

**"The Two Are Inseparable":
Did Personal or Political Beliefs Move Students to Protest?**

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I. CONCEPTION: INTRODUCTION

As a result of the United States' involvement in Vietnam there was a certain intellectual climate in the United States that was mirrored by its young on college campuses around the country. Historians of ideas try to capture the climate, the feelings and opinions, of a people in a history by studying what was left behind by the people whose thoughts and feelings helped to create the climate. Almost anything can be said to make up an intellectual climate and it can be argued that one would have to begin with the debut of history to correctly take into context the climate of any certain period. In this history intellectual climate will refer mainly to the correspondences and publications of the people involved during a limited time period and the events that gave reason to the correspondences and publications.¹

The protests of the United States public were carried out, among other places, on college campuses that can be studied by looking at one of the members of the society of higher education where some of these protests took place. Americans felt strongly about involvement in Vietnam, as was evident on college campuses, but one must wonder if this concern was due to the evolution of a hatred for what the United States was doing in Vietnam or was it that the war hit closer and closer to home with each and every casualty it claimed. I believe that the intellectual climate on college campuses was not only of a political, public, nature but that it also had personal, private, meaning

to those involved in the protest of the war.

To test my hypotheses that the eruption of feelings at Sweet Briar College was not only political but also personal I had to do a great deal of reading between the lines. I first read all of the information in the archives that I found pertinent then I scoured the files for anything else that might relate to my topic of research. I then read the speech titled "Twelve Days in May" given by the Dean of the College during the academic year 1969-1970, Catherine S. Sims, for the Alumnae College at Reunion 1970.² I spoke to Professor Richards about what he might remember from the time; then I read his article for the spring 1989 alumnae magazine on the events of May 1970.³

In my paper I plan to give some of the events that lead up to the protests at Sweet Briar in May 1970 beginning with an event that I believe marks a true beginning to the protest movement at Sweet Briar.⁴ I then will give the events I found to be particularly important to my topic in such a way as to, hopefully, support my hypotheses. I will end my study less than a year from its beginning at a special faculty meeting in May concerning students' political activities in the next academic year.⁵ This seems like an appropriate end point to this history not only because of the constraints of this paper but because there was very little political protest at Sweet Briar after the Spring of 1970 as a result of the Vietnam conflict and great difficulty in finding out what any one student involved in the protests did with her summer.⁶

II. PREGNANCY: NARRATIVE

War in Vietnam began long before Sweet Briar College's "Twelve Days in May" and one might wonder why it took so long for the Sweet Briar population to become concerned about the war. In the last chapel talk of the 1969-1970 academic year, Sweet Briar President Anne Gary Pannell spoke of "revolution" consisting of nine-tenths "evolution", this leads one to the conclusion that the events of May 1970 were not a spontaneous outbreak of consciousness, as the policy statement of the Student Strike/Steering Committee would have us believe, but the end result of a great deal of concern.⁸ In truth, the community had followed the war with concern for some time but due to the scope of this study I will begin in October 1969 at the time of the Moratorium.

In October of 1969 there was a Moratorium held on the Sweet Briar College campus for the purpose of educating the community about happenings in the Vietnam conflict, this event coincided with demonstrations against the war throughout the United States.⁸ A number of letters to the editor of the Sweet Briar News appeared after an editorial comment called the Moratorium, ". . . a rather innocuous restatement of the obvious." One letter stated that, "If there is anything that we should do on this apathetic campus, it is to 'restate the obvious'. . .", and that such a restatement would be, ". . . a clear and undesirable statement of the impatience of students with the lagging-

on of the War in Viet Nam." One of the main arguments against the Moratorium was that it was a waste of time; that accusation was quelled by Professor Richards in writing to the paper and saying that, ". . . no one should be fooled into thinking that the educational process is so sacred that it always comes before participation in public life." After the Moratorium and the debate over its pros and cons were over the Sweet Briar community continued to be what some might consider apathetic.⁹ This argument over the usefulness of the Moratorium shows personal interest in that there were students that believed the Sweet Briar community was too apathetic about the war or conversely that the community already knew all it needed to know, and political interest through the fact that it had to have support to be conceived.

Paint and Patches, a student organization, presented "Viet-Rock" March 6-7, 1970. This play was in protest to the war in Vietnam and satirized various attitudes toward the Vietnam War. It was obviously performed with the approval of someone in the college's administration due to the fact that it was held in the school's auditorium.¹⁰ The personal and political concerns and of at least the governing body of Paint and Patches is shown in choosing to present "Viet-Rock" instead of the myriads of other, non-protest, plays they could have performed. Then almost two months later Sweet Briar broke out of her pathetic apathy and made her voice heard.

April 30, 1970 marked President Nixon's announcement that United States troops had invaded Cambodia to destroy PAVN/VC "sanctuaries and supplies".¹¹ This was the spark that started the

protest fire under the women at Sweet Briar College, in some the announcement aroused feelings of unjustness, others regarded it as a politically correct or incorrect move in the fight to end the war in Vietnam. Within ten days what Dean Sims later deemed "Twelve Days in May" had begun. A student rally held on Thursday, May 7 consisted mainly of signing a petition written by President James Hester of New York University with the intent of convincing President Pannell of the campus wide support of the anti-war sentiment of the petition.

President Pannell refused to sign the petition for personal reasons despite the fact that over half of Sweet Briar's faculty and students had signed the petition to influence President Nixon politically. Instead she forwarded the letter to President Nixon and requested that he take into consideration the support the petition had gained.¹² The Monday after the student rally a teach-in concerning the Cambodian crisis was scheduled; there were to be talks, question and answer sessions, and discussions as to what Sweet Briar could do to end the war.¹³

On the eleventh, after the teach-in, Sweet Briar students met and voted informally to voluntarily suspend classes to stay on campus or return home to continue individual interests concerning Vietnam. This proposal was presented to the faculty of Sweet Briar college at a special meeting on May 12 and Passed by a vote of 71 for, 6 opposed, and 2 abstentions. The proposal was presented by Miss Barton, a professor of art, and ". . . after considerable discussion. . ." it was

agreed that if a student wished she could continue classes until the end of the year as scheduled or she could take her grades as of May 11 without taking exams.¹⁴ Political productivity was the expected course for the student who chose to begin her summer May 11, whether through educating herself and others or taking action, but the college left the decisions up to the personal beliefs of the students.

A question was raised concerning whether or not students could remain on campus until the end of the examination period in the first issue of the Sweet Briar Free Press by Stevie Norris, an editor. This was quickly answered in the second issue by Ms. Jester, the Dean of Students, in an article stating that students other than seniors were required to leave within twenty four hours after the last examination period as opposed to the traditional ruling that one must leave within that time frame after their last exam had been taken. This choice was also left up to the students, they could either stay on campus to work for their political beliefs or go where ever they thought they could have the most impact. In her speech "Twelve Days in May" Dean Sims stated her concern about whether or not students actually used that time for constructive purposes or just to get out of exams and classes. Due to the scope of this study, one can only speculate as to whether or not the time was used constructively.¹⁵

The President of Sweet Briar College spoke at the last chapel meeting of the 1969-1970 academic year on May 12, 1970 about the

role of a college in the Vietnam protest movements. Pannell stated her thoughts on the student strikes by quoting Cornfold and saying that a college should be a "unique community, a silent reasonable world where the only action is thought."¹⁶ Student opposition was presented by Miss Norris in the Sweet Briar Free Press of May 19. Miss Norris wrote, in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson, of the destructiveness of separating education and politics. Miss Norris stated that, "The two are inseparable. It is education which leads to political awareness. And political awareness is something that everyone who holds a vote should have or be educated towards."¹⁷

It is not clear when the Steering or Strike Committee was formed but since it was responsible for many of the opinions appearing in the Sweet Briar Free Press which was first produced on May 13 and the memo to faculty on May 11, so it can safely be assumed that it was formed on or before that date. In addition to the Free Press the Steering Committee was responsible for Princess Caradja of Rumania and Jeff Bigellow speaking on campus.¹⁸

As a result of the anti-administration, anti-Nixon views that seemed so prevalent on Sweet Briar's campus, mainly due to their publication in the Free Press, a group of students formed the Give-Nixon-a-Chance Committee. In its statement of purpose this committee said that it wished, ". . . to educate both the community and the area from a rational vs. an emotional standpoint;" obviously the Give-Nixon-a-Chance Committee thought that those holding opposing beliefs brought their personal feelings to the protest and not their political

reasoning. This committee was responsible for William Ruckleshaus on May eighteenth and Winton Blount on May twentieth, the Assistant Attorney General and the Postmaster General, respectively, speaking at Sweet Briar.¹⁹

In a special meeting of the faculty on May 28 there was a proposal passed to allow students interested in participating in political activities to take the week of October 29- November 4, 1970 off to go to Washington, D.C. This was proposed and passed, one would deduce, due to the interest shown in politics by the student body during May but this option, like the rest of the options the faculty allowed was exercised at the discretion of the student involved.

III. BIRTH: CONCLUSION

In the last several hundred words there has been a strong argument in support of the theory that the protests of May 1970 at Sweet Briar College were not only based on private but also public opinion and mirrored the feelings created when the rest of the country coupled personal and political opinions to create an intellectual climate unique to that time and place. On the one hand there is an argument for the private opinions fueling the protests and, on the other, there is an almost equally strong argument for political opinions being the spark to protest; this shows that they must share equal roles in the ignighting of protest. As a result of the evidence put forth in this history one can only deduce that factors of not only personal but

political belief played an important part in the call to protest that the students at Sweet Briar and other citizens of the United States answered.

NOTES

¹John Tosh, The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history (Longman: London, 1982)

69. The term "intellectual climate" is taken, with all due respect, from this work.

²Catherine S. Sims, "Twelve Days in May" Sweet Briar College Alumnae Magazine (Sweet Briar: Sweet Briar, 1970) 2-7. The speech was published in its original form intended for oral presentation, which caused some confusion as to Dean Sims' meaning. These confusions were aired in editions of the Sweet Briar News appearing in the fall of 1970.

³Michael Richards, "The Spring of Seventy at Sweet Briar" Sweet Briar College Alumnae Magazine (Sweet Briar: Sweet Briar, 1989) 14-16. I read this to give myself an idea about what people who were there thought about the protests years later.

⁴I chose this event as the starting point of my history because there were no significant events earlier that were related to my topic. I also thought that if I chose an event closer to the May protests I would not give the impression that the protests were a product of evolution.

⁵"Faculty Minutes 1969-1970" (Filed as "1969-1970 Faculty Minutes), (Sweet Briar Faculty Secretary 1969-1970, Special Meeting, May 28, 1970) 1. In this meeting it was proposed and accepted that

Sweet Briar students who showed an interest could take October 29, 1970- November 4, 1970 off to promote their personal choice for office, particularly "freedom candidates."

⁶The Sweet Briar newspapers of fall 1970 do not mention anything about student involvement during their summer breaks or any new or continuing protests, nor do any of the other sources consulted.

⁷"The Sweet Briar Free Press of 1970" (Filed as "1970 SBC Free Press") The one page policy statement of the Student Strike/Steering Committee appears in this file with no date of conception, publication, or reception by any of the parties involved.

⁸Gabriel Kolko, Anatomy of a War: the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience. (Random House: New York, 1985) 610. The chronology of this book states that there were anti-war demonstrations throughout the United States on October 15, 1969, the date of Sweet Briar's Moratorium.

⁹Lee Giannakis, Michael Richards, and Josephine Shaw, "Letters to the Editor" and "Editorial", Sweet Briar News. Giannakis, (Vol.43-No.2 Friday, October 10, 1969) 2. Richards, (Vol.43-No.3 Friday, October 17, 1969) 2. Shaw, (Vol.43-No.1 Friday, October 3, 1969) 2. J. Shaw wrote the editorial, L. Giannakis wrote a letter condemning the view in the editorial for the next edition from a student perspective, and M. Richards wrote a letter from a faculty perspective for the third edition.

¹⁰"Student Life at Sweet Briar 1969-1970" (Filed as "1969-1970")

"Viet-Rock" which gives the time, place, and a brief description of the play. The Sweet Briar News also ran an article by Kathy Cummings promoting the performance in Vol.43-No.14 Friday, March 6, 1970.

¹¹ Allan R. Millett, ed., A Short History of the Vietnam War.

(Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1978) 151. In this book's chronology the reason for attacking Cambodia is given. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam. (Oxford University Press: New York, 1978) 523, 526. This book includes a glossary which defines the PAVN/VC as the People's Army of Vietnam (North)/Viet Cong.

¹²"Profile of the Student Body, 1969" (Filed as "1969 Students") This file contains notes on the student rally taken by Dean of Students, Dorothy Jester, which includes the first mention of Hester's petition and the Sweet Briar community's support of it; there is also a copy of the cover letter which Pannell sent to Nixon with the signed petition.

¹³"The Sweet Briar Free Press of 1970" There is a mimeographed letter to the faculty from the Steering Committee dated May 11, 1970 asking for participation in a teach-in to be held that afternoon.

¹⁴"The Sweet Briar Free Press of 1970" The student proposal for a voluntary strike of classes is found in this file. "Faculty Minutes 1969-1970" (Special Meeting May 12, 1970) 1. The student proposal was accepted, with minor changes proposed by Miss Barton. I thought it interesting that the minutes do not mention any of the points of debate in the "considerable discussion" at the faculty meeting.

¹⁵Sims, "Twelve" 6.

¹⁶Anne Gary Pannell, "Last Chapel," Found in "Chapel Speeches 1966-1977" (Filed as "1966-1977 Speeches: Chapel")

¹⁷John Mack Faragher, ed., The Encyclopedia of Colonial and Revolutionary America (Sachem Publishing Associates, Inc.: New York, 1990) 215. In this book it is stated that Thomas Jefferson believed, ". . . education necessary for citizens living under a representative government . . ." I found it interesting that Stevie Norris being the 1969-1970 academic year's St. Andrews scholar was one of the major voices in the protests at Sweet Briar and that one of the basic beliefs of one of our founding fathers had to be brought to our attention by a foreigner.

¹⁸"Profile of the Student Body, 1969" There a number of daily schedules included in this file that have such events as the visitation of The Princess of Rumania to speak on communism (May 16) and Jeff Bigellow, a Black Panther (May 20).

¹⁹"Profile" This file contains the Give-Nixon-a-Chance Committee's statement of purpose as well as the daily schedules that announced Mr. Ruckleshaus and Mr. Blount.

PRIMARY SOURCES

"Chapel Speeches 1966-1977" (Filed as "1966-1977 Speeches: Chapel") [66-77 Chap. Speech] This file is located in Room 204 of the Sweet Briar Archives, fifth cabinet from the left in the third drawer up. Speeches given to the Sweet Briar community including a number of speeches (I do not believe that they are all included) from the years between 1966 and 1977. This source can be used to understand the what the speaker found was important to the community at the time of the speech and contains the notes the speakers used to give their talks.

Faculty Minutes, October 1, 1969- May 28, 1970. (Filed as "1969-1970 Faculty Minutes"). [Fac. Minutes]. This file can be found in Room 204 of the Sweet Briar Archives in the second set of drawers from the left concerning faculty meetings. This file contains very sparse notes as to the goings-on at faculty meetings and was of no great help in this history. An example of how sparse these notes are can be found in the May 12, 1970 faculty minutes which substitute the words "considerable discussion" in place of what one would tend to be warm, if not heated discussion over an issue.

"Profile of the Student Body, 1969." (Filed as "1969 Students") [69 studs.]. This file can be found in Room 204 of the Sweet Briar Archives in the first cabinet from the left, in the second drawer up. This file is not very accurately named; it contains information about the events of May 1970 including things like proposals for suspending

classes and the Sweet Briar Free Press and very little about the students, as it suggests. This file gives insight into the events of May 1970 through the things that were published and circulated during the time.

"Student Life at Sweet Briar 1969-1970." (Filed as "1969-1970") [69-70]. This is found in Room 204 of the Sweet Briar Archives in the fourth set of cabinets from the left in the second drawer up. This file holds documents concerning things that happened in the 1969-1970 school year at Sweet Briar. It contains an envelope holding clippings from area newspapers about the events of May 1970 and programs from other events on campus including the program to "Viet-Rock" a protest musical. This information can be used to put the events of May 1970 in the context of the school year of which it was a part.

Sweet Briar Alumnae Magazine. [SBC Alum. News.] Vol. 40, No. 4, Summer 1970 and Vol. 59, No. 3, Spring 1989. The two articles I used from the Alumnae Magazine were very helpful in giving me insight into what people at the time thought about what was happening at Sweet Briar ("Twelve days in May" 1970) and the specific things that stuck in their minds over almost twenty years ("The Spring of Seventy at Sweet Briar" 1989).

"The Sweet Briar Free Press of 1970." (Filed as "1970 SBC Free Press") [70 Free Press.] This file can be found in Room 204 of the Sweet Briar archives and is in the first cabinet from the left, third drawer up. This file holds much of the literature published and

distributed on campus during May 1970 including all of the editions of the Sweet Briar Free Press, a student publication of the protest movement at Sweet Briar; the Free Press was published five times between May 13 and May 21. In this file schedules of events for each day that the Steering Committee was in existence as well as the Steering Committee Policy Statement can also be found. This file can be used to put the events of May 1970 into chronological order and to find out why some of the committees were formed.

The Sweet Briar News. [SBC Paper] Vols. 43-44, October 3, 1969-May 14, 1971. These volumes of the Sweet Briar News are not bound and can be found in bundles on the last shelf on the left in Sweet Briar Archives Room 2. These newspapers were invaluable in my research; they allowed me to follow the anti-war movement at Sweet Briar in a chronological order and to study the thoughts and feelings of a few of the community members. My only problem is with the amount of information included; I at times was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of things I could not include in my history.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Faragher, John Mack, ed. The Encyclopedia of Colonial and Revolutionary America. Sachem Publishing Associates, Inc.: New York, 1990. This work was mainly used to find a quotation about Thomas Jefferson's educational beliefs to support knowledge that I already

possessed.

Kolko, Gabriel. Anatomy of a War: the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience. Random House: New York, 1985. I used this book because of its chronological overview of the war and my need to have a better command of that knowledge; it also gave me information as to the political nature of the United States' invasion of Cambodia.

Lewy, Guenter. America in Vietnam. Oxford University Press: New York, 1978. The Glossary of this book was particularly helpful in explaining what the acronyms in the preceding book meant.

Millett, Allan R., ed. A Short History of the Vietnam War. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1978. This selection was helpful due to its section on Vietnam War chronology.

Tosh, John. The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history. Longman: London, 1982. This book was helpful not only in giving me my theoretical question but in making me weight the significance of each and every piece of information set before me.