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“IS THERE STILL SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE?”: THE IMPACT OF  
HISTORICAL ACTIVIST CAMPUS SUB-CULTURES ON CONTEMPORARY  
STUDENT PROTEST, 1998-2008

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## ABSTRACT

Many observers have noted a conspicuous lack of student activism in recent years compared with the flourishing of activism in the 1960s, yet there exists no systematic effort to assess that widespread perception. This research investigates the extent of student protest during the last decade, the nature of that protest, and the range of substantive claims advanced at protest events. Eighty colleges and universities were sampled from four categories based upon their history of campus activism, aimed at capturing the residue of the historical presence of activist sub-cultures. This design allows for an assessment of the impact of prior student activism on the likelihood of contemporary protest as well as the types of claims advanced on campuses during the last decade.

The sample of campuses for this study includes 80 colleges and universities selected from a dataset which included all four year institutions in the United States. A scheme was created to establish categories that denoted different levels of a history of activism—institutions with activism in the 1960s but not the 1990s, institutions with activism in the 1990s but not the 1960s, institutions with activism in both decades, and institutions that did not show any activism in either decade. A standard methodology was developed to identify student protest events at each campus using the NEWSBANK database. Evidence was compiled for each protest event to determine the frequency of protest, the claims articulated by participants, and other important characteristics, such as event size and interaction between protesters and law enforcement officials (if any police were present at an event).

The findings derived from this extensive dataset demonstrate that college and university students continue to be actively engaged in protest on campuses across the United States. However, the nature of the protest events has changed considerably since the 1960s, as the recent protest is rarely confrontational, in stark contrast to that of the 1960s wave of campus protests. An institution that experienced previous student activism in any decade—the 1960s, 1990s, or both—was more likely to witness student protest in the last decade than campuses that have not seen protests in earlier periods. Additionally, the type of claim advanced by participants—particularly issues of local self-interest versus those of a broader focus—was not related to any historical pattern of activism. Contemporary students at all types of institutions were more likely to mobilize around claims of broader social interest than those directed specifically at the academic institution where they were enrolled.

Contrary to widespread reports in the mass media, student protest still plays an integral role in student life on campuses across the country. Given the lack of scholarly research focusing on the full extent of recent student activism, these findings illustrate important recent trends in the frequency of student activism, the kinds of claims that are advanced, and the nature of protest actions. While student activism today looks increasingly distinct from that in the 1960s, it continues to be notable in its presence on campuses and demonstrates that there still appears to be something happening here, even if it is substantially less confrontational.

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## Introduction

“College students were once in the vanguard of political change, but not so today... to observers of political awareness among the young, the apathy is another sign that times have changed, and students have changed with them” according to the *Seattle Times* in October of 1998, reporting on the lack of student attention to a ballot initiative that jeopardized government affirmative action (Sanchez 1998). Observers of activism, particularly those in the media, have often been quick to compare the college and university students of today with their counterparts of earlier eras. Another article commenting on the lack of attention to the events preceding the Iraq War on campuses in New York City was quick to note that “...the activists are outnumbered by the apathetic” (Haberman et al. 2002). The thought of student activism often conjures images of campuses in the 1960s where student protest was relatively abundant and reports of confrontational conflict between the “establishment” and idealistic students were common. After detailing a number of grievances present in contemporary society, an article in the *Washington Post* concludes, “It's as though the gods of turmoil threw a party and nobody came. When was the last time you saw a street protest? Or a burning effigy? Or a teach-in? Or a boycott? It's kind of odd: We have the sense that this is an emergency, but open the window and give a listen. There aren't any sirens” (Segal 2008). Searching for the source of the lack of attention, one student interviewed for the same article speculated, “My sense is that nobody feels they can make a difference in the same way that students did in 1968” (Segal 2008).

The rarity of student activism in recent years has been noted by many observers, yet there exists no systematic effort to assess that widespread perception. This research

investigates the extent of student protest during the last decade, the nature of that protest, and the substantive claims advanced during student protest events. Eighty colleges and universities were sampled from four categories based upon their history of campus activism, aimed at capturing the variable historical presence of activist sub-cultures. This design allows for an assessment of the impact of prior student activism on the likelihood of contemporary protest, the nature of contemporary student protest, and types of claims advanced by student protesters on campuses in the last decade.

### **Review of Prior Research on Activist Sub-cultures**

College campuses vary dramatically in their likelihood of student activism and protest both over time and among themselves. Some institutions, such as the University of California at Berkeley, have earned a reputation for enduring student activism, while protest activity at many colleges and universities across the country remains relatively rare (Van Dyke 1998). In this section I review past research that shows that student activism on campuses endures from one activist era to another, discussing some of the mechanisms that have been proposed to explain such empirical continuity.

Local history and culture often help shape the collective identity of a community. That these same processes would also affect the frequency and type of student protest that occurs on campuses across the nation is not surprising. Van Dyke (1998) has proposed that activist sub-cultures exist on some college campuses and are partially responsible for subsequent activism that takes place on them; her research established a connection between campuses that experienced relatively higher student activism in the 1960s and campuses on which students were particularly active in the 1930s. In her research, Van

Dyke (1998) found that institutions with a history of activism in the past, particularly during the 1930s, were over four times more likely to experience student activism during the 1960s than institutions without a similar history of activism.

Establishing a correlation between activism on a campus in the 1930s with that in the 1960s helps to demonstrate the possible effect of campus sub-cultures of activism over time. Sub-cultural influence is not necessarily restricted temporally but can be realized over decades (Van Dyke 1998). Once a sub-culture of campus activism is developed, its effects can endure long after the original students who created it leave the institution. Although protest cycles wax and wane, the persistence of an activist sub-culture can impact appearance of activism in the future. Crossley (2008) pointed to a similar mechanism of politicizing networks that enable the re-emergence of activism on campuses by generating their own momentum, keeping a certain level of activism and commitment alive at an institution even during periods of non-activity. The constant flow of students through institutions provides a form of connection between academic cohorts. This “unbroken chain” provides the stability needed for political networks to develop unique characteristics that can be passed on to later cohorts (Crossley 2008). Networks enable the transmission of various resources, including ideas, knowledge, organizational structure, and demonstration tactics, among multiple generations of students.

In addition, activist sub-cultures are not confined to a single movement or issue, particularly during periods with relatively abundant activism (Van Dyke 1998). This may facilitate transmission for several reasons. First, it allows for exchange of participants among many different issues and social movement organizations. If sub-cultures only facilitated activity around one issue, gaining activist momentum around new social

problems and grievances would be more difficult. Additionally, if a sub-culture was restricted to one issue, it would likely disappear after attention to that particular social problem had waned. In the 1960s, activists organizing around diverse issues provided support to each other, establishing interconnectedness between different movements and creating a large network of individuals with interest in a variety of issues (Van Dyke 1998). In this manner, many single-issue advocates can combine to form a larger movement that creates greater momentum than any smaller organization would likely achieve separately.

Constituents and organizations, however, are only two examples of important resources that activists employ to further their agenda. Many aspects of the societal infrastructure that social movement organizations develop within can be mobilized effectively as resources, including, but certainly not limited to, media exposure, legitimacy, levels of affluence, money, degree of access to institutional centers, occupational structure, facilities, labor, and pre-existing networks (McCarthy & Zald 1977). Grassroots campaigns for women's suffrage at the state level first emerged where national suffrage organizations, such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association, sent resources, including organizers, speakers, and financial help (McCammon 2001). Similarly, activist sub-cultures are yet another resource aiding the development and sustenance of social movements. Sub-cultures can provide political connections, tactical knowledge, and leadership that may not otherwise be available. Access to, and ability to mobilize, these additional resources could help explain why campuses suspected of harboring activist subcultures had a significantly increased likelihood of protest in the 1960s compared to institutions without a similar history.



The presence of activist sub-cultures also suggests a deeper tradition of activism extending beyond mobilization around a single issue. Prior research on sub-cultures found that mobilization inspired by one social issue was related to subsequent emergence of mobilization around other movements (Van Dyke 1998). In addition, the likelihood of any protest event occurring on a campus is significantly increased after mobilization by multi-issue organizations, such as Students for a Democratic Society (Van Dyke 2003). On the assumption that activist sub-cultures are not confined temporally, similar patterns for campuses exhibiting a history of activism should still be evident for recent student protests. Some research indicates that this, in fact, may be the case. An activist legacy, measured in part by the presence of an SDS chapter on campus prior to 1966, made schools significantly more likely to experience both the early formation of a United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) chapter and labor related protest (Van Dyke et al. 2007). In addition, schools with a history of activism, particularly in the 1960s, were also more susceptible to experiencing a unionization campaign by graduate employees between 1996 and 2001 (Dixon et al. 2008).

The nature of activist sub-cultures on a campus can also affect the methods employed by student activists. Einwohner & Spencer's (2005) qualitative study on organizing campaigns implemented by students at two similar universities with the objective of convincing university administration to divest itself of ties with apparel manufacturers relying on sweatshop labor shows that, although the final objective was the same, the tactics employed by students at the two universities were quite different. Their findings led them to conclude "Whether cooperative or contentious in nature, both sets of claims used the locally prevalent notions of "how we do things here" to construct

the actions taken, and “proper” roles assumed, by local actors on the issue of sweatshops at each campus” (Einwohner & Spencer 2005). Social movements take different forms on different campuses. The work of activists both inside and outside the institutional structure may be partly determined by local culture and the legacy of past activism.

Finally, although not given significant attention in past research on student protest, the variable claims articulated by protest event participants may also be influenced by the presence of an activist sub-culture. In general, it is reasonable to suggest that students are likely to mobilize around issues they perceive as being most relevant to their immediate situation. Some observers of the lack of protest against the Iraq War in contrast to that of the Vietnam War suggest that the discrepancy can in part be attributed to changed circumstances directly affecting students, such as the threat of mandatory conscription (Haberman 2002). As types of issues and levels of attention they receive differ across campuses, activist sub-cultures can be expected to affect this aspect of student protest as well.

### **Other Institutional Factors Facilitating Campus Protest**

In addition to the presence of activist sub-cultures, certain other characteristics of universities make them more or less likely to experience student protest, including, most importantly, campus size and institutional prestige. The size of an institution has been shown to have a consistent effect on the occurrence of activism; institutions with higher enrollments are more likely to experience student protest (Dixon et al. 2008, Van Dyke 1998, 2003). Several studies, however, have shown exceptions to this trend. Soule (1997) found that size was not a significant predictor in the emergence of shantytown protests on

college campuses across the nation. Van Dyke (1998) proposed that this non-significant finding could be the result of either improved statistical models, or a shift in factors that influence student protest. Institutional size, while not found to be a direct predictor in the recent emergence of labor related protest on campuses, was a significant predictor of formation of a USAS chapter, which, in turn, was one of the most important predictors of labor related protest (Van Dyke et al. 2007). Since institution size was already a significant predictor of the presence of a USAS chapter, the addition of a variable indicating the presence of USAS chapter may have intervened in the relationship between institution size and the occurrence of labor related protest and rendered institution size insignificant.

The relative prestige of an institution has also been shown to consistently affect the likelihood of student protest. Other characteristics being equal, elite universities are more likely to spawn student activism (Dixon et al. 2008, Lipset 1972, McAdam 1988, Soule 1997, Van Dyke 1998, Van Dyke et al. 2007). A number of theories have been formulated to attempt to explain why the quality of an institution has such a significant effect on student activism. Lipset (1972) suggested that the presence of a higher proportion of students from high socio-economic backgrounds in the more prestigious schools, who generally exhibit higher rates of participation than students from low socio-economic backgrounds accounts for the relationship. McAdam (1988) also found that a majority of student participants in the Mississippi Freedom Summer program had an elite background. This research suggests that the higher participation rates at elite institutions may be more reflective of students' individual backgrounds, giving them a higher predisposition towards protest.

Other research, as well, contributes to our understanding of this phenomenon. Van Dyke (1998) took a slightly different approach to determining the effect of institutional prestige on student activism. In her analysis, she studied the effect of selectiveness of a school while controlling for the level of tuition and a school's public vs. private status, thought to better capture the economic resources available to students at an institution. The selectiveness of a school remained a significant indicator of student activism, while economic indicators did not. The effect of elite status of an institution, then, asserts an influence beyond just providing students with resources that may not be available to them at other schools (Van Dyke 1998). Studies also demonstrate that social movement organizations attempting to recruit students to participate in social movements often target elite institutions (McAdam 1988, Van Dyke et al. 2007). As expected, this practice can create a feedback loop. Recruiters target elite institutions, prompting students at those universities to become involved in activism, making them more likely to be targeted by recruiters in the future.

Although size and prestige seem to be the most consequential institutional indicators, there is some evidence for other school characteristics affecting the level of activism. Private schools, for instance, are more likely to foster student protest than public schools (Van Dyke 1998, Van Dyke et al. 2007). Similar to the impact of elite institutions, the greater level of resources often available at private schools could be the influencing factor. Additional research suggests that liberal arts colleges are more likely to foster protest than do other types of institutions (Lipset 1972, Soule 1997). Regional location of an institution within the United States may also help predict the emergence of student protest, particularly early forms activism around a new issue or protest tactic

(Soule 1997, Van Dyke 1998, Van Dyke et al. 2007). It should be noted, however, that evidence for many of these factors is not consistent across studies.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In this study, I gathered systematic evidence from 80 campuses sampled strategically to allow an evaluation of the affect of previous campus protest activity upon protest during the 1998-2008 period. My review above of past research on campus protest leads me to formulate the following hypotheses:

1. Student protest remains prevalent on college and universities campuses at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, protest is not as widespread as it was in the 1960s.
2. Activist sub-cultures continue to exert an influence on the likelihood of student protest. Schools with a previous history of protest will witness more protest events for the time period of interest, 1998-2008, than schools without a similar history.
3. Not only does a history of campus protest lead to a greater likelihood of protest events, but schools with such a history will also be more likely to witness protest claims for social changes beyond local, immediate campus-related ones.

### **Data and Methods**

The full sample of institutions of higher education for this research includes 80 colleges and universities selected from a dataset which included all four year institutions in the United States. The following framework was created to establish categories aimed at determining different patterns of a campus's history of activism—campuses with

evidence of activism in the 1960s but not the 1990s, campuses with evidence of activism in the 1990s but not the 1960s, campuses with evidence of activism in both decades, and campuses that showed no evidence of activism in either decade. A standard methodology was developed to identify student protest events for the recent decade at each campus using the NEWSBANK database. Basic information was compiled from newspaper stories for each event to determine the frequency of protest, the nature of the protest, the claims articulated by participants, and other important characteristics, such as protest size and any interaction between protesters and law enforcement officials (if any police were present at an event).

#### *Campus Sampling Procedures*

The colleges and universities used in this study were drawn from a larger dataset compiled by Van Dyke et al. (2007) which included all four year colleges and universities in the United States (N=1933). The institutions in the dataset were divided into four mutually exclusive categories—schools that experienced activism in the 1960s, but not the 1990s; those that experienced activism in the 1990s, but not the 1960s; those that experienced activism in both decades; and those that experienced activism in neither decade. The evidence about a campus's earlier history of activism was drawn from the records of earlier research on campus activism. Schools were determined to have a history of activism, thus likely to host an activist sub-culture, if they had activism in the 1960s. This was indicated by the presence of an early SDS chapter on campus prior to 1966, or at least one student participant in the Mississippi Freedom Summer Program in 1964 (Van Dyke 1998). A variable measuring presence of an early SDS chapter was already included in the Van Dyke et al. (2007) dataset, while a listing of all schools that

contributed participants to Mississippi Freedom Summer was provided by Dr. Doug McAdam, who has conducted extensive research on this program (see McAdam 1988). A discussion of how the Mississippi Freedom Summer program data was incorporated with the data provided by Van Dyke et al. (2007) is included in Appendix A.

In addition, I also wanted to investigate student protest at schools that were not identified as activist in the 1960s, but that exhibited a more recent trend of activism in the 1990s. Schools were considered to have a recent trend in activism if an early USAS chapter was formed on campus in 1998, the first year the organization appeared, or if any protest activity on campus was reported in the 1994-1995 school year. Both of these variables were taken from the Van Dyke et al. (2007) data set.

After the measures for a history of campus activism were determined, the original dataset was partitioned into the four mutually exclusive categories. In total, 112 of the institutions were determined to have a continuing tradition of activism, with the occurrence of student activist activity in both the 1960s and 1990s. In addition, 124 schools exhibited a history of activism in the 1960s but no recent trend of activism in the 1990s. Conversely, 84 schools were determined to have a recent trend of activism in the 1990s but no history of activism in the 1960s. The remaining 1,597 institutions in the dataset exhibited no student activism in either decade. Twenty schools were selected randomly from each category to be included in the sample. This was done by generating a random variable, ordering the cases by that variable, and then selecting the first twenty schools in each category for which access could be gained to a local newspaper.

### *Data Collection*

Evidence of campus protests was sought in searches of newspaper reports. It was my original intention to use campus newspapers as the source to gather data on student protest activity between 1998 and 2008. The lack of a uniform search engine across campus newspapers, however, limited my ability to perform consistent searches across sources. Instead, I chose to use a local newspaper from the community in which each campus was located. Access to local newspapers was gained through NEWSBANK, allowing me to use a consistent method of searching for traces of protest events across sources. The basic search string used to identify possible events was “protest OR demonstration OR rally OR “sit-in” AND student”. In addition, the name of each school was added to the keywords to try to limit the number of search engine hits to activity at the specific campus of interest. Newspapers were searched by year, and all articles generated were scanned to identify any potential protest activity.

Although there has been some debate concerning the use of newspaper sources for information on events in the public forum (see Earl et al. 2004, Woolley 2000), I determined that this was the best method available for data collection for this project. As there is no full enumeration of protest events that occur each year on campuses, newspaper reports are one of the few traces that remain after a protest event has taken place. Obviously, it is impractical to believe that all events that occurred on a campus appeared in the local newspaper. The size of the event and whether the main issues articulated by participants align with current national or local issue-attention cycles helps determine what issues are deemed “newsworthy”, and impacts whether the event receives coverage by the local media (McCarthy et al. 1996). Once picked up by the media,



however, the event characteristics considered “hard-news” items, such as the who, what, when, where, and why, are generally reported accurately (Earl et al. 2004). While there may be some bias in coverage, once an event is identified, newspaper articles provide a useful account of what specifically took place and what claims were being articulated.

As there is a wide variety of activist activity that occurs on or near college campuses, firm criteria were established to identify events of possible interest. First, a protest event must have taken place on or very near the campus of the school of interest. All protest events that took place on campus were included, unless the article specifically mentioned that the participants were not students. Events that took place near but not on campus were included if they were organized by, or almost exclusively comprised of, students from the school of interest. Reports of students attending an event in another city, or community events organized by outside organizations were not included. This was done, in part, because my primary focus was student generated protest, particularly that which occurred on campus, and also the result of concerns about consistency in reporting on these types of events. Many reports only mentioned student participation in these off-campus events if a student happened to be one of the participants approached for comment. Rather than being accurate reports of student participation in off-campus events, I concluded that these articles are more likely to be a recording of who was approached for comment by news sources reporting on an event.

Events identified as occurring on or near college campuses had to meet several additional qualifications to be included in the final analyses. Criteria employed to determine a protest event in the study of protest policing by Soule & Davenport (2009) were used as a model to establish my additional rules for inclusion. First, more than one

participant had to be involved in the event; that is it had to be considered a collective action. Second, the event had to take place in the public forum. Resolutions passed or statements issued by organizations during member meetings were not considered to have taken place in the public forum. Third, the participants at the event must have articulated a specific claim, either in support or opposition to an intended target. This was perhaps the most important consideration in determining whether or not an event would be included in the analysis. Fundraisers and organized volunteer service events were not included because these events do not necessarily articulate claims, but only show support for a person or organization. Events that were intended only to remember or honor an individual or group, Martin Luther King, victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, or students who were injured or killed in automobile accidents, for example, were not included as, again, there was no clear claim articulated by the participants. Events that were held primarily in honor but also articulated a secondary claim, such as a vigil in honor of Matthew Shepard that also raised awareness of hate crimes, were included. A complete list of criteria used to determine which events were included in the final sample is included in Appendix B.

#### *Coding of Articles*

After articles were collected and culled for inclusion in the analyses by the criteria discussed above, they were coded for several important indicators of basic concepts. In addition to recording the date of the event and the institution where it occurred, the number of participants, their primary claim, and the type of event, if mentioned, was also recorded. Along with the issue articulated as the primary claim, a separate variable for valence, whether participants were for or against the particular issue at the heart of the

claim, was also included. This allowed me to capture an additional piece of information about the event without having to include twice the number of categories under claims. For example, instead of having two separate categories for the Iraq War—in support of the Iraq War and against the Iraq War—there was one category, the Iraq War, and events could be distinguished as being for or against it by looking at the valence. The list of claims and event form (rally, march, vigil, etc.) were adapted from the collaborative *New York Times* protest project (Soule and Davenport 2009). I also added five variables to capture confrontations between participants and law enforcement officials—any mention of police presence at an event, police use of force, incidence of arrests, use of force by participants, or property damage by participants.

After collecting the initial claim information on each protest event, a dichotomous variable was created that divided the claims into two categories—“immediate” versus “non-immediate”. “Immediate” claims were determined to be those most related to the direct, local self-interest of the students. Claims were considered to be immediate if they targeted any aspect of the institution where the event took place. “Non-immediate” claims, then, were any issue targeted outside of the immediate environment of the institution. This allowed for a comparison between two different orientations of protest events and a test of my third hypothesis.

To test the second hypothesis, concerning the affect of a history of activism on recent student protest, negative binomial regression was employed. Negative binomial regression is most appropriate for use with count data, and my dependent variable for this analysis was a count of the total number of events that occurred at each institution in the sample over the ten year period of interest. In addition, a regression model was ideal for

this analysis because it allowed me to test for a significant difference among each of my categories of activism, while controlling for additional extraneous independent variables. Both the size of the institution and the level of prestige were controlled for, as previous research has shown that they both consistently affect the occurrence of student protest. Information on institution size, indicated by total enrollment for Fall 2008, was gathered from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. A variable measuring the "prestige" of an institution was also included, as institutions with higher levels of prestige are more likely to experience student protest. "Prestige" was measured by an institution's ranking, which ranged from 1-5, taken from the *Gourman Report* (Gourman 1996). The scores on this measure for the 80 campuses were taken from the Van Dyke et al. (2007) dataset.

To determine the most common claims articulated at the protest events, I summed the total number of events that occurred at all the institutions in the sample for the time period of interest and calculated the proportion of events that focused on each issue. It should be noted that there were a few issues included as possible claims that were not consistent targets over the entire period of analysis. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, only appeared as targets of activism from 2001 and 2002, respectively. These examples, however, were relatively rare; the large majority of claims targeted were issues of interest throughout the entire period of analysis.

## **Results**

The results of my analyses appropriate to each of my three hypotheses will be presented in order.

**Hypothesis #1:** Student protest remains prevalent on college and universities campuses at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, protest is not as widespread as it was in the 1960s.

The evidence I have gathered from the previous decade show plenty of support for this hypothesis. In total, there were 750 events identified in the 80 schools over the 10 year period, roughly an average of 9.4 events per school. Table 1 shows the breakdown of events by the primary claim articulated by the students at each protest event. Clearly, with an average of almost 1 protest event reported each year per campus, the widespread perception that student activism has disappeared is not supported. Student protest may not occur anywhere near as frequently as it did in the 1960s on college and university campuses in the United States; nevertheless, it continues as a regular occurrence on campuses.

Table 1: Claims articulated at campus protest events, 1998-2008.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Total Number of Events</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Events</b>
Academic Institution	227	30.3%
War/Peace	157	20.9%
Civil Rights/Civil Liberties	83	11.1%
International Human Rights/Conflict	77	10.3%
Violence/Hate Crimes	76	10.1%
Local/State/Federal Government	18	2.4%
Immigration	14	1.9%
Other <sup>1</sup>	98	13.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>1</sup>Claims included in "Other": Military/ROTC, Death Penalty, Gun Control, Legalization of Illegal Substances, Animal Rights, Religious Issues, Drinking/Drunk Driving/Drug Use, Environmental Issues, Housing Issues, Abortion, Politician, Business/Corporation, Media, Smoking, AIDS, Other, Cannot Be Determined

In addition, the nature of recent student protest stands in stark contrast to the events of the 1960s. For all of the institutions in my sample, the presence of police was reported at only 10.6% of the events. Table 2 shows the breakdown of police presence at a protest event by the number of participants in attendance for those events where an estimate of size could be made. The largest events (more than 1,000) are more than twice as likely to have police present than the smallest (25 or fewer). A chi-square test was conducted on this distribution and was shown to be significant at the  $p=.05$  level. Therefore, the larger the protest event, the more likely it is that police were present, a finding consistent with research on protests in off-campus locations. A chi-square test was also conducted between the four categories of activism history and presence of police at an event, but no relationship was found to be significant, suggesting that protests on campuses with a history of activism are no more likely to draw police presence than those without such a history.

Table 2: Police presence at protest events by number of participants, 1998-2008<sup>2</sup>

Number of Participants	Police Presence at Event		Total
	Yes	No	
1-25	101 (91.8 %)	9 (8.2%)	110 (100.0%)
26-50	104 (93.7%)	7 (6.3%)	111 (100.0%)
51-100	87 (85.3%)	15 (14.7%)	102 (100.0%)
101-500	106 (90.6%)	11 (9.4%)	117 (100.0%)
501-1000	22 (75.9%)	7 (24.1%)	29 (100.0%)
1000 or more	9 (81.8%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (100.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>429</b> <b>(89.4%)</b>	<b>51</b> <b>(10.6%)</b>	<b>480</b> <b>(100.0%)</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2$  (df =5) = 11.0826 Pr = 0.050

Recall that whether there had been an arrest of one or more participants by law enforcement officials at an event was also recorded. In total, only fourteen events reported at least one participant arrest, or roughly 1.9% of events. A chi-square test was conducted between the incidence of at least one arrest and both the number of participants present and the category of historical institutional activism; however, neither test showed a significant relationship. Only four of the event reports mentioned any use of force by police, which includes only .05% of all events. Most surprisingly perhaps, for the 750 events identified, there were no reports of the use of force by participants or any property damage by participants.

Prior research on protest of the late 1960s and early 1970s paints a much different picture of the interaction between participants and law enforcement officials. In the 1968-

<sup>2</sup> Note that the total number of events presented here sum to only 480. There were 270 events included in the sample for which the newspaper report(s) gave no mention of exact or estimated size.

1969 academic year, over 6% of the more than 2,300 colleges and universities in the country experienced at least one protest in which participants employed violent tactics (Bayer & Astin 1969). When restricting the focus exclusively to four-year universities, however, those estimates jump to 70% for private institutions and 42% of public institutions (Bayer & Astin 1969). As my sample only included four year institutions, these figures may reflect a more realistic measure of the disparity. Another study that focused on earlier disruptive campus protests found that during the 1968-1969 academic year, 17% of the universities sampled had experienced a violent protest, and approximately 31% of the schools experienced a non-violent disruptive protest (McCarthy et al. 2004). In the same analysis, 12.5% of the protest events had reported participant injuries, 11.4% had reported property damage, and in 52.3% of the protests participants were arrested (McCarthy et al. 2004). The President's Commission on Campus Unrest (1970) reported that in the 1968-1969 and 1969-1970 academic years, over 4,000 and 7,200 students were arrested, respectively, across the nation for their involvement in violent and disruptive protests. Recent student protest has been remarkably tame in comparison. These insights are also consistent with the findings of McAdam et al. (2010), who concluded from their analysis of protest events that occurred in Chicago between 1960 and 1990 that the percentage of events that exhibited any disruptive features, including injuries, property damage, and arrest, was much higher in 1970 and has been declining in recent decades.

Research studies on media attention to protest events have found that some of the most important predictors of event coverage are “newsworthiness”, which can include the intensity of the event, occurrence of violence, and presence of law enforcement officials



(Earl et al. 2004, McCarthy et al. 2007). This would suggest, then, that the student protest events characterized by police or participant use of force, or property damage by participants would be the most likely to be covered by the local media. This being the case, it is not very likely that the major decline in reported campus protest or the almost total absence of confrontational protest is the result of changes in newspaper coverage of protest events. Rather, my findings appear to reflect an important shift in the nature and tone of student protest and academic institutions' reactions to it since the 1960s.

**Hypothesis #2:** Activist sub-cultures continue to exert an influence on the likelihood of college and university student protest. Schools with a previous history of protest will witness more protest events for the time period of interest, 1998-2008, than schools without a similar history.

Table 3: Mean number of protest events for each institutional type, 1998-2008.

<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Mean Number of Events</b>
Activism in both decades N=20	19.95
Activism in the 1960s, but not 1990s N=20	7.95
Activism in the 1990s, but not 1906s N=20	9.05
Activism in neither decade N=20	0.55
Total N=80	9.38

Table 3 shows the mean number of events for each history of activism type of institution over the ten year study period. Negative binomial regression was employed to determine if the mean number of events for each type of institution were significantly

different from one another. The results of the regression analysis are displayed in Table 4. In the first model, only the institutional activism types are included in the analysis. Each institutional type was coded as a dummy variable, with schools that did not have a history of activism in either decade serving as the omitted category. In the second model, both the size and prestige of the institutions were included.

Table 4: Results of the negative binomial regression analysis with regression coefficients and standard errors

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
Activism in both decades	3.59 (.42)**	1.84 (.46)**
Activism in the 1960s but not 1990s	2.67 (.43)**	1.70 (.42)**
Activism in the 1990s but not 1960s	2.80 (.43)**	1.82 (.42)**
Enrollment Size		.025 (.01)**
Institutional Prestige		.73 (.19)**

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

Institutions that have any type of activism history are significantly more likely to have experienced student protest in the last decade than institutions without any history. This effect somewhat diminishes, but still remains significant, when enrollment size and level of institutional prestige are controlled for. Similar regression analyses were conducted using each of the institutional types as the omitted category. A significant difference was found between schools with a history of activism in both the 1960s and 1990s and schools with a tradition of activism only in one decade or the other only when extraneous variables were not controlled for. Once enrollment size and institutional prestige were added to the model, however, the differences became non-significant. This indicates that while schools with any history of activism are more likely to experience student protest in the recent period than schools that have never had a tradition of

activism, schools that experienced activism in both the 1960s and 1990s were no more likely to experience student protest in the last decade than schools who only had a history of activism in one historical decade or the other.

**Hypothesis #3:** Not only does a history of campus protest lead to a greater likelihood of protest events, but it will also be more likely to generate claims for social changes beyond local, immediate campus-related ones.

Table 5: Cross tabulation of “immediate” versus “non-immediate” protest events by institutional type, 1998-2008

<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Number of Immediate Events</b>	<b>Number of Non-Immediate Events</b>	<b>Total</b>
Activism in both decades	126 (31.6%)	273 (68.4%)	399 (100.0%)
Activism in the 1960s but not 1990s	54 (34.0%)	105 (66.0%)	159 (100.0%)
Activism in the 1990s but not 1960s	45 (24.9%)	136 (75.1%)	181 (100.0%)
No activism in either decade	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)	11 (100.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b> <b>(30.4%)</b>	<b>522</b> <b>(69.6%)</b>	<b>750</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2$  (df =3) = 3.8903 Pr = 0.274

A cross tabulation between “immediate” and “non-immediate” claims articulated at protest events for all types of institutions is shown in Table 5. For all types of institutions, there were significantly more claims of broader social interest articulated than local, self-interest ones. Of the 750 events in the sample, in 69.9% of them claims targeting social issues outside of the academic institution were advanced. Not controlling for other extraneous variables, a chi-square test showed a non-significant difference (at the  $p=.05$  level) between the numbers of events with “immediate” versus “non-

immediate” claims at institutions with different histories of campus activism. The evidence, then, does not support my third hypothesis, and previously active campuses are not any more likely to see “non-immediate” protests than those without such a history.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

These several analyses demonstrate that college and university students continue to remain actively engaged in protest on campuses across the United States, although not as frequently as they did during the activist wave of the 1960s. The nature of the protest events has changed considerably since the 1960s, however, as recent protest is rarely confrontational. This may indicate that a shift has taken place in the way students organize and conduct protest events.

While schools with any history of activism were shown to be more likely to experience student protest in the last decade than schools without any history of activism, schools with activism in both the 1960s and 1990s were no more likely to experience protest than schools with a trend of activism in one decade or the other. This may support the notion that activist sub-cultures exist at some universities, however, these sub-cultures probably do not remain static. It is very likely that as institutions evolve and expand over time, new activist sub-cultures emerge or are transformed. Sub-cultures at some institutions may weaken over time, while other institutions may develop sub-cultures that render them more likely to experience protest in the future.

Additionally, this analysis did not show evidence for an impact of a history of activism on the type of claim advanced by protesters. While a majority of the protest events focused on issues outside of the students’ local campus, there were a significant

number of claims relating to the academic institutions themselves. All types of institutions, however, exhibited a surprisingly—given my expectations—similar ratio of events with immediate claims to events with non-immediate claims.

While these findings did show support for the existence of an activist tradition that made schools with any history of activism more likely to experience recent student protest, a more nuanced trend may have emerged if campus newspapers had been available for analysis. While local community newspapers likely captured the most significant instances of campus protest, school newspapers would probably provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent of activism. In addition, as schools were included in the sample only if they had a local newspaper archived in an online database for the entire ten year period of interest, this sampling decision tended to favor institutions located in larger or more prominent cities. While I have no way of empirically evaluating whether a bias actually exists or the effect it may have had on these findings, this may have affected both the types of institutions that were included in my sample and the amount of coverage campus events received in the local newspaper. Protest events happening at schools located in New York City or Boston, for example, were subject to a much higher level of competition from other newsworthy happenings to be included in the city's local newspaper compared to protest events that occurred in cities that do not usually generate as much news, such as Durham, North Carolina.

Even with these possible limitations, this research makes an important contribution to the study of recent student activism. Contrary to reports from the mass media, student protest still appears to play an integral role in student life on campuses across the country. In the face of a conspicuous lack of scholarly research focusing on the

full extent of recent student activism, these findings illustrate important trends in the frequency of student activism, the type of claims organized against, and the nature of these actions. While student activism today looks increasingly different from that in the 1960s, it continues to occur on campuses and demonstrates that there still appears to be “something” happening here, even if its basic features have changed.

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## Appendix A

Incorporating Mississippi Freedom Summer Data (McAdam 1988) into the Dataset from  
“Manufacturing Dissent: Labor Revitalization, Union Summer and Student  
Protest” (Van Dyke et al. 2007)

Schools that contributed Freedom Summer Participants were listed by official institution name in 1964. There were a few situations that required additional adaptation for inclusion in the Union Summer data set:

- Schools that changed names between 1964 and 2007 were listed under the institution name as it appeared in the Union Summer dataset.
  - i.e. Atlanta University is now Clark Atlanta University
- Schools incorporated into larger institution systems, for example City University of New York or State University of New York, were included under the institution they are currently a part of.
  - i.e. Sacramento State was entered under California State University—Sacramento
- If a general school name was given but had more than one campus or branch listed in the Union Summer dataset, the participants were listed under the main/flagship campus for that institution unless otherwise specified by specific location/campus.
  - i.e. Penn State was listed under Pennsylvania State University—main campus.

Not all of the schools that contributed Freedom Summer Participants could be included in the Union Summer dataset. There were several reasons for this:

- A few of the institutions that contributed participants have closed since 1964. Most of these institutions were community colleges or junior colleges.
- The specific institution could not be identified due to multiple institutions with the same name in the Union Summer data set. The founding dates of the institutions were checked to determine if the correct school could be identified before schools were excluded.
  - i.e. St. Mary’s College. There were several St. Mary’s Colleges in existence in 1964.
- A few institutions were incorporation into other institutions that were already included on the list of contributing schools.
  - i.e. Raymond College has been incorporated into the University of the Pacific. The University of the Pacific was also included in the school listing for Freedom Summer, and was therefore already identified as contributing participants.

## Appendix B

### Complete List of Criteria for Including a Protest Event in Dataset

- Events must have occurred in the public forum.
- Participants must have articulated a clear claim in support of or in opposition to an identified target.
- More than one participant had to be involved in the event.
- Event must have occurred on campus or very near campus.
- Events that took place off but near campus must have been organized by or exclusively comprised of students at the institution of interest.
- Announcements of events were included as long as the announcement was in reasonable proximity in time to the event and the event organization details were fully formed and definite.
- Rallies to encourage voting were not included.
- Newspaper articles that mentioned repeated actions, for example weekly vigils, while reporting on an action of interest were only coded for the specific event of focus in the article. Not enough information was provided for the regular actions for each event to be coded separately.
- Letter writing and telephone campaigns were not included as they were not considered to have taken place in the public forum.
- Petitions were not included unless there was a specific event at which signatures were collected.
- Resolutions passed by student government organizations were not included.
- Events in which a student organized others not affiliated with the institution to protest, the homeless for example, were not included.
- Boycotts were included only if there was a public event which initiated the action.

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