

Radicals in the Heartland: The 1960s Student Protest Movement at the University of Illinois

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One can lament, as Durenberger does, the decline of civility in politics. But his book does not adequately address the historical reasons for that change. Durenberger has axes to grind against conservatism, it seems, and wants to reclaim the mantle of progressivism for the GOP. But that label is now lost to the Left, and it is unlikely that the politics of consensus and cooperation will be returning anytime soon.

Radicals in the Heartland: The 1960s Student Protest Movement at the University of Illinois, by Michael V. Metz. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2019. xix, 269 pp. Timeline, map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$110 hardcover, \$26.95 paperback.

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Many Americans still think of the 1960s student movement as something that happened only at elite schools on the coasts and in the upper Midwest: Berkeley, Columbia, Ann Arbor, Madison. Michael Metz's *Radicals in the Heartland* is a welcome addition to the literature, which needs more accounts of activism in the Midwest. Metz tells the important and little-known story of the movement at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), in which he participated, and he tells it well. At the same time, his journalistic approach—"how and why, where and when this unlikely movement happened"—ignores historiographical trends and debates, and he misses opportunities to highlight the book's contributions to the voluminous literature on 1960s protest.

Metz tells a chronological story, 1960–1970, in a number of short chapters. He seems unaware of the concept of "the long sixties" that many scholars now take as their starting point. Instead, we get a rise-and-fall arc, taking us back to the "declension" narrative of 1960s protest. That narrative, like Metz's book, draws heavily on contemporary coverage of events and the accounts of (some) movement veterans to tell a story of how idealism and nonviolence gave way to frustration and senseless violence. Scholars have forcefully challenged this framework, not least because it privileges the perspective of white male leaders, with women and people of color appearing mainly as the movement starts to fragment and turn to more confrontational tactics. Perhaps inadvertently, then, *Radicals in the Heartland* continues the challenge to scholars to develop a more inclusive and integrated narrative of the student movement.

The Cold War context is critical for understanding the roots of sixties activism, and Metz wisely begins with the impact of anticommunism on the university's flagship campus. The University of Illinois had the

distinction of being singled out by state legislators in the 1947 Clabaugh Act, which prohibited the use of its resources for "any subversive, seditious, and un-American organization, or its representatives" (13). The act planted the seed for the student protest movement and made free speech a popular rallying point. In part one Metz sets up the conservative climate that helped spark the movement, and he gives us a good sense of the conflicting forces campus administrators had to face.

During "The Free Speech Era, 1965–67," students at Illinois, as on other midwestern campuses, engaged in polite protests, formed broad coalitions, and tried out tactics such as vigils, sit-ins, and rallies. Metz explains that concerns about civil rights, student rights, and the Vietnam War overlapped, but he focuses on the rebellion against the Clabaugh Act and students' success in "defanging" it, bringing a Communist speaker to campus.

In part three, "The Vietnam War Era, 1967–69," we learn about an anti-Dow Chemical sit-in, draft card burnings, and Project 500, the university's plan to bring in hundreds of black students in order to meet demands to make the student population more closely mirror that of the state. In the chapter called "Women Rising," we also learn that UIUC elected its first female student body president in 1967 – this is one of several places where it would have been helpful to see comparisons with other campuses.

In part four, "The Violent Time, 1969–70," Metz suggests that the movement came to an end in a shower of violence, both nationally and locally. The Illinois campus was one of hundreds that shut down in the wake of the killings of four students by the National Guard at Kent State. Local concerns sparked protests as well, including Illiac IV, a supercomputer widely seen as part of the military-industrial complex, General Electric's campus recruiting (GE was a Vietnam War defense contractor), and the police killing of a young black man, shot in the back behind his family home. An odd chapter called "Black and White Together" is not about black and white activists working together but about the way authorities lumped them together as repression increased.

The book ends with seemingly contradictory "lessons" we should take away from the student movement. The author claims that students won the struggle against the war, but "failed" at political revolution, bringing on the "unintended consequences" of an ongoing conservative reaction. Yet he also offers more nuanced ways to think about success and failure. If the sixties movement lives on in the shared memory of participants, then, in the words of a former Illinois activist, "The struggle continues . . . participation in the struggle is the most important thing." As Metz concludes, "It can happen again" (230).