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Young Americans for Freedom and the Anti-War Movement:

Pro-War Encounters with the New Left at the Height of
the Vietnam War

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Abstract

While a vast amount of contemporary scholarship has been dedicated to student activism during the late 1960s and early 1970s, very little of it has focused on those who supported the war in Vietnam. The few authors who have written on the topic tend to present pro-war activists as a mild-mannered force that used conventional and congenial tactics to advocate for victory in southeast Asia. This paper will upend this characterization by examining how members of the conservative organization Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) saw themselves as a besieged minority at American universities and responded to the radicalism of the anti-war movement with inflammatory satire and physical confrontation. As their peers in the New Left burnt draft cards and occupied campus buildings, these young conservatives employed aggressive strategies of their own to advocate for the war. During this process, YAF members revealed an affinity for appropriating the rhetoric and tactics of their adversaries, exposing an intertwined relationship between two seemingly opposed political movements that most historians study in isolation

Young Americans for Freedom helped to forge a distinct strain of conservative backlash politics that catapulted Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980. This paper sheds light on radical undercurrents within the organization and its relationship to the New Left, complicating our understanding of both student activism in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the emergence of modern conservatism.

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Introduction

“We could not then, and cannot now, see lowering our flag for four persons at Kent State whom no one at Yale had ever met, known or even heard of, before the notable slaying.” - Richard E. Band, Chairman of Yale Young Americans for Freedom.¹

On May 5, 1970, more 500 young men and women gathered on Yale University’s Beinecke Plaza.² They met to mourn the deaths of four anti-war student protesters at the hands of National Guardsmen at Kent State University the day before. What had begun as a vigil to honor the murdered students soon turned into a rally decrying the war and the presence of more than 300,000 American soldiers in southeast Asia.³ Their anger reflected the frustration experienced by many young people across the country; the military draft, alleged war crimes in Vietnam, and the assassinations of icons like Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy defined liberal unrest in the late 1960s and early 1970s

As the anti-war demonstration escalated, another group arrived on the plaza with a very different agenda. Richard E. Band and several dozen other Yale students gathered to picket the vigil and express their support for the war. They were members of the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a conservative, pro-Vietnam War organization with branches nationwide. When tensions grew on the plaza and the anti-war group attempted to lower the American flag and replace it with a black one, Band and his “boys” physically intervened.⁴ To the pro-war students, honoring those killed at Kent State was akin to celebrating the deaths of

¹ Richard E. Band, “Report to All Supporters of the Conservative Movement at Yale,” 30 June 1970, Box 284, Folder 2493, 6, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

² Stuart Rosow and Lewis Schwartz, “Demonstrators Hurl Protests at ROTC,” *Yale Daily News*, 6 May 1970, accessed March 23, 2019, http://digital.library.yale.edu/utills/getarticleclippings/collection/yale-ydn/id/11303/articleId/DIVL16/compObjId/11307/lang/en_US/dmtext/.

³ Andrew Wiest, *The Vietnam War, 1956-1975* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 11.

⁴ Band, “Report to All Supporters of the Conservative Movement at Yale,” 6, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

American soldiers abroad, and lowering the flag was an insult to the war effort. “We held off the rock throwing, obscenity-chanting mob,” Band later wrote, as anti-war protesters tried to grab the flagpole at the center of the plaza.⁵ Finally, anti-war students armed with knives threatened those guarding the pole and succeeded in cutting the flag down, after which YAFers snatched the fallen American flag and delivered it to the campus ROTC building.

When asked to imagine the prototypical college campus in 1970, many Americans today might picture a student body united in opposition to the Vietnam War. “New Left equals the Sixties Generation,” historian John Campbell McMillan writes in summarizing this fallacy.⁶ Yet, the idea of “higher education in America as a bastion of liberal secularity,” as sociologist James Davison Hunter puts it, is far from the truth.⁷ As young voices denouncing the war in Vietnam seemed to dominate campuses across the country, thousands of young conservatives sought to counter their peers on the Left and advance a pro-war agenda. The brawl on Beinecke Plaza — and others like it — demonstrate a right-wing desire for a well-defined, political youth culture at the height of the Vietnam War.

Spearheading this cause were the vibrant and fiery members of Young Americans for Freedom. Founded in 1960 as an alliance between libertarians and traditional conservatives, YAF was one of the most prominent conservative organizations in the country by the time Yale students clashed on Beinecke Plaza.⁸ YAFers, as the organization's members were known, opposed the expansion of Great Society programs, trade unions and the encroachments on states’

⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁶ John McMillan, “You Didn't Have to Be There,” in *The New Left Revisited*, eds. Paul Buhle, John McMillan (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), 1.

⁷ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 2001), 211.

⁸ Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 246.

rights.⁹ They vociferously condemned liberalism in the Democratic and Republican Parties alike and were instrumental in Barry Goldwater's GOP presidential nomination in 1964.¹⁰ During the early years of the decade, YAFers challenged their liberal peers on an intellectual level with debates, pamphlets and publicized reading lists.¹¹ But, as the war in Vietnam escalated, their opponents on the Left moved away from abstract advocacy and towards direct political action. The New Left seemed to engulf the university, and young conservatives were forced to reckon with a new form of popular politics never before seen on American campuses.

In response, they built on the bottom-up spirit of the Goldwater campaign to construct a new style of political organizing. Soon, "action took precedence over ideology" as YAFers created a grassroots network of students committed to winning the war in Vietnam and confronting the anti-war movement.¹² By the end of the decade, YAF had grown into a political behemoth. With only 100 students present at its founding in 1960, the organization boasted over 50,000 members by 1970. This made YAF the largest non-party political action organization in the country following the collapse of the anti-war group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in 1969.¹³ YAF contributed to a "complex and still neglected social movement," as historian Rick Perlstein describes it, that energized young conservatives and ultimately paved the way for Ronald Reagan's rout of President Jimmy Carter in 1980.¹⁴ "Although conservative

⁹ Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 17.

¹⁰ Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 57.

¹¹ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 246.

¹² Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 10.

¹³ Ronald Dear, "Young America's Freedom Offensive: a 1969 Report," *The New Guard*, January 1970, 21, Microfilm.; George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), 531.

¹⁴ Rick Perlstein, "Thunder on the Right: The Roots of Conservative Victory in the 1960s," *OAH Magazine of History* 20, no. 5 (2006): 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162080>.

ideology was not created during the 1960s,” writes historian Jonathan M. Schoenwald, “its political components were, and the conservatism of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is its direct descendant.”¹⁵

This paper will recount how Young Americans for Freedom helped develop a pro-war movement on the nation’s campuses and illuminate how its members co-opted the tools and tactics of their liberal peers to generate broad support. YAFers reconfigured the toolbox of the Left to preserve their idealized version of a college campus and appeal to the American public. This strategy reflected a fundamental principle at the heart of conservative politics, according to political theorist Corey Robin in his book, *The Reactionary Mind*. Through an “absorption of the ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform it opposes,” a conservative attempts “to transform a tottering old regime into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses.”¹⁶

This paper will also trace the escalation in YAF’s borrowing from the Left through its rhetoric, satirization and, ultimately confrontation, to expose a more radical strain of politics within the organization. While some historians have written on YAF, few have acknowledged the extent to which those on the Right appropriated ideas and strategies from the Left, and others significantly downplay YAF’s embrace of physical engagement.

Some liberal students wore pins to protest the Vietnam War; YAFers adorned themselves with blue buttons to condemn “campus fascism.”¹⁷ Some young men burnt draft cards; YAFers ignited their Social Security cards in response.¹⁸ And when members of the New Left resorted to

¹⁵ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 8.

¹⁶ Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42.

¹⁷ “Blue Button,” Pamphlet, n.d., Box 284, Folder 2491, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁸ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, January 1969, 24, Microfilm.

violence, YAFers were right there with them, ready to engage in “hand-to-hand combat,” as they they did on Beinecke Plaza.¹⁹

Before continuing, however, it is necessary to clarify how terminology will be used in this paper. Conservatism will be broadly characterized using historian Kim Phillips-Fein’s definition as an ideology typified by “anti-Communism, a laissez-faire approach to economics, opposition to the civil rights movement, and commitment to traditional sexual norms.”²⁰ While not every conservative supported the Vietnam War, this paper will use the terms “conservative” and “pro-war” synonymously to capture fervent anti-communist sentiment expressed as support for the war on the Right. Looking to the other side of the political spectrum, this paper will define the New Left using historian John McMillan’s description of “a loosely organized, mostly white student movement that promoted participatory democracy, crusaded for civil rights and various types of university reforms, and protested against the Vietnam War.”²¹ In characterizing the activity of both sides, this paper will employ the description “radical” to mean an extreme or confrontational approach to politics outside the mainstream pursued by any group, regardless of affiliation.

Despite YAF’s large size, scholarship on the organization has been relatively limited. Of those who have written on the subject, many disagree about the extent to which YAFers contributed to the radical student culture that many associate with the late 1960s and early 1970s. This paper will engage with existing literature in two ways: first, by exposing an extreme side of YAF to complicate contemporary debates on the development of 20th century conservatism, and

¹⁹ Wayne Jacob Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes: Young Americans for Freedom and the Creation of the Conservative Movement* (Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books, 2010), 227.

²⁰ Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (2011): 728, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jar430>.

²¹ McMillan, "You Didn't Have to Be There," 5.

second, by expanding on existing scholarship on conservative extremism by exploring how YAFers learned from and emulated their liberal peers to further their own agenda.

Many of those who have written on YAF present a skewed depiction of its members as gentlemanly promoters of ideas rather than radical campus activists eager to threaten and confront those with whom they disagreed. John A. Andrew's *The Other Side of the Sixties* explores YAF's early years and characterizes the group in placid terms. The group provided "a set of concrete conservative ideas and programs that excited millions of Americans," he wrote.²² They were not radical in action, Andrew continues, but rather stood for "an ideological and philosophical radicalism."²³ This may have been true early in the decade with respect to abstract intellectual issues, but as they physically confronted anti-war demonstrators, it becomes indisputable that their direct style of politics extended beyond the philosophical realm. Gregory L. Schneider makes a similar set of claims in his complete history of YAF, *Cadres for Conservatism*. In it, he describes YAFers as "well-intentioned, concerned citizens...motivated to take action by what they believed were the excesses of American liberalism."²⁴ Schneider also forcefully rejects stereotypes of American conservatives, writing "conservatives, however many historians may think otherwise...were not only, or even mainly, a concoction of pro-McCarthy zealots anti-semitic crackpots and racist kooks."²⁵ Instead, he credits YAF with upholding "the tradition of conservative politics in America" by "shaping a key set of principles and affectations that eventually led to political activism and the capture of a major political party."²⁶

²² John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 4.

²³ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 6.

²⁴ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁶ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 1.

Wayne Thorburn takes this rose-colored portrayal a step further in his book, *A Generation Awakes*. Thorburn, who was very active in the group and served as its executive director in the mid-1970s, provides valuable insight into the inner-workings of YAF by focusing on the organization at both the national and grassroots levels. Thorburn makes little attempt to conceal his nostalgic view of his subject as he attempts to vindicate and celebrate YAF at every turn. While he includes several examples of YAFers engaging in physical confrontations with SDS members and other disruptive incidents, Thorburn insists conservative students were “quiet in their style and [had] a disposition to work through regular channels.”²⁷ In rare moments when he does acknowledge direct action, he is quick to contrast it with YAF’s respectable legal victories or with more violent acts by those on the Left.²⁸

While some historians have embraced the idea of mid-century conservatism as “forward-looking, sophisticated, and politically creative force in American life,” not all are quick to dismiss how groups like YAF engaged in disruptive and reactionary tactics.²⁹ Sandra Scanlon’s *The Pro-War Movement* concentrates on YAF’s approach to the Vietnam War to reveal a more impulsive, less ideological side of the organization. YAFers supported the war, she argues, not because they believed in victory necessarily, but rather due to a concern with the influence of anti-war activism at American universities.³⁰ Therefore, she continues, “YAF’s campus campaigns were designed to undermine the message of the New Left and appropriate sentiments that opposed anti-war and anti-radical viewpoints.”³¹ She recognizes that YAFers were not solely

²⁷ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 207

²⁸ Ibid, 241.

²⁹ Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," 727.

³⁰ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 250.

³¹ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 246.

supporting the war out of spite for their left-wing peers, but points out that “characteristics of their activities were often in a reactionary vein.”³²

In commenting on this type of campus politics, Scanlon also sheds light on the emergence of grassroots conservative action — a subject that is only just beginning to be discussed by scholars. Historians of the conservative movement, she notes, have “thus far paid little attention to the movement’s complex relationships with...grassroots supporters of the Vietnam War.”³³ Other historians have echo this belief. In her essay “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” Kim Phillips-Fein argues that most histories of mid-century conservatism “fail to capture the emotional tone of the movement — the animating spirit of disappointment and fury that seems to motivate at least some of its participants.”³⁴ This “rage for moral and social order expressed often in disorderly ways...[is] a history we are only now beginning to understand,” Rick Perlstein writes, and it is one that this paper will engage with extensively.³⁵

Even when this emotional tone is recognized, YAF is often left out of the conversation. Rick Perlstein’s second installment in his trilogy on the rise of modern conservatism, *Nixonland*, explains the emergence of grassroots support for Republicans in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While YAF played a significant role in his first book, *Before the Storm*, about the rise of Barry Goldwater, Perlstein treats YAF as a negligible force at best by the end of the decade. YAF was the largest non-party political organization in the nation with over 800 chapters at its peak, yet Perlstein mentions the organization fewer than 10 times throughout the book.³⁶ When he does acknowledge an “active movement of young conservatives in the 1960s...who preferred their

³² Ibid, 242.

³³ Ibid, 15.

³⁴ Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," 736.

³⁵ Perlstein, "Thunder on the Right," 27.

³⁶ Lloyd Bucher, “Project Appreciation,” Pamphlet, 1971, Box 284, Folder 2494, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

campuses free of disruption,” he makes no mention of YAF.³⁷ Similarly, Shoenwald describes how YAF “became expert at co-opting the Left’s own social protest methods” as it focused on confronting the New Left on college campuses.³⁸ However, this is mentioned only briefly in his more comprehensive book on conservative; this “co-opting” demands more attention.

Finally, above all else, this paper will blur the well-established line between Left and Right in historical writing. While a handful of scholars have written about pro-war activism with countless more publishing on the anti-war movement, these phenomena are almost always discussed in isolation. In *A Generation Divided*, Rebecca Klatch attempts to subvert this trend by comparing and contrasting YAF and SDS as organizations, yet did not cover how the two groups interacted in much detail. This paper hopes to further our understanding of YAFers by illuminating how they imagined themselves in relation to the New Left. The theater of political activism is not a turn-based series of monologues by one side and then the other, but rather a dynamic conversation with each group shaping and responding to the rhetoric and style of the other.

The following sections will explore how YAF confronted the Left and, in doing so, appropriated its rhetoric and tactics for its own cause. After establishing YAF in historical context, the paper will be divided into four sections. First, “An Unconservative Age” will examine how YAFers saw both themselves and the New Left in the campus climate, and how they characterized the threat they believed antiwar activists posed. Second, “Berkeley of the Right” draws parallels between YAF’s rhetoric and materials proliferated by the New Left. Third, “Community of the Right” describes the escalation of these practices as YAFers used satire

³⁷ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 721.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 248

inspired by their opponents on the Left to propagate their own message. Finally, “Guerrillas of the Right” reveals the most radical strain of YAF activism as vigilantism and direct confrontation took hold of the organization when it responded to disruptive anti-war activity.

Early Years and the Vietnam Crisis

While Young Americans for Freedom embraced radical tactics popularized by other groups by the end of the 1960s, the organization emerged in a much more sedate era. YAF was born in 1960 at a conference of young conservatives at the Sharon, Connecticut home of William F. Buckley Jr., arguably one of the most famous American public intellectuals at the time who rose to prominence after publishing *God and Man at Yale* in 1951.³⁹ Over the weekend of September 9-11, one hundred young conservatives representing forty-four colleges across the country met to reflect on the state of American civic life and to chart a path forward for conservatism in the new decade.⁴⁰ Organized around the core tenets drafted in the “Sharon Statement” that weekend, YAF committed itself to instilling patriotism and conservative principles in the nation’s youth. Coming to age at the height of the Cold War and the beginnings of the civil rights movement, the conference attendees described their nation in “moral and political crisis.”⁴¹ They touted individual liberty, economic freedom and federalism as fundamental values that had to be restored in American civic life. Communism, they contended, was “the greatest single threat to these liberties” and “the United States should stress victory over, rather than coexistence with, this menace.”⁴²

³⁹ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 40.

⁴⁰ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 243.

⁴¹ “Young Americans for Freedom and You,” Pamphlet, 1969, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Over the following years, YAF chapters were launched on college campuses across the country. Extending membership to anyone under 35, YAF marketed itself as an organization for young people “to move their conservatism out of the confines of pure theoretic colloquy” and into the public arena.⁴³ Most YAFers were children of GOP voters and members of middle-class households.⁴⁴ Unlike their peers on the Left who rejected the politics of their parents’ generation, YAF members seemed to embrace it. Richard Braungart, a sociologist who studied YAFers in the early 1960s, found that most were far more likely to have good relationships with their parents and positive experiences at school than their peers in more left-leaning college groups.⁴⁵ As George H. Nash writes, these young conservatives were raised by “a generation of parents who... held fast to traditional values, and bootlegged them to their children. Loyal to their parents’ beliefs, defiant of the prevailing liberal climate, these young people were sustained by the growth of conservative thought in the 1950s.”⁴⁶

In the first half of the decade, YAF worked within pre-existing systems and institutions to amplify a conservative message. During this period, YAFers focused on publicizing the work of more prominent, older conservatives who opposed the liberalism of Kennedy and Johnson as well as left-leaning factions within the Republican Party.⁴⁷ Many YAF members tried to purge this liberalism by supporting Barry Goldwater’s insurgent candidacy in 1964. That year, the Republican National Convention floor was flooded with zealous young men and women touting “YAF Backs Goldwater” signs.⁴⁸ While the YAF National Board helped guide organization policy, most leaders were adamant that a robust grassroots network was critical to the group’s

⁴³ Band, “Report to All Supporters of the Conservative Movement at Yale,” 2.

⁴⁴ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 57.

⁴⁵ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 245.

⁴⁶ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 456.

⁴⁷ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 57.

⁴⁸ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 282.

success.⁴⁹ Therefore, as some YAFers focused on electoral politics, others sought to broaden the influence of conservatism on college campuses. YAF's chapter at the University of Kansas was renowned for focusing on campus and community education programs, like small debates and lectures, to engender support for conservative policies at local levels.⁵⁰ In March 1961, YAF also began publishing *The New Guard*, a monthly magazine sent to subscribers across the country to promote debate and build a national community of young conservatives.⁵¹

This spirit of intellectualism and the rejection of direct confrontation was epitomized in YAF President Tom Charles Huston's address at the organization's annual 1965 gathering. In it, Huston denounced conservatives "who abuse the truth, who resort to violence and engage in slander...who seek victory at any price without regard for the broken lives...incurred by those who stand in their way."⁵² Schneider regards the speech as "an unmitigated attack on the John Birch Society," a fanatic anti-communist organization at the time, "and other extremist beliefs."⁵³ While Huston would go on to serve in the Nixon White House and craft the infamous Huston Plan, which urged illegal wiretapping and burglary to combat Weathermen and Black Panthers, his time as president of YAF marked a particularly placid period in the organization's history.⁵⁴

In French Indochina, however, violence was on the ascent. Since achieving independence from France in 1954, the region had been embroiled in conflict. The country we now know as Vietnam had been divided into two after independence, with the People's Republic of China and the USSR supporting a communist regime in the North while the United States — committed to a policy of containing the spread of Communism in southeast Asia — backed the southern

⁴⁹ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 38.

⁵⁰ Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 101.

⁵¹ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 37.

⁵² Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 462.

⁵³ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 97.

⁵⁴ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 249.

government.⁵⁵ While elections were meant to take place in 1956 to reunify the nation, the Vietnamese populations never had a chance to cast their ballots. Instead, tensions between the two regions grew as their superpower sponsors both refused to back down. American troops had been stationed in the region as advisors since 1950, with their numbers swelling as the communist government in the north seemed poised to expand southward.⁵⁶ However, the US military personnel in Vietnam were not combat troops and had seen relatively little action through the early 1960s.⁵⁷

This changed on the night of August 3-4, 1964. Following an alleged naval confrontation in the Gulf of Tonkin between North Vietnamese and American vessels, Congress authorized President Johnson to intervene in the conflict using force. Today, most historians agree that no naval action occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin that night.⁵⁸ Yet, American troops poured into the region, where numbers spiked from 23,300 in 1964 to 184,300 in 1965, and ultimately peaked at 536,100 in 1968.⁵⁹ To sustain this presence, the Johnson Administration expanded the draft system to call up over 40,000 men a month by 1967.⁶⁰

Throughout this escalation, faith in an American victory was always in doubt. “The public knew Vietnam was lost long before their political leaders would admit,” writes historian

⁵⁵ Murrey Marder, “Our Longest War’s Torturous History,” in *A Short History of the Vietnam War*, edited by Allan Reed Millett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 13.

⁵⁶ James Willbanks, “The Evolution of the US Advisory Effort in Viet Nam: Lessons Learned,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* [Online], 29 (2009): <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/15238/24499>.

⁵⁷ Wiest, *The Vietnam War, 1956-1975*, 22.

⁵⁸ John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945 -1975* (University Press of Kansas, 2009), 94, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/46131>.

⁵⁹ “The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History,” Infographic: The Vietnam War: Military Statistics | Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/content/infographic-vietnam-war-military-statistics>.

⁶⁰ Frances Mary Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2018), 46.

William Greider.⁶¹ Even when politicians and acknowledged this, the conflict was continued for leaders “to avoid humiliation,” as Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton wrote as early as 1965 in the secret Pentagon Papers.⁶² By the 1970s, U.S. forces had begun the process of delegating the bulk of the fighting to South Vietnamese forces, a strategy known as Vietnamization.⁶³ The last group of American forces left the region in April 1975, shortly before Saigon, the southern capital, fell. The conflict ultimately cost the lives of over 58,000 U.S. personnel, and 3.8 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians.⁶⁴

As Americans witnessed the horrors of war on their television sets and saw their young men drafted into a conflict few understood, popular anger erupted. “Every major armed conflict in U.S. history has provided an opposition,” writes historian Michael Kazin, but no other movement grew “larger and more powerful as the battles continued,” emphasizing how committed opponents to the war were in their activism.⁶⁵ They saw the conflict as an undemocratic project conducted in secrecy that reeked of a “counter-revolutionary” and “imperialist” agenda as the United States suppressed a popular uprising abroad.⁶⁶ Furthermore, many believed the war was a gross misuse of American resources when cycles of poverty and inequality persisted domestically.⁶⁷ According to one journalist embedded with the infantry in

⁶¹ William Greider, “America and Defeat,” in *A Short History of the Vietnam War*, edited by Allan Reed Millett, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 52.

⁶² Marder, “Our Longest War’s Torturous History,” 16.

⁶³ Wiest, *The Vietnam War, 1956-1975*, 11.

⁶⁴ “Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics,” National Archives and Records Administration, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.; Ziad Obermeyer, Christopher J L Murray, and Emmanuela Gakidou, “Fifty Years of Violent War Deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: Analysis of Data from the World Health Survey Programme,” *BMJ* 336, no. 7659 (June 19, 2008): 1, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/336/7659/1482.full.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 230.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶⁷ Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American New Left, 1959-1972* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 84.

Vietnam, the question “why are we here?” became a constant refrain among soldiers on the frontlines.⁶⁸ At home, many asked the same thing.

This spirit of dissent galvanized a new style of grassroots protest politics on the Left that YAF and other pro-war activists had to contend with. In 1962, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) published the Port Huron statement, which called for a “New Left of young people built from within the university with allies outside...to assault power and create a democratic society.”⁶⁹ Many on college campuses turned to the Vietnam War as a major roadblock to achieving this democratic society and campaigned aggressively for the U.S. to withdraw. In March 1965, the first of many campus teach-ins was held at the University of Michigan.⁷⁰ These large lectures dedicated to exposing American tyranny abroad caught on across the country and were conducted by SDS and other campus groups throughout the duration of the war.⁷¹ As the number of troops escalated in Vietnam, so too did the intensity of protests on the Left. With the expansion of the draft in 1965, students at University of California, Berkeley began burning their draft cards. This practice soon took off nationwide.⁷² On other campuses, students resorted to more radical forms of protest. In April 1968, students at Columbia University shut down several campus buildings and confronted police in clashes that injured almost 150, albeit mainly protestors.⁷³ Over the following months, more than 3,000 campus protests took place, with SDS membership peaking at over 100,000.⁷⁴ While the organization collapsed in 1969, its radical legacy lived on. Following the Kent State shooting in 1970, the bombings of ROTC buildings

⁶⁸ Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist*, 44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁰ Unger and Unger, *The Movement*, 85.

⁷¹ Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist*, 35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷³ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 114.

⁷⁴ Unger and Unger, *The Movement*, 115.

and incidents of occupations spiked nationwide. In August 1970, an extremist anti-war splinter group comprised of former SDSers, Weathermen, detonated a bomb at the Army Mathematics Research Center at the University of Wisconsin, killing a graduate student.⁷⁵ Other violent disruptions forced over a hundred universities across the country to shutter their doors by the early 1970s.⁷⁶

In response, YAFers eagerly crafted their pro-war agenda with a wildly ambitious plan for total victory.⁷⁷ In a memo sent to all chapters, the national board warned that unless YAFers could mount a positive case for the war, “public opinion will continue to move towards surrender and defeat, especially on the campuses.”⁷⁸ Believing compulsory military service to be the main reason for most anti-war vitriol, YAF’s libertarian wing quickly came out against conscription.⁷⁹ In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee in 1967, a YAF spokesman condemned the draft as “slave labor coated in democratic slogans.”⁸⁰

With this all-volunteer military, the organization then laid out a course for absolute victory in Vietnam to preserve freedom and democracy in the region.⁸¹ At their National Convention in 1969 — even as American leaders became more skeptical of winning — YAFers

⁷⁵ Ibid, 183.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 187; Robert D. McFadden, “College Strife Spreads.” *The New York Times*. May 08, 1970. Accessed March 22, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/05/08/archives/college-strife-spreads-over-100-schools-closed-and-up-to-350-struck.html>.

⁷⁷ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 248.

⁷⁸ Ronald Dear, “YAF’s Alternative to Vietnam Surrender,” Memorandum, 7 October 1969, Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁷⁹ David Franke, “Statement to House Armed Services Committee,” 18 April 1967, Box 46, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, 2, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁸¹ “Tell it to Hanoi,” Pamphlet, n.d., Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

laid out their vision for victory.⁸² In their convention referendum, they advocated for a full invasion of North Vietnam, expanding the war to enemy bases in Cambodia and Laos, and flooding entire valleys to destroy Viet Cong passages to the South.⁸³ At the same convention, many libertarians left the organization, claiming that “Americans were waging an evil war against the Vietnamese people, largely enriching the state and its benefactors.”⁸⁴ However, the traditionalist YAFers who remained continued their opposition to the draft and support for the war through the early 1970s.

The intensification of the war in Vietnam led to widespread anti-war activism that also forced YAF to reconsider how it engaged with student populations. While the organization began as a force to propagate conservative ideology, the confrontational and radical atmosphere of the late 1960s became inescapable. In her interviews with former YAFers in the late 1990s, historian Rebecca Klatch found that many young conservatives joined YAF chapters instead of Young Republican Clubs during the late 1960s because the Clubs were seen as “too moderate and not as interested...in confronting the Left.”⁸⁵ The Left was a menace, YAFers believed, and it needed to be combated at all costs.

“An Unconservative Age”: YAF and the New Left on Campus

Faced with this tumultuous reality, young conservatives were forced to define themselves and their beliefs relative to the volatile world around them. In the eyes of YAFers, the New Left

⁸² Office of the Historian, "Ending the Vietnam War, 1969–1973," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/ending-vietnam>.

⁸³ “Vietnam,” National Convention of Young Americans for Freedom, Referendum, September 1969, Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁴ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 129.

⁸⁵ Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 102.

threatened higher education, the war effort and even the patriotic core of the nation itself. On college campuses, pro-war students positioned themselves in direct opposition to their liberal peers and strove to claim their own space in an academic environment they felt was increasingly hostile to their worldview. As a result, YAFers adopted the mentality of a besieged minority which was used to justify their charged and physical clashes with the New Left.

Many YAFers' most immediate concern with the anti-war movement was the threat they saw it posed to American higher education. In their fundraising letters, YAFers embraced the idea of the university as "a free market place of ideas or training ground for future leaders," but lamented that it had become dominated by the far-left.⁸⁶ In the wake of liberal campus protest, members of New York State YAF wrote to Buckley in 1968 that "free speech is denied to those whose views don't agree with those of the mob leaders."⁸⁷ The perceived association between campus liberals and criminality was a common trend throughout YAF's internal communications. In a memo sent to the YAF Chairman David Keene in 1968, YAF College Director Jerry Norton expressed fear that after all the unrest on campuses, Americans were beginning to associate universities with unlawful activity rather than moderate intellectualism.⁸⁸ The organization's fundraisers took advantage of this characterization to persuade older conservatives to support YAF. In a 1968 fundraising campaign, YAFers warned donors that "the peaceful halls of ivy that you once knew — and want your children to know — are today besieged by dedicated, ruthless

⁸⁶ James Farley Jr. to William F. Buckley Jr., 18 July 1968, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Jerry Norton to David Keene, 1968, Box 284, Folder 2492, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

revolutionaries.”⁸⁹ Citing instances of student sit-ins and protests against military recruiters, the authors of the letter presented the Left as a disruptive faction that had to be resisted.

On these corrupted campuses, YAFers portrayed themselves as victims of discrimination. While Perlstein presents liberal students as having “felt themselves a nation, instantly at home wherever they alighted,” YAFers and other young conservatives did not feel the same affinity on campus.⁹⁰ In March 1969, Phillip Abbot Luce — a former member of the New Left who joined YAF in 1965 — published an op-ed in the *The New Guard* warning that “the campuses in California are about as safe as the Lower East Side in New York would be for a representative of the Conservative Party.”⁹¹ YAFers claimed that their voices were silenced, complaining that the Left monopolized public debates on every political issue from Vietnam to civil rights.⁹² Harvey Hukari, president of Stanford’s YAF chapter, stood out for his visceral anger; he saw conservatives as a subjugated class — “the new niggers” — on campus.⁹³

Extending this narrative of victimhood beyond the university, YAFers were adamant that the New Left was engaged in a confrontational and violent crusade against American civic institutions and the rule of law. These young conservatives — believing the deck stacked against them — saw their enemies as a trained, organized and financed force intent on disrupting American life at every level.⁹⁴ In a pamphlet entitled “Victory in Vietnam,” anti-war activists were condemned for “their violent hatred for America, their marked affinity for Communist

⁸⁹ Alan MacKay to William F. Buckley Jr., n.d., Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹⁰ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 208.

⁹¹ Phillip Abbot Luce, “Against the Wall,” *The New Guard*, March 1969, 31, Microfilm.

⁹² Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 249.

⁹³ Luce, “Against the Wall,” *The New Guard*, March 1969, 30, Microfilm.

⁹⁴ James Farley Jr. to William F. Buckley Jr., 18 July 1968, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

causes...and their willingness to deliberately violate the law.”⁹⁵ YAFers fixated on this idea of delinquency in the New Left, and employed it frequently to delegitimize anti-war advocates.

Alice Widener, a notable conservative writer affiliated with YAF, even suggested in 1969 that an SDS pamphlet distributed at high schools was “one of the most dangerous documents ever printed in the United States,” introducing a fourth “r” into the academic trio — “arson.”⁹⁶

When it came to Vietnam, YAFers saw the stakes as even higher. They described the war in southeast Asia as a zero-sum conflict, equating a humiliating American defeat with a victory for the USSR and its allies.⁹⁷ The conflict in Vietnam, the National Board declared in 1970, was merely a continuation of the Korean War and was vital to combating the spread of communism in Asia.⁹⁸ As the war dragged on and total victory seemed less likely, these young conservatives turned their sights on the anti-war movement as a viable target for pro-war rage.⁹⁹ In 1971, New York State Chairman Herbert Stupp told a *New York Post* reporter that “the thousands of deaths and inordinate length of the Vietnam War are a result of liberal, civilian bungling and restraint of the military.”¹⁰⁰ “If we want our men to return home quickly,” the YAF National Student Coordinating Committee for Freedom in Vietnam echoed in an advertisement that same year,

⁹⁵ “Victory in Vietnam: the American Imperative,” Pamphlet, n.d., Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹⁶ Alice Widener, “Student Subversion,” Book Excerpt, n.d., Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹⁷ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 96.

⁹⁸ Ronald Docksai, “Official Statement by National Officers of Young Americans for Freedom,” 26 January 1970, Box 284, Folder 2488, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

⁹⁹ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 112.

¹⁰⁰ “YAF Plans Stop Reds Campaign,” *New York Post*, 15 April 1971, Box 284, Folder 2492, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

“we must protect our President’s credibility with the enemy.”¹⁰¹ The nation’s credibility, YAF leaders argued, was on the line.¹⁰²

While they feared a loss of faith in the United States in the international community, YAF members’ greatest concern was the death of patriotism domestically. Editorials in *The New Guard* characterized the New Left time and time again as a revolutionary force that demanded opposition. Equating “beatnik types screaming for the resignation of a university official and the Paris mobs of 1789 calling for the head of some Burgundian lackey,” one 1968 article evoked a historical sense of revolutionary struggle.¹⁰³ Seeing young men their age die in Vietnam, YAFers viewed themselves as embroiled in a patriotic conflict at home to honor their sacrifice and fight the nation’s own communist insurgency in the form of the New Left.¹⁰⁴ Keith Keener, a student at The University of Southern California in 1968 who left YAF after one meeting, remarked with concern that its members seemed to “consider their work on this campus a holy war.”¹⁰⁵

YAFers also consistently challenged the patriotism of those on the Left and favored language that disassociated liberals from their American identities. In 1970, the National Board released a statement, declaring “we will not continue to allow the good name of peace to be monopolized by those isolationist students who treat our nation’s capitol as a foreign power.”¹⁰⁶

By suggesting that anti-war students held un-American allegiances, the Board propagated a trope

¹⁰¹ National Student Coordinating Committee for Freedom in Vietnam, “How Long Can He Hold Out?,” Print Advertisement, n.d., Box 284, Folder 2492, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁰² Docksai, “Official Statement by National Officers of Young Americans for Freedom,” William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁰³ Douglas Peterson, “The Cause and the American University,” *The New Guard*, March 1968, 6, Microfilm.

¹⁰⁴ Alan MacKay to William F. Buckley Jr., 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁰⁵ Mike Parfit, “Holy Wars?,” *USC Daily Trojan*, 27 September 1968, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁶ Docksai, “Official Statement by National Officers of Young Americans for Freedom,” William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

employed throughout the 20th century against communists who were accused of harboring loyalties to the USSR.¹⁰⁷ In the “Victory in Vietnam” pamphlet, YAF writers urged conservatives to accept “that certain elements in our society are not dedicated to the principles of our Republic and seek to spread dissent, confusion and disloyal acts.”¹⁰⁸ YAF presented its adversary as not just imagining a different version of the country, but actively plotting to tear it apart from within.

For YAF members in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the stakes could not have been higher. The New Left put their campuses, neighborhoods and nation in jeopardy, and YAFers believed they had to respond ferociously. Seeing themselves a victimized minority, YAFers felt an imperative to join the struggle to counter the Left on campus before their influence subverted more American values. This was epitomized in the words of Tom DeWeese, a member of YAF’s Ohio State University chapter. When asked about his involvement with the organization in 2010, he responded: “I spent my early days in the political arena locked in a titanic battle against those who sought to destroy the very core of the nation I loved.”¹⁰⁹

“Berkeley of the Right”: Language of the Left in Right-Wing Rhetoric

In 1968, William F. Buckley Jr. sensed an opportunity. He was playing close attention to the traction liberals were getting on college campuses. As much as Buckley and others like him opposed the New Left, he recognized a chance to capitalize on its tactics and strategies to advance a conservative agenda. On April 26, for example, over one million college and high school students boycotted class to demonstrate opposition to the Vietnam War.¹¹⁰ Their cause, he

¹⁰⁷ M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 85.

¹⁰⁸ “Victory in Vietnam: the American Imperative,” William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 227.

¹¹⁰ Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist*, 51.

realized, had become mainstream, and conservatives needed to generate a similar sense of excitement around their pro-war platform. In a letter to Arnold Steinberg, editor of the *The New Guard*, Buckley proposed that “USC could be a Berkeley of the Right.” In “popularizing conservatism and making it dominant on campus,” he contended, YAF could channel the frustrations of a generation of alienated conservative youth.¹¹¹

Buckley was not alone in this belief. YAF members contended that a silent majority lay dormant on the American campus that was sympathetic to their messaging. “The majority of American students,” YAF National Chairman Alan MacKay wrote in early 1969, “oppose attempts to close down their campuses and replace them with centers of violent revolutionary activity.”¹¹² However, YAFers struggled to communicate their message in a compelling fashion and galvanize this supposed majority. To remedy this, YAFers at every level appropriated liberal rhetoric to form their own ‘Berkeleys of the Right’ — bastions of conservative and pro-war ideology — nationwide. While Buckley articulated his vision to Steinberg in 1968, there was not a single moment when YAFers explicitly decided to pursue this path. Instead, it was a grassroots trend that manifested itself in the organization’s materials at every level; YAF wanted to forge its own strain of youth culture to draw support from the general student population to make pro-war activism ‘cool’ on campus.

This use of leftist language and iconography began as early as 1966, when YAFers when so far as to cite Lenin in strategy memos. At their annual Student Leadership Conferences, YAF members gathered to network, select the next year’s leaders and debate conservative issues. That year, however, the meeting’s agenda shifted to focus on the increasingly visible forces of the

¹¹¹ William F. Buckley Jr. to Arnold Steinberg, Memorandum, 8 October 1968, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹² Alan MacKay, “Young America’s Freedom Offensive,” *The New Guard*, March 1969, 24, Microfilm.

New Left on college campuses. “We are on the eve of the bicentennial of the American Revolution,” the agenda read, and attendees “should be mindful that many of the tactics of the organizational warfare, mass agitation and political propaganda we think of as ‘Leninist’ today were in fact devised by the colonists in their fight against the tyranny of taxation without representation.”¹¹³ The organizers attempted to brand these organizing styles as distinctly American rather than the product of foreign origin, enabling YAFers to apply them in their own work without fear of criticism. They also quoted Lenin, writing “without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary action,” before suggesting the YAFers study Leninist organizing “for countering totalitarian and radical trends in world society.”¹¹⁴

As the Vietnam War and domestic dissent alike intensified, YAF attempted to emulate the language and symbols of the Left in awareness-raising materials to compete for attention with their anti-war peers. As the New Left sent out mailers and distributed flyers, YAFers eagerly provided alternatives.¹¹⁵ Every year, YAF released a pamphlet entitled “Young Americans for Freedom and You.” In 1968, its cover featured a black and white image of conservative students holding signs, and a heading written in a simple font.¹¹⁶ A year later, in 1969, the national YAF organization released another “Young Americans for Freedom and You” brochure with an entirely different aesthetic (Figure 1).¹¹⁷ While the pamphlet’s language was similar to the 1968 version, its visual features were starkly distinct. Its cover featured what art historian Stephen T.

¹¹³ “Student Leadership Conference of Young Americans for Freedom,” Meeting Agenda, 1966, Box 41, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

¹¹⁵ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 246.

¹¹⁶ “Young Americans for Freedom and You,” Pamphlet, 1968, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹¹⁷ “Young Americans for Freedom and You,” 1969, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.



Figure 1: An updated YAF pamphlet featuring a psychedelic font commonly employed by the New Left. (“Young Americans for Freedom and You,” 1969, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.)

F. Poon described as a “psychedelic design” using “the motley schema of gaudy whirls and patterns derived from LSD hallucinations.”¹¹⁸ YAFers intended to deploy this hallmark visual technique of the New Left — commonly used as a “means of expressing an anti-establishment stance” — to attract support for their agenda and develop a rival aesthetic culture.¹¹⁹

By 1969, many *New Guard* issues began to advertise posters and other dorm room decorations for their college-aged audience. “Turn your friends on and turn the Left off with these new propaganda tools now distributed by YAF,” read an advertisement in the January 1969

¹¹⁸ Stephen Poon, “Love, Peace and Psychedelia: the Role of Symbols in the Sixties Counterculture,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*, 03 (2016): 161, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305044338_Love_Peace_and_Psychedelia_the_Role_of_Symbols_in_the_Sixties_Counterculture.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 155.

issue.¹²⁰ “Large wall posters will decorate your dorm room, YAF meeting place or student union.”¹²¹ Featuring images of William F. Buckley perched on a motorcycle or armed members of SDS with the caption ‘The Left is Revolting,’ these posters epitomized YAF’s endeavor to co-opt ‘cool’ from their adversaries.

YAFers also distributed materials that directly appropriated liberal symbols to vex their opponents and highlight perceived hypocrisy. For example, the New Left frequently employed the pejorative epithet “pig” to describe police officers and other members of the establishment. Recognizing this, YAF members eagerly claimed it at marches and in their own media. In March 1969, for example, Stanford YAFers disrupted an anti-war rally by chanting “pigs off campus” at the other demonstrators.¹²² After several attempts to restart the rally, the anti-war students were forced to cancel. That June, *The New Guard* featured an entire issue dedicated to questioning “who are the real pigs?” Its cover depicted a pig wearing a peace symbol necklace and holding a megaphone (Figure 2). YAFers saw the Left as the true “pigs,” who subjugated conservative students and wielded megaphones to drown out their voices.

¹²⁰ “Groovy Posters,” *The New Guard*, January 1969, 26, Microfilm.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 26.

¹²² Kenneth Reich, “Conservatives Strike Back on U.S. Campuses,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1969, Box 284, Folder 2493, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

“Before his death, he said, ‘I think it would be a major mistake to unilaterally withdraw.’”¹²⁶

YAFers commandeered the liberal icon to undermine the New Left and add a more complex dimension to campus discourse.

At many of these anti-war demonstrations, activists donned political pins and buttons. YAFers sought to create a pro-war alternative to this technique with the Blue Button campaign.¹²⁷ Each button came with a printed card, describing the pin as an expression of “opposition to the violence and heroism of our nation’s new Nazis — the radical, left-wing militants” and support “for peace, order and a return to education on campus.”¹²⁸ Some pins featured slogans like “Stop SDS,” with the Ss molded into swastikas (Figure 3). The pins were distributed nationwide and sent to major conservative leaders for their endorsement. Then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan was reported to wear the pin on occasion, and required his staff to do so with him.¹²⁹ YAF leadership saw the button as a tool to advocate support for the war through non-violence.¹³⁰ However, other forms of borrowing were significantly more confrontational.

¹²⁶ “Tell it to Hanoi,” Pamphlet, n.d., William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹²⁷ “Blue Button,” Pamphlet, n.d., William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 247.

¹³⁰ Phillip Abbot Luce, “Against the Wall,” *The New Guard*, April 1969, 9, Microfilm.



Figure 3: Advertisement for Blue Buttons in *The New Guard* (January 1969, 25, Microfilm.)

“Community of the Right”: Satire and Disruption

After watching anti-war protesters advance from distributing pamphlets and holding rallies to raiding campus libraries and blowing up ROTC buildings, young conservatives felt the need to respond in more aggressive terms. As some YAFers satirized organizing tactics from the Left, others moved beyond parody to appropriate and take these tools to the extreme; what began as mockery morphed into a concerted effort to garner support for the war abroad by delegitimizing those who opposed it at home.

In its most mild form, this satire was meant to mock those on the Left and highlight their hypocrisy to members of the general public. “Humor or ridicule is the one thing that the New

Left cannot stand,” wrote Philip Abbot Luce in *The New Guard*.¹³¹ YAFers across the nation took Luce’s words to heart. They picketed SDS rallies with signs reading “Students for a Disrupted Society” or “Subversives for a Demolished Society.”¹³² At the State University of New York at Stony Brook, YAFers responded to SDS rallies by forming a rival organization called S.A.T.I.R.E., “Students Against Totalitarian Ideals and Rampant Egomaniacs.”¹³³ On the other side of the country, YAF members at UCLA responded to anti-war calls to burn down the ROTC building with flyers of their own that sarcastically suggested they would “burn down the job placement center” as an “embodiment of the evils of capitalism.”¹³⁴ They invited other students to join them, urging they “bring matches and flowers.” While these examples seem harmless, they reflect the conservative group’s growing fixation on undermining the anti-war movement and a belief that mocking their opponents would appeal to their fellow students.

YAFers at other schools took this derision a step further in response to liberal hunger strikes. In April 1969, activists at the University of Dayton began a fast to protest the continued presence of ROTC on their campus. Decrying “the violation of our most basic right to intelligently determine our educational environment,” the students demanded the administration act.¹³⁵ The university hesitated, but YAFers struck quickly. As teach-ins and sit-ins became defining features of the civil rights and antiwar movements, the campus chapter organized an “eat-in” where they flaunted pizza and BBQ in a park opposite to where the fasting strikers had assembled.¹³⁶ Ultimately, the ROTC building remained open and the event was widely

¹³¹ Phillip Abbot Luce, “Against the Wall,” *The New Guard*, May 1969, 15, Microfilm.

¹³² “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, January 1969, 23, Microfilm.

¹³³ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, Summer 1969, 24, Microfilm.

¹³⁴ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, January 1968, 4, Microfilm.

¹³⁵ “Student Activism,” *The University of Dayton Alumnus Magazine*, June 1, 1969, 12, accessed March 23, 2019, https://issuu.com/ecommons/docs/1969_summer_uda.

¹³⁶ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, April 1969, 19, Microfilm.

publicized in *The New Guard*, catching the attention of those at other chapters. Later that same year, when students on a hunger strike at Syracuse University occupied a campus building, local YAF members gathered outside and hosted an event they called “Pizza for Freedom.”¹³⁷ The conservatives didn’t challenge the strikers directly, but their biting satire indicated a growing animosity that had escalated from the humorous signs and flyers some of their peers had already employed.

Some YAFers grew more pugnacious in their counter-demonstrations by introducing radical elements to their attempts at satire. In December 1968, a group of young men at the University of California San Diego publicly burnt their draft cards, like hundreds of other men nationwide, to protest conscription. Across the street, YAFers chanted and ridiculed their peers. Then, many of them reached into their pockets and produced their own government-issued Social Security cards. Demonstrating “their opposition to the compulsory nature of the government program, and to the inefficient and economically unsound fashion in which the program is run,” they lit them on fire.¹³⁸ However, in their stated account of the event, UCSD YAFers were quick to clarify that while burning of the cards is not a crime, “photostatic copies of the cards were used” to avoid fees and other inconveniences.¹³⁹ Other YAF members took this incendiary satire to new heights by burning Viet Cong flags that many anti-war protesters wielded at their rallies. Throughout the late 1960s, many had reacted in horror as SDS students ignited American flags to protest the war — an act the young conservatives saw as treasonous.¹⁴⁰ In June 1969, a group of YAFers in Ohio burnt a Viet Cong flag outside an SDS campus meeting and chanted “Ho Chi

¹³⁷ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 223.

¹³⁸ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, January 1969, 24, Microfilm.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ “Victory in Vietnam: the American Imperative,” William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

Minh, We Will Win.”¹⁴¹ Later that year, three YAFers were arrested in Baltimore when they set fire to a Viet Cong flag in front of the city’s Peace Action Center.¹⁴² This moment of police intervention marked an escalation in the tactics of the pro-war movement and was not the last time local authorities had to intervene in YAF activity.

In its most extreme form, YAF activity blurred the line between mocking the anti-war movement and confronting it directly — albeit under the veil of satire. This trend was most evident in the fall of 1968, when YAFers in New York and Boston tried their at hand at their own form of occupations popularized by the New Left. Across the nation, students engaged in prolonged sit-ins in campus libraries and administration buildings to demand concessions from faculty or express discontent. These demonstrations were often forcibly ended by police. At Stanford University, for example, protesters occupied teaching buildings and blocked access to several other campus spaces, prompting local police to disperse the students with tear-gas.¹⁴³

One YAFer in particular saw these disruptions and felt that action was required. In 1968, Ronald Docksai was an undergraduate student at St. John’s University in Queens, New York. He would later go on to rise rapidly through the ranks of YAF to become the New York state YAF chairman and ultimately national chairman in 1973.¹⁴⁴ After receiving advanced degrees from New York University and Georgetown University, he became the Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Reagan in 1986.¹⁴⁵ However, nearly two decades before

¹⁴¹ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, Summer 1969, 27, Microfilm.

¹⁴² Phillip Abbot Luce, “YAF in the USA,” *The New Guard*, February 1970, 4, Microfilm.

¹⁴³ “1960s,” Stanford Stories From the Archives - Spotlight at Stanford, August 18, 2016, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/stanford-stories/feature/1960s>.

¹⁴⁴ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 106.

¹⁴⁵ The White House, "Nominations & Appointments, June 3, 1986," news release, June 3, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60386b>.

this, he was an “a precocious, intelligent young member of the New York YAF.”¹⁴⁶ What defined Docksai, Gregory Schneider noted, was that he “believed SDS’s methods should be used against the Left.”¹⁴⁷

So at 9AM on November 6, 1968, 10 members of NYS YAF lead by Docksai marched into SDS headquarters in New York City and “seized” the office.¹⁴⁸ It was Election Day, and the YAFers had heard reports of “New Left threats to disrupt the electoral process.”¹⁴⁹ To prevent this, they paraded in and declared “YAF is hereby liberating this office.”¹⁵⁰ At the time, there was only a single receptionist in the room who was allowed to leave before the YAFers blocked the entrances to arriving SDS members. The ‘occupiers’, as they were, reported later that they received several menacing phone calls from the local Black Panther Party and immediately called the police.¹⁵¹ By 11AM, TV crews and newspaper reporters had arrived on the scene just as the police formally asked the YAFers to vacate the site, which they did willingly. At a press conference afterwards, Docksai stated, “YAF took command of the SDS office as a peaceful protest, illustrating SDS’ hypocrisy.”¹⁵² By exposing the SDS members as relying on the police, YAFers wanted to emphasize that police officers were necessary in civil society and were not, as SDSers had called them in the past, an “oppressive authority.”¹⁵³ While there was no physical conflict between the groups of students that day, tensions ran high.

¹⁴⁶ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 106.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Docksai, “New York State YAF Liberates SDS Office for Election Day,” Memorandum, 6 November 1968, Box 57, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 2.

Docksai's raid was celebrated among YAF chapters and was soon emulated elsewhere. On November 16, twenty-two YAFers in Boston stormed the headquarters of Resistance, a local anti-war organization. The conservatives announced they arrived to "liberate the Resistance in the name of the free peoples of South Vietnam," hanging South Vietnamese flags and distributing pamphlets on Viet Cong "atrocities."¹⁵⁴ Tom Lamont, one of the students, described how the Resistance members reacted "violently" to their arrival and "stomped on the California grapes brought by YAF as a snack," which was in itself an act of defiance against the Left's national grape boycott led by the Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union.¹⁵⁵ After an hour, the YAFers vacated the space, telling the press and members of Resistance that "YAF respects property rights."¹⁵⁶ When asked what YAF gained from the occupation, Lamont responded "we want to make it clear to the Left that though we abhor its tactics of abrogating the rights of others in order to make a point, we too, could do the same thing."¹⁵⁷ As in New York, there was no direct clash between the groups, but YAFers certainly entered a grey area between satire and confrontation. Writing years later, Wayne Thorburn regarded the moment as "a bit of fun" for the young conservatives involved.¹⁵⁸ Yet, Sandra Scanlon characterized YAF's occupation as a "violent endeavor," revealing an insidious strain of hostility that Thorburn failed to acknowledge.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ "YAF Around the Nation," *The New Guard*, January 1969, 22, Microfilm.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 22.; Matthew Garcia, "Labor, Migration, and Social Justice in the Age of the Grape Boycott," *Gastronomica* 7, no. 3 (2007): 68, doi:10.1525/gfc.2007.7.3.68.

¹⁵⁶ "YAF Around the Nation," *The New Guard*, January 1969, 22, Microfilm.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 22.

¹⁵⁸ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 224.

¹⁵⁹ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 247.

“Guerrillas of the Right”: Bringing the War Home

By the end of 1968, conservatives saw themselves as more victimized than ever on campus. While the occupations in New York and Boston generated some publicity for their cause, national anti-war sentiment was at its zenith. “Our most successful chapters are getting violently attacked by the leftists and liberals on campus,” wrote the National Board in an official statement that year, and insisted that “YAF chapters need to take an active and controversial role on campus.”¹⁶⁰ Therefore, in January 1969, YAF launched the national the Freedom Offensive campaign. Consisting of six sub-programs aimed at raising YAF’s profile, the Offensive included a push for more private-sector involvement in the war and a lobbying effort to implement a Freedom vs. Communism course in the nation’s high schools.¹⁶¹ Notably, none of the programs contained any concrete policy goals for the resolution of the war in Vietnam, signaling how the pro-war movement had shifted its focus towards combating the anti-war activists domestically rather than seeking victory abroad.¹⁶²

Of the six programs, the Campus Freedom Offensive was the most publicized and far-reaching as it sought to create “Majority Coalitions” at every college and take back the perceived Left’s monopoly on higher education. Organizers hoped these coalitions would garner the support of a silent majority of students on campus who could then stand guard at ROTC buildings, sabotage anti-war demonstrations and engage the Left in open combat. These coalitions, Scanlon notes, “represented a departure from YAF’s recent preoccupation with defensive measures against the New Left” as YAFers planned to confront the Left directly.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 120.

¹⁶¹ Ronald Dear, “Young America’s Freedom Offensive: a 1969 Report,” *The New Guard*, January 1970, 12, Microfilm.

¹⁶² Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 248.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 248.

The idea of a Majority Coalition emerged when members of YAF at Columbia University took radical action against liberal occupations in 1968. After police blocked members of SDS from entering and occupying a campus library, several broke into Hamilton Hall, the university's main administrative building, and held a dean hostage.¹⁶⁴ While police and other demonstrators gathered outside, Wayne Thorburn recounts how YAF responded. Dubbing them "guerrillas of the Right," Thorburn celebrated three YAFers who crept through the utility tunnels beneath the building and shut off the power to Hamilton Hall to make the occupation as unpleasant as possible.¹⁶⁵ Outside the building, YAFers joined student athletes and others who opposed the occupation in forming a "barricade to prevent supplies from being brought in to sustain the occupation."¹⁶⁶ Members of the National Board celebrated the ad-hoc Majority Coalition, writing that "successful resistance could be developed when it is broad-based, inclusive and focused on the specific objective of keeping the campus open and free."¹⁶⁷

In a March 1969 statement supporting the Majority Coalitions, YAF National Chairman Alan MacKay characterized the New Left as "no longer interested in discussion: it is interested in revolution...it has taken to the streets."¹⁶⁸ While YAF would "not take to the streets" he insisted, it "also will not adhere to conventional means when the other side has adopted a policy of intellectual dishonesty and physical violence."¹⁶⁹ What exactly did MacKay mean by this? He maintained that YAF would "not mark on a course of vigilante action," but also declared that "groups of students will be prepared to defend their rights" should administrators or members of

¹⁶⁴ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 113.

¹⁶⁵ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 214.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 215.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 216.

¹⁶⁸ MacKay, "Young America's Freedom Offensive," *The New Guard*, March 1969, 24, Microfilm.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

the New Left fail to meet their demands.¹⁷⁰ While MacKay did not openly endorse violent confrontation or encourage YAFers to take vigilante action, his directive was purposefully vague.

Over the following two years, *New Guard* subscribers were inundated with messages from national leaders urging them to take the very steps MacKay never explicitly urged. “We have to begin to take off our gloves from time to time...the battle for the campuses is real and I for one am not about to play around with the New Left leaders that would as soon physically attack me as allow me to speak,” wrote Philip Abbot Luce in May 1969.¹⁷¹ Like MacKay, Luce never clearly called for violence, but he did not denounce it either. In early 1970, YAF Director of State and Regional Activity Ronald Dear made a more unambiguous proclamation: he called on local chapters to pressure “university administrators [to] either crack down on those New Leftists who would destroy private property” or YAFers “will launch a concerted campus to provide physical protection for university buildings and students.”¹⁷²

Columns in *The New Guard* also eagerly celebrated clashes between pro-war and anti-war protesters beyond the campus, further cementing the idea among readers that vigilante action was acceptable. On May 8, 1970, YAFers watched in delight as construction workers in New York City attacked a vigil for the students killed at Kent State. After storming City Hall, they condemned Mayor John Lindsay for sympathizing with the liberal activists, hanging effigies of the mayor and unfurling banners reading “Lindsay for Mayor of Hanoi.”¹⁷³ While violence at the Hard Hat Riot — as it came to be known — was widely condemned across the country, *New Guard* columnists broadcast a starkly different message. That June, Don Feder, a member of the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 25.

¹⁷¹ Luce, “Against the Wall,” *The New Guard*, May 1969, 15, Microfilm.

¹⁷² Ronald Dear, “Young America’s Freedom Offensive: a 1969 Report,” *The New Guard*, January 1970, 13, Microfilm.

¹⁷³ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 207.

National Board of Directors, published an article entitled, “The Hard Hats are Coming, Hurrah, Hurrah.”¹⁷⁴ In it, he described in vivid detail how anti-war protesters were “beaten or trampled viciously,” highlighting that “one man received such severe physical abuse that he later went into convulsions.”¹⁷⁵ Feder claimed that the silent majority had found its voice and “fists were their adjectives.”¹⁷⁶ While YAFers did not participate in the confrontation themselves, he was quick to extrapolate the moment to campuses across the country and pondered when the Left will “comprehend the old axiom: when you sanction the use of violence to attain your goals, you also set a precedent for your enemies.”¹⁷⁷

Of course, YAF members had embraced that precedent over a year earlier. While they never escalated to the levels of violence embraced by anti-war extremists like Weathermen, YAFers instigated physical confrontations with members of the New Left that marked a significant departure from the group’s explicitly non-violent origins. Following the announcement of the Freedom Offensive in January 1969, Wayne Thorburn noticed an “intensification of the violence and destruction on and off American campuses.”¹⁷⁸ He neglects to attribute any of it to YAF directly, but Sandra Scanlon points out that “several of the group’s most celebrated episodes involved members of YAF directly engaging anti-war students in violent conflict.”¹⁷⁹

Many of these confrontations arose as YAFers assembled to guard ROTC buildings from anti-war activists, revealing a sense of vigilante responsibility that characterized much of YAF’s

¹⁷⁴ Don Feder, “The Hard Hats are Coming, Hurrah, Hurrah,” *The New Guard*, Summer 1970, 20, Microfilm.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁷⁸ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 225.

¹⁷⁹ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 247.

engagements with the Left. On May 8, 1969, YAFers at Ohio State University assembled to prevent anti-war protesters from disrupting the school's ROTC Awards Ceremony. According to the campus paper, *The Lantern*, over 500 students had gathered to demonstrate, many with the intention of gaining access to the ROTC building.¹⁸⁰ Tom DeWeese — a YAFer at the protest — later recounted his experience to Thorburn:

We were a rag-tag band of about one hundred students. Most, like me, were members of YAF...we were there because the violent Students for a Democratic Society had vowed to disrupt and stop the ROTC graduation exercise. My colleague and I had vowed that they would never get inside. And so there we stood, barehanded, as the SDS, led by the soon-to-be Weatherman terrorist, Bernadine Dohrn, came over the hill and several hundred strong, Viet Cong flag flying. They charged, throwing rocks, bottles and eggs. Hand-to-hand combat ensued. We drove them back. The cops never had to get into the battle.¹⁸¹

Campus media outlets supported much of DeWeese's account and revealed even more violent moments that DeWeese omitted. During the "scuffles between the two sets of demonstrators," student journalists described YAFers throwing firecrackers at the anti-ROTC students and lighting their Viet Cong flags on fire, details DeWeese neglected to mention.¹⁸² Ultimately, events like this marked a turning point in YAF's history as its interactions with the Left progressed from borrowing rhetoric to satirizing tactics to violent clashes outside campus buildings.¹⁸³

Similar to anti-war tactics beginning at certain campuses before being copied elsewhere, this system of YAFers guarding ROTC buildings proliferated across the country. At Yale that same year, members of SDS assembled outside the campus ROTC building to protest the arrival of Marine recruiters. Many YAFers counter-demonstrating at the site became concerned that the

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Heydinger and Norman E. Cox, "Students Clash Over ROTC As Cadets Receive Awards," *Ohio State Lantern*, May 9, 1969, 1, accessed March 22, 2019, <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Ohio/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=OHI/1969/05/09&id=Ar00102&sk=DFB19E6C&viewMode=text>.

¹⁸¹ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 227.

¹⁸² Heydinger and Cox, "Students Clash Over ROTC As Cadets Receive Awards," 1.

¹⁸³ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 227.

“contingent of campus police would have proved totally inadequate had SDS taken storming the building into its mind.”¹⁸⁴ Eight members of Yale YAF recruited six other students and together formed what Richard E. Band, the chapter president, later called “a corporal wall that greatly bolstered the forces of law and order.”¹⁸⁵ YAFers at Syracuse University employed similar tactics in the fall of 1970, guarding the doors to the ROTC office and shoving away any protester who tried to enter.¹⁸⁶ Chapter President Neil Wallace told *The Syracuse Post Standard* that YAF “will continue to take all necessary measures, both legal and extra-legal, to ensure that the university stands firm against disruption.”¹⁸⁷ While the violence did not escalate to the point that it had at OSU, the Syracuse YAFers’ exuberance at participating in confrontation exposed a taste for direct action that would manifest in more radical ways at other universities.

Beyond the doorways of ROTC buildings, YAFers eagerly harnessed their newfound Majority Coalitions to sabotage and disrupt other anti-war demonstrations throughout 1969 and 1970. At Tulane University, when members of SDS attempted to organize an anti-war rally, YAFers distributed pamphlets with conflicting times and locations.¹⁸⁸ Their actions may have been indirect, but the YAFers successfully stopped the rally and reduced the presence of SDS on the campus. At California State University, Long Beach, members of the Black Student Union staged a series of teach-ins by interrupting lectures to state their positions on the war and civil rights issues. Claiming to uphold free speech on campus, YAFers organized student groups to follow, heckle and shout over the black students, which prompted administrative reprimands

¹⁸⁴ Band, “Report to All Supporters of the Conservative Movement at Yale,” 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ Al Lawrence, “Students End 2-Day Protest,” *Syracuse Post Standard*, 13 February 1971, Box 284, Folder 2492, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ “Back to the Barricades,” *The New Guard*, September 1970, 3, Microfilm.

against the young conservatives.¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, at Rutgers University, the police were called when YAFers started violently removing 40 black students occupiers from a campus building.¹⁹⁰

After the Kent State shooting in May 1970, YAFers continued to clash with their anti-war peers in physical engagements similar to the one on Yale's Beinecke Plaza. At Towson College in Maryland, YAF members physically resisted anti-war protesters' attempts to lower the American flag on the center of campus.¹⁹¹ After giving up, the SDS students marched a few blocks away to Agnew Drive, named for Vice President Spiro Agnew. The protesters used cans of spray paint to rename the street Kent State Avenue, but were stopped by YAFers who then used their own cans to paint over the initial graffiti.¹⁹² In each of these instances, YAF members used aggressive tactics — if not force — to sabotage anti-war demonstrations and police their own campuses. These activities ran contrary to the pronouncements of some YAF leaders like MacKay, but reflected the radical undertones of many *New Guard* articles.

In late spring 1969, YAF action at two schools in particular revealed the most overt and aggressive expressions of the organization's radical pro-war agenda when YAFers directly confronted anti-war activists in revealing displays of force. The first was at Stanford University, where local chapter president Harvey Hukari Jr. organized a confrontation with the New Left and attempted to use anti-war protest tactics to attract media attention. The other case was on the campus of St. John's University in New York City where then-chapter president Ronald Docksai led a blockade of the entire campus as he and other YAFers sought to rid SDS from their school. Unlike the examples enumerated throughout the rest of this paper, these two instances stand out

¹⁸⁹ Reich, "Conservatives Strike Back on U.S. Campuses," William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Thorburn, *A Generation Awakes*, 242.

¹⁹² Ibid, 242.

as YAFers were not simply reacting to their opponents, but rather orchestrating confrontations on their own terms.

In January, 1969, Hukari sought to bring the Campus Freedom Offensive to Stanford. In an op-ed written in a campus paper early that month, he condemned non-violent organizing, writing, “innumerable petitions against the tactics and goals of radicals have been circulated and presented to the university administration with little effect.”¹⁹³ By the end of January, he wanted to demonstrate that there was more than one way to get a message across. On the morning of January 29, Hukari led fifty YAFers to a peaceful anti-war protest. In what a Stanford spokesman called “the most dramatic show of conservative strength yet seen on campus,” the students arrived with rolls of pennies in their fists should violence break out.¹⁹⁴ The same official continued, remarking that “there was more anger on the Right than on the Left...they were anxious to get the Left to attack them.”¹⁹⁵ When the anti-war activists refused to engage, the YAFers began breaking up the rolls and hurling pennies at them. “I would have to say I wouldn’t have been unhappy if we’d been attacked...it would have better served what we’ve so amply shouted and done nothing about,” Hukari told a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁹⁶ In an op-ed published after the event, Hukari promised more violence, writing, “in the future, one can expect to see more militancy develop in various areas of campus to act firmly with campus disorders.”¹⁹⁷

While other historians have briefly discussed this event, most overlook Hukari’s explicit desire to emulate anti-war protesters in his campaign for confrontation “We knew where the

¹⁹³ Reich, “Conservatives Strike Back on U.S. Campuses.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

news cameras were and positioned ourselves nearby,” he told the *LA Times*, “the radicals have been very hip to this — influencing the media — and now we’re learning how to do it. It was a very conscious effort.”¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Hukari brought along two photographers and a lawyer, which suggests he wanted to supplement the mainstream media’s coverage of the event. Hukari’s decision reflected a conservative belief that press coverage was biased against them and revealed how a narrative of perceived victimhood could manifest in extreme ways.

Several months later, Docksai and YAFers at St. John’s University terrorized a group of anti-war protesters in a more violent encounter. While Hukari focused on taking advantage of media attention, Docksai’s group was fixated on stifling the New Left on its campus entirely. On April 26 — like so many times before on countless universities across the country — anti-war activists gathered to protest the university ROTC center. As forty members of the Liberal Students Coalition marched around a corner to reach the building, they saw something they did not expect. “YAFers with blue armbands, loudspeakers and a decorated Mercedes-Benz carrying ‘Save ROTC’ signs were guarding the front entrance of the gym,” Docksai wrote in a letter to the editor of *The New Guard*.¹⁹⁹ While the anti-war protesters did not indicate any intent to enter the building, the YAFers wanted to intimidate them. Up the hill from the center, over three hundred members of St. John’s YAF chapter, its ROTC unit and other campus organizations assembled in support.

Suddenly, one of the pro-war students shouted “charge” and the Majority Coalition stormed down the hill to break up the demonstration.²⁰⁰ According to a *New York Daily News* reporter on the scene, the anti-war students feared for their lives and sought refuge at the gym

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ronald Docksai to Arnold Steinberg, 26 April 1969, Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

next door.²⁰¹ Soon after, the police arrived to escort the students safely out as members of the Majority Coalition threw cans and sticks at them.²⁰² While *The New Guard* piece on the event described the YAFers as “a symbol for true academic freedom and resistance to coercion,” the anti-war students needed police protection to conduct their peaceful demonstration.²⁰³

However, YAFers did not stop there. After learning that SDS members from neighboring schools were driving to the campus to challenge them, Docksai organized “a communications network with walkie-talkies at the four college entrances,” only allowing students with St. John’s IDs onto campus.²⁰⁴ When anti-war protesters arrived from other universities, Docksai described how YAFers refused them entry and “members of St. John’s fraternities reminded them of their mortality” in physical altercations.²⁰⁵ The “victorious putsch,” as Buckley called it, was celebrated in YAF publications and was one of the group’s most violent episodes.²⁰⁶

Conclusion

As the war in Vietnam wound to an end in 1975 and anti-war activism along with it, Young Americans for Freedom had to redefine itself. YAF’s agenda of demonizing the New Left and promoting blind patriotism had overshadowed its vision for victory. Even with appropriated New Left rhetoric and confrontational tactics, YAF’s pro-war message was barely acknowledged amid the tumult and chaos of the era. And as most Americans by the early 1970s came to believe that success in Vietnam was not possible, YAFers had to remove victory in Vietnam as a core

²⁰¹ Thomas Pugh and Judson Hand, “Conservative Students Rout St. John’s,” *New York Daily News*, 26 April 1969, Box 67, Folder Young Americans for Freedom, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ “YAF Around the Nation,” *The New Guard*, Summer 1969, 26, Microfilm.

²⁰⁴ Ronald Docksai to Arnold Steinberg, 1.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 2.

²⁰⁶ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 247.

tenet of its platform.²⁰⁷ By the end of the decade, YAF shifted its focus away from campus activism and towards electoral politics. However, a series of financial setbacks in the early 1980s left the organization a shell of what it had been.²⁰⁸

However, YAF's legacy did not meet the same fate as the organization itself. During the Vietnam-era, Young Americans for Freedom galvanized a generation of young conservatives who would go on to serve as the vanguard of the Reagan Revolution. Some crafted the president's policies and wrote his speeches, others ran for elected office, and dozens of former YAFers went on to serve in influential roles in conservative media, fundraising and academia.²⁰⁹

YAFers reacted to the radicalism of the Left by harnessing the spirit of an irate generation of young conservatives who saw themselves as an ostracized intellectual minority to build a political culture that empowered and emboldened them to express their beliefs. This new style of politics — neglected or downplayed by many historians — had a significant and lasting impact on 20th century conservatism. Rather than removing themselves from the rough and tumble politics of the Vietnam era, YAFers readily embraced satire and confrontation as necessary tools to confront their adversaries. Clashes with the Left revealed not only how closely right-wingers scrutinized the anti-war movement, but also their earnest effort to translate its tactics to advance their own agenda. Historians must no longer study those supporting and opposing the war as isolated forces, but rather as closely intertwined entities who observed and learnt from each other.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, YAF experienced a mild resurgence but never reached the pinnacle of popularity that it had experienced during the 1960s. In 2011, Young Americans

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 288.

²⁰⁸ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 160.

²⁰⁹ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 219.

for Freedom was absorbed by Young America's Foundation, another campus group dedicated to providing "young conservatives with unmatched resources, training, and activism initiatives to advance freedom on campuses nationwide."²¹⁰ Today, the organization invites controversial and conservative speakers to college campuses and defends them vociferously when liberal students protest. This modern YAF — just like its predecessor 50 years ago — stands for "freedom of thought" on campuses increasingly portrayed in contemporary media as hyper-liberal.²¹¹ On March 21, 2019, President Donald Trump responded to calls for more academic freedom and signed the Executive Order on Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities to "encourage institutions to foster environments that promote open, intellectually engaging, and diverse debate," or risk losing federal funding.²¹²

In the spring of 2017, students at Yale University held a hunger strike to advocate for the creation of a graduate student union. Gathered on Beinecke Plaza, the strikers set up an encampment outside the university president's office. In response, on April 28, members of The Yale College Republicans hosted an "eat-in" next to the fasting union organizers.²¹³ On the same spot where their right-wing forerunners fought with anti-war protesters in 1970, these young conservatives attacked the Left using the very tactics pioneered by members of Young Americans

²¹⁰ "Young America's Foundation and Young Americans for Freedom Unite," Young America's Foundation - Young America's Foundation and Young Americans for Freedom Unite, , accessed March 22, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141019063355/http://www.yaf.org/unification-press-release.aspx>.

²¹¹ Steve Krafft, "Ben Shapiro to Speak at GCU after It Initially Spurned Him, Young America's Foundation," KSAZ, February 6, 2019, , accessed March 22, 2019, <http://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/arizona-news/conservative-commentator-ben-shapiro-rejects-grand-canyon-university-s-speaking-invite>.

²¹² "Executive Order on Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities," The White House, , accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-improving-free-inquiry-transparency-accountability-colleges-universities/>.

²¹³ David Yaffe-Bellany, "Yale College Republicans hold BBQ near Local 33," *Yale Daily News*, 30 April 2017, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2017/04/30/yale-college-republicans-hold-bbq-near-local-33/>.

for Freedom almost fifty years earlier. While the battle over the politics of the university dominates headlines today, the war has been raging for over half a century.

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