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Honors Research Paper

Dr. Schultz

April 15, 2006

Out of the Movement and on to Today:
The Contemporary Impact of the Students for a Democratic Society

Given the substantial amount of literature on the Sixties, it is only natural that much scholarship would exist on the Students for a Democratic Society, one of its largest protest organizations. Divisions abound in literature on SDS. Some view the group as the most vital force of “the Movement,” the general term for the widespread political and social counterculture that emerged in the Sixties. Others, like Andrew Hunt, contest this strong focus on SDS as the dominant protest organization of the era.¹ Historians like Todd Gitlin make broad claims to the immense practical impact of SDS on society—“as an amalgam of reform efforts, especially for civil rights...and women’s rights and the environment and against the war, it had been a formidable success.”² To Gitlin, SDS and the New Left only appear to have had a limited impact due to the dramatic resurgence of the right in the seventies and eighties that reversed the Movement’s true to life gains. Others claim that SDS made little practical impact—that its gains were only intangibles.

Whichever position they take, historians of the Movement all tend to isolate SDS within the time frame of the Sixties, ending their versions of its tale with the organization’s obliteration in

¹Andrew Hunt, “When Did the Sixties Happen? Searching for New Directions” *Journal of Social History*, 33.1 (1999): 147-161.

²Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties, Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 434.

1969. SDS is, as Fred Alford states, “light years away” from today.³ As an actual, tangible movement, it is accurate that SDS no longer exists today; as Gitlin states, “the New Left, like its predecessors, failed to create lasting political forms. When SDS was torn apart, so was the chance for continuity.”⁴ Because it is formally dead, SDS is often looked at as a movement passed, trapped in the historical time of the Sixties. Certain historians, though, simultaneously allude to a form in which SDS continues into contemporary times, or at least to the means by which it survived after the Sixties. Such historians speak of the organization’s more subtle benefits. As Linda Gordon states of SDS, “its greatest gains were its intangible ones”⁵—such gains being its positive impact on members and its creation of and acceptance for alternative means of living. These scholars speak of the survival of SDS ideals into succeeding decades.

These aforementioned nods to the group’s less concrete gains have often been expressed as little more than brief generalizations on how participation in SDS events may have had a continued impact on members. Gitlin, historian Sara Evans, and SDS historian James Miller do provide some examples of the lasting effects of the Movement on its participants. Gitlin’s work addresses some of the influences of SDS and protest movements into the seventies and eighties. However, he does not address the organization’s impact on specific individuals, how participation in SDS has continued to influence former members in contemporary times. Evans provides a small section in her introduction to *Tidal Wave* in which she discusses her own involvement in “Group 22,” a women’s liberation group. She, very briefly, relates the fate of some of its members, how the group had impacted their later lives, and how it shaped her own

³Fred C. Alford, “Civil Society and its Discontents,” *The Good Society* 12.1 (2003), 13.

⁴Gitlin 436.

⁵Linda Gordon, “Social Movements, Leadership, and Democracy” *Journal of Women’s History* 14.2 (2002): 116.

turn toward becoming a historian.⁶ Miller provides perhaps the most extensive information on the influence of SDS on its members into contemporary times. In his work, he gives a brief summary of what the members that he has studied are now doing as careers, how their experience continues to affect them, and what SDS has contributed to contemporary times.

What Evans and Gitlin have nearly approached in their works, and what Miller explores in more detail, is what I attempt to uncover in my own essay. I aim to expand upon the general allusions of historians to the intangible lasting elements of the organization into decades later than the sixties. Instead of being solely an analysis of the continuation of abstract ideals into later decades, however, or an inquiry into newer forms of protest that may include past traditions, this essay assesses the contemporary impact of participation in SDS on its members themselves. Through an examination of the writings and interviews of a select group of former members with diverse SDS experiences, it is possible to suggest the ways in which their mentalities have been shaped by their participation in the group. Even this initial study on the topic reveals similarities among the ideologies of former members. The most striking common elements of former members' thought are a shared willingness to rebel against authority, a utopian belief both in people's capability to demonstrate on their own behalf, and a faith in their ability to make gains in doing so. This essay explores these beliefs as products of SDS participation, and it serves as an introduction that will hopefully lead to wider exploration of the topic.

To examine the impact of this group on its members, it is first necessary to set out the foundation of the organization itself. SDS began as the student wing of the more established League for Industrial Democracy.⁷ Originally called the Student League for Industrial

⁶Sarah Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 15.

⁷James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 13.

Democracy (SLID), the group changed its name to the Students for a Democratic Society in 1960. Under the leadership of Al Haber, a student at University of Wisconsin-Madison, the small organization held its first official convention in New York in 1960, at which Haber was elected president.⁸ Most sources fail to cite these first few years of SDS history and place its beginning at Port Huron, Michigan in June 1962. At this time and place SDS ratified its first manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, a document containing a discussion of the current issues facing the United States and a declaration of the goals and beliefs of the Students for a Democratic Society.

SDS would undergo countless transformations in its decade of existence, but its early period was most strikingly marked by idealism. The Port Huron Statement is a testament to the extreme utopianism of these young activists. Their entire program depended on an idealistic representation of the nature of humankind and relationships. According to Port Huron, people were “precious and possessed unlimited potential for reason, freedom and love.”⁹ Despite humankind’s potential, SDS claimed, the abundance of wealth that had come in the 50s had made them complacent. People rarely sought out new opportunities, feared innovation, and were content with immediate monetary success.¹⁰ Port Huron called for “honesty, brotherhood, and humanitarian relationships.”¹¹ The students of Port Huron were not satisfied with material success; they searched for fulfillment outside of traditional bread and butter aims. They desired a revival of the spirit of humanity. SDS recognized that “to many this [Port Huron] will seem the product of juvenile hallucination.”¹² As former SDS member Professor David Garson states

⁸Ibid 38.

⁹“The Port Huron Statement,” in *Democracy is in the Streets*, 332, 352.

¹⁰Ibid 330.

¹¹Ibid 333.

¹²Ibid 359.

of the idealistic claims of student activists, many “chose to dismiss them as a mere fashion or style” and “from a cynical point of view they might be considered naïve.”¹³

Though utopian, the statement hardly depicts the United States as an ideal nation. In a stark contrast to their general overriding positivism, the SDS painted a bleak picture of their current society. The Port Huron statement claimed that, in contemporary times, a human was considered “a dumb and manipulated being incapable of ruling themselves.”¹⁴ The general public had little say in their nation, which was increasingly controlled by the power elite. Even organized labor, typically a liberal establishment, had turned elitist in the new era.¹⁵ The average person had no voice in the issues that affected his or her own well being, and generally accepted this without debate. Not only was the mass public an oppressed group operating under the will of the ruling elite, claimed Port Huron, but this elite was ruling destructively. The government had created a rampant paranoia of Communism that silenced debate on general issues of the Cold War and disarmament in particular.¹⁶ Despite the seeming contentment and prosperity of the 50s, racism ran rampant in the country, along with “hunger, poverty, disease, ignorance, violence, and exploitation.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, the government pumped money into military endeavors rather than social improvements.¹⁸ Such were the grievances as SDS viewed them in 1962. Port Huron illustrated a nation losing touch with its proclaimed democracy—an oppressive country filled with underappreciated individuals with little sense of purpose in their lives and little opportunity to gain said purpose.

¹³David Garson, “The Ideology of the New Student Left” in *Protest: Student Activism in America*, ed. by Julian Foster and Durward Long (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1970) 189.

¹⁴“Port Huron,” *Democracy is in the Streets*, 332.

¹⁵Ibid 370.

¹⁶Ibid 351.

¹⁷Ibid 358.

¹⁸Ibid 340.

Despite their grim assessment of the current situation, SDS was not pessimistic about their ability to alter this disarray. They rather approached their grievances with both an idealistic program and a hopeful confidence. SDS did not despair of society for they had a radical plan for the reshaping of America. Generally, they advocated what would be simplified into a famous catchphrase, "participatory democracy." This phrase, ambiguous as it was, came to embody the idealistic society that SDS hoped to create within America. Port Huron argued that a fundamental problem of the United States was its citizen's lack of input in the decision-making progresses that impacted their own lives. The solution to this, then, was to return to the individual his or her lost sense of power. The early SDS embraced an ideal of man as "capable of ruling himself, with potential for self-determination, reason and logic."¹⁹ SDS believed that every man could and should have "the right to live under conditions one had helped to set."²⁰ Port Huron encouraged people to gain responsibility in their jobs and to take an active interest in politics.²¹ SDS believed they could translate their manifesto into the actual functioning of the nation.

It must be asserted here that although SDS often depicted itself as the originator of these ideas, this is not truly the case. In fact, much of Port Huron was directly inspired by the scholarship of C. Wright Mills, a professor whose writings were a profound influence on SDS members. Much of Port Huron falls right in line with Mills' teachings. This scholar depicted America as a land of "powerless people" that were manipulated by a "world of big organizations," a powerful bureaucracy.²² According to Mills's "The Mass Society," the domination of those controlling power at the top made it nearly impossible for man to take

¹⁹Ibid 332.

²⁰Garson 191.

²¹"Port Huron," *Democracy is in the Streets*, 333.

²² Miller 79.

charge of his own political destiny.²³ Rather than being “primary publics,” small groups organized to enable face to face discussion of political issues between individuals, institutions “had become centralized and authoritarian.”²⁴ Mills was a leading influence for SDS members—almost every member of the organization had read his “The Mass Society.”²⁵ Hence, the Port Huron statement must be seen as a partial reflection of his ideas. In addition to Mills, SDS took inspiration from the civil rights organizations of the time. Also, it must be remembered that SDS is preceded by a long history of American activism, and they were not the first to urge people to participate in politics. This setting out of SDS ideology, then, is not meant to claim that the organization, as much as it liked to believe so, was the first to ever espouse the types of ideals that it did. Still, it is important to note that for the majority of the former members that will be discussed in this essay, SDS was the principal means by which they entered into the Movement. Therefore, if there is a lasting legacy of any organization on these individuals, it is SDS, more so than anything that what preceded it or was also happening at the time.

The statements on Port Huron are generalizations on SDS as a national organization. On the local level, how were these principles enacted? With the Port Huron statement in hand, SDS had to formulate a plan for the actual functioning of their organization. Although SDS strictly refused to become a single issue organization, they turned naturally to the most visible avenue for political action at this time—the civil rights movement. Civil rights protests were glamorous and exciting to the average northern student, and they had a way of “pulling students out of apathy.”²⁶ They had a similar lure for the already politically interested SDS. The Student Non-

²³Ibid 79.

²⁴Ibid 85.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid 35.

Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a principal civil rights group in the Movement, in particular received the support of SDS. This group not only inspired SDS with their nonviolent, direct action tactics, but also, along with similar movements like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), gave them opportunities to participate in their activities.

Civil rights may have been a primary focus, but the organization kept its ties to other issues and potential for activity. Much of the group's activity outside of civil rights involved scattered single protests on individual issues that were of particular interest to SDS. In 1963 a group of SDS students protested against John F. Kennedy's blockade of Cuba until the Soviet Union removed missiles there. For their efforts, the demonstrators were rewarded with the garbage thrown at them by their fellow students.²⁷ In the same year, the organization made plans to picket a bank with connections to South Africa as a statement against apartheid.²⁸ Rather than build a strong movement around one issue, as SNCC had done, SDS spread itself thin over multiple, disparate problems. Despite ratifying the Port Huron Statement, the 1962 SDS convention had achieved little in giving the movement an actual plan for action—"they had no real organization, they were united by ideology."²⁹ Realizing the necessity for a more directed program, SDS resolved to devise a means for enacting participatory democracy at their 1963 convention.³⁰

At the 1963 convention in Pine Hill, SDS proposed a few structured projects that would aide the group in putting their individual democracy theory into practice. SDS projects in 1963-4 gave principal attention to the community and domestic issues. The group wanted to 'bring the

²⁷Ibid 163.

²⁸*Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest.* (New York: Commerce Clearing House, Inc., 1970): 14.

²⁹Miller 167.

³⁰Ibid.

focus back home.”³¹ Perhaps the most significant of SDS’s planned endeavors for the coming year introduced at the 1963 convention was the organization’s “ERAP”—the Economic Research and Action Project. ERAP did not truly come into being until 1964, when SDS members went into Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Trenton, Boston, and other areas of the nation.³² This project was to be the first mass, national project of SDS that put its members’ right into the nation’s ghettos to test their theory of individual participation through attempts to politically motivate America’s poor. Through ERAP, SDS would combine “direct action and direct democracy” to organize the poor and “stimulate the new insurgency.”³³ ERAP aimed at highlighting the struggles of the nation’s poor and urging these people to take an active interest in the politics affecting their own lives. Not wishing to become the leaders of the poor, SDS rather hoped to aide in creating leaders from this class itself, to stimulate authentic interest within that group and show them ways to act upon it. They desired a “grassroots interracial cooperation of the poor.”³⁴ Like civil rights activities, SDS hoped ERAP would give them the means to their participatory democracy and would allow the group to create the politically motivated public they dreamed of.

Despite these positive moves forward, SDS experienced a semi-fall from the clouds mid-decade. Although it had a profound effect on many members, ERAP produced limited actual gains for the poor. Despite some success, many ERAP groups had difficulty arousing the interest of the poor, and even when they did found little concession from the bureaucracies they attacked.³⁵ Some took ERAP failures as a symbol of the oppressive nature of the federal

³¹Ibid.

³²*Presidents Commission* 18.

³³Miller 184-5.

³⁴*Presidents Commission* 18.

³⁵Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A history of the American New Left 1959-1972* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 61. New Left 61.

government—"many ERAP workers came away convinced that the system was 'totally inflexible and unresponsive to demands from below.'"³⁶ Additionally, the issue of Vietnam was making many activists increasingly skeptical towards their government. In 1965, the escalation of the war would make it "one of the bitterest issues of the decade."³⁷ The war would turn many SDS members stalwartly against a government who would enact what they believed was such a horrible and wrong war. The assassination of JFK, ERAP and civil rights failures, an increasingly untrustworthy handling of the war in Vietnam—all turned SDS's starry-eyed view of possibility for reform in the federal government into frustration, anger, and disillusionment with the American way. All of these occurrences aided in moving SDS toward more radical anti-establishment action. Sometimes violent, non-legal means grew increasingly attractive to those that had been so drastically let down, and the group moved in more radical directions after 1965. This fact must be remembered in the study to follow, as the group known as "SDS" differed in this radical aspect of its character depending on the years in which one was a member. Still, what stays consistent throughout the organization's history, despite its varying levels of radicalism and the difference in tactics, is SDS's commitment to participatory democracy and its desire to create a politically motivated populace.

SDS moved to the forefront of the anti-war movement, but was unable to keep an organized infrastructure to regulate the influx of members. In the last years of the sixties SDS accrued members, fame, and criticism. Its protests escalated, as did its commitment to radicalism. The last years of the group's existence were largely taken up by the massive Vietnam War issue. SDS during these years grew increasingly more disorganized and had massive trouble controlling its own movement. In the last quarter of the decade, SDS factionalism ended the organization.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Mark Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 21.

The formal end to SDS occurred in 1969, when it was subsumed by the Progressive Labor Party.³⁸ What was left of SDS after this takeover was “a rump led by a group that called itself the ‘Weathermen.’”³⁹ The Weathermen were a radical and small group of individuals that were to fully embrace revolution and perpetrate the most violent of SDS actions. By the end of the sixties, SDS was no longer a formal organization, and its members were left to move into the next decade full of the memories and experiences of the last ten years.

Organize!

Naturally, many of SDS’s former members remained organizers long after the end of the formal organization. In his study of citizen politics, Harry Boyte highlights the continued yet transformed activism of participants in the wider “Movement” of the sixties, of which SDS was a large part. Boyte claims that “for many of those who were inspired by the democratic values of the sixties, the challenge was to find ways to put these ideals into practice in more realistic and less self-righteous fashion.”⁴⁰ According to Boyte, young activists of the 1960s, frustrated by a failure to make tangible gains, turned toward more practical forms of organizing. He claims they adopted Saul Alinsky’s view of organizing, whose focus on “concrete, practical changes seemed a godsend to many sixties activists fed up with rhetorical posturing and abstract moralizing that never seemed to go anywhere.”⁴¹

In the later years of his life, Alinsky, who had previously had beliefs much like the activists of the sixties, fell from the clouds of idealism much like those Movement members that followed him. Inspired by his later writings, sixties activists took on his new organizing style: “a narrow

³⁸ Miller 311.

³⁹ Ibid 311.

⁴⁰ Harry C. Boyte, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics*, (New York: Free Press, 1989), 73.

⁴¹ Ibid 75.

focus on *issues* around which people could be mobilized, largely detached from reflection on the point of the issues, or the values involved.”⁴² Such groups cared little for the emotional and intangible aspects involved in activism and group participation. Nor did they care to involve each participant in the process of organizing. These activists “saw the people they worked with in a far narrower and even cynical fashion...groups to be mobilized, not listened to or learned from.”⁴³ New organizations were to be more hierarchical and less driven by actions from the general membership. Leaders, not the people, would have the power.

In Boyte’s view, those that formerly believed that “love and truth can be joined in a force for social change”⁴⁴ morphed into a sect of organizers bent on obtaining merely power and concrete gains. In support for his theory, Boyte looks to the group ACORN (Association of Community Organizers for Reform Now). He claims that this organizing society’s “language of power and its own rationale and its view of specific issues as the vehicle for power mobilization illustrate the common vocabulary of citizen organizing.”⁴⁵ For groups like ACORN, and others bred in the aftermath of the Movement, “power itself, in other words, was the point.”⁴⁶ The highly ideological cadres of the sixties reconfigured into groups that had “little discussion about broader ends.”⁴⁷

Boyte’s treatise has merit. He clearly has a strong grasp on the movements of the sixties; his statements at least reflect an accurate picture of SDS. Boyte claims that in Movement groups “youthful calls for community and participatory democracy substituted strident, overblown oratory for practical organizing.”⁴⁸ Additionally, he speaks of the New Left’s “constant,

⁴²Ibid 76.

⁴³ Ibid 77.

⁴⁴ Ibid 65.

⁴⁵ Ibid 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid 80.

⁴⁸ Ibid 64.

interminable preoccupation with group process, consensus meetings, endless discussion, and hostility toward formal leadership structures.”⁴⁹ Although they are in reference to the broader mood of the sixties, Boyte’s assertions clearly apply to the bureaucracy-phobic SDS.

Additionally, Boyte’s own analysis of organizing groups that formed post-sixties does support his thesis of a complete transformation of activist programs and values.

However, Boyte’s analysis of social organizing is, if not incorrect, then perhaps insufficient. There is no doubt that leaving the sixties led to a change in the practice of organizing for these Movement activists. Certainly, many went the way of Boyte’s description, turning to cold, hard organizing in the Alinsky vein. Still, Boyte’s analysis is countered by the presence of one organization, the Midwest Academy, that did not entirely fall into this pattern. One that, although admittedly shifting more to the practical, did not lose a sense of the grander ideology in which issues were merely a part. The Midwest Academy was founded by former SDSers Heather Booth and Steve Max. In 1973, Booth created the Academy as a center for the training of activists. Former national SDS member Max joined her in setting out the guidelines for the new organization. Together, they gave rise to a society for activists largely reflective of SDS principles that differs greatly from what Boyte describes.

The Midwest Academy can easily be seen as at least a partial product of SDS influence. Max was deeply involved in the SDS infrastructure. Booth was a more casual member, and soon not a member at all, but she maintained connections to SDS both by her past involvement and her continued interaction with her husband Paul Booth, the organization’s former national secretary and vice-president. The importance of this SDS influence on the MA is revealed when returning to the Boyte article. Boyte describes post-sixties activism as characterized by a focus on power without attention to broader ideals. It is one of practicality over abstract humanitarian beliefs.

⁴⁹ Ibid 73.

The manual of the Midwest Academy, *Organize! Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, highlights a different sort of activism. Although it contains elements of the Alinsky style of Boyte's focus, there remain in this guidebook hints of the Movement past. *Organize!* contradicts Boyte as a product of Movement activists that remains faithful to a higher ideology and is not solely a treatise on power struggles. In effect, it is a contemporary embodiment of SDS beliefs of the past.

In the opening passage of the book, the authors have written that, "This book is dedicated to all who are committed to this effort, to all who will take control of their own lives and destiny, and who will make history in our time."⁵⁰ Such a statement hardly signals that this is a group that has interest in only practical, tangible elements of power. Although it recognizes the importance of tangible gains, the MA is equally an organization focused on abstract aims of bettering interactions between humans. As *Organize!* claims, organizers

are not concerned solely about winning just this immediate issue, involving just those specific people, or building just that particular organization. Organizers need a broader sense of vision that allows them to place their work in a more historical context, to understand that they are parts of the broader movement for social justice in our society.⁵¹

Clearly this is not the organizing of the new Alinsky style. The MA's is activism with a mind to broader implications for the very nature of humankind.

The aforementioned proclamations are not merely grandiose rhetoric touted in the manual's introduction. Throughout *Organize!*, there is a sense of the "broader values" that Boyte claims are lacking in new activist groups. The MA asserts that:

⁵⁰ Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max, *Organize! Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, (Santa Ana: Seven Locks Press, 1990), 4.

⁵¹Ibid 228.

a good organizer is motivated by strong feelings of love and caring. This should not be forgotten, because a good organizer is motivated as well by strong feelings of outrage and anger at how people are treated.⁵²

The MA stresses a mix of practicality and attention to those elements of activism that cannot be concretely seen. According to this group, in each organization there exists “task leadership” and “maintenance leadership.”⁵³ Task leadership manages actions, the day-to-day planning, and all tangible facets of the group. Maintenance leadership focuses on “the emotional strength of the group and the people involved.”⁵⁴ According to the manual, maintenance leaders emphasize “trust,” “honesty, tempered with tactfulness,” and “positiveness.”⁵⁵ Such leaders ensure that each individual feels involved and happy with their participation. Maintenance leadership is not a given in activism. However, the MA’s leaders clearly view this aspect of organizing as vital, thus setting them apart from the solely power-minded groups described in Boyte’s article that care little for broader ends.

Why, though, has the MA chosen to include these additional moral principles in its manual, or in its institution at all? Perhaps, it has to do with the composition of its founding members—and their ties to SDS. Naturally, multiple factors play into each person’s ideology, and membership in SDS clearly cannot act as the sole basis for one’s system of beliefs. However, it is difficult to read this work without being reminded of the fundamental principles of the SDS of the sixties. The same discussions of broader ends that exist in the MA manual were a principle tacit of SDS, as laid out by Port Huron. This manifesto of the student movement was permeated with an emphasis on emotions and humanity. The very ideal of “participatory democracy” is a

⁵² Ibid 6.

⁵³ Ibid 88.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

goal based on emotional successes. Having a sense of one's own individual freedom and power is not a monetary or tangible gain. Clearly, SDS placed a high level of importance on abstract aims.

The MA continues the SDS attention to nonmaterial gains. Port Huron looked at relationships as a vital element of activism. Contemporary society, SDS contended in the Port Huron statement, had robbed humanity of meaningful relationships. Because of this, SDS's manifesto called for "honesty, brotherhood, and humanitarian relationships."⁵⁶ As Port Huron demands, "human interdependence is contemporary fact; human brotherhood must be willed."⁵⁷ It is difficult, then, not to be reminded of Port Huron as one reads *Organize!*, which proclaims: "Organizing is overwhelmingly about personal relationships. It is about changing the world and changing how individuals act together." Apart from tangible gains, these works recognize a need to pay attention to the subtler elements of activism, the human elements. Both have a mind to not only concrete advancement, but an entire revolution of the interaction of peoples. The MA, like SDS, appeals to broader values than just tangible power. Hence, it appears not to have undergone the intense transformation into the wholly practical, issue oriented organizations that Boyte has described.

The means by which the MA enacts its revolution of relationships also distinguish it from Boyte's analysis and further tie it to SDS roots. What the MA proposes for its organizations has much in common with the aforementioned SDS ERAP projects. In Cleveland in particular, ERAP members lived in a true democracy. They had lengthy discussions, in which every member had a say. Each decision was made by a consensus of all group members; no opinion

⁵⁶"Port Huron," *Democracy is in the Streets*, 333.

⁵⁷Ibid 332.

was silenced.⁵⁸ Cleveland was participatory democracy and Port Huron in action. The MA proposes similar forms of action if not to the extreme of ERAP. It argues for the participation of all members in organizational meetings. As proclaimed in one section, any meeting facilitator must be “the protector of the weak in meetings” that “encourages quiet and shy people to speak, and does not allow domineering people to ridicule others’ ideas or to embarrass them in any fashion.”⁵⁹ This manual demands that each person be allowed to feel a part of any action; that everyone who desires to may have a say. Organizers cannot decide for the people, they must respect the people and give them a sense of power. All of this rhetoric of democratic process and people acting on their own behalf is but participatory democracy by another name. These sentiments are highly resonant of Port Huron. They also separate the MA from the organizations described by Boyte that see members merely as entities to be manipulated.

The striking similarities between the Port Huron statement, the beliefs of SDS, and this manual setting out the principles of the Midwest Academy illustrate a continuation of the beliefs of SDS well beyond the era of the sixties. Of course, to claim that SDS had a profound impact on the formation of the MA requires deeper analysis than solely these similarities of their manifestos. The founders of the MA are tied to SDS. Max became a member of the national SDS early in the organization’s history, in 1961, and was a highly visible and active participant. He attended the group’s national conventions and was a trusted colleague of Tom Hayden at the time that this man served as SDS’s president. SDS historian James Miller claims that Max had a “droll sense of realism.”⁶⁰ As a member of SDS, Max had initially shied away from extreme action and favored more legal strategies for the group. He and his supporters in 1964 pushed for

⁵⁸ Miller 206-7.

⁵⁹ Bobo, Kendall, and Max 100.

⁶⁰ Miller 107.

election of Lyndon B. Johnson, much to the chagrin of more radical members of the organization. Max had always been a more practical participant in the organization.

Because she was a founding member of the organization, it is useful to look at Booth's past, which was also not the conventional narrative of an SDS member. For Booth, SDS served as the springboard to involvement in the women's movement. On the advice of her professor, SDS member Dick Flacks, Booth attended an SDS meeting in which she felt that "it was clear that men were denying the women's experiences."⁶¹ At a second meeting, Booth had another negative experience:

"I [Booth] was talking and one of the guys yelled at me to shut up. I stopped talking. I went around and tapped the shoulder of every woman in the group and we went upstairs and made a separate group. We basically pulled out half the numbers."⁶²

The chauvinism of SDS is well documented. The group may have claimed adherence to a democratic process, but this sense of equality was not always extended to women. Although this discrimination is not a focus of this paper, it is a vital organizational flaw that must be acknowledged. Despite this blatant sexism, the group did provide some positive opportunities for women. Females were a large portion of the group, and often did find in it a place for discussion and interaction of politically and socially motivated people. As Evans states in *Tidal Wave*, "the community organizing projects of the SDS provided unique opportunities for young women to learn the skills of movement building as well as a set of democratic ideas and ideals."⁶³ Hence, although SDS obviously was not the ideal place for women of the sixties movements, females too were influenced by its sense of participatory democracy, and carried

⁶¹"Heather Booth: Living the Movement Life" Interview by Becky Klutchin ed. by Gina Caneva in The CLWU Herstory Website [database on-line], accessed February 26, 2006
<<http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUMemoir/Booth.html>>

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Evans 16.

this to groups outside of the often chauvinistic SDS. Although not a long-serving SDS member, Booth obviously had a connection to the organization. Not only had she attended meetings, but she had an even more intimate tie to this group through her husband. As Heather Booth has said of their relationship, “we have been life partners in the larger Movement.”⁶⁴

The MA’s manual, then, is the product of, even if not typical, SDS members. Booth may have been a short-time member, but Max was anything but, and he was an integral part of the hammering out of the MA’s ideals. It is also important to note that Booth is not one of the authors of this 1990 version of the manual, whereas Max is. Although the Acknowledgements do claim that “many of the concepts, principles, and charts were first developed by Heather Booth,” the actual manual is the product of Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and, importantly, Steve Max. Additionally, the Preface claims that Booth founded the organization’s principles “with Steve Max, the Academy’s first trainer and current training director.”⁶⁵ Miller too cites Max’s connection to the organization: “Max for years has been the curriculum director for the Midwest Academy.”⁶⁶ Hence, it is not at all a stretch to say that this manual is partially if not highly reflective of the ideas of an influential and committed SDS member.

Due to this SDS connection as well as the similarities of the MA and Port Huron statements, it is logical to say that the MA represents one way that SDS has lasted beyond the sixties. The MA, unlike all others referred to in Boyte’s article, brings activism out of the Movement and into the present while keeping alive a sense of purpose greater than simply “concrete gains” and “issues.” It is, as shown, not a stretch to say that the MA is different in this respect because it is influenced by the ideals of SDS, an organization that always had a mind to the larger scope of things. Also, unlike the groups mentioned by Boyte, the MA does not promote a gap between

⁶⁴“Heather Booth: Living the Movement Life.”

⁶⁵Bobo, Kendall, and Max Preface.

⁶⁶Miller 320.

leadership and general members. As illustrated, the group rather encourages home grown leadership and constant participation by all members, much in the vein of SDS.

The MA manual also shares SDS's unique multi-issue focus. The manual aims to be one applicable to any field of organizing, and its examples are drawn from a wide range of causes. The manual ends with a survey of the contemporary state of affairs, "Cleaning up the Nineties." Much like the laundry list found in the Port Huron Statement, this section highlights the problems of the nation and some potential solutions. SDS was never a single-issue organization and it always had a mind to the wider state of world affairs. It makes an even more compelling case, then, for the SDS influence on the MA, that the same can be said for this manual.

Organize! does contain in it elements of the organization style that Boyte criticizes. The manual is not all idealistic preaching on grand issues and plans. Unlike in Port Huron, there is a clear acknowledgement of the practical, logistical elements of organizing. Port Huron never set forth a clear plan for how any of SDS's goals were to be carried out. *Organize!*, then, moves outside of the traditional sphere of SDS to discuss how concrete gains can be made. Possibly, this new practical element can be attributed to Max's own experience in SDS, struggling to find success or any tangible gains in the often confusing and inefficient world of the SDS national office. SDS had ideological strength, but the group always had difficulty in actually formulating a workable plan of action. The MA's practicality, then, can logically be seen at least partially as the result of Max's own experience with a disorganized and, because of this, oft unsuccessful organization. Additionally, it must be remembered that Max was always a practical SDSer; hence, it is not inconsistent that a manual in which he took part maintains a certain pragmatism.

Additionally, it must again be acknowledged that a concern for emotion and human relationships was not unique to SDS; it can be said of any Movement group. To this effect,

especially, it is necessary to note that Booth was a member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and the manual likely reflects this influence as well. Still, the clear connections between SDS and the MA cannot be ignored. Also, if Boyte is correct in his analysis, the majority of Movement activists went down a path different from that reflected in the MA manual. One has to question, then, why this organization did not head in an entirely similar direction. From the analysis of SDS and the MA manual above, one can assert that perhaps the reason that this group did not lose sense of a greater purpose in organizing is because its founders were former members of an organization that always had a concern for broader implications. The legacy of SDS, then, in this case, is a humanitarian activism with a faith in the ability of persons to organize themselves. Hence positive human relationships and participatory democracy find a place in the contemporary world of organizing, at least partially due to SDS.

The Academic Activist

Booth and Max are but two former members that went on to be professional activists. However, many other SDSers did not take this path, and rather moved back into the world of academia. For some, like historian Jesse Lemisch, the experiences provided by SDS proved profound and influential for the rest of their lives. Lemisch first joined SDS “in either 1963 or 1964 (I’m not sure when it began)”⁶⁷ as a professor at the University of Chicago. After being removed from this position due to his participation in an SDS sit-in, Lemisch moved to Northwestern in 1968 and joined the SDS on this campus.⁶⁸ Through this organization, Lemisch had direct involvement in the intense demonstrations of the era—even the storm of the Democratic Convention of 1968. Lemisch recalls this experience:

⁶⁷ Jesse Lemisch, “Re: SDS,” Email to the author, September 26, 2005.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

My capacity to understand the terror and flight involved in eighteenth-century crowd behavior was enhanced by the experience of being in a crowd that was tear-gassed and nearly blinded by Chicago Mayor Daley's police on Michigan Avenue in August 1968.⁶⁹

A 2003 article by Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers for Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Activism," heavily focuses on his and others' sixties experience. He says of the time, "the sixties were not about our being passive spectators, waiting to see how things worked out, but rather active makers and participants."⁷⁰ Because of his focus on this time, even thirty years later, one can see the profound impact that involvement in SDS and its activities has had on Lemisch.

It is only natural that participation in such events left a lasting impression on this historian. After all, the same can likely be said of many Movement activists, who were often deeply affected by the dramatic demonstrations of which they had taken part. The impact on participants in these struggles has been widely studied. For many involved, participation in even violent demonstrations was an exciting and emotionally charged event. Civil rights had thrown students into the racism of the South, just as ERAP had thrown SDSers into the grim life of the American ghetto—"naive students, straight from their government and sociology classes, ran head on into the realities of life as led by the urban poor."⁷¹ As violent altercations and direct collisions with violent racists hardened many SDS members and made them more determined to fight for civil rights, a taste of the life of the average poor citizen turned many ERAP participants into ardent fighters for social justice. As Lemisch writes:

⁶⁹ Jesse Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers for Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Activism" *Radical History Review* (2003): 240.

⁷⁰Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers," 242.

⁷¹Unger 61.

If some of them came away discouraged, others became more resolute. For the optimists ERAP had the same awakening and radicalizing effect as Freedom Summer had for those who went to Mississippi in 1964.⁷²

Clearly, participation in the wide range of direct action activities available in the sixties had the potential to leave deep marks on those involved. As historian Paul Bushnell, a former member of SNCC, claims, “if you became active you were more likely to become more committed—even if you hadn’t meant to. When people suffer danger, they can become more committed to a cause.”⁷³

These generalizations about Movement activists can easily be applied to Jesse Lemisch. Through his writings, one can see the lasting effects of Lemisch’s participation in SDS activities. In a 2003 article for the *Radical History Review*, Lemisch makes a dramatic case for “bridging the gap between activism and the academy.”⁷⁴ His writing is a resounding promotion of direct involvement in activism outside of the campus. As Lemisch claims, “A good dose of tear gas makes us think more clearly as historians.”⁷⁵ Lemisch celebrates radical action tactics and decries those who desire solely to remain in academia. He claims that, “so much of my generation once knew experientially the necessity of activism for the historian, but it has been deradicalized and demobilized.”⁷⁶ The former SDSer’s own experience with activism was obviously positive and, like that of so many others, remains prevalent in his memory. In the same way that past activities made some in the Movement more committed to their causes and direct action tactics, Lemisch’s acts have left him strongly in favor of continued activism. In this

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Dr. Paul Bushnell, interview by author, Bloomington, IL, January 24, 2006.

⁷⁴Lemisch, “2.5 Cheers,” 240.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid 243.

manner, though, Lemisch's article appears to differ little from what may have come from any previously dedicated member of the Movement.

However, Lemisch's publication is not solely a promotion of activism; it is simultaneously a defense of academic pursuits. Historians must not leave academia and become full time organizers, he argues. Rather, they should combine their activism with continued scholarly activity. As he claims:

I see doing history as deeply connected to building a democratic and self-critical left, and as preparing the way for utopia, as well as for the joyful and playful intellectual life that will be part of utopia.⁷⁷

Lemisch's position is not advocacy of fleeing the universities. Rather, he suggests, "face the challenge of figuring out how to be radical where you live"—"where you live" referring to the metaphorical home of academia. He continues, "I say, *stay and fight*."⁷⁸ Not only does Lemisch promote the continuation of intellectual activities, he goes a step further to claim that the material studied does not even need to be directly applicable to either activism or current events: "I'm here to speak for the importance to the left of doing history, regardless of its relevance or irrelevance to current movements of resistance."⁷⁹ In fact, he views such extra-disciplinary study as essential to the survival of radical activist historians. As he asserts: "concern for what may seem even the most abstract and nonactivist kinds of questions, such as form in art and music, can be part of building a better left."⁸⁰ With such statements, Lemisch promotes a "bridging of the gap" between being a passionate activist and a devoted academic.

⁷⁷ Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers," 241.

⁷⁸ Ibid 244.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid 248.

Lemisch's theory is highly reflective of his SDS background. The Students for a Democratic Society itself always "bridged the gap" between academia and action. Port Huron is a strong testament to the intellectualism of the group. It can be said for SDS that it was a politically well-informed organization aware of national problems at home and abroad. Because of this, the organization's manifesto was not merely a call to youth action, but also an academic manifesto on the current state of society. On the domestic front, SDS saw a nation spending on military needs while poverty gradually increased. They desired that the government plan for a peace economy, focusing its energy and funds on domestic reform.⁸¹

An identifiable trend in the aims of SDS as set out by Port Huron is a definite movement from private to public interests, with greater involvement from the federal government in many areas. They desired the expansion of health care, welfare, civil rights initiatives, social security to be greater with the individual's level of need, equal education, and other reforms that demanded "the enlargement of the public sector."⁸² Additionally, they decried the seeming stagnation of the two US political parties which they claimed were too similar to create meaningful, actual debate between them. Such debate was key to prevent inaction in the government, and SDS highly valued all types of dissent and discussion. In foreign affairs, SDS's program was just as broad and demanding. They urged disarmament rather than deterrence and arms control in the Cold War, but they wanted this to be handled by international rather than national groups.⁸³ Other demands included allowing China into the United Nations, abolishing NATO, and giving food through UN programs.⁸⁴

⁸¹"Port Huron," *Democracy is in the Streets*, 363.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid 355.

⁸⁴Ibid 370.

As illustrated by these demands, the Port Huron Statement was not meant to signal a complete move out of the intellectual world. The writing of the statement, primarily done by Tom Hayden, is complex and implies a wider political knowledge. As a follow up to the academic nature of the manifesto, SDS maintained its intellectualism throughout its chaotic history. Many of the groups' own projects revolved around education, like the Peace Research and Education Project and its numerous teach-ins.⁸⁵ The group always "disliked action for action's sake"⁸⁶ and valued academic study even in their most rebellious of times, reading the works of Che Guevara and other guerilla theorists to inform themselves on the proper means of revolution. Clearly, Lemisch is merely continuing a commitment to academia that his own former group instilled in its members.

Despite this intellectual interest, SDS was no less devoted to direct action than any other Movement group. As previously mentioned, SDS members were more than willing to join up with the protests of civil rights groups. The aforementioned ERAP program illustrates another way in which SDS members left the world of academia to directly participate in society. Perhaps the most successful ERAP experiment, in terms of forming the kind of participatory democracy SDS wanted and achieving real gains for the poor was the Cleveland operation, headed by activist Sharon Jeffries. Cleveland's ERAP members lived among and quite like their constituency—Jeffries's organizers limited themselves to 29 cents worth of food a day.⁸⁷ Cleveland workers had "taken up residence in a decrepit frame house in a poor white neighborhood and mingled with the local people."⁸⁸ They had taken a risk, made sacrifices, and moved outside of the university into the world of the ghetto. For organizers like Jeffries, despite

⁸⁵*President's Commission* 19-21.

⁸⁶*Ibid* 77.

⁸⁷Miller 199.

⁸⁸Unger 59.

failures, ERAP was an opportunity for excitement and direct action—actual participation in society.⁸⁹

ERAP was an illustration of what SDS could do when it took to the streets. SDS also showed its dedication to direct action in other, sometimes more destructive incidents. The horrific Democratic Convention of 1968, where students and police brutally battled on the streets of Chicago,⁹⁰ and the infamous violence of the Weathermen sector of SDS that broke off in 1969 are only the most famous of a long string of controversial SDS demonstrations. From their early days of civil rights and scattered other protests to their later mass marches against the Vietnam War,⁹¹ the SDS was never shy about activism. Whether positively or negatively, SDS managed to effectively balance an academic and an activist outlook.

Historian Jesse Lemisch has taken this element of the group's past and has brought it into the present. His dual appeal to the campus and what lies outside of it makes him, in his opinion, somewhat unique. In attempting to enact his vision of blending the two worlds, he has received criticism from academics who desire to remain within the university."⁹² When he proposed supporting a student occupation of a building at John Jay College, a colleague told him that "it was our job to lay the theoretical groundwork for resistance by composing *position papers*."⁹³ Much of this resistance to activism, oddly enough, comes from what he labels "one-time radicals."⁹⁴ Lemisch describes what he sees as a popular phenomenon of former activists moving into the security of the university. As he claims:

⁸⁹Miller 193.

⁹⁰Unger 122.

⁹¹Miller 255.

⁹² Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers," 246.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid 247.

it saddens me that so many of my cohorts have put themselves into voluntary retirement from activism. In 2000, I described this widespread predisposition as a “kind of I-wonder-what-will-happen-next-attitude, a spectatorial stance that waits for others to make a movement.”⁹⁵ Lemisch’s lament of the “deradicalization of former radicals”⁹⁶ not only signals a trend among former Movement activists, but also highlights the fact that he has escaped this antipathy toward action.

It is not illogical to assert that the reason that Lemisch has maintained this commitment to activism is because of his participation in SDS. As explored, SDS put great emphasis on keeping a leg in both the worlds of the university and the wider spaces off campus. Not only did the group promote this, but it also demonstrated the possibility of doing so. SDS members managed to be not just students nor activists, but rather student activists, who could be academics and revolutionaries all at once. Clearly, Lemisch had a similar experience. Because of SDS, he faced the Chicago tear gas that so strongly influences his writings while simultaneously serving as a university professor. Such an experience proved to him that, if desired, one could be activist and intellectual both. Perhaps, then, participation in SDS was an important factor in creating Lemisch’s dual mentality. Due to the fact that SDS so strongly promoted this exact mindset, along with the previous illustration that participation in the group so clearly impacted the historian and his work, this statement is not unfeasible. Naturally, there are complicating factors with this assumption. Clearly, SDS does not make up the entirety of Lemisch’s being, and there are other elements at work here. Additionally, it is likely that, although Lemisch makes generalizations about former radicals, other groups, SNCC, CORE, and the like, also produced academics with a commitment to activism. Still, it is clear that SDS did have an impact on

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Lemisch, and it is logical that this would be manifested in continued promotion of wedding intellect to direct action.

Aside from simply a similarity between Lemisch's and the groups' commitment to two spheres, even more evidence exists for a claim that SDS drives at least a part of Lemisch's work. Previously, the notion of "participatory democracy" was explained as a key element in SDS rhetoric. A semblance of this idea was then shown to exist in the MA manual, through its promotion of equal participation of all members in meetings and a resistance to leader monopolization of any organization. Lemisch continues this tradition, even in his scholarship on the past. This can be seen in a recent article for the *William and Mary Quarterly*, in which Lemisch explores the terminology used to describe gatherings of people—"riot," "crowd," "mob" and the like. Lemisch's assessment of the issue is an interesting one that fits nicely with SDS lines.

According to Lemisch, the "mob" is "passionate, unruly, robust, dynamic, and often violent" and it has "played an important role in history in part *because* of those traits."⁹⁷ However, he claims, "mobs" are derided by historians, "probably reflecting a long tradition of Marxist antagonism to the *lumpenproletariat*."⁹⁸ Lemisch sees this derision of the mob as historians' lack of recognition of the role of the lower classes in making their own history. He lauds British historian E.P. Thompson, who "refuses to read consciousness or its absence automatically from one's place in the social structure."⁹⁹ Unlike historians that "defang the mob and rob it of its radicalism and independent judgment,"¹⁰⁰ Lemisch and Thompson see value in analyzing the mob as a purposeful political tool of the lower social strata. Lemisch labels this kind of work

⁹⁷ Jesse Lemisch, "Communications," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., Vol. 56, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), 232.

⁹⁸Ibid 233.

⁹⁹Ibid 233.

¹⁰⁰Ibid 234.

“history from the bottom up,”¹⁰¹ and he claims that it is something that has long been of interest to him.

Lemisch and Thompson credit the “mob,” effectively the lower classes, with large amounts of self-determinacy. They give respect to this *lumpenproletariat* that Lemisch feels much of academia ignores. In doing so, Lemisch stays consistent with his Movement organization, one that, at least in rhetoric, believed that all members of society had the potential to engage in activism on their own behalf. Lemisch not only promotes this belief in his historical scholarship, but, as previously seen, also in his writings on the present time. By urging academics to be activists, Lemisch promotes “participatory democracy”—people taking an active role in society and engaging in protest. If Lemisch did not believe that people could effect actual change in this way, it is unlikely that he would promote such activism. His statements, then, reveal that Lemisch believes that not only can people participate in demonstrations, but these protests can actually find success in contemporary times.

In this regard, Lemisch shares similar beliefs with the MA. As shown, this group also has faith in the ability of people to organize themselves. Lemisch and the MA possess a belief that the so called “masses” can take responsibility for their own lives and engage in activism. The MA, too, must believe that activism by the people for the people has the potential for success, or else they would not promote it in their manual. It is not a far leap from “participatory democracy” to these beliefs of the MA and Lemisch. Because of the latter two’s close ties to SDS, the commonalities of their viewpoints on this issue, and the fact that this Movement organization so strongly promoted the very beliefs that the MA and Lemisch share, it is fair to claim that a lasting legacy of SDS participation may be a faith in the power of the people to act on their own behalf and their potential to find success in this endeavor.

¹⁰¹ Ibid 234.

What Lemisch and the MA also suggest about the impact of SDS on its members is its instillation of a lack of aversion to, or perhaps even disrespect for, authority and hierarchy. In "Bridging the Gap," Lemisch advocates academic participation in demonstrations that often go against one of the greatest forms of authority, the government. Unlike his colleagues, he showed no fear of retribution for his actions and even went so far as to support a blatant student rejection of the administration. In the *William and Mary* article, Lemisch promotes a different form of resistance to hierarchy. He urges young historians to break away from the lines of tradition, to fight against the hegemony, and to form new historical theories. He claims that they should "set out in new directions while the field is dogmatically committed to an explanatory theory...and stacked in favor of the reigning interpretation."¹⁰² His writings are not unlike those found in the MA manual, which consistently celebrates action against dominant institutions. These further similarities illustrate that another consequence of SDS participation seems to be a persistent rejection of authority and a willingness to oppose dominant structures.

An SDS Transformation

Lemisch's writings, although clearly indicative of SDS influence, does not go into great detail on his actual experiences in the organization. Also, his writings do not allow the reader to see if participation in SDS merely influenced him or actually transformed him into the historian he is today. Hence, although it is easy to see that SDS must have had a certain amount of impact on him, the ways in which SDS actually influenced Lemisch are not crystal clear. The same can be said for Booth and Max. These former members all were influenced by SDS, and seem to have permanently inherited some of the organization's beliefs. However, further proof is needed to claim that SDS could realistically be at least partially responsible for the contemporary beliefs

¹⁰² Ibid 237.

of these activists. Another former member, Carroll Cox, provides greater detail on his activities while participating in SDS and allows a deeper look into the means by which membership in the group could in fact impact member thought.

Cox, currently a Professor of English at Illinois State University, joined that campus's SDS chapter as a faculty member in 1967. The impact of involvement with this group on Cox is apparent from his dialogue, and it shares similarities with the other SDS members previously explored. In an interview given in October of 2004, Cox reveals the revolution of character he experienced largely as a result of SDS participation. Before his entrance into this group, Cox describes himself as "more or less a conservative Democrat."¹⁰³ As Cox claims he "had no strong political opinions then."¹⁰⁴ Reared in the conservative 1950s, Cox remembers telling his father that "members of the Communist party must be fought."¹⁰⁵ Although he did take part in civil rights activities in the early 1960s, Cox still lacked a high sense of rebelliousness after that participation. As he states, "I still voted for Johnson, not against Goldwater but for Johnson in 1964."¹⁰⁶ Despite having an interest in activism, Cox at this earlier point did not have a great desire to resist governmental authority, especially his own Democratic Party, in which he maintained his faith. He also initially lacked interest in formal demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Even after his time in civil rights activity, Cox appeared weary of direct action. In his words, he had been "thinking that the war might not be real advisable, but I wasn't strongly opposed to it, and certainly hadn't dreamt of entering into an organized opposition."¹⁰⁷ Further revealing his hesitancy toward anti-war demonstrations, Cox claims, "I remember saying something like this: If this movement continued, it was a moral obligation to support them, but it

¹⁰³ Carroll Cox, Transcript of interview with author, Bloomington, IL. October 28, 2004, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 4.

was probably ill-timed and one almost wished it wouldn't happen."¹⁰⁸ All of Cox's comments prove surprising only in light of the fact that this man was quickly to become a dedicated advocate of not only Vietnam resistance, but also of highly rebellious and anti-authority techniques.

In 1965, Cox began to question his Democratic Party when "the war in Vietnam and the invasion of the Dominican Republic was taking my party away from me."¹⁰⁹ At this time, Cox joined up the budding SDS chapter on campus. Through this organization, he was exposed to dramatic and public forms of activism. On campus, he and another SDS member made "100 or 200 copies of a half-sheet leaflet and passed it out for about 20 or 30 minutes in front of Schroeder Hall, the two of us calling for a rally."¹¹⁰ From here, Cox's activity spread out to formal anti-war marches. Quickly, he escalated in radicalism, joining a march to protest the Secretary of War's appearance at the Masonic Temple in Bloomington, IL. At this march, "the steps were covered with garbage" and "we ended up sneaking in the back door."¹¹¹ In 1968, he took his activism outside of Bloomington to the Modern Language Association Convention in New York. During this event, a group of radical MLA members had gathered outside of the Americana Hotel for a demonstration and had been arrested for this action. Cox and a man who he had met named Bruce Franklin

walked past the Americana and stood there. The two of us started chanting together "drop the charges!" Then two or three more people joined us. Pretty soon there were 100-200

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid 3.

¹¹⁰Ibid 8-9.

¹¹¹Ibid 12.

people. Officers came and finally we got into a side room where then we had a long discussion between the people in that room and half dozen of the MLA leadership.¹¹²

Cox had gone from hesitance to resistance to complete dedication to activism, even so far as to provoke it himself, in the span of but two years.

Implicit in the growing escalation of Cox's activities is a simultaneously increasing willingness to defy authority. A veteran of the Korean War, Cox was initially a defender of U.S. policy even in the atmosphere of a local bar. He explains an incident in graduate school where he and two friends got into an argument with a woman at a bar: "all three of us were giving long, complex arguments about how she was all wrong and U.S. foreign policy was correct."¹¹³ Even in later years, as mentioned, Cox was very hesitant to act against his Democratic party. Such facts reveal that Cox was resistant to, or at least not enthusiastic about, the idea of challenging traditional authority before SDS. This reluctance to resisting authority clearly evaporated in the later years in which he found himself yelling at the MLA hotel with his new acquaintance. Obviously, to engage in protests and marches, Cox had to have come to peace with the idea of opposing the government. His eventual disengagement from the Democrats also highlights an intense transformation in Cox's mentality. Not only did Cox fall out of favor with this party, but he left in an even more dramatic fashion. Directly after his participation in SDS in the early 70s, Cox joined a group of individuals that were attempting to create a new form of communism in the US. As he claims, "we formed a local group here called the Red Star Council."¹¹⁴ This was an especially fascinating transformation from a man who had previously scorned communism in all forms.

¹¹²Ibid 25.

¹¹³Ibid 5.

¹¹⁴Ibid 7.

It is highly likely that SDS played a role in this transformation. Although small, the group existed on campus and connected Cox to action-minded individuals. Perhaps alone, Cox was not inspired to participate in dramatic actions against the Vietnam War. But joined by the 20-30 people that also entered into the group around 1967-8, Cox had a small but dedicated support system that moved him to action. The nature of SDS as a national organization cannot be overlooked in Cox's transformation. SDS by the later 1960s had come to be a well known protest organization, marked by a willingness to engage in rebellious and sometimes destructive actions. To label itself an SDS chapter, then, the ISU group must have embraced the group's national reputation. Their choice then indicates the same willingness to embrace the direct, dramatic action that did the group at large. The aforementioned activities that Cox participated in through SDS reveal that the ISU chapter of this organization did live up to its national reputation. Because Cox became a part of this group in close timing with his transformation to a radical activist, it is logical to claim that SDS played at least a role in the radicalizing of Cox. It is easy to see how, when exposed to a growing group of individuals that supported the SDS mentality and that also gave him access to radical activity, Cox could have changed from conservative to anything but.

Cox carried a healthy disrespect for authority and a willingness to take action into his years well beyond SDS. In later years, he organized protest groups like the Committee in Solidarity of People of El Salvador (CISPES) and in 1982 the Students for a Free Palestine. Cox has even participated in recent demonstrations, mainly centering on the war in Iraq. Obviously, today, he is not the same man that he was when he first entered into SDS. Naturally, this is not to say that SDS was the sole reason for his commitment to activism and its continuance into contemporary times. The nature of the times, with the steadily increasing Vietnam War and the chaos of the

latter portion of the era must have been at least partially responsible. However, the fact that Cox was closely associated with the group at the exact time in which he changed, and that SDS has a history of promoting such anti-authority and direct action makes a strong case that the group played a part in his new outlook.

Resistance to authority and a turn toward radicalization run in the same vein, and both follow the SDS line. Clearly, Cox's dialogue conveys similar sentiments to the MA and Lemisch's tendency to rebel against dominant structures. The fact that the MA and Lemisch, also tied to SDS, exhibit similar tendencies supports the argument that the organization played a role in the formation of these ideologies. With Booth, Max and Lemisch, it is admittedly difficult to determine how large a role SDS played in their desire to resist authority, despite the fact that it is still logical to claim that the organization did impact their thought. With Cox, the ability of SDS to make one more willing to rebel is, due to the detailed information he provides, much more easily seen. Cox illustrates the way in which SDS had the potential to radicalize its members and make them comfortable with resisting authority. His example makes even more plausible the assertion that SDS could be at least partly responsible for the MA and Lemisch's promotion of opposing authority.

A shared willingness to combat dominant structures is not all that the MA, Lemisch, and Cox share. At this time it is necessary to return to Boyte's analysis of former Movement activists' fall from idealism after the end of the 1960s. Again, Boyte claims that these activists viewed members of their organizations as "groups to be mobilized, not listened to or learned from."¹¹⁵ By contrast, both the MA and Lemisch continue the SDS belief in both the ability of individuals to create and run movements for their own causes and their potential to succeed in such actions. Cox's interview reveals that he too exhibits this continued faith in peoples'

¹¹⁵ Ibid 77.

capability to organize on their own and to find success in so doing. Because Cox provides a detailed description of his SDS participation, it is possible to see how participation in SDS could be a factor in the continued “power to the people” mentality of all members discussed.

Participation in SDS gave Cox a sense of the impact that people could have once they made the move to protest. In his interview, Cox gives an interesting take on demonstrations. According to him, any action, no matter how small, has the potential to be of great importance, even if indirectly. He gives as an example a 1969 protest in Washington DC. As he claims:

It came out later in the memoirs of one of the Nixon people that they had been seriously discussing in the White House dropping nuclear weapons on the Chinese installations in North Vietnam. Toward the end of Nixon’s presidency, one of his aides wrote that the size and militancy of the November moratorium made them change their minds.¹¹⁶

Although Cox did not personally attend, he donated money and a van to those who did. This event and his connection to it empowered Cox. He states, “Those kind of things I helped organize. You helped save the world.”¹¹⁷ Even in lesser protests Cox was imbued with a sense of the power of activists. He speaks of a demonstration of 30 individuals in Springfield that he participated in. Although he realizes that this number is small, he explains how such demonstrations still serve a vital purpose:

We went back home and worked a little harder. That didn’t influence anyone, but it did influence us to go on organizing. These gatherings, regardless of their size do reflect what’s going on. They help people talk to each other in all sorts of localities.¹¹⁸

Cox, then, was able to see his activities as building blocks for larger actions. Because of this, he became convinced that his SDS participation was important, was truly making a difference.

¹¹⁶Ibid 13.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

This sense of the power of protest did not diminish for Cox with the fall of SDS. Having been in what he considered successful demonstrations left him idealistic about the possibilities for activism long after the 1960s. From what Cox has related, it seems as if many of his protest efforts have not been as successful as those of SDS. As he says of CISPES, “we never had a large movement, but we did have two or three respectable demonstrations.”¹¹⁹ Cox also admits that contemporary times sometimes leave activists with diminished hope. As he claims regarding the state of Iraq War protests:

Back before the war started, we had a couple of meetings. Very, very large overflow crowds we had, of course—then attendance fell. When you see a war coming, you can get people, but after it starts, then it drops down.¹²⁰

Still, Cox continues even in the face of this. After all, this activist has seen how little sparks of action can turn into forest fires—it happened for him in SDS.

In SDS, Cox saw firsthand how the voices of a few could turn into those of the many—his own MLA demonstration, which grew from 2 to 200, validates this point. His continued efforts to protest reflect that these experiences have left him with a strong notion that such demonstrations can have success. As shown, the MA and Lemisch share a similar idealism. These former SDS members all express a continued belief that people can effect changes when they act on their own behalf. In Cox’s case, this belief can clearly be seen as the byproduct of SDS participation. Not until his entrance in this group did he fully embrace and believe in the successes of direct action. Even participation in civil rights activities did not leave him with the sense that protest was particularly useful, as shown by his expressed resistance to direct activism even after those experiences. For Cox, SDS was, if not entirely, at least largely responsible for

¹¹⁹Ibid 25.

¹²⁰Ibid 27.

his transformation into a promoter of “participatory democracy.” Seeing how Cox was changed by this experience provides a practical example of how the group could leave members confident in the ability of people to take their own stands and affect change. Hence, his case bolsters the argument that SDS played a role in the similar lasting beliefs of the other members discussed.

Clearly, Cox is not Booth, Max, or Lemisch. Each of these individuals had his or her own experiences, and it would not be appropriate to say that Cox’s example proves that SDS is wholly responsible for the ideologies of these other members. Still, it is intriguing to note that all of these former members share a strikingly similar mentality, and Cox’s story refutes the idea that it is necessarily because they all had it to begin with. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that, as mentioned, civil rights actions did not leave Cox with this mentality. This is not to in any way demean civil right activity. Likely, many former SNCC and CORE members remain committed to activism and still believe in the power of protest. Yet it is worth noting that this belief is particularly strong in these former SDSers, and that this organization was able to provide Cox with the continued idealism that others could not.

Female Perspective

Although, as addressed, SDS could be a sexist organization, it did provide some opportunities for women. In the SDS chapter of which Cox was a part, the president was actually female. Cha Smith, a student at ISU at the time, joined with other interested campus members to form the SDS chapter at this university in 1967—she then took the formal leadership of the organization as President. SDS participation had many of the same effects on Cha as those seen on the other members investigated. She began with her small local campus chapter, then, after being expelled by the university, Cha joined up with the Weathermen in Chicago in

1968. Her story, though in many ways different from those otherwise described here, is a similar tale to those addressed of increased resistance to authority and a continued belief in protest's potential for success.

Smith's activism began in high school, as she and other concerned students discussed issues pressing on the nation. Bloomington, Illinois, Smith's home town, as shown by Cox, was at the time home to various demonstrations for the cause of civil rights. Through this movement, Smith began to actively participate in demonstrations. Her first was a demonstration after the murder of Malcolm X; she then went on to participate in protests against investments in South Africa, due to that nation's policy of apartheid.¹²¹ Although what Smith was doing was obviously activism, she does not consider these activities radical. As she claims, "I guess I could have helped with voter registration or something, but I didn't do that...mostly it was just an in-support kind of thing. I didn't really get beyond sitting in."¹²² Obviously, such demonstrations were important and useful in the fight for civil rights. However, they cannot be considered radical relative to some of Smith's future activities with SDS.

Through this group, Smith participated in rebellious acts, sometimes to the point of violence. This radical activity began on a small scale at ISU. The SDS chapter on this campus, in joint action with the Black Student Union, organized demonstrations and actions against apartheid. These activities led Smith and the President of the BSU to the Dean's office multiple times until finally, "it was just too many times, so basically they [the university] said, yeah, this university isn't a good place for you."¹²³ She and the BSU President were both expelled, and "we exited together—solidarity."¹²⁴ After this incident, Smith went to Chicago and joined up with the SDS

¹²¹Cha Smith, Transcript of interview with author, Bloomington, IL, December 1, 2004, 7.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid 14.

¹²⁴Ibid.

chapter in the city. In the midst of her participation with this chapter, SDS split into different factions due to ideological differences. Smith joined with the Weathermen sect of SDS in 1968.

Through this group, Smith participated in the Days of Rage, a legendary eight day spree of violence that the group put on in Chicago. In this demonstration, Smith was arrested and had both arms broken in police beatings. She writes that the police “were very prepared and they responded very viciously. They just beat the shit out of everybody they touched.”¹²⁵ In the hospital, Smith was further abused by government officials who interrogated her. As she claims,

I suspect that it was the Red Squad. They kept asking me about who were these people and what do you know about this person...For some reason, they woke me up in the middle of the night, and had me handcuffed to my bed like somehow I was going to be cooperating.¹²⁶

By this time, Smith had obviously become a full blown radical.

SDS had led Smith to radical action. The personality of this young activist was not one that was particularly radical, despite what her described activities might suggest. As a participant in civil rights activism, Smith refrained from engaging in the groups more risky activities, like voting registration. Even after her experiences in the Days of Rage, Smith was not entirely comfortable with radical action. As she claims of her participation in this event: “I quit soon after that. I wasn’t seeing that as something that I could really embrace.”¹²⁷ This comment reveals that Smith was not one who naturally tended toward dramatic and violent action. The fact that SDS could bring her into such activities as this Days of Rage illustrates how the group could draw its members into radicalism. Inspired by the SDS members around her, Smith found herself participating in events that were outside of her normal range of activism.

¹²⁵ Ibid 20.

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Ibid 18.

Unlike for Cox, this extreme radicalism did not continue for Smith, as her aforementioned comment indicates. Still, Smith was impacted by her SDS activities. She may not have embraced violence and radical activity, but Smith did continue to promote resistance to authoritarian structures, especially the government. As her early protest activity shows, Smith always had some willingness to challenge authority. However, her extremely negative experience with the police and government in Chicago rid her of any sense of limitation she may have previously felt in opposing them. As she claims of her Days of Rage experience:

I think it made me more resolute. It made me more clear that these lines were drawn.

That I was seen as an enemy or something. There were 300 kids running down the street—yeah, big deal. It wasn't like we had guns. They were the ones who had guns.

There must have been 5,000 cops out that night. It was really pretty sick.¹²⁸

Appalled by extreme police reaction to the Weathermen's admittedly violent protest, Smith turned even more against the government than she had been before. For Smith, the Days convinced Smith that "the F.B.I. had run amok and our civil rights were being violated."¹²⁹

The impact that this experience had on Smith's impression of authority can still be seen in her contemporary worldview. Parts of Smith's interview are given to chiding the current administration, and she shows no limitation in doing so. As she claims of the current government, "clearly what we have now isn't really foreign policy, it is economic policy on drugs and its frightening, you know. It's frankly very frightening."¹³⁰ She is equally critical of the United States's President Bush. As she claims:

¹²⁸Ibid 21.

¹²⁹Ibid 24.

¹³⁰Ibid 31.

how many war crimes is Bush responsible for? One scandal after another that this man's involved in. And it's like nothing. No effect at all except that the entire world is opposed to everything that's even associated with the United States.¹³¹

Clearly, Smith's experience has left her quite open to resistance of governmental authority, and logically so. After witnessing abuses by her nation's government in her youth, it is only natural that she would suspect them of similar injustices today. The legacy of SDS on Smith is, as for the other former members discussed, an increased willingness to oppose structures of authority. In Smith's case, her resistance is especially fierce, due to the extreme nature of her own experiences.

Smith's statement on President Bush, like Cox's picture of the nation, does not paint a hopeful picture for activists. In her view, Bush and his cohorts do not have to be sensitive to the views of the nation. As she claims, in contemporary times:

the network of industry and military and corporations is much more established. They have an agenda and they are way off down that road. They have gotten a lot more buy-in by Democrats and Republicans so they are just not affected by it [activism]. They don't have to be.¹³²

Despite these comments that seem to indicate that protest is ineffective in the present day, Smith, like all members discussed, continues to both promote and participate in direct action techniques. As she states, "I'm still involved in the anti-war movement."¹³³ Additionally, she has taken an active interest in activism for environmental causes. Smith, in the vein of Cox, Lemisch, Booth, and Max maintains an idealistic faith in the power of protest and the people. She ends her interview with the utopian statement on activism: "You think that well, you know, whose lives

¹³¹ Ibid 29.

¹³² Ibid 30.

¹³³ Ibid 29.

are you changing. And you really have no idea.” She continues, “Whenever people live their lives according to what’s out of this place...really trying to link with a global perspective of justice or peace...people are affected by that all over the place.”¹³⁴ Clearly, Smith still has a strong faith in the potential for activism’s success.

This faith is largely a result of SDS for Smith. As a politically interested youth, Smith often considered herself an outsider in Bloomington, even at ISU. As she claims of the student body, “the counterculture was small and invisible.”¹³⁵ SDS, though, brought her into contact with others like her and gave her a support group for her activism. Participation in this group even at ISU gave Smith a sense of protest’s potential for success. As she claims of SDS’s impact on ISU, “we did create some consciousness and awareness and the movement somewhat grew there.”¹³⁶ Even on this conservative campus, “not a place where you would expect or really have a lot of hope that there is going to be a lot of mobilization,”¹³⁷ Smith and her group had some success. Of course, Smith’s greater sense of success came from her participation in the Weathermen, where she was able to see large masses of youths coming together and actively demonstrating for a cause. Her move to the larger SDS chapter of Chicago and the Days of Rage event gave her a sense of shared activism and even greater support. As she claims after this event, “what made me stay involved in it was really feeling like it was a process that bound us together...it was kind of a solidifying thing.”¹³⁸ Through SDS, then, Smith found a sense of the power and success that people could have when they joined together and protested.

Cox, a member of the same ISU chapter as Smith, as illustrated shares this sense of power of the people. Although SDS’s role in giving Cox this belief is logically inferred, Smith

¹³⁴ Ibid 32.

¹³⁵ Ibid 12.

¹³⁶ Ibid 12.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid 21.

directly states that this was the impact that the group had on her. When asked about the lasting impact of her SDS experiences, Smith gave the following response:

I think I learned about what motivates people to take action to sort of break from their own traditional head set. How you are going to affect people's thinking. I think it has been something that I have drawn on my whole life in some ways.¹³⁹

Smith's comments are a testament to SDS's ability to instill in an individual a sense of the power of activism to make a difference. Her statements indicate that, through SDS, Smith saw that it was in fact possible to change the minds of the public and to shake them out of complacency. Because of this, Smith continues to this day, as previously shown, to promote activism as a potential source of success and change, just like the others involved in this study.

Conclusion

What has been assessed here is but a tiny sample of a group that ranks in the ten thousands—the former members of the Students for a Democratic Society. Perhaps this small number of examples is yet insufficient to make broader claims to any general lasting impact of participation of the group on today's society. Still, this brief and limited analysis is enough to illustrate that further inquiry into the subject should be made. The members studied here come from a wide variety of SDS backgrounds. Max from the national SDS, Lemisch from highly active SDS chapters, Cox from a substantially smaller movement, and Smith from a mix of local and national activities. Still, despite the disparity in their experiences, all of these members illustrate similar elements in their belief systems that fall right into line with the teachings of the SDS.

SDS appears to have, perhaps to varying degrees, instilled in its members certain beliefs that have been sustained for over three decades. Each of these individuals display a readiness to

¹³⁹ Ibid 26.

engage in demonstrations and activism, but not merely for the sake of action itself. In the writings of each exists an anti-establishment mentality and a willingness to resist the structures of authority. These former members also subscribe to a strong belief in the ability of every citizen to take political responsibility and participate in the decisions and actions that affect their own lives. The former Movement participants involved in this study maintain an idealistic sense of the potential for success in activism that has and still drives them to political participation even into contemporary times.

These two tendencies, one a willingness to combat authority and the other a belief in people's power to engage in activism and their success in doing so, are found in all of the former SDS members studied here. Because of this, it is worth postulating why SDS might have instilled these sentiments in their members while other groups may have not. Perhaps this sense of people's power found in former members stems from the unique goals of SDS. As shown by discussions of the Port Huron statement, it is difficult to identify any sole, tangible gain that this group hoped to obtain. The only strong, consistent aim was "participatory democracy," or rather, the creation of a politically interested and motivated populace. Because this was SDS's main goal, they could often count themselves as successful as an organization. SDS members found in the group the opportunity to join with others and protest, as the individuals studied here show. Throughout the sixties, especially in the latter half of that decade, people took it upon themselves to be activists, often through SDS. Demonstrations were often and, as Chicago shows, could grow to huge proportions, especially against the war. Clearly, SDS had some hope for practical gain, especially in its last years with attempting to end the Vietnam War. But even if SDS often failed on the tangible level, it could still count as victory the fact that it aided in shaking America out of its 50s complacency and raising political consciousness.

Although any organization hopes that demonstrations will lead to some concrete gain, the very fact that action happened at all was a victory for SDS. Because of this, they were not subject to the same intense disillusionment as other movements. The civil rights movement in particular lost its idealistic nature in the latter 1960s. In 1964, only two seats were given to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at that year's Democratic Convention. After such events, combined with the consistent violent treatment they received, SNCC began to lose faith in conventional tactics, their former allies in the government, and even the white activists that had aided their cause—"The belief emerged within SNCC that it was best for blacks to make their own destiny rather than to integrate with a "sick" white society."¹⁴⁰ Clearly, SNCC and CORE made vital gains for African Americans in the sixties. Still, because their goals were more tangible than "participatory democracy," these groups could not see active citizenship in itself as the success that SDS could.

Equally important, the civil rights movement faced death on a scale unlike that of SDS members. In 1964, three civil rights workers, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, were murdered.¹⁴¹ They, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X are but the most famous of a long list of those who lost their lives fighting for civil rights. Students lamentably lost their lives protesting the war at Kent State, but white, middle class SDS members were not often realistically risking their lives in the way that African Americans were at the same time. This is not to say that SDS members did not sacrifice—often their jobs, academic careers, family relations and other important factors were at stake when they joined in protest. Additionally, they were often beaten and especially through the Weathermen movement, some deaths did

¹⁴⁰ Richard E Peterson, "The Student Left in American Higher Education," in *Students in Revolt*, Ed. by Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip G. Altbach (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 207.

¹⁴¹ Garson 197.

occur. Still, the threat of losing one's life cannot be said to be as strong in SDS as it was for the black members of civil rights movements. Because of that fact, in addition to the sense of success that SDSers could take from any amount of protest, it is not difficult to see why an idealistic belief in protest's success might have stuck for former members of this organization and not in others. Not to say that all SDS participants remain utopian or that former civil rights activists do not continue the fight for people's power. These observations are simply a possible explanation for why a strain of idealism and belief in the ability of people to act and their protests to succeed runs through the words of the former SDSers that one might not see in other Movement activists.

Of course, participatory democracy had its failures. SDS's disappointment and frustration with its own political program began with the ERAP projects in 1964-5. In ERAP, SDS came face to face with the failings of its own utopian Port Huron. ERAP brought about very real problems for participatory democracy. Jeffries's Cleveland contingent may have been living out a true democracy, but they also got a first taste of the difficulty of running life in such a way. With every member being allowed an equal chance to speak, and the groups "rule-by-consensus" strategy, each decision took an excruciatingly long time—"freedom was an endless meeting."¹⁴² SDS realized the difficulties involved with their program on an even larger scale as they attempted to run their own movement in tune with Port Huron ideals. Jeffrey Shero, a 23 year old SDS member, was a champion for running the movement exactly in tune with participatory democracy. He believed that SDS should be entirely devoid of a bureaucracy, with local chapters acting on their own initiative without a dominating national office or leaders.¹⁴³ Perhaps it was admirable for the organization to shun centralization and champion equal

¹⁴²Miller 200.

¹⁴³Ibid 247.

participation of its members. However, it was also disastrous. Participatory democracy was even more impossible to enact in the national movement than in Cleveland. The SDS experience in “office democracy” failed—the national office was in a state of chaos, mail didn’t get sorted, requests to start chapters sat unanswered—these littler complications were not getting accomplished without orders.¹⁴⁴

These failings of participatory democracy, though, did not diminish or eliminate the sense of achievement members got from SDS demonstrations. Frustrating as these issues were, they were not as devastating as death. Additionally, these failures were mitigated by the ever growing amount of SDS members. The reason that the national office was in such disarray was actually a positive one—SDS was gaining participants faster than it could take on. Hence, despite coming face to face with the perhaps impracticable nature of true democracy, SDSers could still see success in the growing awareness and activism of the populace. Clearly, Booth, Cox, Smith, and Lemisch’s enthusiasm for activism was not dulled by the failures they may have encountered. Even Max, who was deeply tied to the national office, continues to promote action by all people through the MA. It is logical to assert that, despite its failings, SDS was less susceptible to disillusionment and had a greater sense of its own success than other Movement groups, hence leading to the continued belief of its members in the usefulness of protest.

This possible explanation for the SDS members’ faith in the power of the people also justifies their shared willingness to move against authority. If these members did not believe that people could succeed in activism, then they would not advocate such action; it is unlikely that they would promote risking anything for a lost cause. Because these individuals believe that people’s resistance to the government and other authority figures can in fact make a difference, they are willing to move against such structures for the purpose of obtaining this gain. Their

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

belief in protest's potential for success naturally spurs them to promote opposing dominant structures that restrain the people. Hence, the aforementioned argument gives one logical explanation for why former SDS members might have these shared tendencies of resistance and idealistic faith in activism.

The extent to which SDS is potentially responsible for such attitudes has been addressed in each case. What can be concretely said is that these former SDSers appear to be in some ways set apart from the average past Movement participants. This fact, along with the fact that these disparate individuals espouse such strikingly similar ideologies signals that perhaps SDS participation played a vital part in the mindset of these individuals. As Cox and Smith illustrate, it is not sufficient to claim that the reason for the shared beliefs is that these former members had them from the outset. Perhaps it cannot yet be known to what extent SDS truly transformed the minds of the MA founders and Lemisch. Still, it is evident that SDS had a powerful impact on all individuals studied here, and the shared mentality of even this small sampling of members merits further exploration into the extent to which SDS shaped them.

If SDS is in fact at all responsible for elements of these individual's mindset, and this study suggests a strong possibility that it is, then SDS has continued into the present, largely in a positive way. The issues of the sixties have not yet gone away. Poverty, public apathy, racism, opposition to the government and even a largely unpopular war plague the nation to this day. These former SDSers are among the activists fighting for at least public interest in these issues. In the face of what appear to be insurmountable problems, they bring optimism and a faith that every individual has the potential to make an impact through protest. They are willing to act against a government and hierarchy that are perhaps in great need of resisting. In such ways, SDS has left a continuing impact on American society, through its former members.

These statements run the risk of being, like SDS, overly idealistic and therefore they must be qualified. It is important to note that, obviously, former SDS members are not the only activists in the world, and are not the only ones who promote the power of the people to organize. Additionally, just as SDS was not an entirely positive force in the sixties, there are likely negative affects of participation that exist in members today which can be given greater attention in further study. Naturally, these generalizations on SDS impact cannot be applied to all members, neither are the beliefs mentioned restricted to the past participants in this Movement group.

However, this study has elucidated the commonalities between select former members of SDS, and in so doing has opened the topic up for further examination. Building upon what has been done here, in addition to looking at Miller's aforementioned comments on the lasting impacts of SDS participation, other historians may cease to restrict SDS scholarship to the sixties and discuss the contemporary impact of the movement on a larger scale. Further exploration can be made to see if the tendencies that have been identified as common to these members are shared by others. Additionally, other historians may desire to expand upon the elements of these activists' personalities that were not particularly identified as shared by all in this analysis: the MA's attention to emotional and abstract aims, Lemisch's blending of activism and academicism, and Cox's and Smith's SDS radicalism. Perhaps a larger analysis of members would reveal that these are also tendencies that former members share. This essay is but an introduction to what I hope will grow to be a larger field of study. SDS does not have to be trapped in the Sixties, although it may no longer be continued by name. The spirit of the group remains in its members, and in the lasting institutions that they are building in contemporary times.

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