therefore, existed throughout the 1950’s and into the 1960’s over what constituted labor power – monetary gains or power over work rules – and whether the expanding labor bureaucracies were representing their members’ best interests. Many issues that had previously been resolved on the shop floor were increasingly bureaucratized through the grievance procedure, taking away the power of stewards. Economic gains were made, but working conditions were hard and shop-floor power was under attack. The restiveness of workers with regard to conditions at work and power on the job caused a great deal of consternation among labor leaders. Longer contracts were one strategy for forestalling struggle, as were

the escalator clauses, both of which became norms or goals for most unions in the 1950's. But the "Treaty of Detroit," the UAW's five year contract signed in 1950, precipitated massive fights over conditions: though the contract stipulated no strikes over its duration, thousands of workers repeatedly walked out in its latter years when the line sped up (Aronowitz 1973, 248), and the UAW brought the contract length down to three years in the next round, and permitted local bargaining. Strikes did not disappear – in fact, there were more strikes per year in the 1950's than in any other decade of the century, with the early 1950's seeing the most:

Table Four: Strikes, 1930's and 1950's (from Preis 1992, 495)

	Number of Strikes	Number of Strikers	Strike Man Days
1935-1939	2,867	1,130,000	16,900,000
1950-1953	4,847	2,642,500	37,275,000
1953-1956	4,176	2,120,000	28,050,000

Many of these strikes in the early 1950's were wildcats, including over 400 at Ford Motor alone (Sugrue 1996, 325). With economic gains increasing over the decade, fights over work rules intensified. The 116-day strike in steel in 1959 was primarily concerned with protecting the "local practices" clause – Section 2-B in the contract – that impeded management's ability to reorganize the labor process (Metzgar 2000, 101-108). Longshoremen, rubber workers, miners and meatcutters resisted similar incursions in 1959, with varying degrees of success. At the dawn of the 1960's, conflict between the bureaucratization of bargaining and the erosion of shop-floor power gave rise to rank-and-file political revolts in nearly every CIO union, as well as a few old AFL standards such as teamsters and miners that played out over the next decade.

Overall, the pre-Vietnam period was one in which things were getting better for workers, but most still lived at only what the BLS understood as "adequate" levels or below. The insurgence and militancy of the previous period had been put down by law, by union practices, and by force, but there was little indication that rank-and-file workers had achieved contentment at work or standards of living solid enough to assure their quiescence or assimilation. The discourses of the affluent worker that circulated in the era are best viewed, therefore, in terms of performing ideological work rather than reflecting objective reality. The imaginary picture of an American idyll kept the turbulence of the pre-war era at bay, and fed upon the promises of the

post-war boom. But stability, satisfaction, and quiet were not at the center of working-class life. By the end of the 1960's, the fragility and brittleness of the actual situation became abundantly clear.

Here, Bourdieu's (1991) observation of the relative lack of cultural capital among workers, and their attendant cultural dependence on representative bodies, helps make sense of the distorted understanding of the "middle class worker" common to our perceptions of the 1950's. Like the Vietnam period, the working class did not, in the 1950's, have institutional or cultural modes of self-representation that could give public lie to the story of their "up and coming" ascent to the middle-class. In fact, such independent representation was arguably less available, in the McCarthyist and business unionist climate, than it would be in the later years. That meant that the much more unsettled, more politically and culturally indeterminate direction of the US workers did not register in the mainstream culture of the period. What people saw, on TV or in movies, or read about, seemed to confirm the idea that industrial conflict had been overcome, and that workers were increasingly "middle class."

Television was a primary vehicle through which this new ideological representation was performed to the public at large. During the 1950's a number of shows focused on the lives of blue-collar, ethnic workers adjusting to or living in the new prosperity. Lipsitz (1990) argues that on shows like *The Goldbergs*, *Life of Riley*, *Mama*, *Molly*, and more, working class families were schooled in the arts of consumerism, and, increasingly, life in the suburbs—some, like the Rileys, started there, while others, like the Goldbergs, moved. The shows, Lipsitz points out, "made new economic and social relations credible and legitimate to audiences haunted by ghosts of the past" (42). They also brought to prime-time a depiction of working-class life that, over the course of the decade, became increasingly indistinguishable from the lives of the generic middle class families that dominated

TV shows in the late 1950's and 1960's. The migration of the Goldbergs from the Bronx to "Haverville" (as Marc, in Lipsitz, points out, the opposite of "Hooverville") sums up the trajectory of many of these families, whose children lead lives buying on the installment plan and worrying about dates and schoolwork. On these shows, bosses and the rich were still pilloried, the work ethic subverted, and representations of class solidarity remained, but many characters were just as much "everyman" as they were "workingmen." (Hamamoto 1989; Lipsitz). By the late 1950's, these families (with the exception of the going-nowhere-fast *Honeymooners*, and some others in syndication) had disappeared from the air (Bodnar 2003, 136), symbolizing what for many was becoming "obvious" – that class no longer existed as a salient economic category in the United States.

The Disappearance of the Working Class

By the late 1950's, many were convinced that class society was a thing of the past. Certainly, there still existed "pockets" of poor people scattered across the country. Yet by and large, such inequality appeared to be behind us. Certainly, as an example, the approbation with which Michael Harrington's expose of the scale and depth of US poverty, *The Other America* (1962), was greeted – the New York Times called it "alarming," the LA Times called it "deeply disturbing" – was some indication that for many in the growing middle and upper middle classes, economic inequality was largely invisible.⁸⁶

For many academic observers, the appearance of relative labor peace and economic security gave rise to contradictory but related theories of the contemporary class scene in the United States. One popular theory was the embourgeoisement of the "affluent worker"; another, related set of theories argued for

⁸⁶ Incidentally, Harrington's book, which was to prove inspirational within the New Left as well as Democratic Party policy circles, similarly divided the United States into "affluent" and "poor," with workers falling on either side of the line, depending on their particular income and status. So, while it served to open middle-class eyes to the persistent reality of economic inequality, it did so according to the same logic that would largely erase the working class as distinct social group.

a purely culturalist (as opposed to structural or power-related) approach to class differences. The first tended to deny that there was any real difference among better-off workers and the middle class, while the latter took affluence for granted, but posited real cultural difference between workers and middle class citizens. While their conclusions were opposite, their foundations were common.

According to the embourgeoisment thesis popular in both Great Britain and the US, material gains made by workers effected a change in their political and cultural proclivities. Income gains, in other words, led to changes in attitude and behavior, in which better off workers acted like middle-class income-equivalents. Among other predictions, this theory anticipated that workers would begin to vote for middle class parties, supporting Tory or Republican parties over Labor or Democratic. This theory was more explicitly raised—and refuted—in Great Britain (cf. Goldtharpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer & Platt 1969). Beyond the problems of the real limits to the monetary gains made among workers, empirical studies repeatedly showed that the type of job performed and the relative freedom exercised by the person doing the job—in short, the degree of individual power exercised on the job—continued to have a greater effect on class consciousness and political behavior than income. Thus the most affluent workers (unionized, higher-income, skilled) continued to act like their brothers and sisters “beneath” them in socio-economic status, and did not act like the middle-class people who were closer to them in income or living standards.⁸⁷

In the United States, working-class affluence was rarely directly studied; in fact, a 1971 review essay surveying the field of such “affluent worker” studies points

⁸⁷ Alford (1963) also found that “class voting” had not in fact decreased in the early post-war period. Decades later, David Halle’s ethnographic study, *America’s Working Man* (1984), would find evidence to support both sides of this debate. Studying a higher-income and relatively skilled group of chemical workers during the 1970’s, Halle discovered that their own sense of class was multi-faceted—attaining a sense of being a “workingman” from the job, while identifying with being “middle-class” at home—and that their leisure behavior and political attitudes had elements in common with both traditional “working class” culture as well as the more mainstream “middle class” concerns and ideals.

out the “neglect” shown by sociologists in the post-war era to actually study “class consciousness, industrial unrest, and nascent forms of labor organization,” in light of the perception that all was quiet on those fronts (Rinehart 1971, 157). Another book-length study of *Blue Collar Life* (Shostak 1968) notes that “data will not sustain” studies of the “heterogeneous amalgam” of workers beyond treating them as a “single construct,” and laments the “crude state of development” of conceptual frameworks accounting for their political behavior. (Shostak nevertheless maintains that a “distinct style of politics” exists that can be appraised “within these restrictions” (212)). Rather, in the US, the assumption of embourgeoisement was taken for granted across the political spectrum, but taken as *a priori* rather than proven. Workers, for many observers, disappeared as a distinct social group.

At the conservative end of the spectrum, Robert Nisbet (1959) was one influential sociologist whose work pursued this reasoning to its logical end. He asked, “may American society at the present time reasonably and objectively be called a class society?” Nisbet relegated the very existence of the category of class to the “conceptual memory” of sociology, a stubborn relic whose obdurate nature distorted scholarly investigation. In fact, “the term social class is . . . nearly valueless for the clarification of the data of wealth, power and social status in contemporary United States” —“we are,” rather, “living in a society governed by status.” (II).

Status, in fact, was the new by-word for much of the stratification literature. This emerging conceptual framework masked a lack of academic or intellectual rigor regarding empirical support for the embourgeoisement thesis. For a period during the 1930’s the relational nature of class was observed in the public discourses surrounding the subject. Elements of this discourse included ideas such as workers and owners being structurally prone to conflict, or that “the working class” was identifiable through its independent organizations, and in many places in the industrialized world, political parties: in other words, economic and political

understandings of class were at the forefront of the popular imagination. Yet the American sociological perspectives that evolved during this period, which were to blossom in the post-War era, described the social realities they apprehended through the concept of “stratification,” a largely distributional model inspired by Weberian status-oriented conceptions of class, and which were developed most cogently in anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner’s influential *Social Class in America* (1949). Gordon (1958) and Grimes (1991) (one approvingly, one critically) describe the typical post-War models as finding inspiration in both the newly-translated Weber (1946) and the consensus frameworks offered by functionalism, emphasizing interdependence and differentiation over power and conflictual relations. Stratification theory à la Warner and others marked a decisive rejection from (most obviously) Marxist versions of class, but also from those prevalent within the classical sociological literature as a whole, including Weber’s own.⁸⁸ Warner’s taxonomy—upper, middle, and lower classes, subdivided therein—eradicated historical and structural determinations of class and radically de-emphasized power, substituting instead a prestige and income scale through which modulations in class location could be numerically recorded. As workers gained in “respectability” and wages, up the scale they moved.

These years saw an explosion in the study of stratification, thus conceived (Bendix & Lipset 1953; Davis & Moore 1945; Goldschmidt 1950 ; Lynd & Lynd 1945; etc.). The “community study” was the most popular method for its study, in which prestige, status behavior, and affiliation (social relationships) were described, with stratification patterns identified from the survey and observation data collected (cf.

⁸⁸ Gerth and Mill’s English translation of Weber was published in 1946, and had a tremendous impact on the American scene. But Pease, Form, and Huber (1970b), writing of much of the sociology that emerged from this time, point out that the frequent invocations of Weber by theorists eager to claim his authority for a status-based stratification model reflect a superficial at best, and distorted at worst understanding of Weber’s actual discussion of “class, status, and party”: “Most American students of stratification simply use Weber’s authority to assert that stratification is not simple and unidimensional (implying, incorrectly, that Karl Marx said it was) and that class and status are analytically distinct (implying, as Weber did not, that the two are therefore equally consequential in social life)” (130).

Lynd & Lynd). This was also the period in which significant sections of sociology renewed an on-again, off-again quest for scientific respectability through quantitative methodology—if it couldn't be counted, it didn't count. Needless to say, an empirical focus on income scales was eminently suited for such a project, while a theoretical model examining sites of leverage within the means of production was not.

With such a culturalist, quantifiable definition of class in place, wherein class is described by one's prestige and paycheck—a kind of “you know it when you see it” model—what happens when it seems you can't see it all so clearly? What happens when nearly everyone's eating meat, buying kitchen appliances, watching television, listening to the new rock-and-roll? Stratification remained, but not stratification based on class or economic realities. Stratification could instead be found in areas such as educational attainment, cultural background, and consumption patterns. Class became a category of culture and behavior, while considerations of structure, work conditions and power receded from analytic view. As Gordon (1958) argued, social stratification “plays the largest immediate role in producing these social divisions . . . of American communities which center around intimate friendships, clique life, association membership and participation and intermarriage” (249).

Without taking it to the extreme of Nisbet, “mass society” theorists instead posited that the increasingly similar lifestyles and life chances of the “middle class” meant that differences based on class were less important than similarities based on these other factors. This too meant the end of any meaningful stratification in the United States within this expanded middle class—arguing for a “middle-mass” over a “middle class.” Similarly, books such as *The End of Ideology* (Bell 1960) and *The Lonely Crowd* (Riesman, Glazer & Denney 1961) focused on the middle class to the exclusion of consideration of a separate working class, usually because the latter was understood as being significantly incorporated into the former. Another bestseller

of the decade, John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1962) took for granted that the vast majority of the US had achieved stable, post-scarcity conditions, and his warning of the need for public investment for the poorest assumed income scales like Warner's.

From the left, Paul Goodman also made use of a stratification scale to explain classes in contemporary America, eclipsing any structural boundaries that might be drawn between middle and working class groups. Goodman was one of the most influential intellectuals for the New Left of the 1960's. He had early and sustained contact with SDS, recognized early the significance of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, and even spent a couple of years working from the Institute for Policy Studies, which served as home to many of the leading left intellectuals of the period. His work of social criticism, *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) was a bestseller, and widely invoked by movement activists, movement press, and mainstream commentators in the years that followed its publication.

In *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman did not deny the existence of class differences in the US, but de-emphasized their import. Following William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, Goodman divides the US into three classes, "the Poor, the Organization, and the Independents," with "three statuses within the dominant class, the Organization," namely, Workers, Organization Men, and Managers (1960, 61). Workers thus exist, whose distinct identity is analytically subordinate to their position within the Organization. To be working class, for Goodman, was to inhabit a status and cultural position, not one with distinct economic or power consequence.

Like much of the social commentary of the era that Goodman is in dialogue with (Kevin Mattson argues "to a large extent, the book synthesized a decade's worth of social criticism" (2002, 113)), Goodman viewed conformity and mass consumption as the salient characteristics of organized society, with problems of inequity

persisting between the large majority of the Organization and “our poor black and brown brothers,” but not within the Organization itself.

The metaphor Goodman created for contemporary society (also following Whyte) was that of “an apparently closed room in which there is a large rat race as the dominant center of attention” (1960, 160).⁸⁹ Echoing the sociological consensus, he argued that workers and the middle class, inside the “closed room,” are distinguished by their value systems, though he insists in seeing these values as mutually oppositional:

A persistent error of the sociologist has been to regard middle-class values and working-class values as *co-ordinate* rival systems. Rather, they are related vertically: each is a defense against some threat of the other. Primary values are *human* values. The middle-class “values” are reaction formations to inhibit in themselves some human values still available to simpler people. Therefore, under stress of life or disillusion, such inhibitions may give way. They may give way to an ambivalent opposite, like becoming a bum; but they may also simply relax to ordinary nature and community, spontaneity, nonconformity, etc. Conversely, the working-class “values” are nothing but ignorance, resignation, and resentment of classless human values of enterprise and culture, at present available only to the middle class; and many a poor boy escapes petty class attitudes and achieves something.” (emphasis in the original, 161)

Ignorance, resignation and resentment? Ascribing these values to workers was fairly typical, and exemplifies the last characteristic feature of much academic treatment of the working class during the period. Workers, when singled out for consideration, tended to be portrayed as politically inert or apathetic; bigoted, small-minded, even proto-fascist. These theses strongly colored movement and popular apprehensions of working class behavior during the turbulent sixties.

Authoritarian Workers in the Mainstream

⁸⁹ Members of the Organization have bought into the need for, and rules of, the rat race. The poor and the independents, voluntary and involuntary exiles from the “center” of the metaphorical room, tend to be the groups that give the system some openness. Goodman’s main concern is with the youth of this society, with an implicit focus on the youth of the Organization Men—the middle class—and their socialization within this “absurd” system. These youth were predictably disaffected (cf., the Beats), but possibly transformative. He asks, “*Is it possible to maintain and pass on a middle class standard without belief in its productive and cultural mission?*” (1960, 123)

With the exception of prominent labor leaders like Walter Reuther and George Meany, workers were largely absent from mainstream political and intellectual culture. A great exception, whose views were perhaps therefore taken as exemplary, was the “longshoreman philosopher” Eric Hoffer. Hoffer was an autodidact from a struggling background who worked on the docks for much of his adult life, reading voraciously and writing copiously on breaks and off-hours. Like many other intellectuals of the era, Hoffer sought to understand the rise of Nazism in Germany, and – making the connection that most others made during the Cold War – “communist totalitarianism” in Russia. His analysis of the genesis of these and other “mass movements,” *The True Believer* (1951) sold over half a million copies, and made him a household name. He followed this book with many others (which also sold well), made memorable appearances on TV, contributed pieces to *The New York Times* and other publications, and remained a public figure until the early 1970’s.

Hoffer’s philosophy, delivered in aphorisms, was that mass movements arose out of the frustrations of individuals whose own lives lacked meaning and inner confidence. This social-psychological view saw particular ideologies as largely interchangeable for the righteous “true believers” whose own emptiness caused them to identify externally with the social whole. Hoffer embraced a self-centered life of stability and comfort as the pinnacle of personal and social achievement, and while he was skeptical, like many of his contemporaries, of the conformism he found in the contemporary US, he initially valued US culture against many others as less conducive to the mass movements he found so problematic elsewhere. Hoffer distrusted abrupt social change, and believed that a society undergoing rapid change was regressing, in the throes of juvenilia – and in the case of the 1960’s social movements, this juvenilia was also literally juvenile, as social change was coming from the youth.

In his work during the 1950's, Hoffer could be read as the perfect ideologue for the complacent corporate capitalism and submerged political tensions of the period. And in the 1960's, as tensions rose and the economic ship began to wobble, Hoffer was the voice of conservatism – and increasingly, reaction – in the face of change. In the face of 1964 civil rights demands and movement, Hoffer advocated a bootstrapping model of self-help for “Negroes” (Hoffer, *NYT* 11/29/64), and, in the aftermath of the Columbia University building takeovers in 1968 – but before Kent State – suggested that Columbia's President might have been better off shooting the protesters who took over his office. While Hoffer never made attempts to speak “for” his class, he frequently invoked his own experiences to make observations about the nature of the social world, thereby making it easy for commentators and audiences to link him to the attitudes of workers – whom they did not otherwise see – as a whole. By 1969 Arthur Shostak named him as the “best single short introduction to the general political philosophy of American's blue-collarites” (1969, 212). That is, therefore, conservative, distrustful of change, patronizing towards Blacks and perhaps violent towards youth.

Athur Shostak's own *Blue Collar Life* (1951) is typical of mainstream sociological treatments of the working class at the period. With the caveats on available data (noted above), Shostak nevertheless is able to discern “the essence of the blue collar political stance.” The aforementioned Eric Hoffer is his first model, which is ironic, as Hoffer's own person is nothing if not incredibly exceptional. (It is also troublesome, as Shostak seems to quote primarily from other people's reviews of Hoffer's work, rather than his own words.) Workers, via Hoffer, are “staunch defender[s] of the country.” They can be counted on further to “defen[d] the status quo.” “Social conventions must be vigorously defended against the intellectuals,” as well as youth: he quotes Hoffer as saying their “penchant for self-dramatization prompts them to extremist poses and gestures.” Shostak's summary of working class

political philosophy as gleaned through Hoffer: “a ‘them-versus-us’ feeling and the nostalgia for times past when common sense and the common man were allegedly in the saddle. . . . intolerance of dissent and distrust of patriotic and moralistic nonconformity. Above all, Eric Hoffer’s variations on blue-collar political philosophy are consistent with the tight-laced, backward glancing, and phobic character of blue-collar politics” (213-214).

An emerging stereotype propagated during this period went beyond predicting conservative behavior from workers: to many, they were potentially fascist. The most resilient of these ideas was the theory of “working class authoritarianism.” The experience of fascism spawned many social scientific attempts at understanding how people could support such a system. Fascism in Germany was popularly supported by the petit bourgeois, peasant farmers, and to a good degree Germany’s industrial elite and large corporations. While studies existed that paid attention to the structural and institutional bases for authoritarianism, social psychologists sought to understand the “authoritarian personality.” Stanley Milgram’s experiment (1961) was ultimately most famous in this regard, and it indicated the situational basis for obedience; but in the years before, other studies were conducted to test the extent to which people in general, or particular groups, were susceptible to authoritarian behavior: a kind of methodological individualism that fit the “apolitical” age. In the US context, it was the working-class that bore the brunt of “proto-fascist” social-psychological scaremongering.

Seymour Martin Lipset collected evidence from these and other sources to support his discovery of “working class authoritarianism.” First published in the *American Sociological Review* in 1959, “Democracy and Working Class Authoritarianism” argued “Many studies suggest that the lower-class way of life produces individuals with rigid and intolerant approaches to politics. These findings . . . imply that one may anticipate wide-spread support by lower-class individuals and

groups for extremist movements” (483). The authoritarian tendency of the “lower-classes,” a concept used interchangeably with the working class, is a “tragic dilemma” for “those intellectuals of the democratic left who once believed the proletariat necessarily to be a force for liberty, racial equality, and social progress” (482). Lipset’s evidence of the working class authoritarianism is drawn from public opinion polls in the United States and Germany, as well as selected studies of family patterns, religious beliefs and organization, and, most controversially, personality studies that were popular at the time. His argument is that lower class individuals personally espouse authoritarian attitudes, and, all things being equal, will tend to support extremist over democratic movements.

His use of evidence is at points misleading. Leaving aside the inherent limitations of the “personality scale” method, one study he cites for support, published as *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950), did find slight differences between their working and middle class samples, though only slight. But the original authors also specifically explained, “since no steps were taken to insure that each group studied was actually representative of a larger section of the population, we are in no position to generalize from the present results on mean scores, however suggestive they might be” (194). To the extent that they do generalize, it is to take the more institutionalist position, arguing that “it appears that the differences among the present groups of men depend more upon the factor of contact with liberal organizations and liberal thought than upon social economic group membership” (197).⁹⁰ *The Authoritarian Personality* authors were rare, in this regard, in their acknowledgement of the structuring role played by organizations and ideology on the responses to the questionnaires they used.

⁹⁰ See also Miller and Reissman (1961) for an excellent overall critique of the piece. Among other points raised, these critics took him to task for his notion of democracy as being particularly congenial to a middle-class liberal audience rather than a working class one, for whom economic democracy was a precondition for many of the rights and freedoms associated with liberalism’s ideals

Lipset was more narrow in his focus. The critical move he makes is to locate the authoritarianism of workers in more non-political realms, such as family structure and social isolation—factors that are themselves influenced by political and economic realities, but are not specifically political or economic. Lipset argues that workers will often act against type, supporting democratic or liberal policies because of their institutional affiliation with democratic or liberal institutions. But their natural tendency, their emotive core, is authoritarian. Their political orientation is thus organic and essential rather than contextual or historical. Lipset also joined Richard Hostadter in outlining a related theory of “status politics,” that predicts that the groups facing the greatest threat to their statuses—working and lower middle classes—would be the most likely to be the extreme right, what Hofstadter calls the “pseudo conservatives” (Bell (ed.), 1962).

Lipset’s work attracted criticism, but *Political Man*, the book in which this essay eventually appeared, became one of the most widely assigned works in political sociology during the decade, and has sold nearly half a million copies since going into print (Mattson 2002). The original *New York Times* review, otherwise positive, singled out his discussion of working class authoritarianism—the “rigid, intolerant approach to politics” that Lipset found—as particularly unconvincing. But by 1964, the paperback edition was called “a brilliant, searching inquiry” in the same paper.

Working Class Political Behavior as seen from the Left

These interpretations of the class dynamics of the period – disappeared, irrelevant, or turned upside down from decades before – shaped the common sense about class in the years before Vietnam. Yet the future antiwar movement did not move only inside the mainstream. For movement activists-to-be, the dominant discourses of “bourgeois social science” held little appeal. SDS’s Todd Gitlin recalls the first time he met Tom Hayden: “He seemed to have read everything. Hayden’s every word seems chosen: he never hesitated, never stumbled, as he crisply assaulted

the social science establishment, especially the idea of ‘the end of ideology’ then in circulation from the influential sociologists Daniel Bell and Seymour Martin Lipset” (1987, 102). Instead, they were more likely to have sympathy with workers and unionists, as well as some knowledge of theories of working-class radicalism associated with the old left. For them, it was the left’s reframing of working class potentialities that had the greatest influence.

But the old left’s prediction of the working class’s central role in progressive movements for social change was also largely re-visited by the progressives of the post-war period. The obvious reason for this was the nearly unanimous embrace of Cold War anti-communism in the ranks of labor, and the collapse of the Communist Party’s influence within the class. For those leftists who also shunned communism, there was no indication that any other progressive political tendency was developing in the house of labor either. But the hegemonic apprehension of widespread affluence was the other main contributor to the emerging new left’s skepticism concerning worker radicalism. Ultimately, workers and their unions were variously seen as economically or politically incorporated. And for some leftists or progressives, the authoritarian label stuck, especially from people who were opposed to the conformity of the era, and who saw workers as emblematic of it. A kind of middle-class exceptionalism was often present within these radical thinkers, who held for themselves, as radical individualists, the possibilities of escaping mass society, while for workers they saw neither the choice nor incentive for doing so.

Paul Goodman, C.Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse were three thinkers whose views of the working class along these lines spoke directly to the burgeoning New Left. Goodman’s own ideas have already been described. But directing his analysis more directly at labor leaders, he argued that “their attitude toward poverty is no longer part of their fighting economic theory. As labor economists, they do not have solidarity with these poor.” This is because “now the rate of interest does not

fall, the system cushions its crises; there is high employment . . . or insurance.” While inequality persists, “workers on a fairly high standard don’t much bother who has millions” (1960, 55).

In the years after the war, C. Wright Mills (1948/2001) viewed the unorganized working class as a potentially progressive force, and the labor organizations of the class as the potential vehicles for the unfolding of this force. While the “underdogs,” who were not so much at the bottom as “largely outside” US society had acquired “habits of submission,” and were “underprivileged socially and psychologically” as well as economically, they might nevertheless be reached by unions in such a way that “politics would become so much a part of the life of the worker, so connected with his daily work and his social routine, that political alertness would be part of his human alertness as a social being.” Ideally, it was “though the union as a community that the political consciousness of the US worker can be aroused” (2001 (1948), 269).

Yet by 1960 Mills had changed his tune. As noted in the first chapter, in his “Letter to the New Left,” printed in the *New Left Review* in 1960 (which together helped give the new left its name), Mills makes it clear that the new generation should abandon the “labor metaphysic,” which he saw as “a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic.” The notion that the working class had a special role to play in revolutions is “an historically specific idea that has been turned into an a-historical and unspecific hope.” In this essay he asserts that historical conditions may indeed rise in which workers might play such a role, and allowed that “where labor exists as an agency, of course we must work with it,” but the attention of the new left should be elsewhere. Mills was eventually the subject of Tom Hayden’s master’s thesis, and “The Port Huron Statement” is deeply influenced by his theories and style.

Herbert Marcuse was another influential theorist for the new generation of activists coming of age in the 1960's. While his influence was most obvious among the white, college-educated left, black radicals were also in his intellectual orbit; Angela Davis had been his teaching assistant while he was at Berkeley. A "Frankfurt School" Marxist, Marcuse recognized the limitations of "actually existing socialism," as well as the "scientific socialist" and economic determinist theories invoked by its supporters. Like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin and others, Marcuse emphasized cultural production, ideology, and socio-psychological experience as central sites for making sense of capitalism's endurance, strength, and possible schisms. Unlike stratification theorists, Frankfurt school theorists maintained structural analyses of capitalism and class relations; like stratification theorists, non-material phenomena were foregrounded in their studies of industrial society.

Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964) was the Marxist analogue to *The Lonely Crowd* and *The End of Ideology*. In it, Marcuse wrote of the problem of "society without opposition," in which "the capitalist development has altered the structure and function of [the bourgeoisie and the proletariat] in such a way that they no longer appear to be agents of historical transformation. An overriding interest in the preservation and improvement of the institutional status quo unites the former antagonists in the most advanced areas of contemporary society." While "there are still the basic classes," he observed, "the people recognize themselves in their commodities. They find their souls in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment" (XIII). Elsewhere, he stresses the system's resilience, describing its success "in channeling antagonisms in such a way that it can manipulate them. Materially as well as ideologically, the very classes which were once the absolute negation of the capitalist system are now more and more integrated into it" (1965, 140).

For Marcuse, then, the inherent class contradiction of capitalism had been largely overcome. Marcuse's work was very influential in the New Left's search for other "agents of social change," which would come to include themselves as alienated youth and future technical workers, their world peoples and the poor: people who were still, unlike "traditional" workers, materially or culturally alienated from the system.

Beatniks, New Youth Movement

Significant changes within youth culture preceded the political changes of the 1960's. As college increasingly became a norm rather than a privilege, more young people "found themselves in a new socially determined developmental stage that extended adolescence into the middle twenties or even later" (Fraser & Gerstle (eds.) 1989, 216). "Youth communities" appeared in college towns, which became the center of lifestyle experimentation before the counterculture emerged full force on the scene. Between the folksingers, jazz musicians, beat poets, and sexual and drug experimentation, these pre-baby boom youth began to create a generational sensibility that the baby boomers would amplify to new levels in the decade to come. But it meant that along with the political commitments felt by many of the radicalizing groups there was a cultural critique and sense of oppositional identity that would set them apart not just from their elders but also from others who did not share in their newly emerging worldview. Part of this worldview was an insistence on authenticity, and moral individualism. Kazin and Isserman sum up the generational zeitgeist:

The demographic bulge, the delayed entry into the adult world, the encouragement of generational consciousness by advertisers, the cultural identification with outsiders and marginal groups, the inspiration of the civil rights movement, and the paradoxical influence of cold war liberalism were the raw materials from which an amass New Left would be fashioned over the coming years (Fraser & Gerstle 1989, 221).

This distinct youth culture would also serve, on the levels of lifestyle and symbols, to divide parts of the new left from not just their elders in general but working class

elders in particular. The documentary *Sir No Sir!* (Zieger 2005) includes some archival footage from an organizing drive in San Diego, in which antiwar organizers conducted a city-wide referendum on whether the USS Constellation should ship out to assist in the air war (the votes against shipping out won by vast margins). A young Air Force veteran is speaking with a retired Navy veteran, who agrees with the antiwar action and opposes the war. But, he asks his young comrade, “Why do you have to look like that?” This genial exchange bridged a gulf that for much of the period was much more wide and hot.

Many of the earliest leaders of the antiwar movement grew up or reached adulthood within this world—one that said that class differences no longer existed in any meaningful way in the United States, one in which the major institutions of the working class were a central part of the ruling, liberal coalition, and one in which workers were understood as being, more likely than not, conservative or complacent, if not reactionary. What many of the analysts at the time (and the culture at large) failed to see was the limited nature of the gains made by the working class, and the continuing existence of a restive rank and file. They failed to see that workers were not only in it for the money, bought off by a few cents an hour, and that “the persistence of nonmaterial values at the point of production, the symbolic nature of many struggles over wages, and the willingness of workers to actually lose money rather than surrender dignity or happiness continuously threatened to undermine the foundation of labor peace in capitalist society” (Lipsitz 1994, 232). In short, they lost sight of the actual, material reality lived by most working class people in the United States, and the extent to which the same terms of exploitation that had prompted workers into action in the 1930’s and 1940’s had not mysteriously disappeared, even if workers were not then engaged in political struggle over these questions. Instead, they too often fell into a “psychological reductionism” that accepted culturally-based

assertions and observations about the nature of class consciousness. These suppositions were to exert a profound influence on the anticipation of class-based political behavior in the 1960's, and the interpretations of working-class attitudes and actions during that turbulent era.

Chapter 6

The Early Years of the Antiwar Movement: Class Culture and Social Context

The great failure of the anti-war movement has been in its arrogance toward people who work with their hands for a living and its willingness not only to ignore them, but to go even further and alienate them completely.

Jimmy Breslin

We call upon all men of good will to join us in this confrontation with immoral authority. Especially we call upon the universities to fulfill their mission of enlightenment and religious organizations to honor their heritage of brotherhood. Now is the time to resist.

“A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority” (1967)

In late 1967 a group of over 300 prominent intellectuals published “A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority” in *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic*. This statement was the most prominent of many written to support draft resistance, attracting over 20,000 signatories by the year’s end. It was also the statement submitted, along with a briefcase full of draft cards, to the Justice Department in October 1967 by Dr. Benjamin Spock, William Sloane Coffin Jr., Mitchell Goodman, Marcus Raskin, and Michael Ferber. These men, “the Boston Five,” were eventually brought up on criminal charges for their pledge and actions to “lend . . . support” to draft resisters. The day after the Boston Five and their supporters returned the cards to the DOJ, thousands of protesters came to Washington in what was arguably the most famous of the early antiwar rallies, the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, featuring the “Battle for the Pentagon” described in Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968). This was the rally in which Jerry Rubin claimed they were going to “levitate” the Pentagon and divest it of its evil spirits; young women placed flowers in the guns of their soldier peers; and a sizable minority of the protesters engaged in a “direct action” to enter the building. This moment, and a constellation of views that surrounded it, together can serve as a point of entry to explore how antiwar class politics had developed over the early years of United States involvement in Vietnam. Specifically, they capture the middle-class nature of the early protest, in persons, ideology, tactics, and strategy.

The “Call to Resist” called for men of moral conscience to resist the war. It also asked the government to respect the moral decisions of individuals opposing governmental policy, and further recognize such actions as permissible under the first amendment. Erudite and historically well-informed, the document belies the deep intellectual pedigrees of its authors, Marcus Raskin and Arthur Waskow of the Institute for Policy Studies. It begins by identifying the kind of protester and reasons for protest with whom such left and liberal intellectuals stood in solidarity: “An ever growing number of young American men are finding that the American war in Vietnam so outrages their deepest moral and religious sense that they cannot contribute to it in any way. We share their moral outrage.” The root of protest is moral repugnance, it grows in the youth; the barometer of one’s resolve is one’s individual refusal to cooperate with immoral deeds. The statement does not identify the moral rot as intrinsic to America, as later radicals will. Instead, they describe themselves as teachers and patriots who are seeking to *uphold* the values and traditions of a country they “cherish.” Thus, in a move that Margit Mayer would describe as typical of many US social movements, these protestors locate themselves within the values of the system they protest: It is the inability of this system to live up to its own best ideals that the signatories find so tragic and abhorrent (Mayer 1990).⁹¹

It was the estimation of these intellectuals that their stand was the most strategic available: “Many of us believe that open resistance to the war and the draft is the course of action most likely to strengthen the moral resolve with which all of us can oppose the war and most likely to bring an end to the war.” Here, a universal moral language is imagined—a communicative action framework within which “all” can find a home (Habermas 1981). This liberal universalism presupposes a common

⁹¹ In tone, this statement is therefore also similar to the Port Huron document of 1962.

set of rationales for opposition to the war, and a common set of choices for those seeking to act upon their opposition.

Yet at the same time the signatories offered the “Call to Resist” as an umbrella under which the whole of the movement might stand, it was becoming clear just who was excluded from the “all” it sought to address.

Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968) offers a close look at both the draft resisters and Pentagon protesters of October 1967. Mailer is both covetous of the patrician morality of his fellow antiwar intellectuals and mocking of all their high-mindedness; he more consistently sympathizes with—some argue romanticizes—the working stiffs he portrays as war supporters (Bates 1996). But there is no doubt in *Armies* that it is the liberal elite who are running the antiwar show: “It would take a rebirth of Marx for Marxism to explain definitively this middle class condemnation of an imperialist war in the last Capitalist nation, this working class affirmation” (257).

Among those covering the march was Mailer’s future New York City Mayoral running-mate, *Daily News* columnist Jimmy Breslin. Breslin’s account also depicts a class divide in the events in Washington—here, between entitled, bad-behaving protesters and upstanding, working class soldiers. He describes how the “kids” at the march “taunted the soldiers,” “went to the bathroom on the side of the Pentagon,” “threw a couple of rocks through the first-floor.” These “rabble” of “dropouts and drifters” “in raggedy clothes” had “turned a demonstration for peace . . . into a sickening, club-swinging mess.” Though he describes the “kids” as almost a lumpen-mob, it is their entitlement and privilege that makes him, and conceivably his readers, so angry. He writes that the demonstration “became an exercise at clawing at soldiers”: “At the end of the day, the only concern anybody could have was for the soldiers who were taking the abuse” (*Daily News*, 10/21/1967).

In 1966 pollster Louis Harris reported that a “new era” in American life appeared to be dawning—one in which (as summarized by historian Charles DeBenedetti) “there was no longer any reliable correlation between affluence and conservatism . . . or between the lower middle class and liberalism” (1990, 160). Voting patterns, along with social movement sympathy and participation, together seemed to indicate that predicting class affiliation with specific points along the political spectrum would no longer be reliable. By October 1967 the polarization was clear in the movement against the war in Vietnam: It was a middle class movement, and those on the other side were the workers, regular Americans, who were written out, ignored, or even taunted by the dissenters. What happened for this to be the case?

A new era in American life?

In the last chapter I traced some of the general historical conditions for this “new era” in American life. Here, I explore the antiwar movement in its infancy, to explain why, in its demographic composition and its culture, it was as “middle-class” as it was. I focus on the years 1965-1967, the period of the movement’s first explosive growth. Why did the antiwar movement find its first roots among a middle-class constituency? Why did it continue to recruit from that milieu? And what were the effects of this early middle-class orientation on the overall development of the movement?

First, a couple of answers that I believe would be wrong, though right in parts. The movement did not grow within middle-class groups because they were more likely to be opposed to the war; inversely, working-class communities were not immune to the movement’s criticisms because they were more likely to be pro-war. In the early years of the war, rates of “hawkishness” – calls for greater escalation – were similar across class lines. As the polls in the third chapter indicated, to the extent that war sentiment correlated with class, rising incomes tended to lead to

decreased skepticism (Lunch and Sperlich 1979). However, it *would* be accurate to argue that the movement organized opposition to the war in ways that did not, by and large, speak to working-class concerns. As Appy (1993) points out, the direct experience of going to war, or sending your sons there, was borne overwhelmingly by working class or rural communities whose reaction to the war would be strongly colored by that experience. Abstract problems, or looming threats, felt or anticipated by middle- and upper-middle class communities did not translate into the lived, tangible realities of war experienced by many working-class people. (I will explore this tension in more detail below.)

It would also be inaccurate to argue, in the first years of the movement, that the movement itself was a negative reference point for working-class people. The movement did not emerge, *a priori*, as anathema US workers. It did become a negative reference point for workers, as well as a majority of non-participants—including a majority of sympathetic, antiwar non-participants, according to later polling. But this negative image developed over time, within a contested field of meaning—a process that began in these early years of movement building.

Part of a better explanation for the movement's early orientation towards the middle-class lies *within* its activist base and organizations. The early antiwar movement was fed primarily by two streams: College students and the organized extant peace movement. From early on, students gave the movement its numbers. In certain places, such as college towns and at certain national demonstrations, it gave the movement its flavor as well. Much of the activism of the youth-dominated groups was characterized by disruptive tactics and innovative organizational forms. Most notably, the Vietnam Day Committee in Berkeley and much of the West Coast activism; many of the local campus efforts in places like Madison, Wisconsin, Harvard, and Columbia; and much of the draft resistance movement; together turned quickly to "direct action" and the call, identified with Students for a

Democratic Society (SDS), to move from “protest to resistance.” These groups also drew on the consensus-seeking, collective models of organizing inspired by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and SDS’s early commitment to participatory democracy (Brienes 1982; Carson 1981; Poletta 2002)

Yet the student organization that helped precipitate this outpouring—SDS—did not play a meaningful *organizing* role in the movement beyond 1965. In fact, no student groups exercised significant organizational sway. (One early effort was launched to bring new left form to the movement, the short-lived National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam, which sprang out of the Assembly of Unrepresented People that took place in August 1965.) Overall, to the extent that the early antiwar movement developed infrastructural characteristics typical of organized movements—discrete, organized groups and leadership; collectively agreed-upon tactics or general strategies; literature; grievance; or “frames”—it was primarily shaped by existing peace groups, including radical pacifists and liberals, and secondarily influenced by various old left groups, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) prominent among them (Isserman 1992; Halstead 1978; DeBenedetti, 1990).⁹² In other words, the movement was filled with people new to activism, but it frequently took on organizational, strategic, ideological and tactical forms that predated the movement itself. And as the years progressed, this became increasingly the case, with the organized left groups becoming more prominent, and liberal efforts within and alongside the Democratic Party increasing in importance.

Parts of the “old guard,” such as the radical pacifists, or non-student activists coming out of the civil rights movement, were committed to capturing this youthful energy, and encouraged the use of organizational forms and political tactics that

⁹² Many of the early movement’s most influential leaders and decision makers, such as AJ Muste, Dave Dellinger, Norma Becker, Dagmar Wilson, Sidney Lens, Fred Halstead, Staughton Lynd, Benjamin Spock, and Richard Fernandez, were part of the pre-baby boom generation(s) of movement activists.

corresponded to the participatory democracy and direct action of the new left (Dellinger 1993; Hall 2006; Ferber & Lynd 1971). The radicals were also more open to the new left's "multi-issue" orientation, and agreed that the problem of Vietnam should be confronted as part of a host of social ills endemic to US society. Others, including many liberal and religious groups, tended to insist on the "single issue" of the war, and encouraged lobbying and education in their youth projects (Hall 1990; Wells 1994). Over time, brokers emerged, bridging the streams; coalitions formed, uniting divergent groups; particular organizations moved in and out of different milieux—from campus to street to door-to-door, from electoral work to direct action.

Nearly the whole of this diverse movement, however, was deeply middle-class in its internal culture and external orientation. In his work on class and social movements, Fred Rose (2000) argues that the "class cultures" created inside movements themselves opens or closes them to people from different class backgrounds. David Croteau (1995) traces a similar dynamic when he attributes the middle-class base of new social movements to their cultural style and (middle) class-specific emphasis on knowledge and expertise. Here, I argue that a middle-class culture already existed within the peace and student groups that helped to spark and harness antiwar sentiment, a culture that tended to reproduce a middle-class base and political orientation for the growing movement. I will explore this culture in part through the ideas, attitudes, frames and tactics of the early movement.

But "class culture" is not sufficient to explain the class-specific direction that the early movement took. In this chapter, I suggest two other contributing factors. I first look at the role played by college campuses as mobilizing vehicles, arguing that the nature of these institutions themselves helped create an early privileged base for activism. Later, I continue to address the inter-movement relations with labor and civil rights, both of which played contradictory roles in relation to the class politics

and composition of the movement. Finally, not all of the movement wrote off the working class, and I look at the extent to which the early movement was open to, or oriented toward, working class constituencies.

By late 1967, at the time of the National “Mobe,” a particular, middle-class oriented response to the Vietnam War had been created, and was recognized as such by the general public. In the ensuing years, the image hammered home of student, radical, elite dissent proved hard to shake. As working class individuals and groups actively pursued opposition to the war, their actions were frequently ignored or went unrecognized by movement observers. And the movement had, by then, become a negative reference point for the majority of non-participants.

The early configuration of groups and organizations who made up the movement—students, peace advocates, the old and new left—indelibly marked the class course that the movement took in its first years. Did the early trajectory of the movement exhibit “path dependent” qualities? Applying a rigorous definition of path dependency, the answer is somewhat ambiguous. Path dependent phenomenon can be characterized by 1) particular importance attaching to earlier events in a given sequence, 2) earlier events characterized by contingency, and 3) later events exhibiting inertia in relation to these earlier events: “once processes are set into motion and begin tracking a particular outcome, these processes tend to stay in motion and continue to track this outcome” (Mahoney 2000; 511). Just how “contingent” or accidental was the early middle-class nature of the peace groups, or the importance of the campus, is debatable. But certainly the early forms taken by the movement proved difficult to get beyond. And when the movement did change, in its scope, orientation, and constituencies, the public impression created of an elite movement proved even more difficult to shake.

Elite Institutions: Campus-Based Revolt

The movement first grew in elite social locations. The peace groups, left groups, and intellectual circles of the war's early critics were largely composed of people from relatively privileged economic and cultural positions – dissidents who moved against the stream of the milieu, but who were nevertheless part of it (DeBenedetti 1990). And the college students who served as the bulk of the troops were similarly positioned. The social class of sixties student protesters garnered a great deal of scholarly attention during the period. In the mid-1960's, a common perception was that left-student activists were the elite of the elite—the most high-achieving, intellectually precocious, and financially secure of the bunch. The earliest sociological studies of continually “concluded” that left activist students were the cream of the crop of “the liberated generation.”⁹³

While this perception might have been partially accurate before the antiwar movement, in 1965 it had ceased to be the case. Later, larger, and more careful studies indicate the insignificance of social class background for student protest (Mankoff & Flacks, 1971; Tygart & Holt, 1971; Kahn & Bowers 1970; Aron 1974). As I explored in Chapter 2, the economic background of the students involved in protest during the era was representative of student bodies as a whole—protesters were not an elite group on the campus. To the extent that college campuses had class diversity within their ranks, so did the protesters. In other words, once you control for the status of the campus itself, the class specificity of the protesters disappeared.

⁹³ The prevailing ideology of the previous decade undoubtedly helped shape the research inquiries of the first scholars who examined the nascent youth movement. As I discussed in Chapter 3, in much of the sociological literature of the 1950's and early 1960's, middle-class youth were assumed to be those who would react progressively to the problems of the era, and working class youth were associated with authoritarian tendencies and cultural influences. The scholars who began to look at student protesters after 1965 began their studies in this milieu. They tended to come from the same class as the protesters they identified, or were affiliated with the same elite institutions. Furthermore, these researchers tended to look at the social-psychological reasons behind protest, a move that only works best when the demographic characteristics of the population being studied are otherwise constant. For a bibliography of these early works, see Keniston and Lerner (1971).

Elite schools, however, were more likely to host protest action. And it was its base in more elite campuses that gave the early antiwar movement an elite cast. Yale, Columbia, Berkeley, University of Michigan, and University of Wisconsin at Madison were the most prominent private and public schools contributing to the movement in its first two years.

Why were elite schools the center of protest? Interestingly, the studies did not directly explore the elite nature of the schools that fostered activism in the early years, except in relation to their social functions. The authoritative studies of the movement still tended to look at *who* the activists were, as opposed to *where* they learned their activism. One (Kahn & Bowers 1970) calls for studying the institutions themselves, remarking,

The top ranking schools, in particular, somehow encourage activism among their most able and intellectually oriented students. Thus, the determinants of student political activism, rather than merely being characteristics of the individual activist students themselves, also are to be found in the quality of the educational institutions that they attend (53).

The authors speculate about possible reasons for top-ranking schools contributing to activism. These include being “a stimulus to intellectualism and critical social thought” as well as being “symbolic and strategic targets” in light of their standing in national and international affairs.

These are hypotheses that warrant further study. The university did emerge as a target unto itself as the decade progressed, as students objected to the multiple connections their “multiversities” had to the military, major corporations, and the government. One could also complicate their first hypothesis, in further support of their second, and observe that while some of their curricula might encourage critical thought, elite universities also encourage conformity, and socialize their students to join the power elite of the country. In that way, these schools might provoke a particular reaction among students confronting the workings of hegemony, moved by the contradiction of seemingly open inquiry within college and what appeared to be

ultimately limited social careers beyond. Certainly, many of the students opposed to the new “technocratic” regime were objecting to precisely this contradiction.

Yet universities are not only places where intellectuals share and are moved by ideas, contribute brainpower to worldly matters, or propel students along particular social-class trajectories. More prosaically, schools also collect tuition and fees; are places of work and dispensers of aid; house and feed large communities of students and at times workers, including professors. These material structures have an impact on the life and lifestyles of the people associated with these institutions. With these factors in mind, other hypothetical relationships between class, school status and activism are worth thinking about.

Most college students during this period were middle-class and higher (Thelin 2004). Most working class families could not afford to send their children to school, and the possibility of finding a decent job without a college education still existed. So the class compositions of the campuses themselves were already tilted, by and large, towards more privileged groups. And this skewing increases when the status of the campuses, and their commuter or dorm-based student bodies are taken into account.

Predictably, wealth and commuter status correlate—students who can’t afford to really “go” to college stay close to home, while students who can afford to live in college and pay for all that tend to be wealthier (Lucas 1994; Thelin 2004). Students who live “on campus” occupy a transitional space in the social order. They are shifting from childhood, uprooted from familiar social roles (within their families and communities) and thrust into an institutional setting of transient community that nevertheless has an abiding ethos of its own. Students who don’t live on campus experience this transition as well, though much less sharply—they still live with their families, or work in their communities, and straddle college life and “real” life simultaneously. Furthermore, for middle-class youth, college was a normal rite of

passage. Their parents were often college educated themselves. Working class students often experienced “enormous psychic tensions” (Heineman 1993, 81), facing either skepticism or exceedingly high expectations from their families, and financial stress.

Among its numerous determinants, campus radicalism, one might predict, would be more widespread among those who live on campus, who are freed from the constraints of normal life, be they the roles they’ve occupied their whole lives or responsibilities like family or job. Extending these considerations, radicalism would be more endemic to campuses dominated by their live-in nature, or with a high preponderance of relatively unencumbered students. The new ideals that challenge the status quo would make headway more easily among this materially unencumbered and uprooted youth group. The “youth culture” that had already begun to proliferate in college towns would find a great foothold in places where “real life”—of family and job—was more easily set aside. Once established, it therefore didn’t matter as much where the students themselves came from. They encountered conditions at the schools that either opened them to radicalism or did not.

Elite schools, by their very nature, are at the extreme of these conditions; and the less elite the school, the less these conditions apply: The material conditions of the schools themselves quite likely fostered activism. Top-ranking state schools drew in students from all over the state and beyond, and housed them in dormitories. Lesser-ranked schools drew from more local populations. Elites sought high status schools; the less privileged sought affordable convenience. An exception to this would be when local off-campus life is itself convulsed, such as it was in certain areas like New York and the Bay Area—two places where “working class” campuses notably joined protest movements from early on. As the sixties continued, it became increasingly common for communities and other non-campus locations to be centers

of the movement, and for working-class veterans to attend, usually lower-status, colleges after returning from Vietnam. And, as the sixties progressed, the culture of student protest spread from campus to campus. But at its outset, it was among these more privileged sectors that the revolt took hold.

Middle-class Culture in the Movement

By the time of the watershed April 1965 SDS march, the middle-class culture of the movement was well established. Each of its participating constituencies framed their critiques and oriented their programs around middle-class concerns and audiences. And even when the intended reach of their programs went beyond the middle class, internal assumptions, tactics, and activities of the groups belied their class roots.

Various social movement analysts provide useful theoretical frameworks for making sense of movement class-cultures. Rose (1997, 2000) argues that movement groups develop their own class character that make them more or less attractive to possible recruits. He emphasizes movement groups' class-specific independent subcultures, whose origins he traces to the workplace. Rose argues that the differences between middle and working class forms of work—specifically, the forms of managerial control and organization of the production process experienced by members of each class—create the conditions for differing strategies regarding social change within each group.

Following Kohn (1963), Rose argues that members of the middle class are raised from early on to be self-directed and autonomous, a socialization process that anticipates the internal motivations needed for professional positions. By the time these middle-class people become activists, they have spent their lives learning that authority structures are best understood as internalized value systems, governed by initiative and personal responsibility; structures that people carry within themselves more than forces that operate externally or with external coercive power. In turn,

they tend to approach social change as a process of personal transformation and education, a result of critical thinking and individual action. (Rose doesn't make this point, but a related implication of his theory is that middle-class activists tend towards idealism, the belief that the world is changed through ideas.) Middle-class work is also experienced as "meaningful," involving tasks that are experienced as inherently interesting or worth pursuing. It follows, for Rose, that middle-class politics often reflect universal goals that are non-economic, worthy of pursuit for their intrinsic or moral value (see also Weber, Gerth & Mills (eds.), 1946).

Because they are themselves directed from within, middle-class activists assume that others will be similarly self-directed to make change. Furthermore, many observers of "new social movements" note how, in such movements, activism is defined as a personal values and expression, in which the "relation between individual and collective is blurred" (Larana et al. 1994, 7): One's individual behavior prefigures larger movement goals, and is often the goal itself. This is related to a common observation of middle-class movements, that "it often makes little difference whether such movements succeed or fail" (Croteau 1995, 122), as being involved alone is considered sufficient ("the way is the way").

To sum up, middle class activism would most likely take the following, at times contradictory, forms. It would be educational in its internal activities and intellectual (or at least, idea-oriented) in its outreach. It would believe that ideas matter, and that they primarily can change social conditions. It would tend to emphasize the importance of one's personal behavior and level of commitment, and embrace tactics that demonstrate that commitment. It would be moved by righteousness and principle, because making the point is perhaps all of the battle.

In the following sections, I examine the different wings of the early antiwar movement—liberals, students, and radicals—looking at the extent to which they partook of these middle-class modes of social activism. In doing so, I will use

frameworks suggested by analysts of the contemporary peace movement (Lofland, Johnson & Kato 1991), who delineate six approaches to social change typical of the movement. Most of these modes of social change prevalent within the peace movement belie the middle-class ways of thinking described above. “Transcender” activists conceive of wars as resulting from misunderstanding, wherein open discussion can relieve the problem. “Educator”-oriented activists commit themselves to teaching people about the facts regarding war, and continuing to keep people informed through the most up-to-date information, so the group can respond accordingly, while “intellectual” theory goes beyond facts to provide interpretations of the war’s developments. Activists who use “politician” theory work through mainstream channels to persuade political elites, while “protestors” disrupt the normal flow of society. Finally, “prophets” embrace moral action, what the Quakers call “acts of moral witness.”

Transcenders and Politicians: Liberal elites

For liberal antiwarriors in 1965, the existing power structure was understood as generally benign and well-intentioned, with the sitting administration no exception. The Johnson administration was making extraordinary progress on civil rights, and had pledged “Great Society” reforms that they had sought for years. Leading insider critics, as well as many of the peace activists and educated professionals who opposed the war, were culturally close to the war-makers and war-supporters among political and corporate elites: They traveled in similar Washington and New York circles, had attended the same schools, or worked in closely aligned fields. The trust in authority shown by these elite liberals was not the trust shown a superior who may “know best”—it was the trust of peers who would be happiest to stand in solidarity with your efforts, if only those efforts were a little more reasoned, or reconsidered.

Early liberals critics were pained by the “mistake” of Vietnam. For those who agreed that “Red China” was a threat, an independent Communist Vietnam could still serve the purpose of containment (Hans Morgenthau, among others, saw its potential as “Asia’s Yugoslavia”). Others were not convinced of the geopolitical importance of Vietnam, but they joined the *New Republic* in arguing that in any event, the war “cannot be won by the United States. It can only be won by the Vietnamese” (DeBenedetti 1990, 102). All early dissenters were appalled by the immorality of the enterprise: Killing American boys—Senator Ernest Gruening called it “murder” in 1964—to support a corrupt regime, in a fight better left unfought, was unethical to the extreme.

The battle these liberals were engaging, as they saw it, was one of ideas. The “best and the brightest” pursuing the war in Vietnam *didn’t understand* that the war they were fighting was ill-judged, immoral, and unwinnable. They trusted their insider status, and well-reasoned arguments, would be able to break through and create a policy change. The belief in the power of argument and reason was just as central for those farther away from the corridors of power, such as SANE and other liberal peace groups. The first audience for such lessons were war-supporting political elites themselves, particularly those within the Democratic Party. Professional groups were appealed to, journalists courted.

Educating and Intellectualizing: Students, one and all

In 1965, the movement saw itself as educating the public. “We need an American teach-in,” exclaimed one early activist, “the people don’t know” (DeBenedetti 1990, 124). As some activists remembered, “either the politicians in Washington would understand the error of their ways, or the American people would bring them to their senses” (Gettleman, Franklin, Franklin & Young 1995, xii). Movements themselves create social roles for their participants (Jaspers 1997),

and the teacher-students roles created within the early antiwar movement had a clear class nature.

People for whom teaching was a profession found a natural place in the movement. Primary and secondary teacher unions were among the first to oppose the war.⁹⁴ The movement enjoyed early and sustained support within academia. Journalists and writers, who perform a kind of public education, were also some early leaders, and many of the alternative presses of the time, like *Ramparts* and the *Guardian*, as well as more established liberal publications such as the *New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, all carried educational pieces about Vietnam. And, of course, in addition to teachers, students abounded. Students studied the war, debated it, learned what they could of US foreign policy, French colonialism, Ho Chi Minh and Vietnamese nationalism. The teach-ins were the synergistic coalescence of the knowledge-based orientation of the early antiwar movement and the student unrest that would come to dominate the decade. The format of the teach-in's themselves reflected a faith in the power of ideas. Intellectual dissenters put forward their analyses up against the rationales of the war-makers: May the best ideas win.

Getting "the facts straight" was a constant enterprise for the young movement. One tireless SDS organizer who left the national office to organize with the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam, reported that "there was an incredible number of people in middle class neighborhoods who felt vaguely and sometimes concretely very troubled about the war. These people need facts to sharpen their concerns into direct opposition" (Clamage, 7/30/66, B1F16, NCCEWV Papers, SHSW). The movement turned to antiwar intellectuals to learn the history

⁹⁴ All of the early trade union antiwar activity included teacher locals. Even Albert Shanker of the United Federation of Teachers briefly lent his name to Trade Union Division of SANE advertisement, though he later regretted it (Foner 1989; LLAP papers, SHSW).

of the region, US foreign policy, and the intricacies of the Cold War, so as to teach their middle-class audience about the mistaken nature of the war.

Already, by 1965, Marcus Raskin and Bernard Fall had put out *The Viet-Nam Reader: Articles and Documents of American Foreign Policy and the Viet-Nam Crisis*.

Another source book on Vietnam of the period was Marvin Gettleman's *Vietnam: History, Documents and Opinions on a Major World Crisis* (1965). This and a later, larger addition (1970) sold 600,000 copies during the period. The documents Gettleman and his co-editors collected fit historical subject headings such as "The Vietnamese Struggle for Independence through WWII," "The War with France," "Geneva—The Peace Subverted," "The Revolution against Diem." Years later, the editors explained that "most Americans were unaware of this history, and the policy makers in Washington seemed to be oblivious to it" (1995, xii). They called the movement first "a spontaneous educational project."⁹⁵

But the education didn't seem to be working. As the year 1965 waned, most of the "transcenders," educators, politicians and intellectuals within the movement began to question their capacity for talking their way out of the war. More and more, it seemed like the government was not making a mistake in Vietnam; it was equally aware of the problems as the protesters. Antiwarriors were forced to the conclusion that their government was knowingly pursuing an immoral war. Even Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV), the moderate coalition of mainline Protestants, Jews, and (few) Catholics, began to change its approach. From 1966 the group increasingly called the war immoral, and not just a mistake. In 1967, their executive director Richard Fernandez explained, "six months ago most of

⁹⁵ The horrors of war that were exposed in the early movement also had consequences for how the problem of war was framed. Early antiwar activists, horrified by what they were learning of napalm, the "body count" strategy, deforestation and civilian casualties in Vietnam wanted, at many points, to downplay the domestic repercussions because it seemed immoral to speak about the problems caused by the war in the United States when the US was causing such horrendous devastation over there. This limited effective outreach to those people dramatically affected by the war at home, specifically, the families of the soldiers doing the fighting and the young men most likely to serve.

us would have said that some very good men in Washington had made some very bad mistakes from which they should try to extricate themselves as soon as possible. Today it seems that this kind of judgment is both out-of-date and inaccurate” (Hall 1990, 30). The analyses and tactics of the radical wing, which had from the beginning argued that the problem was broader than the war, became more dominant in 1966-1967.

Prophets and Protesters: The Radical Wing of the Movement

Alice Herz, Norman Morrison and Roger Allen Laporte, all pacifists, were three of eight US protesters who publicly immolated themselves in the earliest days of the movement. “Prophets,” they made the ultimate personal sacrifice to express their horror at war, and show their solidarity with Vietnamese Buddhist monks who had similarly protested their repression under Diem during 1963. This extreme form of personal sacrifice was atypical, but within the radical and student wings of the movement individual acts of moral protest were the ideal toward which many worked. In 1962 Dave Dellinger wrote in *Liberation* that there was a choice for peace activists, “between being liberals who limit expression of our idealism to activities and goals which minimize personal risk . . . and being radicals who concentrate on historical exigency rather than on personal safety” (DeBenedetti 1990, 59; Dellinger 1993). Paul Goodman wrote that “the Cold war cannot be altered by ordinary political means,” and the movement should break the “narrow confines of symbolic protest to action that will have a real impact on history” (1960, 59).

Before the war in Vietnam began in earnest, a group of protesters committed civil disobedience in New York City during a Cold War civil defense drill, remaining outside in public while they were supposed to take cover. These activists, from the War Resisters League, the Fellowship for Reconciliation, and other radical pacifist groups, were then among the first to advocate non-compliance with selective service

laws as a method for protesting the Vietnam escalation. Most of the organizing taking place leading up to and out of the April SDS march was based in local “committees” against the war: Like the teach-ins, they were another relatively spontaneous and innovative form generated by the new movement. The first attempt at bringing together these local, diverse groups, came with the founding of the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCCEWV), founded at the Assembly of Unrecognized People that was held in August 1965. The NCCEWV was the early movement’s closest attempt to give mass organizational form to the radicals’ insistence on radical critique, disruptive protest and the need for personal commitment and action. The NCCEWV helped to sponsor the “International Days of Protest” in October 1965, the next large-scale student-based radical action following the SDS rally, and survived briefly into 1966 until collapsing under the weight of old-left battles for influence within the organization. Yet it represented hopes for a new left form of protest, different from the transcending, educating, politician models used in other arenas. In extended remarks in the NCCEWV’s newsletter, *Peace and Freedom News*, Staughton Lynd and Bill Tabb wrote that “a protest organization can survive almost any internal problems if there is a deep-rooted objective need that their organization exist.” One of the felt needs for an organization such as the NCC came from the fact that “no existing peace organization was in tune with the style of protest which many of those participating in the AUP had learned in Southern civil rights work.” Lynd, the primary author, calls this style “collective personal protest”: “People acting by personal decision at great personal risk but acting together” (NCCEWV papers, 1965).

Radical antiwarriors began to use disruptive tactics in the first months of the enlivened movement. The Vietnam Day Committee in Berkeley, which had gotten started with Berkeley’s massive teach-in during the spring of 1965, led the west coast organizing for the International Days of Protest, and re-discovered labor’s old tactic

of the moving picket—what the sixties generation called “mobile tactics”—to disrupt business as usual in the military. Trains delivering supplies and troops for the war were briefly halted, and protesters were able to meet-up and disperse one step ahead of the authorities. In 1966, west coast protesters stopped buses of troops from leaving Oakland’s Army base. (Apocryphally, the soldiers there flashed the protesters the “V” for victory sign, which was in that instant transformed into the “peace” symbol of the decade (Antiwar National File, Bancroft).) These actions took a page out of labor’s playbook—in a sense, they were seeking to stop the production of the war.

The decision to disrupt, in itself, does not imply a class-specific internal culture to the movement. If anything, the power of disruption is often the best, or at times, only point of leverage for otherwise powerless groups, such as the poor and working class (Piven & Cloward, 2005). But in the case of the early movement, it makes some sense to see this disruption in class-specific terms. Irving Howe, Bayard Rustin, Michael Harrington, Lewis Coser and Penn Kimble singled out disruptive tactics such as those in Berkeley in an article critical of the radical wing of the movement (*NYRB* 11/25/65). They were coming from a considerably more conservative political position, and made a number of arguments in their piece that underscored a general abhorrence of radicalism. Civil disobedience, they argued, was a legitimate form of protest, but “we would urge that it be employed only after intense reflection and a full resort to other, more ‘normal’ methods.” Howe, et al., develop the case that, unlike civil rights protesters, the antiwar movement has other forms of leverage at its disposal, underscoring the other bases of power—persuasion and electoral—that the mostly middle-class oriented movement was already making use of. These liberal critics could be rightly taken to task for overestimating these

more moderate power bases, but they were not completely wrong to observe the class base of the groups involved.⁹⁶

The authors also criticized the radicals' use of civil disobedience (blocking troop trains) along another tack, namely, "they involve an action by a small minority to revoke through its own decision the policy of a democratically elected government." Breaking bad laws or stopping bad policies is at the core of all civil disobedience, even against "democratic" governments. But the actions at Oakland, while inspiring many, angered many more (Halstead 1978; Wells 1994). Here, the authors point to a problem with the disruption practiced by the antiwar radicals as compared to that of trade unionists or civil rights protesters, who similarly broke laws or directly confronted authorities. Much of the antiwar radicalism exhibited the "go it alone" nature of the saboteur or the classical anarchist, at times exhibiting contempt for the people who did not share their sense of urgency. While this persisted to some degree throughout the 1960's, it contrasted more sharply with majority sentiment during these early years, when the war was still largely considered a legitimate, if flawed, campaign. So, while disruption is not itself a class-specific tactic, the particular contexts within which disruption takes place, and the rationales for its practice, can help make it so. In the early years of the war, antiwar disruption took on a distinctly middle-class character.⁹⁷ It is worth noting, however, that in

⁹⁶ Staughton Lynd and AJ Muste each wrote replies to the liberal call. In comparing the civil rights and antiwar movements, Lynd rejoined, "Isn't it the point that the nation had 'given its approval' to racial equality in just that insubstantial sense in which it might now be said to have 'given its approval'" to the doctrine of loving one's enemies? In other words, isn't the effort in the one case as in the other to make the nation live up to concepts which it had endorsed in the abstract but which it had failed to practice?" (*New York Review of Books*, 12/23/1965).

In an article in the journal *Liberation* (January 1966), AJ Muste wrote a detailed critique of the *NYRB* article, defending the need to make radical analyses and take radical positions and action, even if it meant alienating people today (see quote discussed, in text above).

⁹⁷ One of the major rifts within the left wing of the antiwar movement is often traced to a tension between those who sought to raise the tactical stakes of disruption and those who insisted on "mass legal demonstrations." Those arguing for civil disobedience and disruption tended to claim that it was only through more extreme tactics that the urgency of the issue would be communicated to the powers that be, and that such daring actions would attract people who were angered by the war and the injustices they perceived in US society. Those arguing on the other side, usually associated with the SWP, made the argument that mass demonstrations were the most inclusive (See Wells, 1994; Halstead 1978; Small 2002). Especially when seen in light of the question of the legitimacy of the war

later years, direct action was more widely embraced by the movement, and disruption caused by mostly working-class soldiers helped to bring the war to an end.

Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements

The personnel overlap between civil rights and antiwar was extensive. Many of the activists in the existing peace movement, as well as old and new lefts who were to later play a role in antiwar organizing were participants in the early days of civil rights, and as civil rights turned to Black power Black radicals and disaffiliated whites turned to the issue of Vietnam with increased vigor. Martin Luther King, Staughton Lynd, Bob Moses, James Farmer, AJ Muste, Julian Bond, Bob Zellner, and Ray Robinson were just some of the leaders who embraced both movements—dozens more straddled leading roles, and probably thousands of participants spanned the two. Civil rights organizations, like SNCC and CORE were among the first non-peace organizations to officially oppose the war. The CRM fed into the peace movement, helping it to grow.

The civil rights movement provided a particular model of class action in its own ranks. Many early movement leaders were considered middle-class in the Black community, particularly those who gained national recognition—Rosa Parks and the women and men who ran the Montgomery Bus Boycott; all of the early leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Committee, including Martin Luther King; the students who initiated the sit-downs at Woolworth's; the bulk of the leadership and membership of the NAACP; and most of the eventual leaders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, including Bob Moses. (There were of course numerous and notable exceptions, such as James Farmer and Fannie Lou Hamer.)

effort, it seems to me that in the early years, the radical actions of the few were perceived as elitist and out-of-step with the thinking of the vast majority of people beginning to question the war. But the debate on tactics was elevated to the level of strategy, to the detriment of the movement as a whole. There's nothing inherently elitist about disruption, nor inherently inclusive about mass rallies. The overall context and goals of the mobilization are the critical barometers for deciding on tactics.

This middle-class leadership helped forge alliances among educated and elite political networks around the country. *In Friendship*, a network of northern financial and political supporters established by King, Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levinson, was the first to spread the movement beyond the boycott in Montgomery. By 1963, SNCC's summer projects were reaching northern students. Elites were not the only supporters, however: Other liberal groups also lent their support. The United Auto Workers was central to providing funding and mobilization for the 1963 March on Washington, and numerous other unions pledged their support.

The class base of the CRM leadership did not mean that the early movement in the south was a "middle-class movement," however. Poor, working- and middle-class African Americans shared caste status: The civil rights movement was first a fight against racial oppression, and the central experience of oppression transcended class as much as it was marked by it. Racial segregation insured that for the most part, African Americans lived in racially homogenous and economically heterogeneous communities in the southern cities that were the birthplace of the movement. This geographic cohesion was coupled with strong religious networks, which further united African Americans across possible class divisions. And as industry was still concentrated in the North, Black industrial workers were a rarity outside of Northern cities (Los Angeles and New Orleans were notable exceptions, as well as Birmingham and Memphis). In the early years of the movement, the Black "community" in the urban south could thus be organized and mobilized as such.

Thus the formative movement of the era demonstrated the important possibilities of cross-class and identity based coalition, and the leading movement roles that could be played by middle-class leadership and college students. The sociological categories familiar to US culture at the time, in which the category of "working class" was subsumed by "middle-class" or "poor," were confirmed by the Black mobilization, which, until the later part of the 1960's and the move North did

not have strong roots in an industrialized working class base. And activists observed additional concrete actions that further shaped attitudes about class in the early days of the movement. SNCC's decision to organize in the rural south in 1962-1965 created a model for middle class-poor alliance that was celebrated and imitated by northern student radicals in SDS's Economic Rights Action Project, intended to do in the North what SNCC was doing in the South. White northern liberals, in the meantime, were generally sympathetic to the demands of the southern movement. Early antiwar activists could expect this progressive attitude to be extended to the problem in Vietnam. But the active participation of many of the liberal trade unions seen in the early days of the CRM was rejected as a possibility by peace activists, who were fully aware of the Cold War ideology that prevailed in the house of labor. The overall impressions left by southern organizing was that middle class leaders and the poor were the primary agents of social change; and/or that a liberal elite was responsive to a progressive politics.

For many African American activists and white liberals, radicals and students who participated in or supported the civil rights movement, there appeared to be incredible potential for a new progressive coalition, even the birthplace for a true multi-issue political formation for far-reaching social change. The timing for such an alliance seemed auspicious. With the Voting Rights Act signed, leading civil rights figures believed the "civil rights movement is over" (*NYT* 8/6/1965, *WP* 9/1/1965). It was out of this vision that Staughton Lynd initiated the call for the Assembly of Unrepresented People in August 1965, which brought thousands of peace and southern civil rights activists to Washington DC; that Bob (Moses) Parris lent his name and actions to the antiwar movement and the AUP's call; that Martin Luther King looked in the direction of the peace movement (cf. Branch 2007; Hall 2006; NCCWV Papers, SHSW). The AUP was the first concerted effort to bring loose

form to this burgeoning multi-directional movement.⁹⁸ As part of the traditional pantheon of liberal groups people gave the labor movement lip service, but few activists in 1965 saw it as a real ally with regard to the war. The white working class, understood in traditional terms, was rarely seen as part of this new formation, this new potential.

Whither the Working Class?

Elite focus, intellectual and radical critique, collective personal protest, campus-centric activity, and connections to the civil rights movement—in each wing and phase of the early movement, working class participation was made unlikely by the orientation, activity, location and analyses of the movement groups. Opposition to the war, as framed by the early movement, carried a great deal of elitism within it. Early efforts of the antiwar movement created an image that you needed to know something to oppose the war—you needed to be schooled in your opposition. Being opposed to the war was something complex, not a transparent position. The “we” implied by the liberal peace advocates was an exclusionary group. Some of “us” understand the problems with the war, and we need to convince the rest of “us”—the educated; “upstanding” members of middle-class communities; political and cultural leaders—that it’s a terrible mistake. For many radical protesters, this intellectual isolation took the form of upholding personal sacrifice and extraordinary individual commitment as criteria for action. Almost by definition this would remain an exclusive group, a reality that some early leaders directly acknowledged. Writing in *Liberation* in early 1966, Muste defended the historical and political analysis of the

⁹⁸ The meetings of the Assembly for Unrepresented Peoples and the National Coalition of Committees to End the War in Vietnam also highlighted the personal, organizational and cultural differences between the two movements, again underscoring the distance between the idea of a diverse antiwar movement and its realization. The internecine ideological infighting of the white left, its reliance on speeches and parliamentary procedures, alienated the MFDP and SNCC activists attending the conventions. Ray Robinson said, “people from Mississippi have traveled here 3 or 4 times. Each time they came here they’ve felt unrepresented. In April they just marched. In August they just sat on the grass. Today they watched all this shit [leftist debates and grandstanding]. They came here with the idea of finding out how people can help each other. But that isn’t what these people seemed to want to talk about” (Hall 2006, 37; NCCEWV Papers).

Vietnam situation that served as a base for radical dissent, and their confrontational politics. “If, as is true, this will at first call for the opposition or skepticism on the part of many Americans, we have to face it and in any case will not be able to evade it” (Muste 1966, 35).

For liberals, their initial focus on elite or educated groups was in part strategic. Liberal peace advocates believed that the Democratic decision-makers with the power to end the war would respond to pressure from respected peers, and if not them, from their most influential electoral supporters. Of course, trade unions and other working-class groups also worked through official politics, and were at the center of the Democratic Party’s base. And an electoral and lobbying strategy is far from class-specific: historical working-class “machine” politics and contemporary trade union political action precisely occupied that arena. But working-class groups were neither considered as possible audiences for the movement’s educational process, nor approached as partners in lobbying efforts. The power that workers could bring to the table as voters, in other words, was not sought.

Why? From an institutional perspective, the most obvious answer is the intransigent support for the war displayed by bulk of the US trade union leadership. As I described in Chapter 3, George Meany and Jay Lovestone would be at the bottom of anyone’s list for antiwar collaboration. In September 1965, the AFL-CIO president argued that “For America to surrender, to withdraw, to abandon its solemn commitment to South Vietnam would be the first step toward a world holocaust,” and pledged the AFL’s “unstinting support” for Johnson’s war policy at the convention of December 1965 (*NYT*, 9/7/1965; 8/27/1966). The premier liberal labor leader of the era, the United Auto Worker’s Walter Reuther, called the AFL’s position “intemperate, hysterical, jingoistic, and unworthy of a policy statement of a free labor movement.” But it took him two more years, and President Johnson’s

decision to step down, for Reuther to publicly oppose the war (*NYT* 8/27/1966; Lichtenstein 1997).

The foreign policy positions of labor's leadership in this period did not necessarily reflect the feelings of its members. Political factions, even oppositional slates, had all but disappeared within US labor by 1960, and economism was nearly hegemonic (Kimeldorf 1999; Moody 1988). As the polls discussed in Chapter Two indicated, union-member households were not statistically different from non-union households in their feelings about the war: Like everyone else, they were divided over the war in the early years. Labor analyst Bert Cochran attributed this gap between leaders and the rank-and-file to the following factors: "the membership knows little what its representatives are doing, does not view the union as an instrument of foreign policy, and has no ready mechanism to control these activities." He concludes, "In the absence of significant internal opposition groups, the labor officialdom, in this sphere, operates as a virtually sovereign power responsible to itself alone" (1978, 320; see also Berinsky 2004).

Yet many workers did agree with their leaders, and supported the war. Wars tended to bring jobs, job security, and economic growth. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, "Full employment, with the unemployment rate under 4%, for this country at least has been a phenomenon of war periods. . . . These are the only times we've had it" (*WSJ*, 4/17/70). While some unions were beginning to question the link between defense spending and job security (the Machinists, for example, questioned the reliability of Pentagon contracts over civilian work in Congress in 1962), for many members it made good sense that war spending meant prolonged employment (Lichtenstein 1995). In many working class communities, service during wartime was a particular source of pride and was regarded as a duty (Appy 1993). Intergenerational service in the military distinguished many working-class families. The military had long served as a site of assimilation for immigrants, and as a way for working class

people of all ethnicities and races to advance. Levison (1999) and Appy (1993) also describe how working class people respond to the values associated with the military—brotherhood, team work, bravery, ruggedness. Military culture resembled self-perceptions of working-class culture, and criticisms of military culture could therefore be construed as criticisms of working class culture as well. None of these factors put workers irretrievably beyond the reach of the antiwar movement, but all bespoke the distance, and obstacle-strewn nature, of the path to be traveled for such a connection to take place.

Antiwar Labor's Contradictory Role

As I described in more detail in Chapter Four, top-level bureaucrats from a small number of unions initiated the most influential peace initiatives from the labor movement during the war's early years. These initiatives were generally limited to the leadership: They signed statements, posted advertisements, and held conferences. One short-lived rank and file effort in New York, Trade Unionists for Peace, had pre-dated the leadership assemblies, and other small rank-and-file efforts existed that worked on education and outreach in the 1965 demonstrations (TUP, Tamiment). With a few exceptions, however, these groups attracted the already political, and often isolated members of various unions, rather than growing roots within particular locals. Individuals in unions whose climate was hostile to independent politics often faced intimidation and harassment. Even the most forthright radicals in the movement proceeded gingerly. In 1965, International Longshore Workers Union President Harry Bridges explained his union's contradictory support for antiwar protesters and non-participation in antiwar protest:

. . . with few exceptions, the trade union movement in the US, if not wholeheartedly in support of the war, is not raising any strenuous objections to it. The ILWU is an exception. But effective action—such as trying to stop shipments—not only requires real understanding and unity of our own members, but a national movement willing to stand by and help out if we get ourselves into trouble. Our union—tough as it always has been, and is today—must face the facts of life: must act and work as part of the trade union movement of the US (Foner 1989, 25).

These were the constraints faced by antiwar forces trying to maneuver in the anti-communist and conservative institutional setting of the AFL-CIO.

Thus the leadership orientation of the peace forces reflected a reality of the sixties trade union movement—the concentrated power of the bureaucracy and the limited involvement of the rank and file—and also strategic decisions on the part of labor’s antiwar organizers. To counter Meany and company, they reasoned, comparable leaders must be mobilized. Trade union political activity in the vast majority of unions originated from and was controlled by the bureaucracy: Without a push from the top the peace forces would go nowhere.

By early 1967 the TUD of SANE was co-sponsoring marches and rallies around the country. They were part of the liberal wing of the movement, from their affiliation with SANE and their own political leanings. For the movement, labor’s official presence was on the masthead and the dais has positive effects, and encouraged the coalitions to cast a wider net in doing outreach for the events. The flyer for the Chicago Area Peace Parade and Rally of March 25 1967 asked the uninitiated, “Isn’t it time you joined a peace march?”⁹⁹ The flyer was wordy and educational, and directed at people whose tendency would be to support the President, believe in the justice of the war, or feel resigned to continued involvement as there was no good way out. In other words, the flyer was directed at precisely the profile of most union members, most of whom continued to support Johnson while beginning to question the war. Gently and sympathetically rebutting these positions, the coalition demanded an end to the bombing, a cease-fire, full negotiations, and then took the next step of calling on the government to “make a clear commitment to withdraw our troop from Vietnam on the principle of self-determination for the Vietnamese people,” staking out slightly more radical ground. Their reasons for

⁹⁹ Sponsored by TUD Sane, SANE, WFP, Veterans for Peace, WILPF Midwest Faculty Committee, SDS, Chicago Area Fellowship of Reconciliation, this was one of the last events that successfully united liberal and radical forces in this phase of the movement.

marching combined morality and practicality, the latter being fairly new to this wing of the movement and undoubtedly a reflection of TUD SANE's involvement:

It is in this spirit that we march—
 To end an immoral and senseless war
 To spare the lives of American and Vietnamese alike
 To urge an end to the draft in 1967
 To use the \$24 billions a year wasted in Vietnam for human needs and social reconstruction at home
 To end poverty, to rebuild our cities and to improve the quality of life for all Americans. (TUD files, LLAP Papers, SHSW)

While this flyer and others like it seemed directed at union members, I would argue that the audience for much of TUD-SANE's actions itself, with few exceptions, was largely elite, including politicians and the media, rather than the rank-and-file. The intention behind much of the early trade union organizing against the war was to stake ground in the war of opinions happening within the halls of power, and to add their voices to the concerned liberals who sought negotiations and an end to the bombing. They were interested in responsible, respectful calls for peace, which could reasonably withstand the inevitable red-baiting they would face from their pro-war counterparts in labor while convincing their allies in the liberal establishment that the labor movement was not a monolith. From the letters written to and from the main organizer of 1967's Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace, you can almost hear the unionists saying, "We are not all uncivilized barbarians like Meany." But the intimidation within the movement from the likes of Meany was real and pervasive, and it prevented many leaders from getting involved in the early efforts for peace.

Thus, even labor's first antiwar efforts were stamped with a middle-class character. A good example of this orientation was the first petition circulated by TUD, under the auspices of Negotiations Now!, an early liberal coalition. Of the notable signatories who lent their name to the bottom of the mass produced petition, only UAW Vice President Victor Reuther signed on from labor—even on the version of the literature whose heading read "Trade Unionists Say Negotiations

Now in Vietnam!” The other official signatories included six clergy, five intellectuals, and three heads of major corporations. The petition began: “We trade unionists are confronted almost daily with the choice of one of two courses of action: either constant, senseless strife—or negotiations.” It is unlikely that this responsible corporatism would interpolate a restive rank and file, who knew from experience that negotiations did not signify an end to strife, and who did not see strife as senseless if it was aimed towards a better contract, against unsafe conditions, speed-up, etc. Rather, it reflected the reality of the leaders who sat in negotiations, who tamped down strife, and whose audience was other labor leaders, and the liberal antiwar establishment.

Why not reach into the ranks for support for a cause that so many felt so keenly? Much of the reason was the inertia described above—that was not the way things worked in the business-union climate of the mid-sixties United States. Rank-and-file activist Stan Weir argues that “union officials seek to hide the evidence of the intelligence, organizational skills, and solidarity shown by regular hourly working people” (146), and that they downplay the capacities of their members because it allows them to “justify” their lying and manipulation. But, more centrally (and as much to Weir’s own overall point), leaders downplay the skills of their members to justify their own leadership as necessary and their own decisions as best. For some, member involvement meant the possibility that their members would *oppose* the peace efforts of their leaders—in these cases, the leaders thought of themselves as being “ahead” of the membership, which, in some cases, they no doubt were. For others, opening up a public discussion might mean that members would feel emboldened to push their leadership on other questions as well, regarding which the leadership was happy to be left alone. And, most importantly for some of these unions, opening up the question to the membership would mean opening themselves

up to the radicals, Communist and other, who remained in the locals, and whose voices would jeopardize the carefully orchestrated leadership initiatives.

In large part, labor's early antiwar response was tiny, tepid, and tailored toward non-confrontation. For these reasons, combined with the pro-war strength of the leadership, the movement held a jaundiced view of labor. Speaking at a labor conference in St Louis in 1966, antiwar activist Sidney Lens said that the labor movement in the US "is no longer dreaming of new vistas. It is imbued with a sense of satisfaction. . . . [S]mugness, arrogance, and the unwillingness to probe new ideas have always been the enemies of the labor movement. Without the right to dissent, the labor movement is nothing. The idea of making a fast buck not only permeates our society, but our unions too, to the point that it is a disease—this veering away from idealism" (Wechsler 1967).¹⁰⁰ SDS laid out its early appreciation of labor's capacity for radical change in its Port Huron statement: "Even the House of Labor has bay windows: not only is this true of the labor elites, but as well of some of the rank-and-file. Many of the latter are indifferent unionists, uninterested in meetings, alienated from the complexities of the labor-management negotiating apparatus, lulled to comfort by the accessibility of luxury and the opportunity of long-term contracts. 'Union democracy' is not simply inhibited by labor leader elitism, but by the unrelated problem of rank-and-file apathy to the tradition of unionism" (1962). Compounding these attitudes were the cultural apprehensions of working class conservatism, described in detail in the last chapter.

Millions of working class people encountered either full-throated support or qualified criticisms of the war within their primary reference groups, unions and the

¹⁰⁰ The intransigence of the Meany group continued to haunt the labor movement even as it became more active in later years. Joseph Potofsky, head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and member of the AFL-CIO executive council, spoke out against the Nixon Administration policies. Meany subsequently cancelled his appearance at their convention. Frank Rosenblum, the secretary treasurer, said "The labor movement has lost its image. Labor is now thought of as part of the Establishment. Once the defender of economic and social justice, in the vanguard of progressive movement, we now find the AFL CIO endorsing the war in Vietnam. It has totally alienated our youth, and antagonized others as well" (*NYT* 5/27/1970).

Democratic Party. Given the urgency with which the early movement pursued its goals—which, regardless of the “out now” or “negotiate now” direction of the slogan, always included an immediate end to the bombing—pursuing organized workers would arguably be time better spent elsewhere.

In short, in the first two years of the antiwar movement, antiwar groups reached for what they perceived as low-hanging fruit. College students and academics, middle-class women, and members of the clergy were target audiences from early on. SDS, NCCEWV, SANE, WSP, FOR, WRL, CALCAV—across the political spectrum, a middle class audience was explicitly or implicitly sought out by the movement.

Differences and Debates within the Movement: Coalitions and the Rhetoric of Inclusiveness

The early movement, however, was not monolithic. Some groups uneasily confronted the tension between their strategic analysis of the fitted-ness of a middle class audience, and an ideological or political desire to reach working class people. Sharon Jeffrey, an SDS ERAP (Economic Research and Action Project) organizer in Cleveland, explained how the war became a “volatile element” in the relationship between the ERAP organizers and the poor communities. During the summer of 1965, Jeffrey summarized community views of the government, towards which they were very critical on a local level: “The government (federal government) somehow is honest, moral, and good.... If the US was involved in a war, then it must be for good reasons... Given that the government fought only just wars and war was to prevent the spread of Communism . . . it was wrong . . . to question the role of the United States in war” (Miller 1987, 210). Introducing the issue of the war as a problem was difficult in these circumstances. When activists tried to do so, the attention given to workers was often brief, and quite symbolic. In January 1966 members of the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam who worked at the Ford River Rouge plant

distributed thousands of fliers, “and the response on an individual level is very positive,” reported one activist. River Rouge was the site of some of the most pitched battles of the 1930’s, and Local 600 remained one of the most active UAW locals in the country, exercising extreme political independence, and a penchant for wildcats (see Cutler, 2004; Georgakas & Surkin 1998). But the movement’s flier didn’t reach out to the Rouge workers based on their own self-interest. It read, “The Union movement generally and the Ford workers particularly have in the past always had the courage to struggle for the common people.” “For the common people” is an interesting projection on the part of the DCEWV—workers at the River Rouge were having their history of militant self activity recast as work done *for* others. The flyer also made use of the same kinds of knowledge-based appeals used in middle-class organizing. “Armed with the truth of what is really happening in Vietnam, the organized workers can be a decisive force for peace in our country” (B34A, 1/15/66, SDS Papers).¹⁰¹ Others were more tone-deaf. In Redwood City, CA, anti-napalm activists distributed fliers asking workers to quit their defense industry jobs (Franklin 2000).

Yet even the Redwood City organizing indicates that there was greater complexity to the nature of intra-class organizing in the early period of the war. In one of the few sections of *An American Ordeal* in which the social base of protest is explicitly addressed, DeBenedetti (1990) briefly describes efforts made by the Redwood City Committee Against Napalm, which started its campaign in 1966. The committee, he reports, found that their campaign “split Redwood City along unfamiliar class lines.” “[U]pper-income people, whether Republican or Democrat, mostly backed the campaign,” while, in the words of one committee member, “lower income people seemed to be indoctrinated and wouldn’t listen.”

¹⁰¹ This is from a letter from Steve Fox to Paul Booth, and an attached flyer, “Why are Americans Dying in Vietnam?” which was written by the DCEWV. Despite the seeming naivete of this particular project, the DCEWV was a very impressive, interracial, and long-lasting antiwar presence in that city.

The attitude of this committee member itself speaks volumes about the reasons why lower income people might not be comfortable in the group. H. Bruce Franklin, a future historian of the movement, also described the anti-napalm organizing in Redwood City. His portrait opposes that DeBenedetti's and his activist source. According to Franklin, who was one of the original members of the Stanford Committee for Peace in Vietnam that launched the city-wide campaign, their attempts to reach workers met with mixed reception. Franklin is critical of their "naïve" campaign, in which he and others believed that through mass education citizens, workers, and company officials would come to their senses and oppose the "immoral" and "senseless" war. But he nevertheless credits their first efforts, noting that they eventually lead to an international campaign against the use of napalm and other incendiaries. In a tactic that could be described as paradigmatically middle-class, SCPV began their campaign by meeting with the management of the United Technology Center, the firm contracted by Dow Chemicals to develop and test the new Napalm-B. They explained to the defense contractor the horrific effects of napalm on its victims, in a presentation replete with charts and scientific evidence. Needless to say, this educational mission did not convince the company to stop developing napalm. Franklin describes how activists then leafleted workers at UTC's facilities. "Most" workers took leaflets the first day; "some went out of their way to be friendly," while "a few tried to run us down." The second day, security guards and a photographer were posted at the gate, and most workers ignored the leafleters. But, when they tried again a few miles down the road from the plant, they caught many workers with whom "the response was even more friendly than it had been the first day. They told us that the management was very nervous, and had posted plainclothes security guards in the plant to keep an eye on the workers." The leaflets these Stanford professors and students had put together asked that workers quit their jobs, refuse to be part of the war machine. According to Franklin, some

actually did—“two or three,” who he says were then blacklisted in the area. But most, he says, were more scared that they might lose their jobs if they engaged in any protest activity, or “if they showed any sympathy for our position” (Franklin 2000, 82-88).

Franklin is far from a disinterested reporter, but his recollection should be judged as subjective as DeBenedetti’s sources. If the response within Redwood City did fall out along polarized class lines, Franklin’s story helps to explain why that might have been the case. Worker hostility to the movement might have been precipitated by the movement’s own overtures, or encouraged by managerial intimidation. The issue may have been less the war, and more the stakes involved in expressing dissent and the company one would keep doing so.

The Vietnam Summer project of 1967 was perhaps the best early case of trying to straddle both working- and middle-class constituencies. In March 1967 Gar Alperovitz wrote an article that served as the basis for the project, titled “What Can be Done about the War?” (B3F15 Webb Papers). Rather than mobilizing for one-off events like demonstrations or advertisements, Alperovitz urged a community-based approach that could “reach personally every household” in a given area, “initially to educate, secondly to commit the members of the household . . . to opposition to the war” (emphasis in original). This committed action would ultimately be electoral—“it must be viewed as a continuous and calculated strategy aimed at preparing the foundations for the 1968 election in such a way that the opposition candidate will be forced, by the depth of public sentiment, to campaign on a platform to end the war.”

He explicitly identified the communities in question as middle class. Speaking of Boston, but extending his observations to other cities, he writes “there are four groups of potential organizers who . . . could be mobilized to reach deeply into the middle-class community . . . 1) the intellectual community, 2) the student

community, 3) the clergy, and 4) the growing number of middle-class community conscious women.”

Yet as Alperovitz’s proposal was turned into program it changed. “Vietnam Summer” was announced on April 23, 1967 by Dr Martin Luther King, Benjamin Spock, SDS’s Carl Oglesby, and former Ramparts editor and Congressional candidate Robert Sheer. Its publicity materials suggested that it was “an attempt to expand and diversify the anti-war movement, building a base outside the existing constituency.” (B3F2I 5/8/1967, Webb Papers, SHSW). Rather than pursue one centralized kind of work, as Alperovitz recommended, Vietnam Summer took the “many hats” approach more typical of SDS, and reflective of the heterogeneous coalition of groups that eventually coalesced to endorse the effort. As the publicity materials for students said, “there is not a preconceived mold that students must fit into.” They offered to “train organizers, develop educational materials, and provided funds for many types of activities.” These included “community teach-outs,” “draft resistance” and “university projects,” but also “selected projects in poor and working class communities.”

Those projects that did focus on “poor and working class communities” (there were three of them) were, by and large, a bust.¹⁰² The organizers that went into the communities did not do so from a knowledge base of the issues pertinent to the workers who lived there, and one summer’s outreach was not going to counter many years of non-interaction.

Chatfield, concluding DeBenedetti’s *An American Ordeal*, argues that “middle-class antiwar activists made some lackluster attempts to rally working class Americans to their side. . . however there were few serious attempts to convert lower class dissent into an active antiwar force. Although radicals tended to romanticize

¹⁰² The Boston Draft Resistance Group got started as a Vietnam Summer project, though, and learned how to change.

Blacks and poor whites, for the most part working class Americans were regarded as inert and inaccessible” (1990, 394).

Poor Man’s Fight?

The “decision” to by-pass workers, to the extent that most groups in the movement consciously made it, received attention at the time; in certain places, it was questioned or reconsidered. Many movement organizers recognized the relationship between the frames they were using to reach constituencies, the mobilizing vehicles they used, and the resulting middle-class demographic of the movement they were building. Some of the first major debates within the antiwar movement concerned questions that directly related to the class composition of the group and audience: What is it about the war that we oppose? How do we build the biggest movement possible? What are we asking others to do? Who are we seeking to recruit and ally ourselves with?

In an early meeting of the NCCEWV’s Standing Committee, a representative from the Lower East Side Milwaukee Project, whose members were working and poor white Italian and Poles, noted the “lack of discussion about reaching the working class.” According to notes from the meeting, he argued that “it isn’t a question of discussion in terms of right versus wrong but there are other issues” that would arise for his members. He described them as people critical of the war, but who were “veterans, Democrats, conformist” and would therefore be concerned with “troop welfare” in Vietnam as a primary issue. The movement needed to address the issue of the troops if it was going to “establish legitimacy” with the people he worked with (1/1966, NCCEWV Papers, SHSW).

Similar arguments took place in other left and radical organizations, or coalitions within which leftists or radicals worked. H. Bruce Franklin described the early debate over the demand of “immediate withdrawal” as often couched in class terms. The argument went something like this: working class people support the

troops. Any demands or campaigns that could be interpreted as working against our troops—such as a campaign against a particular weapon, like napalm—would “alienate” working class people. Getting the troops home was “the only demand that working class people can support” (Franklin 2000, 76). Franklin was skeptical of this particular argument, and probably rightly so: other demands could and were supported by working class people. But his interlocutor’s general concern about the movement’s frames alienating working class people was not misplaced. For those whose families were fighting the war, a campaign against a weapon—a weapon that might, in the eyes of the soldier’s families, be keeping their son alive, seemed completely outside the point. Would you say the soldiers should give up their guns? And of course, that is precisely what many members of the movement did argue, as committed pacifists. This kind of tension only increased when more radical groups called for the victory of the NLF – victory, that was, to the people who killed working class sons (Levison 1974). The cultural gulf between the movement and the working class loomed large.

One area in which this cultural gulf proved most daunting was in draft resistance. Public draft card burnings were one of the earliest tactics of part of the radical wing of the movement. A combination of New Left and religion, they were often described in terms of moral witness, and were predominantly carried out by white upper- and middle- class college kids. As draft-resistance historian Michael Foley observed, it was an “act of resistance [that] took on an air of condescension for some working-class observers” (Foley 2003, 25). The group known as the “Resistance” was the first to try to coordinate the return of draft cards, and turn this action into a wider and more significant draft resistance movement. It was the Resistance who coordinated the October 1967 card returns, and it was their action that the “Call to Resist,” described at the top of the chapter, was designed to support.

By 1967, before the National Mobilization in DC, some of the debates about the strategy of draft resistance and the particular tactics used by draft resisters revolved around the question of the class participation within the movement itself. SDS had decided to participate in draft resistance, but internal questions were raised about the class base of that movement. SDS member Steve Hamilton argued that the tactic of individual imprisonment would have little effect on the bulk of working people.

I don't think moral witness on our part can have any concrete effect on those who cannot afford to make a moral witness . . . No revolution is built on bad consciences but on the organizations of those who are exploited. Middle-class tears and money mean very little. (*New Left Notes*, July 1967)

Hamilton urged an organizing approach over a focus on “public effect,” and criticized the Resistance for “building a movement that hoped to stir one more wave of middle-class liberal sentiment against the war and American militarism” rather than organize more people to be involved.

Inspired by these kinds of analyses, the Boston Draft Resistance Group began organizing on the heels of the Resistance, as an attempt to use a mostly middle-class base of students to reach out to working class communities. The core of the BRDG, a mix of college-educated and local working-class organizers, criticized the way that the Resistance, and efforts like the “Call to Resist,” required a moral commitment to partake in the actions. Harold Hector, an African American organizer from Roxbury, was one of three main organizers of the group, who cautioned that the approach taken by the BRDG must disassociate itself from “affluent draft dodgers whose political dissent was a function of class privilege” (Foley 2003, 66). Some BRDG organizers, after working in working class communities for months, came to be critical of the tactic of burning the cards: “Card burnings are seen as a gesture of contempt directed at the guys who are already fighting, and people do not believe that card burners are exposing themselves to punishment: they assume that card

burners are simply destroying evidence” (Ferber & Lynd 1971, 174). Without the time spent organizing in working class communities these organizers would not have seen how their tactics came off in the eyes of others.

Nick Egleson, former president of SDS and then head of BDRG, spoke at a rally a few days before the October National Mobilization, criticizing the ideas behind the draft resisters: “Equipped only with a standard of individual conduct and a calculus of right and courage, we lose sight not only of the many kinds of change needed but also of the motivation for change. So equipped, we easily confine our organizing to the campus. . . But all the while the men of Charleston and South Boston and Riverside, of Roxbury and Dorchester and of the working-class parts of cities all over the country are threatened by the draft . . .” (Ferber & Lynd 1971, 112).

Egleson laid out a vision for how the movement might begin to meet and enlist these men:

Our solution must be to being to organize those most threatened by the US armed force. How many people gave out information about the October 16 rally in Boston in poor and working-class neighborhoods? Who put up posters speaking the language of those communities? Who tried to counter, thereby, the image the press promotes of us as hippies, cowards, and peace finks? Who suggested in those places that we—not the US Army—speak to people’s immediate and long-range interests? (113)

The BRDG took a number of steps in this direction. Rather than emphasizing the political content of the “We Won’t Go” statement circulated by the Resistance, the BRDG made the statement “a symbol of commitment to work actively against the war through other activities of the Group” (Foley 2003, 67). Foley quotes a member of the BRDG explaining that the group strived “to reach those who were anti-war out of self-interest as well as those who had firm moral and political conviction.”

Foley explains,

Those in the Resistance tended to believe that their personal sacrifice was a necessary moral act, but that it could also inspire others to do the same while disrupting the Selective Service’s ability to smoothly recruit. Many from SDS, and the Boston Draft Resistance Group, saw imprisonment as a zero sum game, however, with each arrest meaning another organizer taken out of the

real action of community organizing. The BRDG called it a form of 'useless martyrdom' (99).

BRDG used a tactic they described as the "Early Morning Show" to reach people showing up for their pre-induction physicals. By "early February 1968 a pool of more than 100 volunteers helped to pull off Early Morning Shows at more than twenty draft boards each month." They did this for two years. At the centers, the organizers talked to the potential draftees about the war and the draft. Tim Wright, one of the main organizers, said, "Mostly we were not successful," with about half of the people there hostile to the movement, another third passive and a rest sympathetic. But, "the basic rationale for the 'early morning show' is to broaden the antiwar movement. Unless you get a man's name and phone number we can't see if he knows other men who need counseling or whether he or his friends will help us with anti-draft and anti-war work" (quoted in Foley, 72). The draft counselors from the BRDG specialized in finding loopholes for deferments, but always included political discussion in their counseling. While they were not always successful in convincing the young men to get involved, "some counselees went on to organize in their own neighborhoods, become counselors themselves, or even volunteer for Early Morning Shows" (73).

Until 1968, however, even the efforts of the BRDG to reach working class young men met with limited success. Looking back, the organizers estimated that in the first year, 80% of the young men they saw were college students, despite having explicitly targeted working class draftees. Given the many factors at work – the middle-class image of the antiwar movement, the basic support of the military in most working class communities, the lack of many meaningful or possible alternatives for young working class men who were not drafted – a change in tactics and orientation was not enough for the young working class men to be mobilized, en masse, against the war. Yet, the cumulative experience of the war, and the normalization of dissent did combine to change the face and class-base of the

antiwar movement. But in its early years, the middle-class focus, politics, and milieu of the antiwar movement was difficult to overcome.

Chapter 7

“Elite Doves” vs. “Hardhats”: Consolidation of the Image

“I’m scared. If this is what the class struggle is all about there’s something wrong somewhere.”
 Cliff Slone of Brooklyn, a freshman at the University of Michigan, looking at the “flag-waving workers”
 during the 5/20/1970 march in NYC (*NYT* 5/21/1970)

“Vietnam has left us with a heritage rich in possibilities for class warfare,” argued James Fallows in his widely read 1975 *Washington Monthly* article, “What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?” Appearing in multiple anthologies, otherwise reprinted and quoted, its fame is “evidence of how painful a nerve he had struck.” (Isaacs 2000, 36.)

Fallows’ narrative begins in the fall of 1969, when, as a young Harvard graduate, he received his draft notice. Draft resistance, he knew, meant going to prison or leaving the country. He instead sought a physical deferment, which “would restore things to the happy state I had known during four undergraduate years.” Along with a significant majority of his Harvard compatriots, Fallows succeeds in winning an “unqualified” status, and is overcome with relief. Yet he shortly begins to feel a “sense of shame that remains with me to this day.” Beyond having lied to the draft board, his shame sprang from witnessing the “boys from Chelsea . . . the White proles of Boston,” who “walked through the examination lines like so many cattle off to slaughter.” When the cosseted Cambridge co-eds returned to the Yard later that day, there was “something close to the surface that none of us wanted to mention. We knew now who would be killed.”

As numerous memoirs, histories, and studies have made clear, it was working-class men who overwhelmingly comprised the Vietnam-era armed forces, and bore the brunt of its casualties. James Fallows’ argument, here, rests on sure ground. Yet the thrust of his argument is not that the working class disproportionately served. He turns his eye instead to those, like himself, who did not serve. And there he finds the “seedbed” for “class hatred now so busily brewing in the country.”

Like Chris Buckley's similarly renowned article "Viet Guilt," Fallows' basic argument is that elite students avoided the draft to save their own skin, though they rationalized this decision through various politically correct "theoretical frameworks" that made them feel virtuous. Their political arguments for not serving, however, were "basically fraudulent." In the eyes of the nearly 30-year-old Fallows in 1975, the underlying insincerity of the political case against the draft was largely apparent to anyone who was being honest with themselves at the time.

Fallows' rendition of the political case against serving in Vietnam is often sloppy. He confuses those who argued for resisting the draft with those who argued for evasion.¹⁰³ He supplies caricatures – or allows the movement's most caricature-ready elements – to stand in for the whole of the anti-draft scene in Cambridge.¹⁰⁴ The particular argument made by many local antiwar activists – that resistance itself was perhaps an elite tactic, and that evasion was more inclusive – is lost on him.¹⁰⁵ He moves between describing the actions and beliefs of all Harvard students and those of antiwar activists as if they are the same group, a problem he continues as he develops his argument about class warfare, collapsing liberals, the antiwar left and the "highbrow circles" he (self-loathingly) condemns.¹⁰⁶ His overall argument has been taken as evidence of his "neo-liberal" status.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Fallows collapses the proponents of draft evasion and resistance by mistakenly attributing to Michael Ferber, a leader of the Resistance, a speech espousing evasion. Fallows writes that Ferber said "as committed opponents of the war, we had a responsibility to save ourselves from the war machine." Ferber rebuts this description in a later article, explaining that the Resistance's clear position at the time was "our place was up against the war machine, and in prison" (Ferber 2007, 115).

¹⁰⁴ Fallows goes on to describe draft counseling sessions, writing "the boys of Chelsea were not often mentioned during these sessions; when they were, regret was expressed that they had not yet understood the correct approach to the draft. We resolved to launch political-education programs, some under the auspices of the Worker-Student Alliance, to help straighten them out. In the meantime, there was the physical to prepare for." The WSA was a project of the left group Progressive Labor Party, which had relative strong roots in the Cambridge chapter of SDS. But, PL was a negligible force in the anti-draft movement. They were among the most dogmatic and doctrinaire of the groups, hardly a stand-in for the antiwar movement or draft counseling.

¹⁰⁵ See discussion of the BDRG in Chapter Six.

¹⁰⁶ Foley explains "the New England Resistance had steadily established good relations with Vietnam veterans who returned to the United States and began working, individually and collectively, against the war (2003, 307)." This alliance brought veterans into working class high schools in Lowell, Lynn, Lawrence, New Bedford, Fall River, and Mission Hill (340). Contrast this with Fallows' anecdotal, "among any highbrow audience, it is scarcely possible to attract a minute's attention on the subject of

Yet Fallows makes two even more damning critiques. The first finds echoes across the revisionist spectrum: by counseling people to avoid military service, and by following such counsel, antiwar protesters prolonged the war. “It is clear by now that if the men of Harvard had wanted to do the very most they could to help shorten the war, they should have been drafted or imprisoned en masse.” Criticizing himself and others, “our reluctance to say ‘No’ helped prolong the war. The more we guaranteed that we would end up neither in uniform nor behind bars, the more we made sure that *our* class of people would be spared the real cost of the war.” He explains: “Because their boys weren’t being killed,” the parents of the elite “opposed . . . the war . . . in a bloodless theoretical fashion . . . the mothers of Beverly Hills and Chevy Chase and Great Neck and Belmont were not on the telephone to the congressmen screaming, ‘You killed my boy.’” He concludes, “We certainly could have seen that by keeping ourselves away from both frying pan and fire, we were prolonging the war and consigning the Chelsea boys to danger and death.”

It is undoubtedly true that a mass imprisonment or drafting of Harvard men would have had an effect on the war. It was, in fact, precisely the former strategy that the Resistance, and other anti-draft groups, was pursuing in the years before Fallows’ successful evasion. Yet the government did not oblige them, a fact that, among others, Fallows chooses to ignore. Very few draft resisters were prosecuted largely because of the unpopularity of the war, which increasingly made such prosecutions politically untenable, and the government wisely declined to take the

Vietnam veterans.” Fallows wants to draw a connection between the movement and his “highbrow” friends, but the movement did not behave in such a contemptuous manner, even though his friends might have.

¹⁰⁷ Nearly twenty years later before making his similar turn, Christopher Hitchens wrote of Fallows, “anyone who believes that the objection of antiwar activists was to personal danger rather than to complicity in atrocity and aggression just wasn’t there at the time.” He lambastes Fallows for raising the question of “who served,” rather than “how people thought about the war, or what they did to stop it.” Regarding his point that the war was fought by the poor and Black, Hitchens writes, “I distinctly remember making this point about the draft, as did the whole of the antiwar movement and in particular the much-forgotten GI Coffeehouse and GI counseling groups,” and remarks that he doesn’t remember any other time that a “neo-liberal like Fallows has felt compelled to stress that America is a class society” (Hitchens 1993, 69).

bait. Fallows also dismisses as largely insincere a primary criticism leveled against the draft by the movement: that it behaved in a class-discriminatory manner, disproportionately miring the working class and releasing the middle class to their families and careers. It was concern over the selectivity of the selective service that prompted anti-draft groups like the Boston Draft Resistance, operating in Fallows' backyard during his halcyon days as an undergraduate, to focus their work among the area's "proles."

There is debate about the role the movement played in relationship to the duration of the war, and some honest speculation that the credibility gap created by the movement helped to restrain Johnson, who otherwise might have gone to extreme measures to "win" the war (Garfinkle 1995). (This argument assumes that the Vietnamese could have been bombed into submission, basically, had the movement not put the brakes on the war machine. Given the extreme nationalist support found by the Vietcong and the NLF, it's far from clear that this would have been the case.) Most observers agree that the movement served to keep it from being an even more vicious bloodbath in Vietnam (Small 2002). But in Fallows' construction, the blood of the working class casualties is on the movement's hands—it was the movement, not the war policies, that was "consigning [them] to danger and death."

Which leads to the most insidious charge in the piece. Fallows writes, "You could not live through those years without knowing what was going on with the draft, and you could not retain your sanity with that knowledge unless you believed, at some dark layer of the moral substructure, that [by getting out of serving] we were somehow getting what we deserved." We, the elite who didn't serve, thought this moral calculus made sense. Fallows, in a sense, sees a little Dick Cheney in every peacenik who didn't go to jail: the anti-warriors had more "important things" to do than serve in Vietnam.

Fallows attributes a deep, fundamental elitism to a substantial wing of antiwar activity, using a broad enough brush that the answer to the question, “which side were you on?” comes down very simply to the choice of elite protesters or working class soldiers. But the movement specifically argued against the class discrimination of the student deferments, and everyone who burned their card or otherwise resisted the draft was directly confronting that system. Evasion was understood at the time by many, including most in the movement, as an appropriate if less noble response to an immoral and illegitimate war, as was desertion. By taking the actions of the evaders out of context, confusing resistance with counseling, and attributing an elitist cynicism to those who didn’t go to war, Fallows creates a highly distorted picture of the class dynamics of the anti-draft movement. Fallows turns history on its head here, history that is so recent it’s barely behind him.

What happened in latter half of the war that such distortions could be so blithely described in the pages of the *Washington Monthly*, and widely accepted as truth in the years to come? Ironically, at the very moment that the antiwar movement opened to be a more broad-based, diverse movement in composition, reach, and tactics, the dominant and popular image of the movement sharpened to exclude nearly all groups except for the most elite, be they youth or intellectuals. These elites, in turn, were understood as protesting in direct opposition to hard working, blue-collar patriots. In this chapter, I will detail the proximate elements that collectively gave rise to this dominant image of the class dynamics of the popular response to Vietnam that we hold today. The seed of the distorted perception of the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and protest can be found in events that transpired during the rocky period of roughly 1968-1970, nourished in the soil of the social context described in the past two chapters. Referring to a related phenomenon, political analyst Andrew Levison described the “sociological perfect storm” that destroyed the chance of a progressive working class revival in the 1970’s.

Here, rather than a perfect storm, one could say that a perfect sociological climate was reached to grow the image of political class polarization that was to quickly blossom and thrive in the years to come.

What happened in these years to crystallize this polarized image? The current state of the antiwar movement, the machinations of the Nixon administration, the multi-level fragmentation of the Democratic Party all played roles. The media and political discourses concerning all of the above cemented it. Much of the groundwork for the image of the elitist protester had been laid in the preceding period of 1965 to early 1968. In the latter period of the war described here, public attention given to the “blue-collar backlash,” and the actions and attitudes of blue-collar workers themselves contributed to the “worker-hawk” side of the stereotype. As we have seen, the image that emerged on the one hand found the antiwar protesters as overly-elite and cut-off from the real world concerns of most Americans, and on the other singled out the white working class from a larger group of white Americans as being particularly reactionary and pro-war, when in fact the opposite was true.

This is not the first study to point out that we have mis-remembered the working class as particularly hawkish during this period. Many historians and cultural critics have written about the hawkish image of the blue-collar worker promulgated in this period. Peter Levy’s (1994) study of the new left and labor seeks to understand the more complex political affiliations of organized workers and movement activists in the period. Jefferson Cowie observes that the enduring image of the 1970’s working class is not, for example, labor’s militant workplace insurgency—a 1969-1971 strike wave that rivaled that of 1946 in depth and duration; wildcats and other rank-and-file rebellions lasting to the mid-1970’s – but rather the “beer slugging bigot of the blue collar backlash” (2004b, 84), and goes on to illustrate that the working class could best be understood as “vigorously left, right, and center,”

which is to say, identified across the political spectrum. Barbara Ehrenreich, writing of the media coverage and political discourses around blue-collar workers at the time, similarly notes, “they did not discover the working class that was – in the late sixties and early seventies – caught up in the greatest wave of labor militancy since world War II” (1989, 101). Ehrenreich argues that the “blue collar backlash was a highly biased and selective interpretation of the mood of working class Americans at a certain time” (9). Christian Appy writes,

During the war, the mass media gave little serious attention to the relationship of the working class to Vietnam. Instead, the subject was presented in an indirect and distorted way that reduced workers to a grossly misleading stereotype. Rather than documenting the class inequalities of military service and the complex feeling soldiers and their families had about their society and the war in Vietnam, the media more commonly contributed to the construction of an image of workers at the war’s strongest supporters, as superpatriotic hawks whose political views could be understood by simply reading the bumper stickers on some of their cars and pickups. . . . These “hard-hats” or “rednecks” were frequently portrayed as “Joe six-pack,” a flag-waving blue-collar anti-intellectual who, on top of everything else, was assumed to be a bigot.” (1993, 38)

These authors supplement an argument that was already outlined in the 1970’s by Andrew Levison (1974) and Patricia Cayo Sexton and Brendan Sexton (1971). These earlier authors confronted the larger myth of the blue-collar reactionary and countered it with book-length studies detailing the working conditions, community relations, and diverging political attitudes of blue-collar workers in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

In observing and refuting the myth of the blue-collar bigot, then, this current study walks on well-traveled ground. What, instead, I hope to draw attention to are overlapping aspects of the ideological functions of this image. The first is the point I’ve made throughout this dissertation—that the image of the reactionary working class was tied to the image of the elitism of the protest movement—a specific polarization that even many of these authors just cited accept as given. Why does it matter that it is a two-sided coin? One, at the time, it helped deflect attention from the criticisms of the war abroad to the problems raised within the “war at home,”

thereby disabling antiwar criticism. Two, the two sides of the image have functioned together over these years to create an impression of an unbreachable gulf between these two groups, an opposition that makes the possibility of shared political attitudes or actions close to nil. The success of the image of the hard-hat rampaging against the elite antiwarriors – its salience and consistent invocation in the period that followed – assured that that a discursive wedge was driven between the majority who shared the movement’s basic criticisms and the movement activists themselves. It helped divide the increasingly restive organized US working class from allies it might find in the movements, and vice versa. (I draw out the implications of this in my conclusion.)

The final aspect of this two-sided image that I want to bring attention to is the prominent role it played in President Nixon’s attempt to consolidate the “emerging Republican Majority” that he and his party sought during this period of crisis in liberalism. The sixties and seventies are the period of “the great unraveling,” credited with marking the end of the liberal consensus and the rise of social polarization. Race, the gains of the civil rights movement and the resistance to those gains are the dominant fault lines traced by most political analysts of the period to explain the crumbling of the New Deal coalition (Edsall & Edsall 1992). The Republican party generally, and the Nixon administration specifically, are credited with both fanning the flames of polarization and reaping its rewards. Receiving less attention in the historical record, the antiwar movement served as a primary rhetorical foil for the first Nixon administration. In Vice President Agnew’s and President Nixon’s discourse, antiwar protesters played prominent roles in the chorus of contemporary ills. It was against the antiwar movement that the “Silent Majority,” the semi-mythic, semi-actual “Middle Americans” who became central to the conservative realignment in American politics in the era, was most notably and repeatedly invoked. The hardhat riots of 1970 were most important in this regard.

New York construction workers, and by discursive extension, blue-collar workers around the country, became a site of condensation for the discourse circulating at the time about the “troubled Americans,” of white middle class and working class people who were by-and-large not involved in the movements of the period. As Frymer and Skrentny (1998) argue, the hardhat demonstrations indicated to Nixon that the white working class was a Democratic constituency that might be peeled away from the DP.¹⁰⁸ Focusing the amorphous appeal to the “silent majority” as a more specific appeal to workers, while using the image of the antiwar protester as a more specific incarnation of the lawlessness of the movement culture, was, in 1970, a key tactic in Nixon’s mid-cycle electoral strategy.¹⁰⁹

A Growing Movement?

The October, 1969 Moratorium against the war was the largest coordinated nationwide protest in the history of the United States. Over two million people took part in local actions against the war. *Life Magazine* said, “It was a display without historical parallel, the largest expression of public dissent ever seen in this country” (10/24/69, in Hall 2006, 160). One organizer convincingly likened it to a “general strike,” as schools, businesses, and even some government offices observed the Moratorium’s dictate that “business as usual” be suspended so that “students, faculty members and concerned citizens can devote time and energy to the important work of taking the issue of peace in Vietnam to the larger community” (Halstead 1978, 473).

¹⁰⁸ Cowie (2004a) argues that Nixon’s interest in the working class dated from his having read Pete Hamill’s 1969 *New York Magazine* article about New York workers. This seems true, but I agree with Frymer and Skrentny (1998) that the hardhat rallies marked the moment when the Nixon administration began to aggressively pursue workers and their unions to join its electoral base.

¹⁰⁹ Strategically, however, opposition to the antiwar movement was not as powerful as the more serious wedge issues of the era would prove to be – race, rights, and taxes, in the formulation of the Edsalls (1992). The hardhats and the antiwar protesters got a lot of play during Nixon’s mid-cycle election campaigns of 1970, but then largely faded from view. It was the real-world weakness of this image—the fact that the working class was *not* in fact hawkish or pro-war, the fact that the antiwar movement was *not* in fact elite and cut off from the general population—that made it less strategically viable than other rhetorical tropes used by Nixon and his colleagues in their efforts to create an “emerging Republican majority.” In this sense, the image produced in this period outlived the immediate practical use to which it was put by the Republicans.

Dozens of cities hosted rallies of tens of thousands of antiwar protesters, nearly all breaking previous records for any kind of demonstrating at all. Church bells tolled regularly throughout the day; religious organizations across the country passed resolutions in support of the peace efforts, like the two million member United Church of Christ that found the war to be “destroying the spiritual, moral, physical and economic health” of the United States; while the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. offered prayers for peace at every hour. All over the country, schools emptied out, colleges were shut down. In New York City, the board of education estimated that 90% of high school students and 75% of junior high and elementary school students were absent that day. The Moratorium was endorsed by the UAW and the UFW, as well as the Steelworkers, Teamsters, Chemical Workers, and hundreds of locals around the nation. United Electrical members in Paterson, New Jersey, called for an end to the war, even though their company made bulletproof vests and body bags for the US military. Endorsers ranged from dozens of Senators and Representatives, to the National Urban League, Americans for Democratic Action, the NAACP, and the National Welfare Rights Organization (see *NYT*, *CT*, *WP*, *LAT*, *WSJ* coverage of events). Taking place during the fourth game of the World Series, the Mets starting pitcher Tom Seaver told Jimmy Breslin, “If the Mets can get to the World Series, the US can get out of Vietnam” (Perlstein 2008, 425). The Moratorium’s exercise in quiet, peaceful and local antiwar protest demonstrated to the nation how widespread and normal opposition to the war had become, as well as the potential for regular people to be at the forefront of the movement.

One month later, on November 15, the largest single demonstration in the history of the country to that time took place in Washington DC, under the auspices of another antiwar organization, the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, or the “Mobe.” Crowd estimates ranged from one half to one million

participants, with another quarter or half million assembling in San Francisco. In DC, forty thousand individuals comprised a “March of Death,” which, for 40 hours through often-inclement weather, marched single file from Arlington Cemetery to the front of the White House, where one by one they spoke the name of an American soldier who had been killed in Vietnam. The Mobe included speakers like Dick Gregory, who told the crowd, “The President says nothing you kids do will have any effect on him. Well, I suggest that he make one long distance call to the LBJ ranch and ask that boy how much effect you can have on him” (Wells 1994, 726).

The movement had spread considerably from the campuses at this point. GI coffeeshouses had been set up by dozens of bases. In the days prior to the Mobe’s demonstration 1365 active GI’s, including nearly 200 stationed in Vietnam, had signed a public letter in the *New York Times* urging that soldiers support the demonstration. Vietnam Veterans Against the War was being sought out by returning soldiers. Planning for the Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace was underway, and the Alliance for Labor Action had come out against the war. Since the Tet offensive in January 1968, support for the war had entered terminal decline. The potential for mass mobilization was great.

Beginning of the End

And yet. . . . The fall’s Moratorium and Mobe are often seen, in retrospect, as the “beginning of the end” of the antiwar movement by leading organizational leaders and historians.¹¹⁰ Many more significant protest events were still to come, including the nationwide college strikes of May 1970 and the second largest demonstration in US history in April 1971 (also famous for the presence of Vietnam Veterans throwing their medals back to the government that awarded them). But to

¹¹⁰ For example, David Dellinger is quoted in Wells, “That’s when things did begin to fall apart. . . . That was the beginning of the end” (1994, 399). Melvin Small writes, “The antiwar movement peaked in the fall of 1969. From that point on, despite an impressive series of demonstrations in May 1970 and on April 1971, it became less cohesive and more fragmented than it had ever been before (2002, 119).

the extent that the antiwar movement had been able to attain some degree of cohesiveness and focus through an organized presence, that organization deteriorated in the years to come.

Within the organized movement, internal disagreements between various factions that had haunted the direction of the movement from its outset were boiling over. The tactical directions, political content, and organization of the large events—under the auspices of the Mobe—represented an uneasy alliance between liberals, radicals, and left groups, all of whom felt continually compromised in their visions of the best way forward for the movement. This fractious coalition came together and came apart, and it would only be partially in jest to say that they spent as much time arguing with each other as they spent recruiting others to the movement (c.f. Dellinger 1993; Halstead 1978; Wells 1994). The other leading group that emerged that year, the Moratorium, represented a liberal wing of the movement, consisting at the staff level of mostly former McCarthy and Kennedy supporters and staffers. In April 1970, two weeks before the invasion of Cambodia, the Moratorium closed shop. The Mobe called its final rally the week of May 8, 1970. The various groups of the Mobe then split to form the National Peace Action Coalition and the National Coalition Against War, Racism, and Repression, which later reconstituted as the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice. While these groups collaborated on future events, the organized movement had effectively splintered.

The troubling, recurring questions for organizers and the organizations were, what would the movement do? What power did it have? Was it actually stopping the war? By the end of 1969, many of the leading activists and some of the newer organizers felt discouraged that they were not making a difference. Burnout became a real problem. Old arguments about tactics were refreshed. Big demonstrations were seen by the newly constituted radical caucus of the Mobilization as

“gathering[s] in the park” or to liberals “a political fad that has worn off” (*NYT* 4/20/1970). To liberals electoral work made sense, while to radicals direct action was necessary. Direct action was seen by others as alienating the larger audience the movement was seemingly beginning to reach. Still yet others countered that exclusive focus on the war was tamping the movement’s capacity to extend its reach to the Black movement and the other movements of oppressed peoples. Losing the focus on the war would confuse and demobilize the growing numbers of people who were against it, countered the moderates. You’re failing to seize the momentum of the movement, or to see the generalized radicalism in US culture, argued the radicals. But you’re raising the threshold to action so high that you’ll get too far ahead of the people turning against the war, fumed the moderates. Compromising a political vision means failure, said the radicals: “They think that numbers will be enough,” Angela Davis disbelievingly remarked (Hall 2006, 163). In short, antiwar work was increasingly viewed by many in the movement as insufficient unto itself to either address the problems of US society or end the war, while for others a single-issue focus on the war was the only possible way for the movement to grow and make a difference. Along these real fault lines, the movement came closer to fracture (See Halstead 1978, 522-525; Wells 1994, 398-403; Hall 2006, 163-166). Ultimately, the fall of 1969 marked the end of the period in which the groups representing these different positions all worked together with any real degree of productivity for a sustained period.

The break-up of SDS was emblematic of this period of radical fragmentation, and bore directly on the perceptions that the media and general public were to develop about the class nature of the movement during this period. Its central leadership had long ago abandoned antiwar organizing as a main focus, having relinquished its lead role as early as 1965 and disbanded most of its anti-draft work by early 1968. Its early leaders had moved on. In Lexington, Kentucky in June, 1968,

President Carl Ogelesby told SDS it had done all it could to end the war and that Black liberation should be its first priority (Sale 1975). In an un-ironic description of the winter 1968 national SDS meeting, former SDS national secretary Carl Davidson, then of the *Guardian*, wrote in its pages, “The meeting, characterized by intense factionalism and infighting, was considered the best national gatherings SDS ever held in its seven year history, according to many experienced participants.” He further noted that “among the major motions defeated at the hectic five-day meeting was one calling for support of the antiwar mobilization during the inauguration,” which was deemed “too reformist” by the majority of participants (1/11/1969, 4).

Yet, for the general public, SDS remained the most prominent student organization, and therefore the most prominent student antiwar organization. The fractious infighting of SDS gave rise to the final split in the organization that took place in summer 1969. Emerging from the group was a very small, but very prominent group that became known as Weatherman. Weatherman included some young people from very rich families, whose rhetoric was particularly inciting and whose violent tactics (such as bombings) were particularly despised by the mainstream, movement and non-movement alike. In March 1970 three members of Weatherman were killed when a bomb they were building exploded in a townhouse in Greenwich Village that was the family home of a member of the group. The radical elitism of this fragment of the movement was widely publicized and tarred the movement as a whole (Anderson 1995). In parallel fashion, the press’s predilection for elite antiwarriors was so entrenched that even among the most working-class organization of the latter period of the war, VVAW, the most nationally prominent figure became Lieutenant John Kerry. VVAW faced a bind that many movement groups faced: without celebrity or connections, how could they get the resources or media attention they needed to spread their message? But the

media's focus on figures like the Yale-educated and articulate Kerry, or the main sponsor of the Winter Soldier Investigation, Jane Fonda, meant that the real base of the group was obscured. In the aftermath of the Dewey Canyon events of April 1971, where Kerry had testified, the organization made a conscious decision to work towards its own base of working class veterans, and in doing so it also faded from the public spotlight even as it continued to grow (Hunt 1999).

Despite the internal fragmentation, as measured by numbers, what SDS had discovered at the beginning of the movement still held true: the movement was there whether anyone organized it or not. Hundreds of thousands of people joined the movement in its fractured, various forms in its final years. As described in more detail in Chapter Three, the final years of the war saw the rise of the Chicano Moratorium, the unanimous embrace of the antiwar cause by African American groups across the political spectrum, and the rise of the GI and Veterans movements. A sizable minority of labor unions, eventually representing between a quarter and a fifth of organized workers, had by then turned against the war and begun to actively protest in greater numbers. The actual number of people active in antiwar protest, as understood in both movement protest in the United States and troop protest abroad, did not peak until 1971. The April, 1971 protests against the war in Washington DC and San Francisco were the largest of the era, and had wide-ranging sponsorship and participation. The National Welfare Rights Organization, SNCC, the Teamsters (who served as marshals) and other unions, the Gay Liberation Front, and dozens of other movement organizations, liberal and community groups joined the march, making it the most diverse of the era.

We saw in Chapter Two the problems with locating the peak of the movement in 1968, as most textbooks do. Locating the end of the movement with the collapse of its leading organizations has similarly limiting effects on the way we remember it. In sheer numbers, more people understood themselves as being part of

the antiwar movement in 1971 than in 1969, and more people in 1969 than in 1967, and so on. Much of this antiwar work took place in the context of other movement work, and their identities as part of the movement were not crystalline, attached to particular organizations or groups. This was particularly true for Black and Chicano antiwar activists, whose organizations had conflicted with the single-issue orientation of the predominantly white organized antiwar movement, and consistently argued that racism should be at the center of the antiwar fight.

The “counter-memory” sketched in Chapter Three, and the great diversification of the antiwar movement, is therefore eclipsed when only the movement organizations as such are looked at. Understanding the arc of the movement, its rise and fall, is essential for answering such questions as why do movements grow, how do movements sustain themselves, what are the limits to particular organizational forms or political frames. But, in the case of the Vietnam antiwar movement, the decline of its leading organizations pre-dated the decline of its actual membership and appeal, a fact overlooked in an organization-centered approach.

The Discovery of Middle America

By this time, another turning point had also been reached that was to have a profound effect on the popular perceptions of the movement, the shape of mainstream politics, and, for purposes of this dissertation, the perception of the class dynamics of antiwar sentiment and protest. This was the discovery of the “Middle American.”

1968 was a year unlike any the country had seen in memory, experiencing upheavals that many compared to the Civil War. President Johnson stepped down as a result of the Vietnam War; Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated; hundreds of cities erupted in riots; and with the Columbia University building takeovers the student movement became more militant.

In August 1968, antiwar Democrats came to Chicago to protest the nomination of Vice President Hubert Humphrey who seemed clear to win against the antiwar Eugene McCarthy. What had initially been planned as a large, peaceful week of protests and rallies shrank and grew more possibly militant and dangerous in the months before the convention. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's violent antipathy to protesters promised confrontation with Chicago's 12,000 police, as did the city's refusal to release any permits for protest. McCarthy asked that his supporters not attend en masse, and his sure defeat discouraged many more moderates from coming at all.

In excess of even the most pessimistic prognostications, Daley's police beat and gassed the protesters in Chicago, sweeping up participant and bystander alike in mass arrests, hospitalizing hundreds. Mainstream media, later joined by the Walker Report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, reached consensus that the events of Chicago consisted of a "police riot." From the summary of the report:

The nature of the response [to protester provocation] was unrestrained and indiscriminate police violence on many occasions, particularly at night. . . . That some policemen lost control of themselves under exceedingly provocative circumstances can be understood; but not condoned. If no action is taken against them, the effect can only be to discourage the majority of policemen who acted responsibly, and further weaken the bond between police and community (Walker, 1968).

But, as the country was to find out in the following weeks, a majority of Americans apparently didn't agree. "Less than 20% said the police had used too much force" (Anderson 1995, 235), and interviews indicated that many white Americans were outraged by the protesters. Polls began to bear witness to the fact that protesters were disliked as much, if not more, than the war itself. The American Federation of Police founder said, "We are at war with an enemy just as dangerous as the Viet Cong in Southeast Asia" (Anderson, 228). Rather than restrain the police, a majority of Americans seemed in favor of letting them off the leash. In the direct aftermath

of the DNC, a poll found that those who opposed the War also opposed the protesters. 75% of respondents to one survey placed ‘Vietnam war protesters’ on the negative end of a feeling scale, with 33% at the far end. 63% of those who viewed the war negatively placed the protesters there as well, and even 53% of those who called for complete withdrawal rated the protesters negatively (Schuman & Converse, 1970).

Who were these people who seemed so disgruntled, wondered the press. How could they condone such terrible violence? A professor surveying the press during this period identified a pattern of reportage that was proving to be the central theme for the “liberal media’s” soul-searching produced in the wake of Chicago: “On the one hand the young, the disenchanting, the revolutionary, the pacifistic and idealistic, the draft resisting, the McCarthy-supporting and those concerned with the desperate plight of the blacks and of a nation in a horrendous war [were covered]; on the other hand the complacent the contented, the Nixonites and Humphreyites, the ones who have it made” (Nathan Blumberg (1969), in Rosenbergs & White 1971, 277). The press, he seemed to say, sympathized with the young idealists and put everyone else on the other side. Following Chicago, Joseph Kraft, the syndicated columnist credited with coining the term “Middle America,” wrote:

Most of us in what is called the communications field are not rooted in the great mass of ordinary Americans—in Middle America. And the results show up not merely in occasional episodes such as the Chicago violence but more importantly in the systematic bias toward young people, minority groups, and the of presidential candidates who appeal to them. To get a feel of this bias it is first necessary to understand the antagonism that divides the middle class of this country. On the one hand there are highly educated upper-income whites sure of and brimming with ideas for doing things differently. On the other hand, there is Middle America, the large majority of low-income whites, traditional in their values and on the defensive against innovation (Perlstein 2008, 365).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Kraft, here, anticipates the attacks on the media that were paired with the attacks on the protesters in the coming years, particularly from Vice President Agnew. He also paves the way for the media’s conservative turn, which was (self-)excused by reference to “systematic biases.” Many later analysts point out that the media had not in fact been overly liberal in its coverage of the movements; Ehrenreich (1989) argues that the media’s “discovery” of a conservative white worker gave cover to the growing conservatism of media and political elites.

Kraft lays out the basic outlines that the public discussion of class, race, and values was to take in the years to come. There is an elite, of upper-income whites including the media, who are systematically biased towards the youth and the Blacks pointing towards change, and there is a lower-income white group suspicious of change and defensive concerning the traditional things for which they stand. We, the media—and by extension, other elites in the country—have not paid sufficient attention to these ordinary people, who, it appears, hate us.

The focus of the country suddenly became these “forgotten” people. The precise definition ordinary middle Americans remained somewhat vague, defined more by who they were not—not Black, not radical youth, not “pointy headed professors”; a burgeoning social force distinguished by its lack of force, notable for its normality. In the book length version of *Newsweek*’s “The Troubled American” series the author posits that “middle Americans” made up 55% of the population, defining them as “white Americans whose income ranged from \$5,000 to \$15,000” (Lemon, 1970, 7), while Pete Hamill’s “The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class” in *New York Magazine* looked only at those he called “working class,” who made \$5,000 to \$10,000, and comprised nearly 40% of the total population.¹¹² It was this latter group that eventually became the focus of media and government attention, often talked about as the “ethnics,” and as “blue-collar workers.” In 1970, the Labor Department released a report, commissioned by Nixon, on the “Problem of the Blue Collar Worker,” neatly capturing the tone of the discourse in circulation.

Appeals to the larger, more middle-class inclusive group of “Middle Americans” were a central plank of Nixon’s “southern strategy,” the organization of a racial and regional re-alignment for Republican roots. The Democratic Party had

¹¹² Hamill used the headline “lower middle class” because he was following the fashionable sociological assertion that everyone was now middle class—but he quickly sets the record straight: “Sometimes these brutes are referred to as ‘the ethnics’ or ‘the blue-collar types.’ But the bureaucratic, sociological phrase is White Lower Middle Class. Nobody calls it the Working Class anymore. But basically, the people I’m speaking about *are* the working class.”

ruled, without any serious contest, most of the South for nearly 100 years, but their embrace of civil rights meant that the field was open for competition from the right. Nixon, with the help of advisers like Kevin Philips (who wrote *The Emerging Republican Majority* in 1969), recognized the growing influence of the “Sunbelt”—the long southern swath from Florida, through the growing southern cities and suburbs of Atlanta, Charlotte, Richmond, over to Arizona and the desert southwest, across to southern California—in American politics (Davis 1986; Lassiter 2007; Philips 1969). Middle-class whites were flocking to these areas, along with the businesses that gave them their livelihood. Many of the key issues that were to define the conservative agenda of the coming decades—tax cuts, “law and order,” defense spending, “family values”—found their roots in this region. Barry Goldwater’s Republican campaign of 1964, which indicated the salience of many of these issues for formerly Democratic voters in the South, and Wallace’s successful racist and populist challenges within the Democratic Party and as an independent candidate together gave “clear signs that a conservative Republican realignment might be imminent” (Judis & Teixeira 2002, 17). But Nixon did not stop his focus at the middle-class Middle Americans: he and his supporters saw the possibility that “sunbelt attitudes . . . might eventually spread into the suburbs and working class neighborhoods of the old North” (Shulman 2001, 37).

What were the political attitudes of these Northern and “Middle American” workers? As we’ve seen from earlier chapters, generalizing about so vast a group is sociologically ill-advised, the very enterprise filled with necessary stereotypes and distortions. Despite the inherently shallow nature of the question, it was one that the media, and politicians in their wake, began to ask with abandon.¹¹³ The

¹¹³ Ehrenreich (1989) hypothesizes that the lower middle class and working class were “discovered” as conservative at this moment to give cover to a conservative swing being made by elites – the media and politicians, and professional middle classes more generally, could explain their own conservatizing in reference to those beneath them: they were trying to stay in touch. I will touch on this again in my conclusion.

dominant stereotype, as we've seen, predicted that the working class was moving to the right—and recent indications of a possible rightward drift were plentiful. In *New York Magazine*, even Pete Hamill wrote “The working-class white man is actually in revolt against taxes, joyless work, the double standards and short memories of professional politicians, hypocrisy and what he considers the debasement of the American dream. But George Wallace received 10 million votes last year, not all of them from rednecked racists. That should have been a warning, strong and clear. If the stereotyped black man is becoming the working-class white man's enemy, the eventual enemy might be the democratic process itself” (1969). Their concerns about crime and civil disorder, hostility to student demonstrations, and most importantly, negative reactions to the civil rights gains of school desegregation through busing and expanded welfare benefits were taken as positive evidence that Republicans seeking an expanded conservative base could find in workers fertile soil.

On the other hand, some of the early media discussions of this group observed the indeterminacy of the political direction that these “lower-middle class” workers might take. Alienation, defensive feelings about traditional values, anger at economic instability, an aggrieved sense that the system wasn't treating them fairly, a growing distrust of government: these sentiments, culled from polls and interviews, could go in many directions. Workers remained economically liberal. The fear in 1968 that the Northern white working class would go over to Wallace proved unfounded. Bobby Kennedy's brief candidacy indicated that Blacks and white workers could still exuberantly support a shared candidate, and Humphrey ultimately received a similar number of votes from workers as John Kennedy had in 1960. Democrats continued to do well at the local level in the elections of 1968 (and even in the local elections of 1972, in the Nixon landslide). Polling data indicated that on most questions, this large, varied group was not more intolerant or illiberal than whites with higher income or prestige (cf Levison, Chapter 4, 1974).

And, workers were in revolt. As described in Chapter Three, the early 1970's saw the greatest strike wave the country had seen since the 1940's. And workers were not only fighting on the economic front. Over the course of the 1960's, numerous leadership challenges developed in leading unions; the rank-and-file Lordstown strikes were just around the corner.

Many wings of the social movements recognized this potentially progressive opening. The GE strike received extensive support from students. Each side of the SDS split agreed on a basic "working class perspective." A small left group, the International Socialists, developed its orientation toward the rank-and-file rebellion. Having left the antiwar and student movement, many of the more moderate former SDS'ers were working within labor.¹¹⁴ The *Guardian* had hired former labor organizer Stanley Aronowitz to write a column on labor, and the paper editorialized that there was "No More Life of Riley" for the working class.¹¹⁵

All of the speculation and debate about which way the working class might go was shadowed by the equally impressive spectacle of worker inaction and apathy. Working class political participation was dropping—voting rates were shrinking, and the negative feelings about politics presaged that inertia might be the real story of the era (cf. Leege, Wald & Kruger 2002, on voter demobilization in this period).

Regardless of the interpretation one reached about the political direction of US workers, the overall picture was possibly a grim one for Democrats. To the extent that white workers had participated in the electoral political process in the

¹¹⁴ Paul Booth, Steve Max and Frank Goldsmith proposed a project the year before Nixon suggested his "Study of the Blue Collar Worker," called "Young White Workers: The Drift to the Right." They note that it was "not unreasoned" for such a shift to be occurring, if indeed it was. (The support for Wallace and Nixon in the 1968 elections was their evidence). Economic stagnation, perceived job competition with Blacks and the effects of integration on property values in neighborhoods would have all played parts in creating a right wing drift. They wanted to study this transformation to see if the drift right could "possibly be transformed into a movement to the left if issues and solutions can be properly formulated" (Booth Papers, December 1968).

¹¹⁵ Much of the left was also at this point looking for "an historical agent," having experienced the disillusion of the student revolution—which doesn't mean that its interest in the working class should be written off entirely, but just that this new working class perspective should be taken with a grain of salt.

20th century they had done so as Democrats. Their disaffection and apathy drained a Democratic base, their distrust of government developed under Democratic leadership. As the Democratic Party became more and more identified with the social movements of the period, the extent to which workers felt alienated from the same marked distance they felt from the Party. The largest, and most predictable, erosion of the Democratic Party base occurred in the Dixiecrat south, with Goldwater's victories in 1964 confirming that the Civil Rights Act and economic changes in the region would be the deathknell for the Party in the region. Would Democrats lose the white working class along with the South?

For Republicans, the opportunities and challenges for attracting the working class vote were clear. But their strategy for consolidating a new majority was, at first, less so. Nixon's campaign and first years in office witnessed a scattershot approach to attracting Democrats and creating a new Republican Majority, a story that has been detailed elsewhere (e.g. Edsall & Edsall 1992; Frymer & Skrentny 1998). Here, I will focus on his attempts to win Northern workers, with "positive polarization" as his primary strategy. I see this period as one in which Nixon was still fishing around for how to get workers. Polarizing this "silent majority" from antiwar protesters was a primary tactic. During this period, Nixon had not committed himself to abandoning the Black vote (and there's debate about just how far Nixon went in that direction, as his record was extremely mixed). From 1968-1970, it was the youth protester who became "other" to the working-class majority.

The Silent Majority versus Antiwar Protesters

Within days of the Democrat's Chicago convention, Nixon chose that Democratic Party stronghold to "launch" his campaign, and was greeted by hundreds of thousands of supporters: "Veteran observers said they never had seen a Republican candidate for any office get such a welcome here in 30 years" (*CT* 9/5/1968). It was in Chicago that he began to hammer home the theme of law and

order, which became a central plank of his campaign, and addressed himself to the “forgotten Americans” who had supported the police against the protesters.

The outlines of Nixon’s general, if still somewhat muddled, polarization can be found in his campaign speeches of 1968 (Nixon/Agnew Committee 1968). On the one hand, he presented himself as a unifier. He spoke of a Republican Party that “is larger than party,” that is “bigger than the differences” between people, that is “a new coalition.” Nixon did not go after the ethos of liberalism, but rather the form it takes, arguing against a model that offers assistance in times of need rather than self-help in times of opportunity. “I am not suggesting that we should be trying to undo what has been done, that we should turn back the clock or renounce the great progress that has been achieved. I am suggesting, rather that we have reached a point at which we need a new direction. This is a cause in which liberals and conservatives increasingly are finding common ground. The old New Deal was born in response to despair and desperation. We now need a new vision that embraces the hopes of an age of opportunity” (“Learning to Share Responsibility,” March 28, 1968).

He sought to break the liberal consensus and consolidate new voting blocks by criticizing the notion of consensus, and appealed to people ready to break from groups that he implied held them back. In one speech, “A New Alignment for American Unity” (May 16, 1968) he asks, “How do you become part of the new alignment?” The answer: “You don’t have to be a member of any special party, or any union; you are not required to live in any region or any city; you don’t have to be rich or poor, young or old. Because we’re not dealing with blocs, we’re dealing with an idea.”

Nixon’s surface conciliatory tone distinguished him from the competition in the 1968 race. Humphrey was himself a mainstream liberal, but was presiding over a bitterly divided Democratic party indelibly associated with the mayhem of its

convention in Chicago, and hounded by antiwar protesters for most of the campaign for his refusal to break with President Johnson. George Wallace, running as an independent, appealed to the anger and dislocation that many whites and would-be Nixon supporters felt, but was also judged as so polarizing a figure that his promises of law and order seemed unachievable as he so clearly stoked rather than quenched the flames of discord in the nation (Rieder 1987; Scammon & Wattenborg 1976).

Running as a relative moderate, Nixon described five elements of a new unity-in-diversity formation that he argued was emerging within the US (see, campaign speeches). Republicans were one, with their libertarian, small government outlook. He defined another as a “New Liberal,” who similarly believed in a balance of personal freedom and order. This New Liberal was counter-posed to both the New Deal Liberal, who sees the government as responsible for meeting human needs, and the New Left, who seeks to “tear down in order to build. . . leading us to anarchy.” Needless to say, neither the New Deal Liberal nor New Leftist was welcome in the new unity. “The new South” was the third, which was “no longer bound by old habits or old grievances or the old racist appeals,” but rather is developing its economic infrastructure, attracting capital, and “breaking the shackles of one-party [Democratic] rule.”

The fourth element, perhaps surprisingly, was “the Black militant.” The Black leaders evoked by Nixon “do not want to be recipients, they want to be participants. The message of giveaway, of handout, of permanent welfare is no longer of interest to people who want dignity and self-respect.” As the idea of any self-respecting Black militant supporting Nixon in 1968 is ludicrous to the extreme, this particular appeal should be read as a sign of Nixon’s early support for a Black capitalism that could pull “blacks into the private sector mainstream” (Edsall & Edsall 1992, 86), as well as his efforts to polarize the question of values among his

primary audience, middle-class whites. (see also, Frymer & Skrentny 1998, on the as-of-yet ambivalent position of Nixon administration with regard to race).¹¹⁶

The final group he called here “the silent center.” This group was “the millions of people in the middle of the American political spectrum who do not demonstrate, who do not picket or protest loudly.” Anticipating what would be his hallmark contribution to American political discourse, he claimed “as this silent center has become a part of the new alignment, it has transformed it from a minority into a majority” (Nixon/Agnew Committee 1968).

In these unity-themed remarks, Nixon was clearly also playing into a politics of division. Recognizing this, Vice President Humphrey argued from the stump “you can’t vote your anger,” and positioned the Democrats as the party of “hope.” When Johnson ended the bombing, Humphrey’s numbers jumped, and a Democratic victory appeared viable for the first time since Robert Kennedy’s death. Northern and urban white working class support for George Wallace largely evaporated, and Humphrey received the same level of support from them as John Kennedy had. Electorally, despite the Nixon victory, the country did not look terribly different than it had in 1960.

So Nixon’s “southern strategy” persisted after the election: Having won a plurality of 43% in the 1968 election, Nixon still had a majority to pursue.

Nixon and the Antiwar Movement

Abetting the internal dissolution of the movement was an external campaign waged by the Nixon administration to discredit the movement and isolate the protesters, begun immediately after coming into office. In the first months of the Nixon administration, surveillance of all protest movements was dramatically increased (Wells 1994). The universities, where possible, were overrun with military

¹¹⁶ James Farmer, for example, formerly of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), had joined the Nixon administration in its early years, though he quit it, unsatisfied with Nixon’s racial policies, in 1971.

agents; the CIA's domestic counterintelligence expanded, along with wiretap rights; and the FBI increased its manpower on the ground. The antiwar leader Fred Halstead told an interviewer, "The Nixon administration was different in that sense. I mean, suddenly you were covered like a blanket. You could feel it"; while the superintendent of the Illinois State police reported, "I've never seen anything like the intensity of current investigations in all my years in law enforcement" (Wells, 311). The antiwar movement, like the Black Power and civil rights movements before it, was under ongoing surveillance, infiltrated, red-baited, and subject to varying degrees of repression (arrests, *agents provocateur*, break-in's, intimidation, and physical violence).

In addition to these intensifying tactics, the Nixon administration launched a special campaign in anticipation of the fall events of 1969 (see Anderson 1995; Wells 1994). The Moratorium and Mobe represented the first large-scale protests during Nixon's tenure, and the White House spent months formulating plans to defuse and disrupt the demonstrations and instigate counter-mobilization efforts. Memos circulated within the White House: "We all felt threatened, put on the defensive, by the imminence of these two well-organized, well-publicized demonstrations, and the President was taking the initiative in suggesting how we might counter our critics" (Magruder, in Halstead 1978, 483). Nixon said he was "not going to be pushed around by the demonstrators and the rabble in the streets" (Anderson 331). Among the plans that were later executed included the active manipulation of the media, pressure on antiwar Congressmen, and the creation and facilitation of pro-Nixon groups and actions during the fall.¹¹⁷ Together, these actions were meant to fulfill the central objectives of the White House counter-offensive: "isolate the leaders" and ensure that "those people who are loyal to the country and who have been disillusioned by

¹¹⁷ Vietnamization and the introduction of the draft lottery also forestalled the movement.

the war . . . be pulled back into the fold of national consciousness.” (memo from Chapin to Haldeman, 10/16/1969, quoted in Halstead 1978, 493).

A two-pronged discursive strategy was developed to fulfill each objective. Attacking the protesters was job of Spiro Agnew, Nixon’s Vice President. Attracting the “people who are loyal” was the work of Nixon, first through his “Silent Majority” speech of November 3, 1969. In that speech, Nixon famously declared, “The more support that I can have from the American people the sooner that pledge [to end the war and ‘win the peace’] can be redeemed. For the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate in Paris. Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that. . . . You, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support.”

Like the days following the DNC Convention in Chicago, Nixon positioned himself, and the silent or forgotten Americans he claimed to represent, against antiwar protesters. Nixon’s numbers jumped in the aftermath of the speech, reaching a high point for his administration. Following the speech, the Harris poll asked, “In general, just as far as their objectives are concerned, do you sympathize with the goals of the people who are demonstrating, marching, and protesting against the war in Vietnam or do you disagree?” Indicating that the polarization was moderately successful, 45% of people surveyed disagreed with the goals of antiwar protesters, 39% sympathized and 16% were not sure (*WP* 11/14/69) – this after the very popular October moratorium.

The potential unpopularity of the protesters, discussed in greater detail below, created an opportunity; Nixon aide Haldeman was later to report “there is political mileage in attacking student radicals” (*NYT* 6/5/70). The lines of attack were to question the patriotism of the protesters, who were accused of “taking orders

from Hanoi,” and to play on the class-specific picture of a radical and liberal elite.¹¹⁸ In the weeks of the Moratorium and Mobe, the Nixon Administration unleashed Spiro Agnew to lead the charge. Vice President Spiro Agnew, who initially made a name for himself facing down Black activists in Baltimore, expended his greatest invectives during his first years in national office for the antiwar movement – led by “effete corps of impudent snobs,” consisting of “ideological eunuchs,” “merchants of hate,” and “parasites of passion.” Agnew called the Moratorium demonstrations a “carnival in the streets” led by a “strident minority” filled with “intolerant clamor and cacophony” (*NYT*, 11/11/1969) Playing the bad cop (or as Gene McCarthy observed, “Nixon’s Nixon,” referring to Nixon’s pugnacious anti-communist VP-turn under Eisenhower) Agnew referred to the President’s inaugural plea that the country “lower our voices” by saying, “I, for one, will not lower my voice until the restoration of sanity and civil order allow a quiet voice to be heard once again. The Mob, the Mobilization, the Moratorium have become somewhat fashionable forms of citizen expression,” which are “negative in content, disruptive in effect.”¹¹⁹

Agnew consistently painted a picture of an elite protester. As *Time* reported in 1969, he ridiculed “campus protesters who ‘take their tactics from Castro and their money from Daddy’” (“King’s Taster,” 11/14/69). But Agnew’s charge of elitism was not original. This image, combined with the image of civil disorder that such privileged elite recklessly produce, can be found in the rhetoric of George Wallace’s

¹¹⁸ The red-baiting of the Nixon administration and the Republican party was extensive, and deserves more space for a full explanation of how they sought to isolate the protesters. Some examples: On eve of the moratorium, Hanoi sent a letter of support, “Dear American Friends,” to the Moratorium. The day before the Moratorium was to begin (10/14/1969), Agnew appeared calling on its leaders to “repudiate the support of a totalitarian government which had in its hand the blood of 40,0000 Americans.” Earlier that week, then-California Governor Ronald Reagan said at a fundraising dinner in Seneca Falls, “We have a right to suspect that at least some of those who organize those parades are less concerned with peace than with lending comfort and aid to the enemy. Many of our universities, which should be committed to learning and free inquiry, will close down their classes in what is called a Vietnam Moratorium Day—which, probably is correctly named, for there will be a moratorium on free discussion and some young Americans living today will die tomorrow as the enemy frames his strategy to add fuel to demonstrations in our streets” (*NYT* 10/15/69).

¹¹⁹ The only group greeted with as much venom was the other side of that liberal elite, the mass media, or in speechwriter William Safire’s alluring alliteration, “nattering nabobs of negativism.” The campaign against the media abutted the campaign against the college educated and professionals.

campaign in 1968. Wallace proved to be popular when he went after hippies and antiwar protesters, and against the “briefcase totin’ bureaucrats, ivory-tower guideline writers, bearded anarchists, smart-aleck editorial writers and pointy-headed professors.”

With this kind of rhetoric, the amorphous nature of the middle American became more class-specific. In Wallace’s and Agnew’s right wing populist language, an “us,” white workers, was posited against a “them,” liberal bureaucrats and protesters. Wallace’s economic populism and flamboyant language of class resentment helped him to achieve a popular following among Northern urban workers for a period during his Presidential campaign. Wallace reached out to “the average man on the street, this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, this beautician, the policemen on the beat,” and he described how “a select group have written guidelines in bureaus and court decisions, have spoken from some pulpits, some college campuses, some newspaper offices, looking down their noses” at them. These elites say “that you do not know how to get up in the morning or go to bed at night unless we write you a guideline” (Dionne 2004, 91; Scammon & Wattenborg 1976, 62). Agnew, in words more rousing than his President’s, called on the “silent young majority who got school and to work and war, if necessary,” to “make itself heard, to come to its own defense.” Theirs was the most vivid, most consistent, loud and publicized class-specific rhetoric of the period.

The “Hard Hats”

The tone of these angry invectives undoubtedly connected to many white workers in a cathartic manner (see Rieder 1987, 173-174). Time magazine quoted Paul M. Deac, executive vice president of the National Confederation of American Ethnic Groups, who “expressed the especially virulent outrage of the poorer Middle Americans. . . . ‘The Moratorium was a stab in the back to our boys on the firing lines. Our families don’t have long-haired brats—they’d tear the hair off them. Our

boys don't smoke pot or raise hell or seek deferments. Our people are too busy making a living and trying to be good Americans" (*Time*, 1/5/70). Whether or not this was wholly true, the anger he describes was echoed in article after article.

Coming from powerful politicians and media, such rhetoric also lent discursive organization to sentiments where such organization was otherwise lacking (Bourdieu 1991). Specifically, the other reference groups that might have competed for that discursive space – the antiwar movement, the Democratic Party, or the labor movement – were unable, unsuccessful or uninterested in doing so. The outcome of this angry virulence and successful Republican organization would be the hard hat riots of 1970.

In the aftermath of Nixon's November 3, 1969 "Silent Majority" speech, the *New York Times* reported that "many American were convinced by Mr Nixon's speech that he was striving hard to end the war. Their comments also indicate that he left with them an expectation that we will remove US troops from Vietnam within a reasonable time" (11/23/69). His approval ratings peaked, and Kissinger claimed that the speech "turned public around completely" (Anderson 1995, 331).¹²⁰ But progress on the war proved elusive, and the high approval of his handling of the war proved short-lived, dropping from 65% in November to 46% in April (Wells 1994, 409). In February, an aide to Haldeman reported, "the President noted that it seems that our silent majority group has lost its steam." At the same time, Nixon sought to make a decisive turn in the war, as peace talks had stalled. The invasion and bombing of North Vietnamese strongholds in Cambodia was the tactic chosen by Nixon, and supported by the military, to deliver the blow (cf. Wells 1994).

The invasion of Cambodia, announced by Nixon on April 30, 1970, precipitated a mass outpouring of antiwar actions across the country, particularly on

¹²⁰ Nixon's approval rating in the aftermath of the silent majority speech was only topped once in his presidency—on the day he announced the ceasefire with Vietnam, in January 1973. This indicates the centrality of Vietnam in American consciousness in the period, and the extent to which the people of the US wanted out.

college campuses. Nixon had promised to be winding the war down, and Cambodia was an expansion. When four students at Kent State were killed by National Guardsmen on May 4, 1970, the protests gave way to shutdowns, with 1.5 million students closing 20% of the nation's campuses. Over half of all campuses reported that some protest took place in those weeks, and some colleges remained shut for the rest of the semester.

On the morning of May 8, in New York City, a small group of antiwar protesters had gathered on Wall Street to protest the expansion of the war and once again demand immediate withdrawal. At lunchtime, an even smaller crowd of around 200 construction workers arrived at the antiwar rally, chanting "Love it or Leave It," and "Impeach Lindsay" New York's liberal mayor. In the next few hours, backed by hundreds of Wall Street employees and more construction workers from the World Trade Center site, hundreds of workers "rampaged" through lower Manhattan, storming City Hall and Pace University, injuring seventy antiwar protesters and bystanders. This protest was followed by daily lunchtime marches of hundreds of workers and supporters, culminating in an "Honor America, Honor the Flag" rally on May 20, organized by the Building Trades Council and its president Peter Brennan. Describing this final rally, crowd estimates for which went as high as 100,000, one reporter wrote, "There was a swagger to the crowd, built of a kind of joy at being what participants saw as the first counter-response from a long-suffering middle America" (*NYT* 5/13/70). The *Times* reported that many "described themselves as ordinary people, mainly family men and veterans, who had become fed up with various facets of the peace movement."

Construction workers in Buffalo, Arizona, and a few other scattered locations demonstrated as well. During those weeks, local and some national media outlets dispatched dozens of reporters to get a sense of the attitudes of workers in New York and around the country. In the context of the period described here, the

quotes selected by local papers need to be taken critically, as the selection process within the media – as well as the words spoken by the workers they interviewed – were already framed by the stereotypes of the angry worker, and within the discourses of the resentment of the Middle Americans (see Gitlin 1980; Small 1994 for media analysis). Unsurprisingly, among the themes that prominently emerged in the reporting were anger and reaction: “These hippies are getting what they deserve” (*WSJ* May 11). The “double standard” argument was frequently cited. In a long magazine piece, electrician Joe Kelly, who participated in the hardhat demonstrations, explains that he doesn’t support the war. What gets him angry, though, among other things, is “These kids. . . they can do as they feel like. I mean, burn, loot, steal, do anything they feel like in the name of social reform. But can the average Joe Blow citizen go out and do this?” (Rogin 1970).

The greatest specter was one of working class thuggery and authoritarianism. “I think it’s about time something like this has being done. Everybody grows up and everybody has somebody over them, and when the parents don’t take over, things go wrong.” Another, also invoking the need for greater parental discipline, explained that if your kids disagreed with you, “Well let me tell you the old-fashioned way: Use your hand. My father didn’t stop to hit me. If I said I didn’t like something, he hit me. I larned [sic] to like it. That’s the way it has to be.” Another reporter quotes someone as saying about the dead students at Kent, “I have no sympathy for them. I’m not a college man, I’m not smart, But I know one thing: when a guy’s got a gun, I don’t throw rocks at him. I go the other way. . . .If I attacked that cop over there, I’d expect him to shoot me” (All quotes from *NYT*, 5/18/70 and 5/21/1970). The *New York Times*’ editors opined about the “antidemocratic currents, from opposite political extremes” that were harming the country (6/7/70).

Agnew said it was “understandable” that construction workers attacked antiwar demonstrators. He argued there was a “fundamental difference” between

campus protest and the hardhats: “campus disruptions were not spontaneous. They were not the result of a rage that swept a person who worked with his hands to build America [and saw] people advocating that it be torn down. This [the hard hat attacks] was a wave in defense of a country, not a wave to destroy a country.”

Complicating the Image

What the protesters was defending was much less clear than what Agnew, or the mainstream coverage, indicated. There was a consistent focus in the national press on the “prowar” nature of the rallies. But it is clear from most of the local coverage, even given its biases, that the working-class people rallying did not share a common response to the war. (It is also clear that working class people were not the only ones rallying, and that Wall Street contributed mightily in numbers to all of the events that were described as “hardhat” events.) One 37 year-old worker said “personally I think this war has lasted too long: anyone who’s simply for war is crazy” (NYT 5/13/70). Another 23 year-old “long-haired” worker said “I don’t think you honor America by beating someone over the head with flag.” A dock worker argued, “Listen, all of us have a breaking point. My son asks me, Why is there war, why are there troops over there. Sometimes I really can’t give him an answer. All I know is we have one leader and one country and must back them to the limit.” He thought for a minute and added, “If my son were over there I’d want the country to back him” (NYT 5/13/70).

The frustration expressed by many workers who were interviewed, as many later analysts and further studies have noted, seemed to be less about the war, and more about class and power (cf. Sexton, Appy, Sennett and Cobb, Freeman, Levison).¹²¹ For some, the gulf between their experience and those of the college protesters loomed large. An unnamed wife of a worker who witnessed the hardhat riot from her office told the paper, “We were watching and wanted to go get down

¹²¹ Mayor John Lindsay was the primary political target of the protesters.

there with them. We wanted to tell off those kids. They have too much.” (NYT, 5/12/1970) Another argued, “I feel they [college demonstrators] have been with the silver spoon in their mouth too long and somebody has to take a hand in this to stop them, because if not, the country itself will come to ruins” (NYT, 5/20/70). Repeatedly, a class resentment of privileged youth was echoed. Echoing Nixon, another man said, “The students who throw bottles, close colleges and use foul language are bums.”¹²²

But this class resentment was complicated, for some, not by a gulf between themselves and the protesters, but a disturbing proximity. These workers had dedicated their lives to getting a leg up for their children, and the college campuses where they sent their children appeared were closing, and coming apart at the seams. The Secretary Treasurer of the Electrical, Radio and Machine workers union explained of his members, “I would say that the majority were opposed to the decision to go into Cambodia. They feel that the students should have a right to dissent. They can’t understand how the students can tear up their own facilities. They are paying high tuition and see the schools closed down. Their kids missing class. This isn’t right.” The President of the Carpenters said, “These guys have worked hard to send kids to college. Kid [sic] have a right to protest but not to burn down buildings. Our men see them throwing away a great opportunity that they wish they could have had” (NYT, 5/17/1970). One young man who had recently worked on a construction crew wrote of his former foreman: “He says that he has worked hard all these years for his kids to go to college and now he see college as a place ‘where kids run wild, doing whatever the hell they please’” (NYT, 5/31/71).¹²³

¹²² The “bums” label, from Nixon’s comment in the first days of protest against Cambodia, played into another side of class identification. According to a White House text of his remarks, he said: “You see these bums, you know, blowing up college campuses today. . . storming around about this issue. . . Then out there we have kids who are just doing their duty. They stand tall and they are proud. . . They are going to do fine and we have stand in back of them.” (NYT 5/2/70). Unlike the soldiers and others who work, the students are bumming off others, they don’t work.

¹²³ Jack Metzgar remembers his father warning him when he went to college, “that some of those professors were ‘godless Communists’ who could turn me against my own family and friends . . . by

Similar sentiments are expressed by the Boston workers interviewed by Sennett and Cobb (1993) in the course of their ethnographic research, from July 1969 to July 1970. They tease out an even deeper level of anxiety within their subjects on the subject of having sent their children to college. “Education” is a “cover term,” they argue, that “stands in for a whole range of experiences and feelings that may in fact have little to do with formal schooling.” Through their interviews, they conclude that education is interpreted by the workers they spoke to as giving people the chance not only to have better jobs, more money and respect, but to have greater “personal, rational control,” what they call “the weapons of self.” But this feeling is combined with a sense of “revulsion” about the actual life of a middle class person, and the less honest work that they do.

Capturing respect in the larger America, then, meant to [one man they spoke with] getting into an educated position; but capturing that respect means that he no longer respects himself. This contradiction ran through every discussion we held, as an image either of what people felt compelled to do with their own lives or of what they sought for their sons. If the boys could get educated, anybody in America would respect them; and yet . . . the fathers felt education would lead the young into work not as “real” as their own (23).

Lurking, therefore, close enough to the surface for the media to pick it up, was a class resentment among workers that was in part expressed around the issues of war and protest.

Schism in Antiwar Sentiment and Movement?

The values placed by workers on “real” work, and “real” experience, are central to understanding how the schism between antiwar workers and antiwar protesters could be fostered during this period. The antiwar movement was frequently described as having a moral opposition to the war, by which people meant that the war was in principle unjust, inherently loathsome. On the other hand antiwar sentiment among working class people appeared to have been rooted, for the

the late ‘60’s it was clear he had been right. . . . He thought things were getting pretty nutty by then: ‘I can’t even talk to you anymore. You college guys think you know everything. Actually, every year you get dumber and dumber’” (2000, 195-196).

most part, in the negative experiences associated with the war. In June of 1970, directly following the hard hat riots, sociologists Philip Converse and Howard Schuman published a piece in *Scientific American* called “Silent Majorities and the Vietnam War,” which analyzed the polling data to that point. They argued that it was “likely” that the grounds for antiwar sentiment “are quite disparate” for the “silent majority” and the antiwar protesters. The moral outrage among the educated group is obvious, they say. But “the polls have made little effort to illuminate the bases of negativism in the broader public.” Their own supposition was that the antiwar sentiment experienced by the “general public” was more “pragmatic” than the sentiments expressed in the context of the movement: “most disenchantment with the war seems pragmatic and can be summed up in the attitude that “we have not won and have little prospect of doing so” (Converse & Schuman, 1970).¹²⁴

Schuman (1972) went on to investigate this question of different sources of antiwar sentiment through an analysis of a 1971 dataset of an open-ended question asked of over 1200 Detroit residents who had reported that they found the Vietnam war to be “a mistake,” which was the most common question asked in the polls at the time. They were asked, “Why would you say it was a mistake?” and “Is there any other reason why you think it was a mistake?” Schuman compared the results of this group to the responses of three sociology classes at the University of Michigan.¹²⁵ Schuman found that “moral” reasons for finding the war to be a mistake were more frequently invoked by college students than regular Detroit citizens (35% of the time

¹²⁴ This article is cited by DeBenedetti (1990) as evidence that there was a great divide in the sentiment against the war, despite the fact that the authors did not yet have the evidence to make that claim. See DeBenedetti, 283-284.

¹²⁵ The author is well versed in the limits of survey research (see Schuman, “Sense and Nonsense about Surveys” 2000), and raises self-critical questions in the article regarding its limits. But there remain problems with the study. No mention is made of who did the interviewing, and under what circumstances, which could be compared to Sennett and Cobb’s and Lillian Rubin’s extreme self-consciousness of that question, particularly in a cross class situation (privileged researcher—working class interviewee).

The decision to elaborate the “mistake” question could itself be problematic. The question implies that someone went wrong somewhere, which in fact could be opposed to the idea that the war was in fact fundamentally wrong. The question thereby steers people away from “moral” responses and towards “pragmatic” explanations of the “mistake.” See following discussion of this.

as opposed to 11% of the time), while “pragmatic” concerns dominated both sets of responses, though more so among the non-college students. Responses were coded as moral when they fit the following four sub-categories: “US motives wrong or questionable,” “we shouldn’t force our way of life on Vietnam,” “North Vietnamese or Vietcong justified; or “the war is immoral or wrong, no further explanation.” “Pragmatic” responses, and the percentage of Detroit citizens who named them, included: “American soldiers killed” (28%); “The war is not ending—it just goes on and on” (16%); “The war is their responsibility, not our war” (16%); “Loss of resources” (specific or unspecific) (12%); and “The war is unwinnable” (10%).

The attribution of “moral” and “pragmatic” codes to these responses does not strike me as foregone. Offering that the war is unending, or that it’s not the responsibility of the US, does seem pragmatic. But loss of life and resources are both potentially moral critiques of the war – if the war seemed justified than it is likely those answers would not be forthcoming, but the data doesn’t explain why these respondents didn’t think that the war was worth the sacrifices. “We shouldn’t force our way of life,” and that the war itself is immoral seem appropriately coded as moral responses. But the other two, that US motives are wrong or that the North Vietnamese are justified, are part of a political critique of the war. Similarly, the “pragmatic” response that the war is “unwinnable” strikes me as part of an ideological or educated critique of the war, more than a simply practical response.

There are other problems with the study. To answer the “mistake” question in a meta-critical fashion – it’s not where we went wrong, it’s that we *are* wrong – implies a standpoint that allows for a sense of a “we” outside of “them” who were wrong, a standpoint that is more structurally available to college students (as well as more individualistic professionals rather than collectively-oriented workers (Rose 1997)). Students are taken outside of their normal reference groups, and are expected to engage in some level of critical thinking while in school, both factors that would

contribute to a metacritical perspective. Following Bourdieu (1973), while their relative lack of cultural capital would make it less likely that working class people would see themselves as in a position to make abstract claims about the nature of war, students are precisely in the process of acquiring such capital in their studies. Foreign policy, in particular, is an area that working people have reported as feeling ill-equipped to judge (Croteau, 1995). Students are generally a younger group, and therefore also have arguably fewer personal experiences to guide them in their analysis of the war, making the appeal of abstract arguments over personal knowledge perhaps more prevalent (the Detroit sample was adults over 21, while the University of Michigan sample drew from freshman, sophomores, and seniors). Furthermore, students are exposed to the movement's ideas in school. Schuman eventually makes the point that college students learn a moral critique in the context of the schools they attend, arguing that "we are dealing here with ideology, not with personality. . . . College students provided moral criticisms primarily because they are exposed to, and learn, such criticisms on campus" (1972, 534). So the poll could be taken as measuring the extent to which the movement's critique of the war had penetrated society beyond the campus, and the answer was, not much, perhaps, during much of the war itself. Judging by the later polls that did find the US to be "fundamentally wrong," this was a vantage point perhaps available to more people by the time of the war's conclusion.

For most damning is the fact that when Gallup finally asked the question, in 1978, whether the war in Vietnam was "fundamentally wrong and immoral" rather than a "mistake," 72% said that it was, a number that remained fairly constant in the years to come (Chomsky 2007). And this underscores the basic problem with the original polling material used by Schuman, and many others, to gauge the extent to which people had "moral" objections to the war. The "mistake" question presumes good intentions; it invites pragmatic elaboration. Later, when people were asked to

counter-pose the two, the vast majority, at least in the war's aftermath, chose the moral path and rejected the very language of "mistake."

There is no way of knowing for sure that during the war the moral choice of "fundamentally wrong and immoral" would have been chosen in the polls, as it was not asked. But the very distinction, of "moral" and "pragmatic" opposition, lends itself to the creation a character-based assessment of the different groups, along the lines of "rich people can afford to be abstract and moral" and "workers are down-to-earth and pragmatic," or more damningly, "the elite think of others, and workers only of themselves." The distinction also obscures some of the material and cultural reasons for the differences in sentiment that did exist.

Limiting my analysis to the contemporary polling data, news coverage, interviews, memoirs and other materials, I think a better distinction would be ideological/experiential – did your opposition to the war echo the articulated reasons for opposing the war made by the movement, or does it reflect your personal experience with the war? Neither side of this divide should be understood as fully free of the other – ideological opponents drew on their experience; experiential opponents made sense of their opinions through ideological frameworks. But the movement carried specific, and often abstract, critiques; while many workers evoked particular, and often personal critiques. Here the problems of education, entitlement, and cultural capital help to make sense of the differences between what college students would say about the war as opposed to what non-college people would say about the war, as well as the tensions that both existed and were encouraged between the movement and non-movement participants.

Why was the "general public" possibly immune to the "message" of the antiwar movement? Certainly, the abstraction with which many antiwar activists made their cases was part of the problem, as we saw in the last chapter. As early as 1967 one activist noted, somewhat romantically, "I have said we are less popular than

the war. . . . I am not altogether unsympathetic with the popular judgment of us, manipulated and outrageously unfair as it is. The media would not be able to achieve such results if we had not handed them a culturally-prescribed handout for doing so; we march, we debate, we talk, we write, we burn draft cards, we work for peace as if we were living in a world carved out by John Stuart Mill while real men, women and children are making and unmaking history in the hell of organized warfare” (Richer 1967, 61). This abstraction was increasingly coupled with highly ideological and political criticisms US imperialism, which cast the North Vietnamese as sympathetic freedom fighters. Chants like “Ho ho ho Chi Minh, the NLF is gonna win,” and North Vietnamese flags at demonstrations, while always a small minority of the movement as a whole, garnered significant media attention and contributed to the distance that many felt from the message of the movement (Gitlin 1980).

The movement was indisputably *moralistic*, in that it carried a judging attitude in its expression of opposition. This moralism of many of the war’s opponents, and the perception of a morally righteous movement – “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” – contributed to the difficulty and resistance that many people would feel in identifying their own disagreements with the war with those of the movement. Moralistic opposition to the war carried with it the potential for the perception that the moralists were judging the soldiers, their families, people who support the president or who believe in the country. It was that sense of judgment, this other group sitting on high and telling us how to live our lives, which Wallace and later Agnew fed upon with accusations of “impudent snobbery.” One of the interviews described by Sennett and Cobb was with a young man who had returned from Vietnam hating the war, but also hating the protesters. They quote him as saying about the protestors, “Their advantages, you know, wealth, education, the suburbs, all that, make them think they can be more moral. They can understand

you, with all their fancy words, but you can't understand them, 'cause you're just part of the scenery" (1993, 147).

If abstract, moral, or political reasons for opposing the war were often suspect, experiential reasons were more likely to be seen as legitimate. But the most vocal opponents to the war *appeared to be* the people least affected by it. In this way, the problem went beyond the fact that working-class people felt that they were being judged by upper-middle class people. It was the very idea that these upper-middle class people could judge anything at all from where they sat that also fueled a class-based anger, particularly among veterans. The young veteran who spoke with Sennett and Cobb explained, "I had to fight over there. . . I mean, I grew up with all the patriotism, the VFW crap, and like, it *hurt* to change, I went through hell" (1993, 147). Another, Victor Belloti, who went to Vietnam in 1965 and returned for much of the movement, told Appy, "To me most of them were the arch-liberals from suburban communities, having never really worked in their lives. They were kids who had never had anything go wrong with them and they went on "marches" and they protested the Vietnam War. They didn't have the slightest idea what was going on over there. Politically they were right, I'm not saying they weren't" (303). Despite this gap, however, it's also worth remembering that veterans and GI's joined the movement, and the overwhelming majority of Americans morally condemned the movement in its aftermath.

Moralism cut both ways. "It was clear," wrote a working-class antiwar activist, "that ordinary students who were against the war thought that workers were all crypto-Nazis. Many students and active leftists really did believe that 'working people are the enemy.'" (Welch, in Walker 1979, 185). While this activist goes on to say that this was not true of the movement as a whole, Sennett and Cobb argue that elite liberals were both assigned and themselves took up "badges of ability" conferred on them for their morally righteous opposition to the war. "Badges of ability," as

developed by Sennett and Cobb, are ways in which individuals come to be seen as standing out from the group. The traction of the image of the hard hat, they suggest, lay in the fact that it conformed to the “social ideal” that there existed a few, a moral minority, that understood the true, socially just path—being against the war—who stood against the mass of people “whose sensitivity they believe inferior to their own.” (1993, 69) Classical conservatives (in the mode of Ortega Y Gasset) and contemporary liberals (along the lines of Seymour Martin Lipset) could together agree on this kind of demarcation of the mass from the few. It was not from nothing that the movement had an “elitist” image – there were people, like James Fallows friends, who looked down on workers and bought the stereotypes.

The appearance of moral superiority and denigrating attitudes from some protesters were among the more explicit manifestations of a conflicted relationship, largely based in class dynamics, between many parts of the antiwar movement and workers. This climate of friction was, occasionally, punctured with physical acts of violence, including fights at protests and, obviously, the hardhat demonstrations themselves. The climate was fostered by the rhetoric of the Republicans, supported by the actions of some of the movement itself, and perhaps, at least for veterans, an inevitable result of the class differences that did exist between most veterans and most college students. Because of the widespread impression of an elite and righteous movement, myths of protesters spitting at veterans when they returned from Vietnam, and calling them “baby-killers” found ground to grow. While such actions were extremely rare (and possibly, in the case of spitting, entirely apocryphal), they could be perceived as true because of the schisms that had been successfully established (Lembcke 1998).

The image of the belligerent “hardhat” infuriated with elitist protesters, whose significance was to take on mythic proportions, was not “stitched out of whole cloth.” Real class anger and real frustrations with the antiwar movement

provided cultural space for the image to be amplified, despite its extremely narrow empirical basis. Within weeks of the riotous demonstrations, that cultural space was filled with another rapacious image of a right-wing worker, in the popular film *Joe*.

Joe Curran, the antihero of this instant “cult classic,” is a white “working stiff” who spends his days “burning his balls” in front of a furnace. The audience meets Joe at a bar, where we watch him in a long monologue/rant about the social problems of the day. “Niggers are getting all the money,” he complains in a long racist soliloquy about welfare – “they’re not doing nothing;” “burn a few buildings you get paid for it;” “I ain’t even been inside of Macy’s and they want a charge account.” Affirmative action is skewered: “If you can’t read you have a better chance of getting hired”; Joe’s own “kids couldn’t get into a regular college.” But the “white kids are worse than the niggers . . . money don’t mean nothing to them.” “White kids, rich white kids, the worst hippies”, “they used to be idealistic, now they go on those peace marches, whacked out on drugs.” They have “no respect for the President.” They go to “Ivy leagues colleges”, the “best colleges” and they’re just into “sex, drugs, pissing on America.” Worst of all, “poor kids and middle class kids are copying the rich kids.” Joe concludes, “I’d like to kill one of them.” And by the end of the film, he’s killed quite a few, in a shootout at a rural “commune,” a scene that was evidently inspired by the MyLai massacre. His unlikely ally and inspiration is an advertising executive who begins the film accidentally killing his daughter’s drug-dealing hippie artist boyfriend – arguably the least sympathetic character in the film, Joe included – and ends it by “accidentally” killing his daughter.

“The message” of the movie,” as explained by Peter Boyle, the actor who plays Joe, “is very plain. It says that we’d just better stop that war in Vietnam now; that we’d just better stop killing our children there or we’re going to be killing our children in the streets here” (NYT, 8/2/1970). What seems plainer is the movie’s depiction of an American social fabric strained to the point of rupture. The catalytic

elements in this rupture are the hedonistic, narcissistic drug-addled youth on the one side, and the bitter, resentful, hyper-patriotic white workers on the other. The two sides are seen as hating each other – Joe, quite obviously, in nearly everything he says; and the hippies, who consistently mock Joe – “he looks like a truck driver” – when they see him. Joe is also envious of the life these young people lead and their freedoms, while at the same time is unsettled by what he sees as the meaninglessness of their lives. “How do they fall in love?” he plaintively asks, watching the beginning of a free-love “orgy.”

Yet the fulcrum of the film is the executive father, who is much less sure about his own place in this new world. He takes action, but it’s unconscious, unintended action. He didn’t mean to kill the first young man; he consistently argues with Joe to be more restrained. He is concerned about his hippie daughter, but not clear what to do about it, and his passive acquiescence to Joe’s actions results in the worst possible catastrophe. The “culture” is getting away from him, just like it is getting away from Joe, but while Joe is ready to “go to war,” the executive seems like a man who is caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. He finds a false ally in the murderous Joe – scenes where the two families come together or where each man enters the other’s cultural sphere are strained and deeply uncomfortable. Joe’s bowling buddies joke that his new friend “better stick to golf,” the executive’s wife is clearly horrified by his new friend. The soul of the establishment, roiled by the changing culture, is vulnerable to the worst instincts of reaction, the movie seems to be saying, with Joe embodying those instincts.

Released in the aftermath of the hardhat riots, the alignment of white workers with the forces of reaction seemed “prophetic,” and the rift between the “hippies” and “workers” was at its zenith. Boyle reported, “I hear that kids are standing up at the end of the movie and yelling, ‘I’m going to shoot back, Joe.’” Within months, “All in the Family” aired for the first time, and Archie Bunker was

piped into millions of American homes. The cultural icon of the reactionary worker had been firmly established.

For those on the left, Ronald Radosh's (1969) widely read *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy*, presented hard evidence to back up the observation of "total absorption of American unions in the corporate capitalist structure" (451). Labor's support of the political subversion of social democratic regimes abroad reinforced, for many activists, the sense that labor should no longer be counted as part of any progressive coalition, and the influence of Maoism in the latter part of the movement explicitly amplified this analysis. Even VVAW, which had been the most effective working-class antiwar movement organization, fell under a Maoist sphere of influence and became deeply critical of any "reformist" actions directed at white workers. A 1975 discussion paper from the Santa Cruz chapter of the then VVAW-Winter Soldier Organization (the Maoist incarnation of the original VVAW) explained,

We feel that the United States has historically proven its ability to co-opt and pacify the majority of the American working class by stepping up its exploitation of the Third World; all of our programs have therefore been developed from a world-wide, anti-imperialist perspective. It's important to recognize that in the context of a world economy, a large part of the American working class comprises a labor elite—aware of their relative position of comfort and fearful of losing it. As is demonstrated by workers opposition to foreign labor, busing, and anti-war activities, present day American labor is for the most part only brought to action so its relatively privileged position in the world [is protected]. (B9F2 VVAW Feb 1975)

The organization was therefore critical of the more moderate activities of its past: "this applies to the struggles with the V[eterans] A[dministration]: to expect that anti-imperialism will "unfold" with more educational benefits or better home loans is to ignore both existing conditions and historical precedents;" concluding, "In short, we believe that our programs must be developed with respect to their inherent correctness, and not their potential for alienating the privileged elite of American workers." Ultra-leftism, the apparent conservatism of the class, and the apparent

conservatism of the labor movement worked in combination to create even more distance between the new social movements and the working class.

As we've seen, the frustrations of the "middle Americans" were not themselves myths, but the right-wing cast through which those frustrations were understood was. George Meany's leadership of the AFL CIO reinforced the image, and, with Walter Reuther's sudden death just weeks after the hardhat riots, the countervailing liberal and antiwar face of labor lost its most prominent leader.¹²⁶ Reuther's death was compounded by the support that Nixon found in the Teamsters, which had previously allied with the UAW to form the Alliance for Labor Action that had been critical of the war. Labor, and the working class, seemed irreparably torn from its progressive past.

Representing the Working Class and the Democratic Party

A week after the hard hat demonstrations, one construction worker on a site near City College explained to students there, "most construction guys don't go looking for trouble. . . .But they feel they're getting stepped on. We built this country and I don't think we have a say now" (NYT, 5/17/1970). This feeling of "not having a say" was prevalent in the reporting of working-class attitudes of the period. The media, as we've seen, was in the throes of a correction on that front – doing what it could to remember the forgotten Americans. But substantial representation proved more elusive.

The Nixon administration was eager for working class support, but equally aware of the necessarily symbolic nature of this courtship: while it may invite them to the party, the GOP would not seriously countenance a seat for working class people at the main table. During his first administration, Nixon embraced a reform rhetoric—and took certain reform actions—that put him to the left of his party on

¹²⁶ As a sign of the declining liberal consensus, Reuther's influence had already begun to wane at the time of his death. See Lichtenstein (1995).

the question of workers. The Rostow report on “The Problem of the Blue Collar Worker,” commissioned in 1969 and released in 1970, found that workers wages were falling behind inflation, workplace conditions remained poor, and chances for career advancement were limited. Its main recommendations, which included childcare support, increased access to education, support for unions and model employment policies within the government were not implemented, but Nixon did sign the Occupational Safety and Health Act in December 1970. Nixon also began to back away from affirmative action plans for integrating construction work which had infuriated the construction unions (and, in doing so, took steps distancing himself from African American support). Foreign policy proved an easier fit. Meany and Nixon were very close on the question of Vietnam, and Meany had even been privy to the invasion of Cambodia before it began, later offering the President the AFL-CIO’s “full support” (Gross 1995). And Nixon’s “law and order” campaigning had broad appeal.

But it was through symbolic appeals to workers and their leaders that the party and its President were most committed (cf. discussion in Mason 2004). Appeals to “the workingman” were encouraged by the White House press office, and labor leaders were invited to serve on numerous executive commissions. In one such symbolic action, on Labor Day, 1970, labor leaders were invited to dine at the White House, and Meany was lavishly praised by the President. All in all, Nixon’s actual record with labor remained weak. His National Labor Relations Board substantially strengthened the employers ability to fight unions; he vetoed a Democratic bill in 1971 that would have pegged government salaries to increases made in the private sector. The Republican Party was not about to deliver solid gains to working people over the objections of their business base (cf. Frank 2004, among others).

If not always with enthusiasm, for substantial representation, workers and unions had historically turned to the Democratic Party. At the level of Presidential

elections, this base was not as reliable or consistent as the recent story of its decline would make it seem. Truman won almost 80% of the union vote in 1948, as he spoke out against Taft Hartley; but in 1952 Adlai Stevenson's labor record was to the right of Truman's, and while the Times noted that he "managed to retain the admiration of the Northern liberals without alienating the Southern Conservatives," he did alienate labor for actions such as criticizing Truman for not having used Taft Hartley to further discipline striking steel workers earlier that year (Piven, 1991, 236; Preis 1992, 461-2). Stevenson won a little more than half of union voters in 1952, and even fewer in 1956. Johnson, promising a Great Society and running against Barry "in your guts you know he's nuts" Goldwater in 1964 again secured 80% of the union vote, but Humphrey's in 1968 support paralleled Stevenson's.

In the last years of the 1960's, the orientation of the Democratic Party had itself shifted. On May 5, the same day that news of Kent State made headlines, the New York Times editorialized about "Democratic Reform for '72." Reporting on the new nomination and convention rules recommended by the McGovern-Fraser commission, created by the DNC in response to the disastrous 1968 convention, the Times was hopeful that the new practices would make the delegate selection process more democratic, decreasing the influence of local state party brokers and increasing the seating of women and minorities. "Looking toward 1972 and later, the Democrats will have to reform their own warring ranks—sectional, racial, traditional and liberal—if they are to recover their position as the party of progress and the bearer of the occasional politics of happiness."

Unfortunately for the Democratic Party, reform their own warring ranks they did not, and it is questionable whether they could have (Piven 1991). Over the course of the 1960's, the DP's big tent seemed to be covering less ground. They were losing the South, and some blamed the party's decline on its liberal turn on social issues. Columnist Ernest Conine in the LA Times argued that,

The whole idea of the New Politics [within the DP] is the emergence of a new “coalition of conscience” embracing Negroes, Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, young people, and “concerned” members of the intellectual and business establishments. The trouble is, from the standpoint of winning elections, that such a coalition included more people out than it includes in. President Nixon’s vaunted Southern or Middle American strategy is really nothing more than a strategy for enrolling the rejects in the Republican Party (8/16/1970).

In the months after the hardhat rallies, Democratic politicians and media commentators were not unaware of the challenges facing the Party with their white working class base. The solution of the party’s mainstream leadership was to move closer to the Republicans on social issues. In August 1970 Humphrey told a crowd that the Democrats need to “let the hardhats know we understand what is bugging them—that we, too condemn criminality and riots and violence and extreme social turbulence.” The “conservative” Humphrey wing of the Democratic party moved away from the new politics model described here, and for much of the 1970 election cycle, Democrats were fairly successful at “cutting right” to undercut the law and order campaign of their Republican rivals.

On the left flank were party activists still angered by the anti-democratic exclusion of McCarthy’s antiwar candidacy in 1968, and the hardball tactics pursued by the traditional Democratic machine in keeping the more liberal delegates and positions at bay during the Chicago convention. Teddy Kennedy, following his brother, was one “bridge” between the wings of the party, and he argued that “the umbrella of the Democratic Party is broad enough to cover every type of young American—the young hardhat as well as the young Dove, the worker as well as the student” (LAT 8/16/70). But for many left Democrats, seeking to maintain a connection with a revanchist labor bureaucracy and what appeared to be, as we’ve seen, a reactionary white working class, didn’t seem worth the effort. For them, “all the myths of authoritarianism and relative well-being were simply updated to include an explanation of why ‘backlash’ or ‘conservatism’ were now inevitable” (Levison 1974, 234).

The McGovern candidacy and ultimate defeat in 1972 marked the culmination of these factional trends that had been developing in the Party, and confirmed the declining significance of the Democratic party's role as a reliable reference group for white workers in the United States. The McGovern-Fraser rules change had the intended effect of breaking the hold that labor, among other traditional Democratic kingmakers, had in the party. Delegates were now overwhelmingly chosen by primaries open to all registered Democrats, and the party had the option to not seat delegations whose members were not representative along lines of race and gender of the constituency they represented. The new rules and possibilities for credential challenges better suited an articulate, college-educated crowd. When the 1972 convention in Miami began, it was clear the "new politics" wing of the party had prevailed, and that the AFL-CIO, which had sat out the rules change process, had been completely out-organized. Opinions on both sides of the democratic aisle hardened considerably as a result of labor's rout. McGovern's supporters were thrilled that they had beaten the old guard, while Meany was horrified that labor had lost its influence. For the first (and only) time in its history, the AFL-CIO decided to remain neutral in the presidential elections (forty national unions nevertheless campaigned vigorously for McGovern). Meany, the great bridge-builder, commented at a Steelworker's convention in the aftermath of Miami:

The so-called McGovern commission was supposed to produce the most democratic convention in the history of the parties. . . Oh, 300 labor delegates managed to get there, but only one was allowed to address the delegates. [Instead,] we listened for three days to the speakers who were approved to speak by the powers-that-be at that convention. We listened to the gay-lib people—you know, the people who want to legalize marriage between boys and boys and legalize marriage between girls and girls . . . We heard from the abortionists, and we heard from the people who look like Jacks, acted like Jills, and had the odor of johns about them." (Dark 2004, 161).

These intolerant and vituperative comments confirmed the sense that, for many liberal and left Democrats, the party was better off without labor.

Labor, when looked at through the votes of unionized white voters, did not completely abandon the Democrats – McGovern got 40% of the white unionist vote. But the “new politics” wing of the party did alienate many working-class Democrats. This alienation was complex, and stemmed from a number of sources that included intolerance and bigotry, big Labor’s conservatism, as well as deep-seated cultural mores that were upset by the rapidly changing culture surrounding them.¹²⁷

Its roots, however, went deeper. Structurally, as Piven (1991) points out, the US welfare state was both too fragmented and too meager to buttress class solidarity. The expansion of the welfare state under Johnson and Nixon came as a response to African American mobilization, and resulted in greater support for programs that benefited the disproportionately minority poor. These urban renewal, cash benefits and health programs were paid for through regressive taxes whose burden therefore fell disproportionately on lower income people. Andrew Levison’s *The Working Class Majority*, criticizes this fragmentation, arguing “none of the social programs of the great society period were aimed at championing the new and growing social and economic grievances of all working people. Instead they were focused entirely on blacks or the very poor” (1974, 233). And even those programs were not viewed as particularly successful. As early as 1967, SDS member Paul Booth wrote to *Commentary*, “the program of liberalism is more clearly washed up in the eyes of the

¹²⁷ Jonathan Rieder indicates that the racism attributed to many white ethnic workers during this period was intermixed with class-based experiences: “In ways that Americans did not always appreciate, these apparent arguments about race and remedy were often displaced conflicts of class. In the minds of many white ethnics, ghetto rioting fused with the street crime practices by a dispirited segment of the black underclass. The white view that quotas were a way to get ahead without paying one’s dues merged with popular resentment of welfare “giveaways” to poor blacks. The dislike of welfare drew force from a broader perception of the ghetto as a place of incivility, where the culture of pleasure triumphed over all moral restraint and striving. Little in their culture focused the attention of provincial ethnic Democrats on the sociological causes of drug addiction, illegitimate births, male sexual irresponsibility, and female headed households. Their moral traditionalism stoked contempt for transgression, which added a powerful overlay of virtue and vice to the fundamental cleave of race and class already dividing two crucial elements of the Democratic coalition.” Jonathan Rieder, “The Rise of the Silent Majority,” in *Fraser Rise and fall Of New Deal Coalition* page 256.

American people than ever before. The major riots . . . occurred in the country's most liberal cities—Detroit, with its outstanding war on poverty; Newark, with its top public housing program; Milwaukee; New York City; and finally New Haven, the apple of the liberals' eyes. These were the models of the Great Society.

Americans believe that those liberal programs are a flop—they do not prevent civil unrest nor do they meet the needs of the poor. The American people are right” (BIF7 Booth papers, 10/13/67). Liberalism's lost promise had caused many young protesters to move the left, and many more of its adherents to become disaffected. But for many white workers, liberalism's basic meaning was transmuted, a change in perception that facilitated by the campaigns of the conservative Republicans and the class-blind actions of its progenitors: liberalism came to be seen as a “force inimical to the working and lower middle classes” (Rieder 1989, 258).¹²⁸

Levison (1974) lists a number of issues on which the Democrats could have better served a working class base while continuing to practice anti-racist and other social justice politics. Desegregation efforts in schools and housing were disproportionately enacted in working class neighborhoods, and the first affirmative action programs took place in union workplaces. While racism contributed to the resistance that many white workers showed towards these programs, most social scientists have argued that their reactions were more often predicated on a sense of having to bear an undue burden: why us? was the question most frequently asked. Writing in 1971, the Sextons quote pollster Lou Harris arguing “The privileged have become the progenitors of change, while the underprivileged whites have become

¹²⁸ The Democratic party was not the sole bastion of liberalism during this period: “Rockefeller Republicans,” of the John Lindsay variety, had long been socially liberal. And the Democrats were recently the party of Dixie, and still had a strong presence in the South. But the parties were being reconfigured during this period. Nixon's presidency marked the turn when socially illiberal Republicanism gained a solid threshold in national party politics, having begun its rise with Goldwater in 1964. (Nixon himself was a contradictory figure, and it was not until Reagan's election of 1980 that the declension of the liberal Republican was complete.) I therefore collapse the “Democratic Party” with the project of liberalism because, by 1968, of the two, it *was* the party of liberalism, and particularly of the socially liberal brand of liberalism that the Republican party was increasingly eschewing.

the steadfast defenders of the status quo.” The Sextons then argued, “He misunderstands. Workers simply oppose change that always benefits others and hurts them. In this, they resemble many who serve on college faculties. That is, they resist change that threatens them personally, and can afford to take grandstand postures on issues that do not” (258). Levison argued, “To be sure, there is substantial racism of the most overt and mindless type. But clearly, the hostility to busing, quotas, and public housing was made far worse, and many additional workers were alienated because, instead of seeking to meet black needs a part of a general assault on the social and economic problems of all workers, these programs put black improvement directly in conflict with the objective interest of white workers” (237). Similarly, the Democratic Party failed to fight for “economic conversion” as it fought for peace, and failed to fight for jobs as it fought for a cleaner environment. He concludes,

The worker who had voted for George Wallace in 1968 had seen nothing since then to make him change his mind. Wallace’s potent message, “Send them a message!” was precisely geared to the rising anger of blue-collar workers. One does not need elegant sociopolitical theories or the incomprehensible musing about “consciousness” of a Marcuse or Reich to understand the “drift to the right,” or the “emerging Republican majority. The only way progressives have won a majority of the American people is by offering genuine programs that meet the needs of ordinary people. There is nothing strange in the fact that workers began deserting liberalism once liberalism so decisively deserted them” (239).

Levison, I think, expects too much from the Democratic Party. It was not, nor had it ever been, a labor party or source of social democracy in the United States, and its minor steps in those directions had been as reactions to militant forces from below. The postwar privatized welfare state (created with the blessings of big labor) did not represent universal class issues, and no group of “progressives,” including labor, had successfully campaigned for such an expansive class vision in that period (or, arguably, ever). But to the extent that workers did find their interests supported by

Democrats, that support was weaker at the dawn of the 1970's than it had been before.

The Consolidation of the Image

By the beginning of the 1970's, the lines of the "class war" had been drawn. "Liberal elites" faced off with "blue-collar bigots," and every major institution in the country – political party, media, labor or social movement – accepted or articulated, or at the very least didn't challenge, this common sense. Such a "re-alignment" had been anticipated for years, but it was not until 1968 that its true crystallization seemed to begin. Perversely, the popular response to the Vietnam War was held up as the prototype the divide. The "hardhats," Joe's, and Archie Bunkers stood in for workers. To the extent that white working class people were radical or militant such sentiment and behavior was eclipsed by their apparent electoral conservatism and pro-war, racist reaction. The Republican Party under Nixon did what it could to stoke this picture, the official labor movement (against whom workers were themselves rebelling) contributed to it, and the Democratic Party was a fractured and always already anemic "voice of working people." The media amplified these institutions, trumpeting the "upside down" political alignments that the US was suddenly experiencing.

On the other side, the antiwar movement appeared to exemplify the excesses of the elite. Despite the inaccuracy of this picture, that it could be seen as such was in no small part related to its own middle-class and elite character in its early years. The eventual diversification of the antiwar movement and sentiment went largely unacknowledged, and in any event did not bridge the real gaps that existed between the white working class and the "typical" movement types, as seen on TV, in the news, or described by the politicians. Over time, most people who opposed the war in this country did so for similar reasons – unnecessary death and destruction, and its fundamental immorality. The movement never united all of those people who felt

that way – nor did any social institution. But when all parts of the active opposition to the war are taken into account, together they did point to a kind of unity – in distrust of the government, dislike of war, and a determination to fight against those policies that contributed to the degradation or destruction of their own lives and the lives of others.

Yet Fallows' question, "which side were you on in the class war?," reflected the common sense of the post-Vietnam era. A fractured American populace came out of the war politically divided and scarred. Progressive ideas had made inroads among an educated professional class, conservatism was winning over the regular working stiffs. Vietnam was a dividing line that cut the social cloth along these untraditional lines, and his prediction of "a heritage rich in possibilities for class warfare" seemed all but assured.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The useful research heuristic is to understand that as opportunities for new wars . . . arise, the elites of the day and their homefront adversaries will strive to shape public interpretation and reinterpretation. As a more general matter, the capacity to make war, even as wars now change in their nature, will turn on just how those involved in the discourse succeed, at any given point, to give meaning to wars gone by and to those who opposed them.

“Who Supports the Troops? Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the Making of Collective Memory”
(Beamish Molotch & Flacks 1995, 56)

[A]lthough opinion polls demonstrate that workers' views on major issues actually span a wide range from left to right, many college-educated Americans still hold stereotypes of blue-collar workers as conservative “hard hats.” . . . The Archie Bunker stereotype survives not because it is accurate but because those who live outside working-class America have no other image with which to replace it.

Andrew Levison, “Who Lost the Working Class?” *The Nation*, May 14, 2001

This dissertation argues that our collective memory of a class-polarized response to the Vietnam War is inaccurate, reflecting some half-truths and some outright falsehoods. The popular image holds that in the United States working class people were more likely to support the war, take “hawkish” positions, and held the antiwar movement in deep contempt. The antiwar forces, in turn, are remembered as an educated elite, of upper-middle and middle-class students, public intellectuals, celebrities and liberal politicians, who either fought on the side of justice, or stabbed “our boys” in the back. But, in fact, this was not the case. Elites were always more likely to support the war, workers to oppose it, and the mass, multi-faceted movement that actively fought against the war was eventually comprised of Americans across the class spectrum. The student and mass movements were more economically diverse than remembered, and even labor began to break from its cold-war foreign policy as a result of Vietnam. Working class resistance to the war in the armed forces was a necessary ingredient in the war’s eventual end, and working-class organizations like Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Chicano Moratorium Committee indicated the salience of antiwar issues to the lives of working people.

That our collective memory of the period is distorted is due to a number of overlapping factors. Since World War II, the popular image of the white working class has been one of increasingly conservative political and social behavior, itself traceable to overblown estimations of its material affluence, political incorporation, and decreasing militancy in the workplace. Labor unions, for their part, were in many important instances conservative forces in the post-war era, working to retard the restiveness of their rank and file members, minimize political dissent, and, until Vietnam, embrace a hawkish foreign policy. Unions were also economically and socially liberal, and an essential partner in liberal coalitions. But their conservatism contributed to a syllogistic attribution of quietude, conformity, and hawkishness to workers. And, compared to the working class upsurges of the earlier part of the century, particularly the 1930's, the postwar working class looked relatively quiet to many, inert to others.

The early shape taken by the antiwar movement, growing as it did among liberal and radical peace groups and on the college campuses, largely precluded the early inclusion of workers, and created a middle class movement culture and orientation that proved difficult to shake in later years. Elitist attitudes within the movement, as well as strategic orientations towards what appeared to be the easiest audiences to reach – that is, people like themselves – further steered the early movement away from a working class audience. Despite widespread antiwar sentiment among African American workers – who, due to the racialized definition of “working class” in the US, were not usually included as part of it– the African American and antiwar movements did not successfully conjoin, and their inter-movement relations even had the effect of increasing the middle-class orientation of the latter. Big labor’s seeming intransigence on the question of war further discouraged working-class outreach, though this did not mean that many groups and individuals within the movement did not make efforts in that direction.

By the time antiwar sentiment and movement had broadened, and workers were joining the movement or otherwise resisting the war, other social tensions that had been building were exposed and encouraged by media and political elites. “Middle Americans,” those who had not participated in the social movements of the era, were discovered by the press to be angry about social unrest, uncertain about their future, and resentful of the social changes that were taking place that appeared to benefit others while often hurting them. Republicans fixated on the anger at protesters demonstrated in the aftermath of the Chicago 1968 Democratic National Convention, and sought to polarize the “impudent” antiwar “snobs” from the “silent majority” of working-class Americans. In May, 1970, construction workers rioted against antiwar protesters in New York City and a few other places around the country. The image of these “hardhats,” followed by other right wing icons in film and television, cemented a picture of working class pro-war conservatism. Workers were, in fact, frequently moving to the right during this period, just as they were to the left, and middle. This same few years saw an abrupt rise in labor struggles, a rekindling of a labor left, and ongoing support for Democratic Party politicians at the local level. But the Democratic Party did little to court workers, and Nixon’s landslide in 1972, with considerable working class support, has in retrospect appeared to presage the birth of “Reagan Democrat,” and symbolize the end of the era of “New Deal Democrats.” This distorted image thus finally resonates precisely because it appears to anticipate and account for the growing disaffection that white workers have displayed towards the Democratic Party, and their growing embrace of the Republican Party. Because the distorted picture of who supported the war and who opposed it seems to fit so well with the political future, it remains the common supposition today.

The Legacy of the Image

As a whole, most scholarly and popular renditions of the Vietnam period take the stereotype at face value, and are overly captivated by the neat story of class division that it offers. This distorted memory of the period has had negative effects on our appreciation of political attitudes and possibilities in our own era. In these final pages, I will suggest some of these negative legacies.

The first problem is the assumption of who supports wars, and why. Acceptance of the image has meant that the breadth of antiwar sentiment has been reduced to an elite few, and support for the war has been incorrectly assigned to the working people who make up the military. In the first Gulf War, the call to “support the troops” was brandished in the face of the substantial antiwar movement that was building in anticipation of that first invasion of Iraq. The Vietnam movement’s supposed anti-troop perspective was invoked to make all war criticism soldier criticism. The myth of the anti-troop antiwar protester has numerous roots (Lembcke 1998), but it is fed in part by the image that protesters had nothing to do with the soldiers—they were not soldiers, their families did not fight, they were not in Vietnam. For the antiwar movement in Vietnam to have been anti-troop it had to be far away from the millions and millions of Americans who served or who were related to those who served. The success of the yellow ribbon campaigns, and probably the relatively muted antiwar response during that brief war corresponded to the nagging feeling that Fallows described in his essay – that perhaps the elites did turn unforgivably turn on the boys, a mistake not to be repeated. Many went out of their way to “prove” their support for the troops, even when questioning the war (such as Todd Gitlin’s donation of blood on national television) (See Beamish et al. 1995).

The movement was not anti-troop, however, during Vietnam, though the returning veterans did receive terrible treatment from the government upon their return, and had little in the way of economic opportunity from the world of business.

Of course, the fact that the *troops* during Vietnam did not support the war was never mentioned, nor the antiwar sentiment that ran high among veterans. Standing by the military men meant supporting the war, opposing the war meant distancing oneself from the sacrifice that others made for you, putting you above the hardship soldiers faced.

While less explicit in the current wars – the Gulf War was, after all, the first war since Vietnam, and there was the “syndrome” to destroy – pro-war propagandists continued to draw the connection between “liberal elites” opposing the war and opposing the troops, the heart and soul of America. Democrats joined Republicans in full throated support for our fighting men rather than respond to activists in their base who opposed the war, or the near majority of all voters who opposed it within its first year. In the 2004 elections, John Kerry distanced himself from his brave and principled antiwar activity as a young veteran and instead wrapped himself in the flag, campaigning from what was essentially a pro-war position: he had voted for it, he had criticized it, he made no promise to end it. The ability of the Republicans to “swift boat” this war hero was in part a result of the success they had in framing his service and dissent as a product of his elite background. It was, of course, easy to make latte jokes about Kerry – who among us did not? – but they had practiced first with Howard Dean, the Democrat’s most popular antiwar primary candidate.

Which brings me to the implications for the fight against the Iraq war today. In the build-up to the war, the largest global mass demonstration against any war took place (on February 15, 2003), and the antiwar movement was quickly supported by the US labor movement and new groups of military families – constituencies who were not reached for years in Vietnam. Since 2005, a majority of Americans have opposed the war, and for most of that time have supported calls for either an immediate or specified end of the occupation. Given the fictitious and farcical case made for war by the Bush administration, the disastrous chaos in Iraq that resulted

from the US invasion, and the corruption and stagnation in the efforts to “rebuild,” it is almost accurate to say that the war in Iraq was more widely discredited and unsupported in its first two years than Vietnam was in its first ten.

Yet the antiwar movement that emerged wonderfully at the start was almost nowhere to be seen a year later. When the Abu Ghraib scandal broke in April 2004 not a single major protest was called. Similar silences followed repeated revelations of corruption among US contractors, and the large-scale protests in Iraq against the occupation in 2005. Beginning with numbers provided in a classified State Department report described by the *Washington Post* in June 2006, majorities of Iraqis have consistently wanted immediate or close to immediate withdrawal of US troops, believing that the situation will get better faster without the US there. But these polls – in 2006, 2007, and 2008 – have not been responded to.

A full analysis of the early collapse and ongoing struggle to rebuild the antiwar movement is beyond my current project. But one striking motif was an early reluctance on the part of some antiwar groups, such as MoveOn.org, to take positions – like “immediate withdrawal” – that might alienate “ordinary Americans.” And nearly all parts of the antiwar movement, eager to see John Kerry elected in the Presidential election of 2004, did not challenge the Democratic Party’s continued support for the occupation, the most immediate galling effect being the silent response to Abu Ghraib, but also the movement’s demobilization in the election year that I would argue it never recovered from. In their own way, both the moderate and more radical antiwar groups like United For Peace and Justice compromised political independence and moderated their own antiwar positions in deference to a “Middle America” being courted by Democrats.

My research does not indicate that Middle America would, in 2004, have embraced “immediate withdrawal” any more than it did during Vietnam in 1968. But “ordinary people” did come over to oppose that war, and they did so in a climate

created by an independent and politically diverse antiwar movement. Working people did not necessarily agree with the Vietnam antiwar movement, and they were often alienated from its most militant actions. But the presence of the massive movement helped to normalize all kinds of dissent, from liberal to moral to pragmatic to experiential to radical. The movement became its own pole of attraction, forcing the Democratic Party to turn against the war it had initiated, forcing all candidates to become “peace candidates.” It gave rise to the GI movement, which in turn supported the soldier’s revolt.

Today’s antiwar movement does not seem to have consistently, or with enough focus, seen the strong inroads it could make with “ordinary” Americans by focusing on the goal it embraces first – ending the war and bringing the soldiers home. If the antiwar movement had responded to Abu Ghraib, it could have focused early on the scapegoats that were made of lower level “grunts” in the service of protecting the architects of Bush’s war and torture strategy, at the same time that it condemned the inhumanity of this “war for democracy.” As it was, it missed an opportunity to reach out to soldiers and veterans living under immoral orders, following stupid strategies, with insufficient supplies, in a racist climate, for a war of occupation. Most soldiers and veterans perhaps do not share these feelings, but if the Iraq Veterans Against the War, and memoirs of returning soldiers are to be believed, many do. The lack of a draft has been cited to explain the lack of a mass antiwar movement today, but the economic draft has not become a consistent focus of the movement. Anti-recruitment drives – like those among the outstanding IVAW -- are excellent, but could be linked to groups working for greater economic opportunity for the young people who still see the military as their best way forward. The movement’s main concentration on elections and lobbying – UFPJ’s Iraq Campaign consists of three elements: “Legislative Action, Nonviolent Direct Action, 2008 Voter Engagement Work”– has taken it away from the base-building

that is quite possible, and necessary, for pressure to be created domestically, within the troops, and internationally to end the war.

Our misinformed memory of the Vietnam era also breeds a cynicism concerning the capacity for groups to change. The idea that the antiwar movement should moderate its demand to end the war to appease ordinary Americans – such as MoveOn did; or the Education for Peace in Iraq Center did; or though its electoral strategies, as UFPJ is basically doing, as neither party is promising to end the war – speaks to a sense that sentiment cannot be changed, that mass action is not possible. But the Vietnam experience showed that the cumulative effects of war, combined with persistent criticism and public dissent did lead to overwhelming opposition and extensive resistance. Given the long and disappointing history of Democratic politicians in particular, who as IVAW member Adam Kokesh said to Congress are interested in “looking good instead of doing right,” placing such faith in politicians who won’t be tarred with the brush of “cutting and running” is a deeply cynical tack for the movement to take.

Olick and Robbins (1998) describe collective memories’ persistence as being traceable to the cultural resonance they strike, instrumental uses to which they are put, and inertia – the lack of adequate force to shake its hold. The cultural resonance of the image, as I’ve described above, is that it fits with our current story of the political class divide in this country. The distorted images we carry of the popular response to Vietnam have served all war-supporting political elites who would like to see all memory of antiwar resistance erased, but who are happy to see it shrunk. It serves the Republican party, which has sought to ally itself with working class people across a spectrum of social and economic issues, and who, in the question of war, militarism, and soldiers, is happy to have the broad struggle against the war and majority antiwar sentiment buried out of sight, and is thrilled to have more ammunition against a liberal elite. The Democratic Party is even selectively

served by this image in contradictory ways, as it at times gives cover to its own conservatism – the party can't stray too far from conservative workers – while paradoxically justifying its own abandonment of working class voters in its orientation to “liberal elites,” and the true conservative audience being sought by of the party in most recent elections, white suburban “soccer moms” and “Nascar Dad's,” who, when working class, are at the affluent upper-end.

Is there a force that might shake the inertia? I think the answer to that lies primarily in the movements against the current wars and occupation. If today's movement successfully gave lie to the notions that only an elite will oppose a war, and that working people will stand with the war-makers, then our recent past might be less obscured. A secondary force, however, would also be some kind of challenge to the reigning story of working-class conservatism. Judging by party identification, white workers are now around evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, a significant change from the New Deal; white workers have also supported Republican presidential candidates by wide margins in most elections since the 1970's (Abramowitz and Teixeira, 2008). Yet the “selective demobilization” of these voters, caused by their perception that the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties have narrowed on questions of the economy and social welfare, combined with the reduced outreach made by the Democratic Party, means that the real story of the working class vote is not who they vote for but why they don't vote most of the time (see Piven & Cloward 2000; Martin, Jenkins & Forbis 2004). The combination of Democratic abandonment and Republican wooing might together explain the vanishing working class voter, and the conservative voting pattern of those who continue to participate.

Measures of political orientation are not easily come by, with voting records being a poor stand-in. Which leads me back to the problem encountered throughout the period studied here. The white working class does not have, and has

not had for over half a century, meaningful institutional representation in this country, through labor or party. Without such forms through which to express demands, support, beliefs, or disagreements, the field is open for other groups, elites, organizations and institutions to present their own versions of working class political consciousness. These versions will have some accuracy, and many limits. Their partial and contradictory qualities help to explain why election experts see the white working class as “volatile” – as a demobilized, disorganized group (Teixeira). Which way they will go in the future will probably depend on what kinds of paths are laid out from without, which will centrally include what happens to the labor movement in the coming years.

The diversity of the “new working class,” and greater organization within public and service sector workers, has finally expanded the country’s understanding of who is in the working class. For the past decade there have been many promising signs that labor – the “traditional” white industrial and craft workers and the “new” public and service sector workers – takes the challenges of its own decline, economic instability, immigration policy, and national social policy (like healthcare) seriously. Again, an analysis of the future possibilities of the US labor movement is also beyond this current project, but I believe it is largely in labor’s hands whether workers in this country, of any race or ethnicity, achieve independent political representation that would dislodge the easy stereotype of conservatism.

Appendix: Bibliographic Note

The sources for this project fall into three main categories: materials drawn from historical archives, newspapers and magazines contemporary to the period studied, and books. As it is a study of memory and discourse, many sources that might in other contexts be considered “secondary” have served as “primary” source material for my research; and to a limited degree, the reverse is true as well.

All materials drawn from historical archives are cited within the text itself according to the following format, and making use of the following abbreviations. For material from Boxes or Cartons, the number of the box or carton is specified after the abbreviation “B” or “C”. Then, if the box or carton is organized by Folders or Files, the specific number or name of the folder follows the abbreviation “F.” Finally, I specify the specific set of papers the materials are drawn from, followed by the name of the collection itself. For example, if I quoted a pamphlet that I found in box 1, folder 3 of Paul Booth’s papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the notation reads B1F3 Paul Booth Papers, SHSW.

I made use of archives at the State Historical Society at Wisconsin (SHSW), reading the following papers. Individuals: Paul Booth, Lee Webb, Sidney Peck, and Fred Halstead Papers; Organizations: the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCCEWV), the Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace (LLAP), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

At the Swarthmore Peace Collection, I made use of AJ Muste’s papers, as well as their Vietnam Summer Collection, and only wish that I’d had more time to explore it more fully.

At Tamiment, besides extensive use of the alternative press microfilms. reading the *Militant*, the *Guardian*, and *New Left Notes* for the entire period covered here, I used numerous specific collections that contained materials covering the Trade Unionists for Peace, the GI movement, and high school antiwar organizing.

Berkeley’s Bancroft library had recently committed its Antiwar National File to microfilm when I visited in November of 2004, and I was able to access its contents through both microfilm and, in some cases, hard copy.

Each archive is organized differently, but I hope that the citations are sufficiently clear to be followed.

I also made extensive use of the contemporary New York Times (NYT), Los Angeles Times (LAT), Washington Post (WP), Chicago Times (CT), Christian Science Monitor (CSM), Wall Street Journal (WSJ), and to a lesser extent the New York Daily News, as well as reading Jimmy Wechsler’s columns in the old New York Post. All citations from these sources are in the text itself, by date.

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