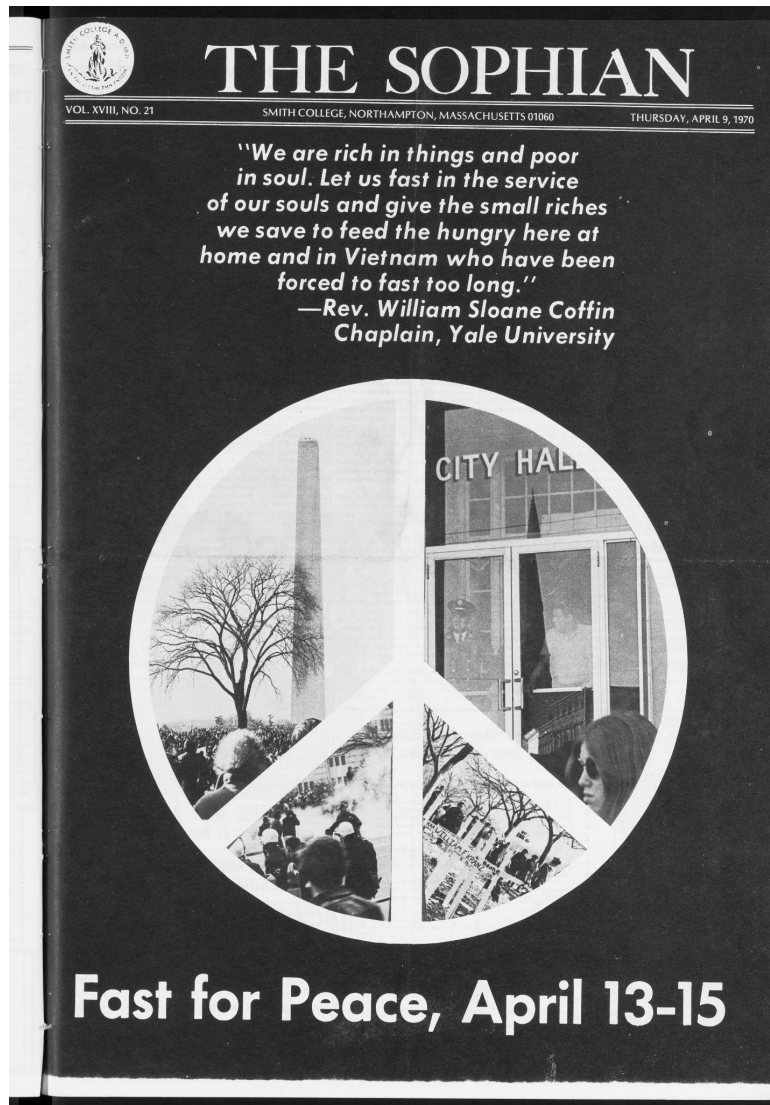


**"We are Mourning:"
Expressions of Grief and Religiosity
in Vietnam War Resistance at Smith College**



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In February of 1968, twelve Smith and Amherst students stood in the snow across from Neilson Library, cloaked in black veils that covered their faces. Joined in solidarity by community members and professors, the students silently handed out leaflets stating: "We are mourning. We are mourning because a war is being fought in Viet Nam. We are mourning because our government is conducting this war... because our government is here today to ask us to aid them."¹ The group organized to protest the presence of a CIA researcher recruiter on campus, understanding that any CIA position only furthered the violence and death they gathered there to grieve. Alongside their statement of mourning, the students handed out a fact sheet on the CIA stressing their counterinsurgency program and work supporting coups in the "Third World."² These students had a clear antiwar ideology that moved them in their action. However, they did not solely work to change policy. In invoking the language of mourning, the group endeavored to understand both the moral and material loss enacted by the war. Across the antiwar movement, at Smith and beyond, activists contended with the violence of the U.S. state as towards both life itself and the identity of the nation.

As outlined by historians Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield in their book *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*, the antiwar movement arose out of 1950s anti-nuclear peace advocacy.³ In the first half of the 1960s, further influenced by the New Left and the civil rights movement, increased American military involvement in Vietnam transformed anti-war resistance into its own social movement.⁴ Surfacing in community spaces—such as churches and colleges—antiwar dissidents organized demonstrations nationwide throughout the duration of the war. The number and strength of these protests varied over the Vietnam War period, particularly rising at times of higher casualties, such as the winter and spring of 1968, or the furthering of U.S. involvement in

¹ "Shrouded Demonstrators Protest CIA Recruitment," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 14, February 22, 1968, p. 2–8, Smith College Archives.

² "Shrouded Demonstrators," 8.

³ Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse University Press, 1990), 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

the region with the 1970 invasion of Cambodia.⁵ Strong in numbers, the antiwar movement represented a broad coalition for social change that both gave it a cutting edge and made it "vulnerable to fragmentation."⁶ Though diverse in motivation for their dissent, a sense of moral responsibility and outrage for American intervention in Vietnam anchored much of the antiwar opposition. Concern for Vietnamese and American life guided demonstrators, while many Americans experienced the war itself as a battle for national identity and dignity. The daily death tolls and the government rationale for continuing to enact such brutality further provoked people to question the meaning of American values and the purpose of military violence in the name of stopping communism. For many, the conflict became a personal reckoning with the meaning of war and society, mediated in homes, streets, and community spaces.⁷ Apprehension towards the war nationwide followed four main lines of criticism: that the war was immoral, that American intervention was futile, that intervention was counterproductive to global stability, and that it contradicted—if not corrupted—American ideals.⁸ All four of these critiques dominated wartime discourse at Smith College, but discussion of morality particularly stretched across years, demonstrations, and ideologies.

As early as 1964, staunch pushback against the moral imperative of American intervention in Vietnam dominated statements from national antiwar groups and leaders. Concerns for the moral implications of the war's violence, drawing on the emerging antiwar opposition's roots in the pacifist-led peace movement, often turned arguments for the moral need of the war in the protection of anti-communism ideals on their heads. Dissidents warned that the process of trying to "save" Vietnam from communism was destroying the people; fighting in the war for national honor was to "blow off heads to save face."⁹ The emerging antiwar opposition questioned the notion that the promotion of American ideals

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁹ Ibid., 95.

justified the bloodshed intervention caused or that the war had any moral justification at all. Instead of arguing that intervention saved the soul of America, they pushed just the opposite, often using these particularly religious terms. As antiwar activist and Presbyterian minister Norman Thomas expressed in 1965, "I'd rather see America save her soul than her face."¹⁰

Though many left-wing religious leaders and organizations supported the war effort, a vocal group staunchly opposed on moral grounds, further advocating for Vietnamese and American lives alike. Between 1967 and 1968, 26 Catholic intellectuals declared the war unjust, arguing that Christians had a moral obligation to oppose it. Protestant minister Robert McAfee Brown asserted that "the American war effort was 'evil, vicious, and morally intolerable.'"¹¹ Groups like the Catholic Worker Movement, newspaper *Christian Century*, and the Catholic Peace Fellowship, among others, made a continued effort in the 1960s to promote antiwar and pacifist thinking while criticizing the state for its unjustified violence. In 1968, one of the deadliest years of the war, the *Christian Century* proclaimed the war to be made of "the logic of men maddened by murder. We have all been made murderers."¹²

These same ideas characterized the discourse and resistance by Smith students and their faculty and peers at the four colleges (Smith, Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and University of Massachusetts Amherst) during the Vietnam War.¹³ Students saw the war effort as morally unjustified, threatening to young American men, and leading to murders that every American bore responsibility for. Religious ritual and language, in tandem with symbolic demonstrations of grief and mourning, provided a means for students to process the violence and death happening in Vietnam—both to American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians—not as a production of numbers but as tangible, human loss. Smith students and faculty, working with their peers at Amherst, contended with the same moral and political

¹⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹¹ Ibid., 195.

¹² Ibid., 210.

¹³ Though Hampshire opened in 1970, journalism and other materials related to antiwar activism tended to only mention the four colleges.

dilemmas that moved people across the country. Antiwar Smith students opposed the draft, supporting resisters and counseling local boys, organized protests and demonstrations, participated in strikes, and chronicled dissenting opinions in the campus newspaper, *The Sophian*. Moral disgust and notions of injustice saturated these actions, and students further moved to vocalize the quiet sense of mourning that underlined the period. Antiwar dissidents turned to symbolic demonstrations, utilizing the familiar framework of religious ritual and language, to process and acknowledge the death the war brought. At Smith, vigils, memorials, and fasts became regular occurrences for students and faculty to bear witness and bring awareness to the war's moral upheaval and disregard for human life. Smith's chapel, in moral alignment with antiwar students, worked to support undergraduates in their activism and grief. College religious leaders, particularly Reverend Richard P. Unsworth and Rabbi Yechiael Lander, were seminal in helping to organize these solemn actions, introducing religious language and practices to greater campus and community protests. Working within the national landscape, Smith students, faculty, staff, and community members brought the antiwar movement to Northampton.

The Students for Democratic Society (SDS) served as a way for Smith students to organize locally while working within a national framework. Emerging from the youth branch of the democratic socialist group the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) in 1960, SDS split off in 1962 due to a rejection of the anti-communist Cold War frameworks applied by their parent organization. In their Post Huron Statement, SDS laid out their vision for a better society, including "students' support for civil rights, disdain for nuclear proliferation, and hope for a progressive realignment of the Democratic Party" as well as disdain for Western authoritarianism in the East. They further refused to include an anti-communist clause in their statement, thus leading to the branch's separation.¹⁴ At its onset, SDS focused largely on civil rights and urban poverty rather than the war in Vietnam. However, by the end of 1964, there was a large—though unorganized—base of dissent against Vietnam policy

¹⁴ Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (AK Press, 2006), 26.

both within SDS and across the country.¹⁵ After an escalation in the war in February of 1965, with the U.S. responding to Viet Cong strikes against American forces with a series of air strikes in North Vietnam, SDS led their first antiwar march on Washington. With 20,000 people in attendance, the group experienced an outpour of support double what they expected.¹⁶ Following the march, membership skyrocketed, with 12,000 people joining by 1966.¹⁷

In 1965, during this period of mass war escalation of the growing dissent, Smith and Amherst formed their own intercollegiate chapter of SDS. Though the Smith-Amherst chapter continued pursuing actions towards racial equality in its early years, as the war continued, they followed the national trend towards draft-focused antiwar actions. In September of 1967—off the heels of Vietnam Summer, a grassroots national campaign to mobilize protests against the war—80 members of the Smith-Amherst SDS met to decide on anti-draft actions for the year on campus, off campus, and at local high schools specifically. On campus, work was to center around draft counseling at Amherst and protesting military recruitment on campus, while off-campus work was to focus on coordinating with other SDS chapters in the national movement and "physically and morally" support the Springfield draft resistance group. Anti-draft work in local high schools educated younger students about the "important draft angles not publicized." At the same meeting, students organized an anti-draft protest for the sixteenth of that October when 5,000 men across the country were to turn in their draft cards. SDS "suggested girls support this program," reflecting a role Smith students commonly took in anti-draft actions as standing in solidarity with these demonstrations despite their own inability to be drafted.¹⁸

Smith students throughout the war saw part of their role in resistance as one of solidarity with young men vulnerable to the draft. Outlining the reasons for a campus-wide

¹⁵ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 28.

¹⁸ "SDS Decides on Anti-Draft Actions," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 2, September 28, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

fast in 1968 expressing hope for the war to end, organizer Kathy Green '68 described the action as "[illustrating] that, though we are women and not threatened by the draft, we have an obligation to speak out about the war."¹⁹ Kathy Rodgers '70 similarly described in her Alumnae Oral History Project interview that the antiwar movement was one of the biggest forces in her and her peers' time at Smith precisely because "our boyfriends and brothers and friends were being sent off to a war that, to many of us, didn't make sense."²⁰ The grief embodied by anti-war Smith students was often anticipatory. The fear of their loved ones being killed, or made to kill, in a fight they already saw as pointless if not immoral operated as the core motivation for Smith student opposition, rather than distress over Vietnamese lives, North or South. This concern for American lives in a vacuum permeated campus discourse surrounding the war, as it did nationally. Debates over intervention from the beginning to the end of the war centered on Americans, with Vietnamese welfare a secondary concern.²¹ One SDS demonstration that sheds light on this framework occurred on Rally Day 1968, a Smith tradition celebrating Smith Alum achievements that originated as a commemoration of George Washington's birthday.²² Outside of John M. Greene Hall, before the all-college assembly, Smith and Amherst SDS students distributed a "Rally Day Proclamation" with a crossword puzzle stressing similarities between the Vietnamese and American revolutions (following the theme "Spirit of '76"). After the assembly, five Amherst students in black robes stood in front of the John M. Greene, carrying long sticks over their shoulders, before jumping on the back of a hearse labeled "to Viet Nam."²³ The message of the demonstration was clear: not only was American condemnation of the Vietnamese revolution hypocritical, but to be sent to fight in Vietnam was a death sentence. In choosing

¹⁹ Alicia Campi, "1284 Students Fast, Rally for Peace in Viet Nam," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 16, March 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

²⁰ "Transcript of Interview with Kathryn 'Kathy' Rodgers," May 22, 2015, Alumnae Oral History Project collection, Smith College Archives, 3.

²¹ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 4.

²² "Celebrate and Learn about Rally Day!," accessed December 2024, <https://libraries.smith.edu/news/celebrate-and-learn-about-rally-day>.

²³ "Students Applaud Rally Day Speaker; Spirit-of-'76, SDS, Hearse Outside," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 15, February 29, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

to invoke funeral imagery, SDS members pushed onlookers to contend with the violence inherent to battle, especially as their male peers were put at risk of being drafted.

Smith-Amherst SDS members further expressed their opposition to the war as a general sense of moral disgust to the American government's actions in the region. Discussing the aforementioned 1968 fast at Smith, Smith-Amherst SDS president Eric Bohman '70 expressed the action as a means to "register our sorrow and anger, our disgust over the war in Viet Nam... the evil War... a liberal's war."²⁴ 1,284 Smith students, five faculty, and two locals fasted, while 366 students, forty-five faculty, and thirty-one locals demonstrated support in the form of wearing green armbands over the three days the fast took place. Fasters, on the other hand, wore black armbands resembling those of a mourner.²⁵ Though secular in organization, reasons for the fast were, in part, framed in religious language. When asked what the students were doing while speaking at the opening rally for the fast, Professor Ramon Ruiz stated that they were "making a statement, through the media, that we can admit sin."²⁶ Smith's Rev. Unsworth further defined fasting as a "religious act to produce a religious effect—that is sorrow, and commitment—not simply a political act."²⁷ Unsworth framed the moral opposition expressed by the student body in religious terms, and by including Rev. Unsworth in the rally, the students did the same. The reverend closed out the action, with students gathering to reflect with Unsworth before breaking their fasts. For these students, religious gatherings provided a means to communicate and feel their discontentment with the war.

Organized as an educational and individually reflective form of war resistance, some students (such as the satirical student organization Students for an Undemocratic Society) condemned the fast as useless.²⁸ However, as Rev. Unsworth elaborated on in a later *Sophian* article, the fast was meant to be "right, not useful," raising awareness for the

²⁴ Campi, "1284 Students Fast," 3.

²⁵ "Opposition to War Stirs Student Plan to Fast for Peace," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 15, February 29, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

²⁶ Campi, "1284 Students Fast," 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸ Linda Kent, "Students for an Undemocratic Society Protest Against SDS Demonstrations," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 16, March 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

suffering happening in Vietnam and the "absurdity of the bloodletting" occurring. The fast was a tool for "intensification of a person's thought about and concern about the personal consequences of the war to Vietnamese society and to our own."²⁹ During a war seen by many as a moral indictment of American society, fasts asked people to contend with the implications of the violence in Vietnam while quietly bringing it into the public eye. These actions thus worked to tackle the war on the home front, rather than making a direct attempt to change the political landscape. From April 13th to 15th of 1970, students participated in a nationwide Peace Fast from April under a similar rationale. The fast was in moral opposition to the continuation of the war and its economic expenditures, with people asked to send the money they saved from not eating for three days to the victims of the war. The fast represented a commitment to "improve the quality of human life and alleviate human suffering." Referring to a rally held during the three days, student Kay Stewart conveyed that "a fast is so quiet, so personal. This is one way to make it public, to add deeper meaning to our efforts."³⁰ As in 1968, the fast worked to draw public attention and awareness while addressing the internal moral concerns of the dissent. Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin, as reported in *The Sophian*, advertised the fast as "in service of our souls."³¹ As part of this personal service, Smith students again closed out their fast with a gathering in the college chapel, inviting people to speak on their personal experiences. The 1970 fast remained further cognisant of the tangible human toll of the war, honoring those lost in a vigil that Tuesday on the Neilson Library lawn, one of many vigils Smith and Northampton saw throughout the war.

In April of 1967, 30 Smith students and faculty stood silently in front of Neilson Library. Lined up in a semicircle, hands clasped, the participants had one goal: "to draw

²⁹ Alicia Campi, "Participants Discuss Meaning of Peace Fast," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 17, March 14, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁰ Marlene Bellamy, "5-College Fast Wednesday Highlights Community Peace-Plea," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 21, April 9, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³¹ *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 21, April 9, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

attention to the fact that 'a war is going on, and people are getting killed.'"³² Weekly vigils like Smith's began across the country that spring, serving as solemn demonstrations organized to contend with popular moral discontent with the war. Northampton was one of the twenty towns and cities to begin this work.³³ In February of 1967, a group of concerned Northampton citizens organized a weekly, hour-long vigil in front of Northampton's Memorial Hall to express their pain in the face of widespread apathy towards the war and its consequences.³⁴ Often advertised by faculty organizers in *The Sophian*, these vigils reflected a sense of communal responsibility felt by the participants as Americans for the violence of the war. As the organizers stated as their official purpose, they joined to "express our sorrow and protest because we Americans are killing and being killed in Viet Nam."³⁵ Starting the same year, students, faculty, and community members similarly worked with the Valley Peace Center to host weekly gatherings at the Amherst Town Common for one hour at noon.³⁶ Unlike protests and political actions intended to change U.S. policy in Vietnam, vigils grappled with the moral battle the war spurred in the U.S. itself. As Professor Michael Rice, a regular attendee of the town peace vigil, described, "the chief beneficiaries of the vigils are the participants."³⁷ Like fasts, vigils provided a space for community members to process and share feelings of sorrow and moral outrage for US involvement with the war with like-minded people. Further, they allowed participants to feel like they were "doing something." As Rice put it, he hoped the vigil would contribute to public recognition of the tangible bloodshed occurring at the hands of US weaponry; "that human beings (mostly a-political peasants) are the real victims of the war." The vigil served not as a means of pushing against the war as a battle of abstract political ideologies, but instead as a fight with

³² "Peace Vigils Protest U.S. Viet Nam Policy," *Sophian*, vol. 15, no. 21, April 6, 1967, Smith College Archives, Smith College Archives.

³³ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 172.

³⁴ J. Diedrick Snoek, "Peace Vigil Changes to Saturday Morning," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 3, , Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁵ Michael Rice, "Vigiler Discusses Ideas Inspiring Silent 'Ritual,'" *Sophian*, vol. 15, no. 21, April 6, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁶ Gini Erck, "Faculty, Student Initiate Protests Against Viet War," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 5, October 19, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁷ Rice, "Vigiler on Ritual."

deadly consequences for innocent lives and with little hope of an American victory. In March of 1969, Smith junior Rhoda Micconi reported on a six-hour vigil held in Northampton in response to the army's handling of the Presidio 27—an incident the previous October in which 27 inmates at the Presidio army stockade in San Francisco were held in mutiny for a peaceful sit-down protest against the Vietnam war. Fifty people stood on Main Street, across from the Northampton National Bank, handing out over 500 leaflets reading "Until These Men Are Free, None Of Us Is Free."³⁸ Though the vigil did not free those imprisoned, it allowed participants to express their support for their fellow dissidents while honoring and reflecting on their actions.

The Presidio vigil arose during a lull in antiwar activism following the 1968 election. During that November, Smith student journalism and demonstrations largely focused on the presidential race and election of Nixon. Following the election, for example, *The Sophian's* cover page featured only a large picture of Nixon's face accompanied by a quote from Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen stating "A lie, turned topsy-turvy, can be prinked and tinselled out, decked in plumage new and fine, till none knows its lean old carcass."³⁹ The Editorial Board expressed further dismay for Nixon's win, citing his lack of clarity on Vietnam and economic plans detrimental to Black populations.⁴⁰ For weeks after, people flooded the newspaper with complaints and letters to the editor both for and against the controversial cover—some even cited it as unkind to Julie Nixon, the president's daughter and a Smith student at the time.⁴¹ While anti-war student organizing continued during this time, the focus of students across the country largely shifted to issues related to curricula and social rules.⁴² At Smith, student activism primarily surrounded the creation of the open curriculum and an African-American Studies department.

³⁸ Rhoda Micconi, "Army Trials Arouse Nationwide Response," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 18, March 20, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁹ *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 7, November 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁰ *Sophian*, "No Mandate," vol. 17, no. 7, November 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴¹ Paul Pickrel, "Apology Requested," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 8, November 14, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴² DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 243.

Over the later 1960s and early 1970s, activism at Smith went beyond solely discussing the war. In early March of 1969, the Black Student Union, at the push of Smith's Black Students Union (BSA), the Committee on Educational Policy announced that they would recommend to the faculty at their April meeting the introduction of an Afro-American Studies major the following year.⁴³ The BSA assisted on a committee to find a new director of admissions, pushing for an increase in Black applications and acceptances to Smith.⁴⁴ Through 1970, colleges throughout the Valley joined in advocating for autonomy over Afro-American studies programs as well as cultural spaces and resources for Black students.⁴⁵ On May 6th, 1969, the college canceled all classes to allow students and faculty to discuss the curriculum demands happening on campus.⁴⁶ These discourses culminated in the removal of non-major related degree requirements and the creation of Smith's current open curriculum in 1970.⁴⁷ Students in Hubbard House further pushed for changes in Smith's regulation of behavior in the fall of 1969, submitting a proposal for houses to create their own social rules rather than following those made by the institution.⁴⁸ However, amidst these various student demands, Vietnam War dissent remained present on campus, though at times quieter than other student causes. Antiwar activism at Smith reemerged with greater strength in the fall of 1969 with the organization of the Moratorium.

The Moratorium began nationally on October 15th, 1969, as a national day to stop everyday business in recognition and reflection of the violence occurring in Vietnam.⁴⁹ At Smith, chapel leaders Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Yander, alongside student coordinator

⁴³ Ellen Kanner, "Dean Lehmann Clarifies Black Studies Program," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 18, March 20, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁴ Sandra Fascell, "BSA Rep on Committee to Select Admissions Director," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 17, March 13, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁵ *Sophian*, "Black Students Stage Take-Over at Amherst, Issue Demands to Valley Colleges, Call for Autonomy Over Black Programs," vol. 18, no. 16, February 19, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Mendenhall and Kathryn J. Rodgers, "Formal Announcement," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 22, May 1, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁷ *Sophian*, "Faculty Vote to Abolish Course Requirements," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 15, February 12, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁸ Sherry Strasser, "SAC Meets to Discuss Hubbard House Proposal," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 8, November 6, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁹ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 248.

Chuca Meyer '70, organized the local Moratorium.⁵⁰ Rabbi Lander sent out letters of interest to the faculty, while students released a petition discussing the "senselessness of the war" and asking their peers to go against business as usual.⁵¹ Prior to the first Moratorium, *The Sophian* reported 123 faculty members favored the action, with widespread support from the student body.⁵² Writing a Letter to the Editor of *The Sophian* that same issue, Unsworth advocated for the necessity of the Moratorium, proclaiming that "in the months of March through September of this year, more than one hundred fifteen thousand individual human beings have been killed in the war in VietNam," not including civilian deaths.⁵³ Invoking the loss of life as the primary motivation for the Moratorium, Unsworth again framed the war as an immoral act demanding opposition precisely because of the deaths it caused. Despite a decline in public outcry, the war marched on, with the only hope of stopping it resting on the people. Writing with Rabbi Lander to their religious colleagues the week before the Moratorium, the two men sought wider support and sympathy stating that "The purpose of this day is to focus the attention of our citizenry on the Vietnam War and its mountain toll of human suffering; to protest its continuation and to call upon our government to increase and speed its efforts for peace."⁵⁴ They encouraged their colleagues to devote part of their services to the Moratorium and the war, advocating for the suspension of normal activities. Further, the Reverend and Rabbi noted plans for a silent vigil for all clergymen near Northampton's City Hall. For Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Lander opposing the war was not only a moral but a religious calling, demanding peace and safety for all people.

Clergy had been prominent in the antiwar movement from its genesis. In 1966, Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin created the National Emergency Committee of Clergy

⁵⁰ Sherry Allen, "Town, College Communities to Rally for Myriad Activities on October 15th," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 5, October 9, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁵¹ "Petition Against 'Business as Usual,'" October 15, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

⁵² Allen, "October 15th."

⁵³ Richard P. Unsworth, "Letter to the Editor of the *Sophian*," October 8, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

⁵⁴ Richard P. Unsworth and Yechiael Lander, "Letter on the Moratorium," October 7, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

Concerned about Vietnam. Describing his rationale in a New York press conference, Sloane advised "for it may well be that morally speaking the United States ship of state is today comparable to the Titanic just before it hit the iceberg. If we decide on all-out escalation of the war in Vietnam, then to all intents and purposes of the human soul we may be sunk."⁵⁵ With these concerns in mind, Coffin went on to join one of the most prominent antiwar organizations during the Vietnam era, particularly among the religious community, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). Fellow members included Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Reverend John Bennett, and Martin Luther King Jr.⁵⁶ As liberal dissent among clergy towards the war grew in 1966, and coming out of strong interfaith cooperation achieved in the struggle for civil rights, Coffin became pivotal in connecting the two causes and leading the religious opposition moving forward. Having served in WWII and the Korean War, worked in international service, and protested segregation, Coffin had connections to clergy in support of the civil rights movement and trained his constituency on matters related to Vietnam in 1965.⁵⁷ Smith's Rabbi Lander and Rev. Unsworth thus acted within a greater pattern of religious leaders taking a strong stand against Vietnam and using their community platform to project these views.

On the national scale, Divinity School graduate Sam Brown largely organized the Moratorium, and across the country, Moratorium activities featured religiously oriented activities reflective of its local and national organizers.⁵⁸ The Moratorium reflected "the changing nature of the war for America... It expressed a nation longing to find meaning in its losses—something more than empty humiliation."⁵⁹ Just as vigils gave way to expressing this sense of loss, solemn gatherings and acts of remembrance continued to do so during the Moratorium. At Smith, a candlelit march led students and community members to the local Unitarian Church at 7 p.m. on the fifteenth to attend an interfaith memorial service where a

⁵⁵ Mitchell K. Hall, "Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam: A Study of Opposition to the Vietnam War." (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 1987), 1.

⁵⁶ Hall, "Clergy and Laymen", 27.

⁵⁷ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 144.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

list of those from Hampshire County dead in the war would be read.⁶⁰ An estimated 1,500 people attended. Giving the benediction, Rabbi Lander stated "We shall not remain silent in our quest for Peace. May you go in Peace. Be strong and in good courage," encouraging students to keep their voices in the movement.⁶¹ St John's Episcopal Church in town hosted a "Pray for Peace" brief interfaith service every hour from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.⁶² In a *Sophian* pictorial, student Sherry Allen described the Moratorium as "a Sabbath disengagement... the goal is the formation and expression of will."⁶³ Framing the day in such religious terms and centered around actions of faith, many Smith students, faculty, and Northampton community members understood the Moratorium and their views of the war itself as a moral dilemma with answers found in their religiosity.

The Moratorium continued monthly on the fifteenth through April of 1970, when it was dedicated to the national fast. Local homes held discussions with faculty, students, clergy, and locals to discuss the Moratorium and the war as a whole throughout this time.⁶⁴ In November of 1969, the local committee planning the war further emphasized the Moratorium as a reflection upon wartime grief, encouraging student houses to purchase American flags to be flown half-mast from November 13th through 15th. That same month, they organized a candlelight ceremony at the Amherst Town Common, including a procession, a reading of the names of young Massachusetts men killed in Vietnam, and a solemn observance led by Rabbi Martin Kowal from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.⁶⁵ Writing to *The Sophian* in 1968 about the importance of the antiwar movement, community member Nancy Rice argued that while Christmas approached with its "extraordinary demands that we love one another and prove that we do so with gifts,

⁶⁰ Allen, "October 15th."

⁶¹ *Sophian*, "Estimated 1,500 Attended Interfaith Service at the Unitarian Church," October 16, 1969, vol. 18, no. 6, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶² *Sophian*, "October 15, 1969," vol. 18, no. 16., October 16, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶³ Sherry Allen, "A Pictorial," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 6, October 16, 1969 Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁴ *Sophian*, "Smith-Amherst Buses Travel to D.C. Death March; Goodell, McGovern to Address Rally on Saturday," vol. 18, no. 9, November 13, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁵ *Sophian*, "November Moratorium to Happen Here," vol. 18, no. 8, November 6, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

including gifts of life... people are losing their lives in Viet Nam."⁶⁶ As a whole, the Moratoriums worked to acknowledge this disconnect, suspending the everyday life of Americans in recognition of how the war has destroyed and upended the lives of so many.

Despite the Moratorium, anti-war demonstrations decreased in 1969 through early 1970. However, after the April 29th invasion of Cambodia, this quickly shifted. Despite Nixon's insistence the invasion was not a widening of the war, activists in New York and Philadelphia took to the streets within minutes. On May 2nd, two radical students at a Yale Black Panther support rally advocated for a national student strike, quickly endorsed by seven Ivy-League newspapers, the National Student Association, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and New Mobilization. Two days later, on May 4th, four unarmed Kent State University students were shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard at a rally against the invasion of Cambodia.⁶⁷ The Smith student strike began in the wake of this massacre.

A call to suspend normal activity, the strike built on the same ideas that formed and guided the Moratoriums. As described in the first Smith Strike newsletter, the strike was for three demands: for the end of the U.S. government's systematic oppression of political dissidents and release of all political prisoners, particularly those from the Black Panther Party; that the government end the calculation of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and Laos and withdraw all forces from Southeast Asia; and that Smith "end its complicity with the United States war machine" by ending campus recruiting by corporations tied to the government and military.⁶⁸ However, debates surfaced among the Smith Strike Committee regarding maintaining the national set goals of the strike or not. Namely, some students felt the strike would only gain necessary support if Cambodia was the main issue. In line with these concerns, the committee redrafted the petition for the strike with the last line, stating

⁶⁶ Nancy Rice, "Wisdom of Demonstrating," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 11, December 14, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁷ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 278.

⁶⁸ "Strike Committee- Newsletters, May 4 - 31, 1970," May 1970, Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives, 2.

"power to the people," removed and Cambodia made to be the first issue. Though some argued that "the strike was not defined by speeches," students continued to push for race as a topic in the demonstration. At a 5 p.m. meeting the same day, one student stated that "Cambodia was not the main issue" and that students who thought that were racists. At the same meeting, "half-hearted sympathy" was extended to the Black Panther party, with a quiet sense of failure for not pushing for the strike's goals regarding American racial inequality.⁶⁹ On May 6th, a BSA member highlighted the falseness of emphasizing Cambodia rather than the oppression of Black Americans.⁷⁰ Another student told a professor she stopped striking after realizing the underlying racism of the war that the Strike Committee overlooked.⁷¹ While the Strike Committee worked to maintain the appearance of a unified front, racial tensions continued to underlie the action.

Some students further expressed doubt over the political effectiveness of the strike. For example, one student wrote a one-page newspaper titled *The Screwdriver*, Volume 2, number 1, on May 5th with a single article asking "Is the strike a good idea?"⁷² The author argued that workshops can occur while finishing the semester on time. Regardless of their position on the strike, however, a majority of students planned to attend the strike's rally on its eve.⁷³ Sending out ballots to vote for the strike on May 5th, 1,546 Smith students voted in favor compared to the 436 who voted against.⁷⁴ The faculty further endorsed the strike of the majority of students and supported "their efforts to educate themselves, eliminate repression and effect changes in foreign policy," advocating for a break in normal college activities from May 6th through the 10th.⁷⁵ Prior to and throughout the strike, students and faculty articulated the strike as an educational tool rather than a campaign against Smith. Along the same lines, tensions between students and the college appeared minimal.

⁶⁹ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72," n.d., Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Correspondence- Aldrich, Michele, May 4 - 20, 1970," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives, accessed December 23, 2024.

⁷² "Strike Committee- Newsletters."

⁷³ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

⁷⁴ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 4.

⁷⁵ "Memoranda- Faculty and Staff, Apr 17 - Jun 1, 1970, Undated," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

President Mendenhall announced that while the college would not endorse the strike, they would allow it. However, the president and faculty spoke at rallies over the course of the strike.⁷⁶ In a letter from the meeting of the faculty, faculty further condemned the invasion of Cambodia, positioning themselves as in line with striking students.⁷⁷ The registrar accommodated the strike as well, creating a revised schedule for final exams and granting extensions.

For the duration of the strike, activities largely centered on political organizing and education. In daily newsletters, printed with *The Sophian's* facilities, the Strike Committee listed opportunities for leafleting, community outreach, and organizing to bring students to Washington. Students were further encouraged to write to their senators and representatives in support of the Hatfield-McGovern Amendment to end the war. Replying to the students, senators cited their grief and horror at the war's casualties and the violence at Kent State University. In a telegram sent to student Ellen Kanner, senators George McGovern, Mark Hatfield, and three other senators wrote that they were "shocked and grieved by the tragedy that occurred at Kent State" and filled with a sense of guilt over the lack of alternatives provided by the Congress, emphasizing grief as a force present both in the lives of dissenting students and politicians.⁷⁸ Throughout the day, professors gave lectures on topics related to Vietnam and the military industrial complex. Through the strike, faculty continued a tradition of using their academic knowledge and positions to aid students in their fight against further violence and escalation. Rev. Unsworth supported students in his role, giving lectures of revolutionary texts in the Bible and the ethics of war.⁷⁹ The chapel further lent its support to students, using its spaces for meetings and classes while aiding student newsletter printing when needed.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

⁷⁷ "Press Releases and Letters to Editor, May, 1970, Undated," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁸ "Correspondence- United States Congress, May 7 - Jul 7, 1970, Undated," Student Demonstrations collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁹ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 24.

⁸⁰ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

Spaces for grief, religious reflection, and organizing continued to anchor the strike as they anchored resistance throughout the war. A student Church Action Committee worked with local clergy in support of the strike and dissent towards the war.⁸¹ In a Community Actions Through Churches meeting at Edwards Congregational Church in downtown Northampton, Lucy Bodine '72 and other unnamed students organized another meeting in the campus chapel lounge. The meeting totaled forty Smith students, fifteen members of the clergy or area activists, and Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Lander.⁸² In this way, religious gatherings provided another outlet for students to gather and contend with the war while connecting with the antiwar movement outside of Smith's campus. In the wake of violence against antiwar protesters, religious ritual further provided a sense of comfort and condolence. On May 8th, 1970, the day began with an interfaith memorial service for those killed in the Kent State shooting. The service included a performance of a folk song and readings from Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Psalm 130, declaring "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, oh Lord."⁸³ The memorial closed with a reading of the Mourner's Kaddish, collectively acknowledging the young lives lost at Kent State University.⁸⁴ On the 12th, the murder of Black 16-year-old Charles Oakman occurred in Georgia followed by the murder of six other Black people the ensuing night. The Smith Strike Committee quickly released a letter condemning the murders. Despite previous moves to minimize the centrality of racial equality in Smith's strike, the Committee asserted that ending the war in Vietnam would not stop racialized violence in the U.S., calling for work to end "the oppression at home" and articulating that if no action was taken on these deaths, then the strike was for nothing.⁸⁵ On the 15th, a memorial service was held at Paradise Pond for the seven dead, led by Rev. Unsworth and student Dale Lewis.⁸⁶ Strike activities continued at Smith through the end of May, up to commencement. While American troops did not leave

⁸¹ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 11.

⁸² "Diary- Lucy Bodine, '72, 1970-05-08 - 1970-05-16," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁸³ "Strike Committee- Newsletters."

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.

Vietnam until 1973, the strike marked a peak in student antiwar activism both at Smith and beyond.

Throughout the antiwar movements, criticisms of actions as useless or politically ineffective came with every major demonstration. However, for many, these actions were not solely intended to stop the war. Rather, they gave students a voice to express that the war was not supported by all. Antiwar actions, at Smith and on college campuses across the country, permeate Vietnam War history today and remind the modern reader how the war was experienced by so many. In remembering dissent, people are forced to recall the grief and heartache at the heart of the war, and the lives that were lost and forever changed. While vigils and memorials did not make a political impact in Smith students' antiwar activism, they served as a place for people to cry out when they felt nothing else could be done. Filled with horror over the death and violence which surrounded them and feeling hopefulness to prevent it, these rituals gave space to place and process internalized grief. Acts of mourning allowed students to let the world around them know that, in the face of unmitigated death for what many seemed like a pointless cause, the lives that were lost mattered. In gathering with others, they could find comfort in those who felt the same.

Smith's activism was a smaller part of a broader national antiwar movement. However, it is the actions of small cities, towns, and colleges that allowed the national movement to survive. As DeBenedetti and Chatfield astutely argued, "the call for protest was national, but the response was overwhelmingly local." In studying antiwar activism at a smaller institution like Smith, one can understand the complexities within the national movement more broadly and where its strengths and cracks came about. As historians of the Vietnam War era often emphasize, the movement arose as a broad coalition for social change, granting it a wide array of support which paradoxically made it vulnerable to splintering. Throughout the movement, however, the grief and despair felt by its participants permeated their efforts and rationale. Across backgrounds, people found

comfort among their peers in placing this grief as a community and using it to motivate them to change the world around them.

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