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## Protests, Patriotism, Prayer: Bethel College Students and the Vietnam Debate

Annie Berglund  
*Bethel University*

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Annie Berglund

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Protests, Patriotism, Prayer: Bethel College Students & the Vietnam Debate

The 1960s and 1970s in American history conjure up a wide variety of dramatic visuals: Rock and Roll, hippies, civil rights, Kent State, assassinations, drugs, riots. Similarly, draft-dodging, protests, tear gas, policeman, and imprisonments are obvious, explicit, and vocal responses to Vietnam that draw many Americans into discussion about the anti-war movement. This period of debate and activism is well researched and captivating. However, the tendency to look at the 1960s and 1970s as a conglomeration of movements and political groups can fail to appropriately acknowledge the complex responses of average individuals in the United States. Even within major organizations like the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, Students for a Democratic Society, and Organization for Women Now, members had divergent beliefs about activism, morality, and support for other societies. The small, predominantly midwestern, evangelical community attending Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, experienced the Vietnam War era like many other Americans: with diverse opinions and a wide spectrum of activism and indifference. Studying this group of individuals, noting their engagement with the war and their decisions regarding it, is vital in adding to a more comprehensive view of this infamous time period in U.S. history.

Focusing on Bethel students during the Vietnam War adds depth to the history of that time period because it breaks down common misconceptions and blanket statements about college students and evangelicals. The information gleaned from studying this community will fit into the broader framework of Protestant colleges and universities in the U.S., showing where

many at Bethel may have fell on the scale of left and right ideology over the war. Even more telling, it will illustrate the importance of avoiding the tendency to identify a particular section of society into one mindset or political belief system. Displaying the larger context of the Vietnam War era and diverse opinions resulting from it are necessary in order to analyze Bethel students' different responses.

The stance of Bethel's administration and its Baptist background gives insight into the influence on Bethel students. However, the primary avenue for navigating Bethel students' understanding is to study the various resources available in the form of student literature, which will answer the question of the student involvement, moral beliefs, and understanding regarding Vietnam in their college experience at Bethel during the 1960s and 1970s.

#### A Brief Contextual Analysis

As with many political opinions in the past and present, Americans fell across the spectrum of the Vietnam debate, from extreme radicalism to moderate beliefs and uncertainty. A tendency is to view the Republican and Democratic parties as holistically pro-war and anti-war, respectively, though this severely limits the complexity of the debate. Some Republicans avoided much discussion on the war, trusting instead the leaders of their party and their government to make proper judgments about military intervention. However, many other Republicans supported the war and its advancement with zeal.<sup>1</sup> The Democratic party, on the other hand, held more drastically different ideas. For instance, much of the opposition came from Leftwing constituents, but many Democrats from the South and conservative-leaning ideologies supported the war. Even in the state of Minnesota, prominent Democratic politicians were split on the

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1. David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 78.

debate over the war, with Humphrey supporting and McCarthy opposing in the 1968 presidential election.<sup>2</sup> In 1971, 531 Bethel students, about half of the population, were given a questionnaire about their religious, political, and socioeconomic background. The report revealed 66% were from Republican families, 11% were Democrat, and 19% Independent, with the remaining 4% unsure or without an answer.<sup>3</sup> Though the majority of students at Bethel came from politically Republican backgrounds at this time, this poll does not imply that they held pro-war beliefs. The diversity within parties and the new influences outside of family background as students' entered college would challenge their political leanings.

To understand student and religious responses, like those of Bethel College, the trajectory of the debate must be given ample study. The debate existed since the beginning of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, but escalated and shaped itself as the 1960s unfolded into the 1970s. The early 1960s saw less publicized and dramatic unrest regarding Vietnam. While a portion of Americans have historically viewed war as an undesirable option or something to oppose at all costs, official U.S. military effort in the Vietnam War, beginning in 1964, proved itself to be significant and unique because of the wide variety of feelings and actions it created in American society, as well as the fervor in which these opinions were expressed. Opposition to the war developed for many reasons, but a key component was the view that it was immoral. This was clearly demonstrated to citizens through mass media coverage of battlefields. As more military servicemen were needed - along with the increasing use of bombing, napalm, and other brutal warfare methods - newspapers, television broadcasting, and protesting disillusioned many to the

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2. Levy, 82.

3. "Survey Reveals Students' Home Background," *The [BGC] Standard*, December 13, 1971, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

cause that resulted in terrible loss of life and innocence.<sup>4</sup> While the battlefield was atrocious for Vietnamese civilians, the impact it had on the soldiers committing personal and impersonal violence was lasting and tormenting as well.<sup>5</sup> Most men and women who supported the war did so because they believed it would quell communism's spread and influence. Regretting and revering the loss of life resulting from Vietnam, pro-war advocates still found U.S. intervention to be necessary in the long run for fostering global peace.<sup>6</sup> When military efforts in 1965, 1966, and 1967 required hundreds of thousands of more servicemen, and with devastating images of failure and fear like that of the 1968 Tet Offensive, anti-war fervor ignited, diminishing only as the war came to an end in 1975.

#### Debate Subgroup: Students

While Bethel College student responses to the war are significant to those living in Arden Hills, Minnesota, in the 1960s and 1970s, this institution was a part of a much larger framework of higher education. A common belief persists that, of all American subgroups, youth and college-educated students were among the most radical and vocal leaders of dissent toward the Vietnam War. Tragic deaths and injuries resulting from student protesters clashing with police, like that at Kent State University, would be enough to perpetuate this notion. Similarly, televised reports and newspaper articles depicting chaotic demonstrations in American colleges and universities, from lighting draft cards aflame to picketing, is enough to cause uneasiness and fear in some and encouragement in others.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in the Twin Cities, educational institutions took

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4. Levy, 54.

5. Ibid, 59.

6. Ibid, 64.

7. Ibid, 105.

part in what people may have deemed as radical forms of activism. For example, the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota held its first anti-war protest against the use of air bombing in 1965. After this, marches, protests, teach-ins, and other forms of dissent grew in number until their height in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Minnesotan higher education was not immune to the national call of protesting for peace.

The image of violent student protests is valid in a few cases, though the largely understated moderate activism within schools should not be ignored. A significant population used literature and discussion as a means to promote their opinions on war and peace. They spoke out against military recruiters on campus. They passed out facts and information to their fellow students, faculty, and community. They brought in guest speakers and professionals on the topics of governmental procedures, diplomacy, and the need for peace or the benefits of war. They created posters of their opinions. They initiated peaceful strikes and teach-ins.<sup>9</sup> Expressing their views largely through writing, drawing, and speaking, students voiced their concerns through active engagement with their nation's decisions. At the University of Minnesota, for example, Minneapolis students used their campus paper, the *Minnesota Daily*, to print letters, editorials, and articles about Vietnam-related events on and off-campus, opinions of the student population, and current news involving the U.S. and Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup> Mirroring this type of activism, the anti-war constituency at Bethel would exercise their freedom of speech with literature as U.S. involvement in Vietnam grew in the mid- to late 1960s.

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8. Alpha Smaby. *Political Upheaval: Minnesota and the Vietnam War Protest*. (Minneapolis, MN: Dillon Press, 1987), 42, 74.

9. Levy, 107.

10. Smaby, 41-42.

## The Baptist General Conference

While strong opinions and concerns over Vietnam were present in many significant subgroups of America, evangelical Christians during the 1960s and the 1970s had unique approaches to addressing U.S. involvement; they measured it alongside Scripture and theology. The Baptist General Conference (BGC), the denomination with which Bethel was affiliated, dealt with the socially and politically charged revolutions of the Vietnam era through a Pietistic lens: Developing personal conviction and promoting social engagement.<sup>11</sup> In their 85th Annual Meeting in 1964, BGC leaders and organizers discussed a variety of resolutions for their denomination. One of which, titled “War and Peace”, was a proposed standing resolution that stated

We are convinced that war destroys all Christian values, including the destruction of human lives, rights and properties; that the possibility of plunging the human race into an unimaginable holocaust of death and destruction through nuclear warfare is ever upon us;...that we express our Christian love toward all mankind, since we believe that God is love and that every person is precious in His sight; that ultimate peace comes only through the coming of the Prince of Peace; and that any temporal hope for the solution of the problems of human society is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ which offers reconciliation and peace with God and our fellow men.<sup>12</sup>

Though this resolution does not denote a clear response to the specific military efforts in Vietnam, the call for a lasting peace and the description of war as opposition to “all Christian values” illustrates that the BGC also tackled the complex issues of peace and war in the tumultuous 1960s.<sup>13</sup> This proposed standing resolution, though recurring in discussion for the Annual Meetings from 1966-1969, had still not been acted upon.

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11. Christopher Gehrz, *Missional Pietists: Lessons from Dale W. Brown and Carl H. Lundquist (The Covenant Quarterly)*, forthcoming), 1-14.

12. Baptist General Conference, *Reports to the Eighty-Fifth Annual Meeting*, (Evanston, IL: Harvest Publications, 1964) 71-72.

13. Ibid.

While official stances on war, peace, and Vietnam do not seem to have been expressed by the BGC as a whole, individuals in the Conference shared their opinions over the regular editions of the *Standard*. Written by BGC churches, leadership, editors, and members for each other, the *Standards* in the 1960s and 1970s discussed Vietnam among a plethora of other topics. The magazine also contained sections with articles devoted to BGC educational institutions, of which Bethel was nearly always included. The majority of Bethel College and Seminary articles from 1967, for example, dealt with issues about funding, enrollment numbers, staff additions or retirements, and other related topics. In the '60s and '70s, these articles dominated because, as the U.S. was going through times of social and political change, Bethel campus had its own transformation. Seminary moved from the St. Paul location on Snelling Avenue to the Arden Hills site, with the College following close on its heels a few years later.<sup>14</sup> However, some mention of life at Bethel shone through in the *Standards* with discussion of students, goals, new faculty, and periodic letters from Bethel President Carl H. Lundquist.

Bethel's president during the Vietnam era held the position from 1954 to 1982, allowing him to see the progression of the student body through the decades of political and social unrest.<sup>15</sup> As the spokesperson of Bethel for the BGC, he made no personal statements about the Vietnam War. However, several articles reveal Lundquist and the Bethel student body grappling with the revolutionary time period. In the January 26th edition of the *Standard* in 1970, Lundquist wrote "For an Upside Down World." He stated that Christian youth need opportunities and encouragement for mission work because "[t]hey know more about the wounds of their

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14. Olaf S. Olsen, "Higher Education in the Seventies," in *The 1970's in the Ministry of the Baptist General Conference*, (Evanston, IL: Harvest Publications, 1981), 97.

15. Gehrz, 8.



fellow humans around the world caused by deprivation, ignorance, disease, prejudice, war, and exploitation.”<sup>16</sup> While this article does not mention the need for political activism, Lundquist brings up the topic in an earlier *Standard* edition. In January, 1969, Lundquist’s article “Christian Witness in Revolutionary Times” was published, bringing up the topics for Bethel’s annual Founders Week chapel series. He compared the morals and concerns of revolutionaries in his day to Christian values. He explained that radical activists uphold “the insistence that every human being is important...that love ought to characterize our relationships, that right ideals are worth suffering for...and that what ought to be done ought to be done now,” eventually aligning these to Christ’s mission.<sup>17</sup> This stance is noticeably less condemning than an article published in the issue released two weeks earlier, in which the director of youth work of the BGC, Gunnar Hoglund, stated that “the hippies and yippies are, in our judgment, nothing more than a sick part of a sick society.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, Hoglund claims that “the rankest hypocrisy of the hippies is their pretense of being apostles of love. Really, they know nothing of love, particularly the love of Christ...”<sup>19</sup> While Bethel’s president affirmed positive elements of a revolutionary time, opinions similar to this contrasted with other authors within the BGC. These discordant beliefs color the background out of which Bethel students emerged, revealing the difficulty in grouping the students under one umbrella of the debate.

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16. Carl H. Lundquist, “For an Upside Down World,” *The [BGC] Standard*, January 26, 1970, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

17. Carl H. Lundquist, “Christian Witness in Revolutionary Times,” *The [BGC] Standard*, Jan. 27, 1969, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

18. Gunnar Hoglund, “The Hippies are Phonies,” *The [BGC] Standard*, January 13, 1969, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

19. *Ibid.*

## The Voices of Students

Bethel College represented students from many backgrounds and beliefs, but hearing the words of a sample of students can shed a greater light on their standings for the Vietnam debate than simply researching their context alone. For this reason, focus will be placed on articles from Bethel's weekly student newspaper, *The Clarion*. This written source will be supplemented by other material that captures the essence of students' vocal concerns about the Vietnam War debate, including *Minutes & Reports* of the Student Senate meetings, various pieces of literature distributed to students, and other material.

Like articles in other college and university newspapers during the Vietnam War era, Bethel's *The Clarion* expressed the opinions, concerns, and events of students who grappled with the debate over peace and war. While collecting specific and accurate numbers of students who read *The Clarion* has yet to be done, articles from the newspaper indicate that the influence of *The Clarion* was widespread on the college campus. For instance, in 1969 the editor of the paper, Lynn Bergfalk, wrote "Are Bethel Publications Plagued or Prospering?" in response to an editorial claiming student readership was dwindling. Bergfalk stated these claims as "unfounded" based on current high ratings it received and the increasing amount of staff.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the editor-in-chief during the 1967-1968 academic year wrote that *The Clarion* was "the most powerful single influence on the college campus" like "college papers across the nation" in 1968.<sup>21</sup> The purpose was described as "hold[ing] before the students not only the significant facts of news transpiring in important places like Saigon...but also opinion that is designed to send this

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20. Lynn Bergfalk, "Are Bethel Publications Plagued or Prospering?," *The Clarion*, May 9, 1969, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

21. Jonathan P. Larson, "Editor Reflect on Year of CLARION Job," *The Clarion*, January 11, 1968.

generation outside of itself and its peers.”<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of determining Bethel College’s stances on Vietnam, the newspaper supplied diverse voices of students and illuminated responses to the war through campus events.

As demonstrated through the printed sources of students, the Vietnam debate rises and falls at Bethel in sync with the majority of the nation. Student publications regarding the war increased during the mid-1960s and hit a peak in the last years of the decade as moratoriums, teach-ins, and protests emerged. Still, even escalation of social concerns on campus must be placed within the context of American youth responses. While demonstrations and dissent occurred, Bethel students continued to inform each other of their differences in convictions with respect.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1963-1965: Early Stage of Interaction

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution launched escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1964. While military aid and intervention were already provided by the U.S., this date marks a specific turn of events that did not go unnoticed by U.S. citizens.<sup>24</sup> That being said, Bethel students, as evidenced by articles in *The Clarion*, had little engagement with the debate over war. Instead, most of the information about the war remained generic and factual, choosing to highlight the academic need to learn about the situation before choosing an opinion. A column titled “Non-Reader’s Digest,” found in editions from 1963, 1964, and 1965, supplied the student body with national and global news, including military movements and political changes in Vietnam. Several opportunities were available to students who desired to learn more about the

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22. Larson.

23. Olsen, 124.

24. Levy, 43.

U.S. and Vietnam. In 1963, the national Student Peace Union held an event at the University of Minnesota, which a group of Bethel students attended. Offering a “study of alternatives to war,” students returning to Bethel were encouraged to begin their own Student Peace Union group on campus.<sup>25</sup> This may have been one of the first efforts by students to address the Vietnam debate through an event sponsored by institutions of higher education. *The Clarion* promoted an event in the following year that was also held off-campus at the University of Minnesota. A symposium titled “Great Issues in Government” was to occur from February 16-19. The free event represented multiple sides to the Vietnam debate, with a conservative speaker and a socialist party leader discussing peace and war.<sup>26</sup> With a rise in events dialoguing about both sides of the debate, *The Clarion* began to voice diverse student beliefs in the mid-1960s.

Even in the early stages of advancing military involvement, students at Bethel began to express both pro- and anti-Vietnam War standpoints in college publications. In 1964, a Vietnamese freshman student was interviewed explaining the horrific effects of warfare on her country of origin: “We live in fear. At night it isn’t safe to leave your house for fear of being killed.”<sup>27</sup> Growing in number in 1965, student editorials and articles about Vietnam depicted more negative views. In a “Dear Abbey” letter, one student challenged the Bethel community, and Christians in general, to reevaluate the government’s actions in Southeast Asia. The tendency at Bethel, the student wrote, is instead for students to grow apathetic and accept involvement in Vietnam without considering its implications on people abroad and in the U.S.<sup>28</sup> On the other end

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25. Carol Armstrong, “Student Peace Union Believes, Works Against World Militarism,” *The Clarion*, April 30, 1963.

26. “Left, Right Wing Leaders to Speak on Great Issues in Government,” *The Clarion*, February 12, 1964.

27. Gloria Nelson, “Vietnamese Freshman Recalls Fear, Army Drilling; Plans Medical Career,” *The Clarion*, October 28, 1964.

28. “Dear Abbey,” *The Clarion*, November 24, 1965.

of the spectrum, articles surfaced indicating pro-war mentalities. One letter to the editor explained the importance of continuing efforts in Vietnam in order to prevent the spread of Communism and, the author argues, atheism.<sup>29</sup> An advertisement for the U.S. Air Force was given space in a *Clarion* from 1964. Next to a photo of a man and woman smiling and fixing their uniforms, the article encouraged ROTC programs because of their benefits for students in the future.<sup>30</sup>

As the U.S. initiated stronger military responses in Vietnam during 1965, students at Bethel responded with new opportunities to raise awareness of their differing views on war and peace. Setting the framework for future events and activism, students began to create and sign petitions, like one that showcased support of the war and was advertised in *The Clarion*.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in a summary of a Student Senate meeting on April 4, 1965, a motion was raised by student Bill Carlson and five other students suggesting a new committee to discuss “social awareness and social action on campus.”<sup>32</sup> To be called either the Social Awareness Committee or Social Action Committee, the goal for the student group was to “inform the student body about current social issues” by posting information on a bulletin board for events, holding regular seminars with outside speakers, linking the school with volunteer organizations in the Twin Cities, and encouraging other community events for Bethel students to attend.<sup>33</sup> The Student Senate voted to carry the motion for future implementation. While the term “social

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29. David Hartzfeld, “U.S. Stand in Vietnam Supported,” *The Clarion*, March 17, 1965.

30. “Let’s Say for a Minute, This is You,” *The Clarion*, May 20, 1964.

31. “Students to Circulate Petition,” *The Clarion*, December 8, 1965.

32. Student Senate Minutes, April 4, 1965, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

33. *Ibid.*

action” is broad and the motion does not specifically mention the Vietnam War, discussion and activism are stimulated in future years at Bethel College because of student instigation on the part of pro- and anti-war beliefs.

#### 1966-1967: Momentum Gained

The years of 1966 and 1967 contained an increase in number of academic opportunities, discussions, and debates as seen in previous years, but new avenues for activism were developing during this period that would make way for campus dissent in the late 1960s. Bethel students were notified of various academic options for discussion of the Vietnam War. In 1966, *The Clarion* offered a new column titled “Fellowcitizens,” which would include editorials “airing opinions ranging from those of flagwaving conservatives to those of the U.S. Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front in Viet Nam”, as well as student opinions.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in the start of the 1967 Fall semester, *The Clarion* published an article titled “CLARION Seeks Revolutionaries, Offers Its Ink To The Outspoken.”<sup>35</sup> Beginning the year with a call for influential media on social concerns, *The Clarion*’s new staff sought to “revolutionize the Bethel scene” by allowing the student body to let the paper “help you say the things you want” about hot topics of their time.<sup>36</sup> Because of this push from Bethel editors and through the outside influences of upheaval over U.S. involvement of Vietnam, various articles in Bethel’s newspaper would address both anti- and pro-war concerns in the mid-1960s academic years.<sup>37</sup>

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34. “New Column To Be Seen,” *The Clarion*, October 20, 1966.

35. “CLARION Seeks Revolutionaries, Offers Its Ink To The Outspoken,” *The Clarion*, September 9, 1967.

36. Ibid.

37. For anti-war and pro-war opinion articles from these years, see Doug Ring, “National Front Lacks Cohesiveness; Vietnam Differences Lead to Strife,” *The Clarion*, May 18, 1966; John Sailhamer, “Diagnoses for Vietnamese Maladies Seek Aggressive American Policies,” *The Clarion*, September 28, 1966; “Fellowcitizens...,” *The Clarion*, October 27, 1966; “Students Express Viet-War Feelings,” *The Clarion*, January 19, 1967.

Opinion-based publications were not the only instances of increasing awareness of the Vietnam War on Bethel's campus. During these two years, the campus was invited to discussions and Bethel's students heard prayers and seminars during weekly chapel services. For instance, World Vision, a global Christian mission and service-oriented organization, held two viewings of their new film "Viet Nam Profile" in Bethel's Fieldhouse on January 23, at 3:00 and 9:00 pm. The film followed Chaplain Warren Harding Withrow, the father of a current Bethel student, as he discusses the merits of witnessing to and assisting soldiers in times of war. Each viewing that night had room for 1500 people, which *The Clarion* mentioned as an encouragement for students to join.<sup>38</sup> Another humanitarian event for students regarding Vietnam was a soap drive led by Bethel Seminary Professor Reuben Omark. Through a personal connection with a medic in South Vietnam, Omark requested that Bethel raise money and soap supplies to be delivered by World Vision. Omark's quote "Wrap every bar with a prayer" was written in *The Clarion's* coverage of the effort of Bethel faculty and students to give aid.<sup>39</sup> Humanitarian efforts were precursors to more demonstrative events in the years to come. That being said, Bethel students did find opportunities to engage in discussions on campus through chapels and events.

When addressing Vietnam through a prayer during chapel, one student's response offers another insight into the growing apprehension over U.S. military efforts in Southeast Asia: The draft. Nothing loomed over the heads of college-aged males more than the possibility of mandatory military service. The student sent a letter to the editor of *The Clarion* in 1966, stating that she walked out of chapel upset. She explained that she "agreed with both speakers

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38. "World Vision's 'Viet Nam Profile' Shown At Bethel on January 23," *The Clarion*, January 14, 1966.

39. Jonathan P. Larson, "Omark Heads Vietnam Soap Drive; Attempt To Relieve Acute Shortage," *The Clarion*, May 18, 1966.

concerning their hate for the evil of war,” but did not know how to react to the Christian soldiers fighting abroad.<sup>40</sup> This bit of honesty not only illustrates Vietnam as a topic used during on-campus chapels, but also poses serious questions about the morality of working in the military in a Christian perspective. The *Clarion* defined terms of new military service announcements, like the Military Selective Service Act of 1967. The editors provided frequently asked questions about the procedures of the new laws and how they would affect male Bethel students.<sup>41</sup> The school paper also provided an outlet for students to exchange opinions about the draft. One article cited the fact that youth have a minuscule amount of knowledge about the war, so they have “no strong motivation to join in,” causing further opposition of the draft.<sup>42</sup> While the troubling issue of the draft is manifest in these earlier documents of Bethel students during 1966 and 1967, the topic, along with increasing anti-war fervor and pro-war dedication, grew to new heights as the U.S. was shaken by events in 1968 and the turn of the decade.

#### 1968-1972: Protests & Patriotism

The tumultuous year of 1968, with race riots, assassinations, and growing unrest among youth, was also characterized by a presidential election. The Bethel College population did not only wait with anticipation to know the results of voting; they lobbied for their nominees based on a variety of policies and platforms, including the major motivation of the candidates’ strategies for Vietnam. In the beginning of 1968, a group of Bethel students created a McCarthy for President Club on campus.<sup>43</sup> The leading Democratic candidate after Johnson’s decision not

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40. Susan Gilberg, Letter to the Editor, *The Clarion*, November 17, 1966.

41. “Selective Service Boards Clarify Changes In Student Draft Status,” *The Clarion*, September 21, 1967.

42. “Draft, Mighty Institution, Haunts American Males,” *The Clarion*, March 2, 1966.

43. “McCarthy Men Mobilize Support, Summon Campus Meet Today,” *The Clarion*, February 14, 1968. 1.



to run for another term, Senator McCarthy's stance on Vietnam was one of de-escalation and negotiations for peace. Bergfalk, editor of *The Clarion*, noted the political activism of McCarthy's supporters, who used "door to door contact and weekend trips to Wisconsin" to promote their presidential candidate.<sup>44</sup> Though Democrat McCarthy clearly had his supporters at Bethel, Republican nominee Richard Nixon officially came out on top in a mock nation-wide primary called CHOICE '68. According to Bethel's coordinator for participation in the primary, 40% of Bethel students voted for Nixon while 32% supported McCarthy. This close of a race, however, did not leave McCarthy's Bethel constituency unhappy. The turnout was substantial in light of Bethel's traditionally right-leaning campus, which may have been due both to McCarthy's opinion on Vietnam and the power behind student support of him.<sup>45</sup>

CHOICE '68 marked Bethel's split on political ideologies, but also showed a larger percentage of dedication to the effort to take American forces out of Vietnam. Withdrawal and reduction of military servicemen in the war was supported by 65% of Bethel voters, while "[p]ermanent cessation of the bombing" was desired by about 29%.<sup>46</sup> While students continued to face the reality of drafting and thousands of troops were shipped to Vietnam, Bethel's campus allowed military recruiters to set up tables and presentations. The Student Senate felt the tension of selective service and military recruitment as the "Hershey Letter" surfaced during 1968. The purpose of this order was to combat demonstrations of students against military recruiters. In practice, the subjects of protests would be more likely to be selected for military service as a

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44. Lynn Bergfalk, "Present Political Scene Open For Student Impact," *The Clarion*, April 4, 1968.

45. "Nixon Tops McCarthy in CHOICE '68 Votes," *The Clarion*, May 2, 1968.

46. "Bethel's CHOICE '68 Vote Follows Similar Pattern to National Results," *The Clarion*, Vol. 42, No. 26, May 16, 1968.

result of their dissent.<sup>47</sup> Continuous debate ensued between student senators about whether recruiters should be prevented from coming onto campus because of the threat of the Hershey Directive in students' freedom of speech. After discussing and amending the motion several times, the senators finally agreed on this resolution:

Recruiters for the military should be allowed on this campus; however, it is the opinion of the Student Association that the Hershey letter is not in the best interests of the Bethel College Student Association, the students in general, and to the country, and it is the opinion of the Student Association that the Hershey Letter is unfair and unconstitutional.<sup>48</sup>

Armed with academic support, pamphlets, and solid arguments, students against the war, those in support of it, and unsure students participated in a respectful debate with military recruiters in Spring 1968. In the end, *The Clarion* explained that the “non-recruiters” won the battle, winning over four students to their cause whereas the Army recruiters left with no one.<sup>49</sup> Though student confrontation occurred, it remained peaceful and orderly.

While other campuses in the nation reported greater student unrest and demonstrations, students at Bethel explored whether Christianity and revolution should mix. In the Fall of 1968, faculty at Bethel were handed an announcement to be shown to students about an upcoming on-campus event aimed at analyzing Christian dissent.<sup>50</sup> The speaker, Mulford Q. Sibley, was a political science professor at the University of Minnesota and prominent supporter of Christian pacifism. “Justifiable Dissent: The Courage of the Christian Conscience” was his topic for the

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47. Lynn Bergfalk, “Prevailing Attitudes Fail to Value Role of Dissent,” *The Clarion*, February 29, 1968.

48. Student Senate Minutes, February 12 1968, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

49. “Army Recruiters Visit Campus; Face Orderly Student Protests,” *The Clarion*, February 22, 1968.

50. “Justifiable Dissent: The Courage of the Christian Conscience,” handout, *G. William Carlson Personal Collection*.

evening of October 29, 1968, and students were encouraged to attend through faculty and an article in *The Clarion*.<sup>51</sup> Several further articles, like one from student senator Maurice Zaffke, challenged Christians to consider their role in social concerns, stating, “What meaning can a demonstration of concern have when Bethel students will not even verbally involve themselves with the issues?”<sup>52</sup> Students continued to ask how much is too much regarding activism as Christians, resulting in a wide variety of conclusions.

The year 1969 contained similar methods of academic activism on Bethel’s campus as 1968, but two events stand out as unique. Bethel students participated in two major moratoriums, both nationally sponsored. This marks a clear break from previous years. Some students moved more resolutely from discussion and education about the war into dedicated actions against it.

The first Vietnam moratorium of the year, of which Bethel was intimately involved, occurred on October 15, 1969. With students from over 500 educational institutions participating throughout the nation, Bethel students were given the opportunity to voice and demonstrate their diverse opinions on-campus and at various locations throughout the Twin Cities. Endorsed by organizations like the National Americans for Democratic Actions, the National Student Association, and the New Mobilization Committee, a goal of the moratorium was to reveal massive disapproval of those opposed to the government sending tens of thousands of more soldiers to Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> *The Clarion* laid out the schedule for October 15, which would start with a rally at Macalaster College in St. Paul. This was followed by a 10 a.m. veteran’s march to the Federal Building where a roll call of fallen soldiers was announced and a speech ensued. After

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51. “Campus Hears Sibley on ‘Justifiable Dissent’,” *The Clarion*, October 25, 1968.

52. Maurice Zaffke, “Student Concern,” *The Clarion*, November 1, 1968.

53. “Vietnam Moratorium will Escalate Anti-War Action,” *The Clarion*, September 26, 1969.

this, at around noon, students and other moratorium attendees would pass out pamphlets and literature to houses in the vicinity. A dispersal would occur in which students would return to their campuses for further events created by their own educational institutions.<sup>54</sup>

Bethel College offered several events for students to engage in following morning moratorium events, beginning with a chapel service on the topic of prayer for peace in Vietnam by Methodist Dr. Philip Hinerman. Later, a teach-in by members of the political science faculty was established so that students could learn both about the history of the nation of Vietnam and how its past plays a role in the current violent situation.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Bethel College provided a symposium where, according to *The Clarion*, “those of differing views [could] interact on a more formal, academic level” with respect and a desire to learn from others.<sup>56</sup> After Bethel students attended these events on their campus, they would again join the larger group of moratorium demonstrators for a candlelit parade to the Capitol building where a rally would take place and cap off the experience.<sup>57</sup>

The moratorium was well-received by many who advocated peace in Vietnam, but a large number of students and faculty disagreed with the anti-government overtones used by some students. Their response was to create a petition showing Bethel students’ support of their government. The students who signed agreed that the Vietnam moratorium had value, but that, in the future, participants should focus more on prayer than on speaking out against national leaders. In total, 130 faculty members and students wrote their signatures in agreement over their

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54. “Plans for Moratorium Continue”, *The Clarion*, October 3, 1969.

55. Arne Bergstrom, “Bethel Community Plans Moratorium Activities,” *The Clarion*, October 3, 1969.

56. Ibid.

57. “Plans for Moratorium Continue”, *The Clarion*.

discontent with the moratorium's consequences on students' mindset.<sup>58</sup> That being said, the second moratorium still saw motivated and devoted anti-war demonstrators.

The second moratorium spanned over November 13th to 15th and took place throughout the nation, including the Twin Cities. Again, a group of Bethel students would ally themselves with colleges and other educational institutions in Minnesota to rally and strike against further mobilization efforts by the U.S. government. The larger effort of the Minnesota rally was to gather support for the peace march gathering in the nation's capital.<sup>59</sup> One of the largest anti-war events during U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the march was described in an article used in *The Clarion* as containing hundreds of thousands of dissenters.<sup>60</sup> While students in Minneapolis and St. Paul mobilized for the effort, one student wrote an article for *The Clarion* describing how she and four other students hitched rides to Washington D.C. to take part in the monumental protest. She described the atmosphere in the capital to her Bethel readership with awe and respect:

We started moving. The cops were warily watching us from the tops of the federal buildings. The march was leisurely, and a relaxed, friendly atmosphere prevailed. Mothers for peace, Vets for peace, businessmen, Black Panthers, SDS'ers, hippies, McCarthyites, were all there and getting along just fine. People were giving away and sharing food, cigarettes, money, and smiles.<sup>61</sup>

She marveled over the experience as one that was more valuable than anything she and her friends could learn in a classroom. Ending her article on the November moratorium with a melancholy appeal to her classmates, she pleaded that Bethel concern itself with national and international concerns instead of the small and insignificant controversies and arguments that

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58. "Students and faculty reaffirm faith in government," *The Clarion*, October 24, 1969.

59. "Schools Throughout Area Plan Moratorium," *The Clarion*, November 7, 1969.

60. "There was Nothing New Said About Peace During the March in Washington-But Then is There Really Anything New to Say?," *The Clarion*, November 24, 1969.

61. Marjorie M. Rusche, "Bethelites Hitch to D.C. for Moratorium," *The Clarion*, November 24, 1969.

plagued their campus.<sup>62</sup> While these moratoriums are the pinnacle of Bethel's involvement in political and social activism regarding the Vietnam War, they also illustrate the fact that the majority of Bethel's student body did not concern itself with the Vietnam debate as much as some students would desire.

The turn of the decade saw similar methods of activism like those of 1968 and 1969. Students reacted to significant events like the violent protests at Kent State in 1970 with articles in *The Clarion* and prayers during chapel.<sup>63</sup> Similar humanitarian efforts that existed since the increasing mobilization of the mid-1960s continued to occupy student responses to Vietnam. For example, the Student Senate organized a Peace Fast at Bethel to coincide with those being done by the Vietnam Moratorium Committee in April 1970. For every meal the students chose to fast from, money was given to the Mennonite Central Committee's mission work in Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, students continued to take roles in picketing, protesting, and teach-ins, still allowing ample time and support to opposing views in order to have a balanced understanding of the Vietnam debate.<sup>65</sup>

Though not as widespread as the November moratorium in 1969, some Bethel students attended moratoriums in both 1970 and 1971.<sup>66</sup> The latter, described in a handout distributed by Professor of History Roy Dalton, noted the Baptist General Conference's resolutions of war as a context for students at Bethel to consider. Citing Bible verses and quoting theologians, Dalton

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62. Rusche.

63. "Colleges Protest Nixon Decision; Four Students Killed at Kent State," *The Clarion*, May 8, 1970.

64. Student Senate Minutes, March 18 1970, Bethel University Collection, History Center, Archives of the BGC and Bethel University.

65. "Bethel Students Stage Teach-Ins, March, Picket," *The Clarion*, May 8, 1970.

66. Paul Swanson, "Nov. 6 Moratorium," *The Clarion*, October 10, 1970.

lobbied for a large student turn-out at the moratorium. He advocated for engagement “not to win converts to pacifism primarily” but to increase awareness among the Christian community of the moral and spiritual consequences of warfare. The ultimate goal to allocate time “in praying for peace and considering seriously God’s leading regarding our roles in a war-ridden age” was central in many of the Vietnam-related events from 1968-1972.<sup>67</sup>

Gaining a fuller image of this period of height in Bethel’s activism regarding Vietnam necessitates devoting time to recognizing faculty efforts. With the anxiety over the draft, many students sought refuge and advice from the offices of Bethel’s professors. Numerous conscientious objection letters, written by students under the advice of faculty, were sent to local authorities in order to make a case against conscription. Looking for professional and personal references to support the students’ claims of Christian pacifism, professors advocated by explaining the students’ efforts for peace through outward activism and inward pensiveness.<sup>68</sup> Another way faculty encouraged students during these pivotal years was by developing a new academic program to discuss literature, events, and people who were Christians and pro-war or anti-war. Initially calling it Pacifism: The Forgotten Option, this course was offered during the newly adopted interim period in January, 1971.<sup>69</sup> Though students initiated awareness of the Vietnam debate on campus through various methods, faculty members played a role in fostering an environment for this to be successful.

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67. “Moratorium Oct. 13, 1971,” handout, 1971, *G. William Carlson Personal Collection*.

68. “Conscientious Objection Letters,” *G. William Carlson Personal Collection*.

69. “Pacifism: The Forgotten Option Syllabus,” 1971, *G. William Carlson Personal Collection*.

## 1973-1975: The Debate's Denouement

As United States military involvement came to an end in the mid-1970s, Bethel's coverage and activism of the debate over Vietnam diminished. *The Clarion* had several articles with news about Southeast Asia, but these are significantly less common than in previous years. One event mirrored those of the late 1960s; Bethel students participated in another moratorium organized largely by Dr. G. William Carlson who assisted students with conscientious objection, encouraged teach-ins and symposiums, and was a professor for the Peace Studies interim course. A different flavor than the prior moratoriums, the one held on April 26th and 27th, 1974, reflected on the past decade of military escalation, its impact on the American society, and the lessons that can be learned from it. The "bloody disaster of Vietnam," as described by a writer in *The Clarion*, would be given closure for Bethel students at this event, titled "The Vietnam Experience: Impact, Reflection, and Evaluation."<sup>70</sup> In the same year, Dr. Carlson, in his analysis of the Peace Studies program at Bethel, wrote about the students of Bethel and their overall contribution to pro- and anti-war activism, noting that the years of 1968-1972 were the most politically active. With Vietnam's de-escalation and ceasefire, students were given the opportunity to shift their anti-war activism to broader concepts of violence in society, nonviolent methods to approach social ills, and ways in which politics, educational institutions, and churches can be enlightened by students voicing their concerns.<sup>71</sup> The Peace Studies program hoped to accomplish this task, though Bethel students had to rise to the occasion as they had proven themselves capable of doing throughout the Vietnam era.

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70. Steve Harris, "Bethel Hosts Peace Conference to Evaluate War in Vietnam," *The Clarion*, April 19, 1974.

71. G. William Carlson, "A Preliminary Study: A Peace Studies Cognate At Bethel College," Bethel College, March 1974, *G. William Carlson Personal Collection*.



## Conclusion

Documenting mindsets is not an easy task. Much of how students perceive and feel about current issues are expressed through conversation or internally processed, causing a gap in the historians' pursuit of a complete history of responses to tumultuous times. What went on in the thoughts of a student as they sipped coffee at a symposium or sat around a table with their friends at a teach-in? This component of the past can not be measured, though synthesizing information from *The Clarion*, brochures, transcripts, and student senate discussions can give some insight into outward expressions of students' beliefs. These sources do reveal a comforting conclusion about the years of 1963-1975. While many outspoken demonstrators and activists on both side of the Vietnam debate were uncivil in their interactions with opposition, resorting to throwing eggs at veterans as they returned home or calling pro-war proponents murderers, war-mongers, and sadists, Bethel students remained respectful in their publications and demonstrations.<sup>72</sup> Fostering environments of peaceful conversations and using their Christianity and desire to learn as a means of engaging others in the topic, heated debates and radical activism do not define Bethel students' reactions.

What this study does show is that no group is monolithic. Bethel College in the 1960s and 1970s is no exception. Political ideology divided the campus in significant ways, as evidenced through polls and a campus primary. Convictions of war and peace varied greatly, especially among evangelical Christians who have historically debated between pacifism and just war for centuries. As youth, not only were some Bethel students fervent anti-war demonstrators, but still others were stringent supporters of the government's decision for war in Vietnam.

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72. Levy, 66.

However, a significant portion of students were also apathetic or unsure about their beliefs on the topic of the Vietnam War. In the broader view of U.S. history during this period, observing Bethel students' responses to the war unveils the complexity of opinions and actions within a subgroup of American society: midwestern, traditionally conservative-leaning, and evangelical college youths.