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## **Yale and the Vietnam War**

*A DRAFT NOT TO BE QUOTED OR CITED WITHOUT  
THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION*

In 1919 President Arthur Twining Hadley said that the men of Yale who had died in the Great War were the fortunate ones, for they had fulfilled the ultimate purpose of the University in service to the nation. A generation later, on the eve of the entry of the United States into World War II, faculty, students, and alumni were as divided on the issue of isolation or intervention as were the American people and Congress. But President Charles Seymour took sides on behalf of the University. He deplored student isolationism and committed Yale to support all measures necessary to defeat Nazi Germany. There was no place in his mind for personal or institutional neutrality. Pearl Harbor, of course, ended all debate. Yale became a military camp until 1945.

The Korean War was relatively brief and had less impact than the Yale administration feared, but once again hardly anyone suggested institutional neutrality in that conflict or more broadly in the Cold War. In 1951 President A. Whitney Griswold defended liberal education as essential preparation for lieutenants who knew why they were fighting.<sup>1</sup> Until the mid-1960s the Cold War consensus reigned in the classroom, the research and writing of faculty concerned with international relations, and in the minds of almost everyone connected with Yale. This was the university of Henry L. Stimson's commitment to "active duty in peace and war", of Secretary of State Dean Acheson who was "present at the creation" of American world power, and of the pioneer geopolitical "realist" Professor Nicholas Spykman. In those years Yale graduates disproportionately populated the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency; and in New Haven the University dutifully prepared and stocked shelters against nuclear fallout during the confrontations with the Soviet Union in 1961 crisis over Berlin and in 1962 over missiles in Cuba. When the United States under President John F. Kennedy in 1961-63 increased the number of military combat advisers to South Vietnam in an escalating civil war, little notice was taken at Yale or, for that matter, in the country at large.

### **Southeast Asian Studies at Yale**

Yale did have a small Southeast Asian studies program, but it had been plagued by early misfortune and was focused on primarily Indonesia. The first professor specializing in contemporary Southeast Asia was Raymond Kennedy, a charismatic, square-jawed man with the short hair and intent eyes of a Marine colonel. Kennedy graduated from Yale College in 1928 and for three years sold American automobiles in what was then the Netherlands East Indies. When the economic depression dried up the market, he came back to Yale for a Ph.D. in sociology and throughout the 1930s as graduate student and junior professor was often in Southeast Asia. During World War II as an intelligence analyst in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) and the State Department he was a blunt and prescient critic of the British,

French, and Dutch colonial empires. For example, in 1944 he wrote that "a savagely repressive attitude toward native political activity, made the idealistic statements of French colonial policy a hollow mockery in Indochina." With Japan's defeat in sight, he warned that "American military operations in Southeast Asia involve potential danger to American prestige among the peoples of the area, because the latter are bound, regardless of our protestations to the contrary, to link American military forces with the reentering Anglo-Dutch-French military and civil administrations." And in October 1945, with the war over, he urged that the United States oppose the use of force by the French in Indochina and make clear that "our willingness to see French control resumed is predicated on the assumption that future events will bear out the French claim to have the support of the Indochinese population."<sup>2</sup> These opinions were anathema to the State Department's European desk officers, and they blocked publication of a Kennedy article in the Department of State Bulletin.

Kennedy returned to New Haven in 1946 and became one of Yale's popular, outspoken, iconoclastic teachers. The central theme of his teaching was that "the caste line of oppression and exploitation, whether in America or the colonies, is a race and color line." In a 1947 lecture on "Race Relations: Colonial and American" he condemned more fiercely than anyone else at Yale the pernicious doctrines of white supremacy. He said that American Negroes (the term in use at the time) at least were citizens and could hope to attain legal equality. But where colonial powers refuse to change the laws, colonial peoples will "change the laws themselves, by means of revolution and seizure of the government for themselves." The French in Indochina are the worst, he said, and there is no hope for them.

Kennedy was the driving force behind the creation in 1947 of the Council on Southeast Asian Studies, Yale's first inter-disciplinary area studies program and the prototype for programs which would eventually focus on all regions of the world. The Carnegie Corporation In New York provided ten years funding. In 1949 Kennedy embarked on a 15-month research trip throughout Southeast Asia to study the interaction of western and local cultures. In April 1950 he was murdered in western Java along with Robert Doyle, a Time-Life reporter, when their jeep was ambushed by an armed band. The killers were never identified. Kennedy would not have reached retirement age until 1976. With his death the United States and Yale lost an informed voice of conscience.

John F. Embree, Kennedy's fellow Southeast Asian specialist also died (of illness) in 1950 and the program struggled on while the Carnegie support ran out. The emphasis remained on Indonesia, although Paul Mus, the French authority on Indochina, was appointed in 1952. In 1959 Yale turned successfully to the Ford Foundation and soon carried out a promise to make at three new appointments in the field. By the 1960s Yale was rebuilding Southeast Asian studies, offering courses in the Vietnamese language, and training a respectable number of doctoral students in several disciplines -just in time to provide informed opinion when dissent over the American role in Vietnam began to roil the nation.

### **Three Dissenters: Thompson, Lynd, and Coffin**

The United States government in 1950 began to equip the French forces in their bloody war to retain their colonies in Indochina. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, a dominant member of the Yale Corporation (board of trustees) made the key decision. But the gift of American planes and tanks could not save the French from defeat in the battle of Dienbienphu in 1954. They withdrew from Indochina. "Jungle Jim" Kennedy had been right. Vietnam was temporarily divided between nationalistic Communists led by Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi in the north and an unpopular American-supported regime in Saigon in the south. Presidents and Kennedy used military and economic aid and thousands of advisers to shore up the Saigon regime. Nothing worked. In 1965 President committed American forces directly to the war, and precipitated dissension in the United States soon to become more bitter than any since the coming of the Civil War a century before.<sup>3</sup>

Beneath the apocalyptic rhetoric of opponents and defenders of the war were different views over the relation of past to present and the character of the American nation. Defenders of the war argued that American action in Vietnam was the latest chapter in the commitment of the United States since 1940-41 to defeat or at least contain totalitarianism and give democracy a chance. The defeat of Germany and Japan; the reconstruction and strengthening of western Europe under the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; the Berlin airlift of 1948 and subsequent creation of a democratic West Germany; and the Korean War were the honorable antecedents of Vietnam- past and present were identical. The United States had to choose between winning in Vietnam or abandoning its commitment to freedom, destroying its credibility, encouraging the spread of international Communism, and making a third world war more likely. The choice required accepting the tragic necessity of using force against force and the death of innocents as well as soldiers. Tragic necessity was not immoral as long as the higher goal was a moral world.

Moderate opponents like Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and most American scholars of Asia- including those at Yale- agreed that American foreign policy before 1965 had been right, moral, and effective. But the situation in Vietnam bore no resemblance to the past. The Communist affiliations of the Vietnamese were incidental to their nationalistic determination to be free of foreign domination. President Johnson and his advisers were intoxicated by the "arrogance of power" and blind to the differences between Vietnam and previous undertakings in the Cold War. The blindness and its consequences were immoral and destructive of American national interests.

A third position was occupied by radical opponents of the war and was most fiercely argued at Yale and on other campuses by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). It held that the past and present behavior of the United States government was identical in iniquity. Vietnam demonstrated the continuity of an American effort fueled by the military- industrial complex to dominate the world, ignore the democratic voice of the American people, suppress the wretched of the earth, and risk nuclear war in the interests of capitalist profit.

The national dissension over the Vietnam war swept over Yale relatively late and non-violently. Dissension came late because issues of racial injustice were a higher priority for engaged faculty and university officers than a small and distant problem in Indochina. Furthermore, the realist tradition of foreign policy analysis with its wariness of moral argument was still strong at Yale. When dissension arrived there was a rising tide of panel discussions, study groups, signed petitions, letters to the editor, and lobbying trips to Washington. But no mass demonstrations, occupations of University buildings, heads cracked by police clubs, or nonnegotiable student ultimatums to the administration. The absence of damaging violence was partly a matter of luck, but also the result of a university president who listened and took seriously the anti-war arguments even when he disagreed. Yale's twelve undergraduate residential colleges may also have inhibited violent demonstrations by bringing faculty and students together in small groups and inhibiting mass organization.

However, the war forced Yale, as it forced all universities, to wrestle more painfully than ever before in the twentieth century with the meaning of academic freedom, the nature of obligations to the Federal government, and the concept of institutional neutrality when morality and politics were entangled. The story of the impact of the war on Yale is a case study not in radicalism, but in the ways an institution with philosophically conservative leaders and faculty came eventually to see the Vietnam war as morally and politically wrong. The refrain "For God, for Country, and for Yale" after Vietnam no longer meant that unquestioning service to the Government was always a sacred obligation.

One way to understand Yale's response to the Vietnam War is to focus on how President Kingman Brewster, Jr. (in office from 1963 to 1977) dealt with anti-war dissent, trying simultaneously to uphold

academic freedom and condemn disobedience to law. His self-education took him from complacency, to troubled support for the war, to vociferous opposition. As a Yale junior and senior in 1940 and 1941 Brewster was chairman (editor-in- chief) of The Yale Daily News and a principal founder of the isolationist America First Committee. His criticism of President Franklin D. Roosevelt for leading the nation toward war was nationally quoted. Brewster was already a public figure. But in the months before Pearl Harbor he abandoned isolationism and in 1942 joined the Navy and became an aviator. After the war he earned his law degree at Harvard, was a staff member on the American mission overseeing the Marshall Plan in Europe, and joined the Harvard law faculty. In the early Cold War he was a typical internationalist of the eastern "Establishment". He became Yale provost In 1960 and president in 1963 after the death of A. Whitney Griswold.

One of Brewster's closest friends was McGeorge Bundy, national security adviser to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson until mid-1965. Although they had been on opposite sides of the isolation- intervention debates of 1940-41 when both were Yale undergraduates,<sup>4</sup> Brewster's and Bundy's opinions on foreign policy in 1965 in relation to Vietnam were similar. Both saw the American presence in Vietnam as essential to containing Communist expansion and preserving American security in a non-totalitarian world. Until 1965 Brewster paid little attention to the Vietnam war or to the still weak and scattered voices of protest. His greatest concern about the external world was over racial injustice. He was proud that Yale gave Martin Luther King an honorary degree at commencement In June 1964 and he responded vigorously to criticism from reactionary alumni.

In May 1965 he dismissed some of the anti-war protests and teach-ins around the country as "ludicrous mockeries, on the level of stuffing telephone booths and other expressions of egoism."<sup>5</sup> But the response to the war of three people at Yale--far more mature and serious than stuffers of telephone booths--was about to test his presidential skills. One, Chaplain William Sloane Coffin, Jr., was already famous for his participation in the civil rights movement; the second, Assistant Professor of History Staughton Lynd would soon be famous; the third, a Philosophy Instructor named Josiah Thompson, did not seek the limelight.

We begin with Thompson, a lowly Instructor in Philosophy. Thompson graduated from Yale College In 1957 and the next year as a Navy ensign in command of an underwater demolition team during the U.S. landings in Lebanon he acquired "a deep distrust of the the public justification for U.S. military action .... When Vietnam cranked up in the early 1960s, it was a case of *deja vu*." After writing a Yale dissertation on Soren Kierkegaard, Thompson started teaching. At an anti-war meeting led by Staughton Lynd he picked up a document entitled "Declaration of Conscience Against the War in Vietnam" drafted and circulated by a coalition of radical anti-war groups. To sign the declaration was to oneself to active civil disobedience- refusal to serve in the armed forces, encouragement to others to do the same, actions to block the shipment of men and munitions to the war. Thompson decided to use the declaration as the basis for a term paper assignment in his Philosophy 12b, Problems of Value. He instructed the students to make a considered ethical choice-sign or not sign--and to write a 10-page paper explaining the decision by grappling with the question of when "is civil disobedience justified? Are there limits to an individual's obligation to the state? If an individual believes the state to be acting unjustly may he terminate his allegiance to it, or is he duty-bound to continue his allegiance?" The closing instruction read: "You are reminded ... that true ethical reflection terminates in action. Unsigned declarations may be discarded or returned to me; signed declarations may be forwarded to any of the listed addresses."

Thompson told the Yale Daily News that he was not recommending that students either sign or not sign, but that they confront the connection between ethical discussion and ethical action. He said it would be "an abuse of the privilege of a teacher to use the petition for political purposes, rather than as an instructional aid in the course."<sup>6</sup> One of the students in the course told his father, Arthur L. Stern, about the project. The father-Yale alumnus, lawyer, and himself chairman of the board of trustees of the

Rochester Institute of Technology-wrote President Brewster and quoted Thompson's injudicious marginal comments on the son's paper. For example, when the son wrote that signing the Declaration meant accepting Communist propaganda and believing that President Johnson was lying, Thompson jotted: "No responsible opinion believes the stated reason to be our principal reason for being in Vietnam." The elder Stem said he was aware of the danger of interfering with "the freedom of members of the faculty to teach in their own fashion" but in this case freedom might place "the future well-being of the students" in jeopardy.

As we all know, sophomores are an impressionable group. More than that, they are at the age where military service in Vietnam may seem particularly abhorrent and anything may seem appealing which might lessen the chances of being called for such duty.

Brewster took the almost unprecedented step of calling Thompson to his office, asking for an explanation, and a written "brief" in self defense. The academic year was now almost over and Thompson had accepted a tenure-track position at Haverford College for the following year, but he never forgave Brewster for on the one hand saying to Stern he had not intended to abuse his position as a teaching but that on the other hand he would not be at Yale next year. Thompson believed that was an implicit suggestion that he had been terminated.

Staughton Lynd, son of the eminent sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, came to Yale in 1964 as an assistant professor of history specializing in the political ideas of the American revolution. Lynd was described by one senior historian at Columbia, where he earned his Ph.D., as "Just about the best student I have ever run across."<sup>7</sup> Yale first offered him a job in 1962, but Lynd declined in order to teach at Spelman College, a black woman's college in Atlanta. "History is being made intensely in the South just now .... I believe I have much to learn as a whole human being as well as a teacher from living here."<sup>8</sup> Two years later he reconsidered in part because the administration at Spelman fired his friend and fellow radical historian, Howard Zinn.

Lynd began a five-year appointment July 1, 1964. That autumn Lyndon Johnson won election over Senator Barry Goldwater whom he depicted as a reckless warmonger who would bomb North Vietnam and embroil the United States in a bloody war. In the first months of 1965 Johnson did exactly that. Lynd moved, as did many radical activists, from concentrating on racial discrimination in the United States to opposing the war in Vietnam. He spoke at small meetings at Yale such as the one where Josiah Thompson picked up a copy of the "Declaration of Conscience Against the War in Vietnam" and in April 1965 he was one of the leaders of the first large anti-war rally in Washington. During a march toward the Capitol he was splashed in red paint by a counter-demonstrator and his dramatic photograph appeared in the press and on television across the land. To Lynd

it seemed that the great mass of people would simply flow on through and over the marble buildings ... nothing could have stopped the crowd from taking possession of Its Government. Perhaps next time we should keep going .... One can now envision a series of nonviolent protests which would question the legitimacy of the Administration's authority where it has gone beyond constitutional and moral limits, and might, if its insane foreign policy continues, culminate in the decision of hundreds of thousands of people to recognize the authority of alternative institutions of their own making.<sup>9</sup>

Here, with Its evocation of the romantic days of the American Revolution, was the authentic voice of radical dissent.

Overnight Lynd became a national figure. In a series of widely publicized speeches he accused the United States government of following a murderous course and he openly advocated civil disobedience as a means of bringing the war to an end. President Brewster was soon deluged with irate letters

denouncing Lynd's views and asking how Yale could permit his continued presence on the faculty.

Brewster wrote Lynd on June 2 and enclosed a typical letter with a news clipping. "I'm getting quite a few of these. Before I reply I would like to know what you did say. Since I have too often been misquoted and misinterpreted by the press, I don't want to buy their version if it is not substantially correct." Lynd replied that the newspaper account was accurate and invoked his own Quaker convictions and the legacy of Henry David Thoreau and the abolitionists in the crusade against slavery. "I think It is my duty as a Christian and a citizen to put my body in the way of the (as I see it) needless murder going on in Vietnam, and the drift to nuclear war. I am prepared to take the consequences for my action."<sup>10</sup> Brewster then prepared a stock letter to those who demanded Lynd's dismissal, saying that he disagreed with Lynd's Ideas but found him acting "in the most honorable pacifist tradition." He would not interfere with Lynd's freedom of expression because "political conformity, whether lured by popularity or coerced by censorship, would be wholly subversive of the whole University tradition."<sup>11</sup>

Lynd escalated his actions and words in step with the escalation of the war. In December 1965 he joined Tom Hayden, a founder of the SDS, and veteran American Communist Herbert Aptheker on a "fact finding" mission to Hanoi in violation of a U.S. State Department ban on travel to North Vietnam. In Hanoi Lynd publicly accused the Johnson administration of lying and waging immoral war. Now the deluge of protests reaching the Yale president's office made the earlier complaints seem a mere drizzle. The chairman of the Yale Alumni Fund (who happened to be a son-in-law of Dean Acheson) in a letter to all volunteer class agents seemed to threaten the flow of gifts to Yale if Lynd remained on the faculty. Brewster's assistant, Sam Chauncey, drafted a reply saying that Lynd's actions were "indefensible and damaging to Yale" but he hoped they would not affect giving.<sup>12</sup> In a public statement Brewster used words from the law of treason, saying that Lynd's trip to Hanoi gave "aid and comfort to a government engaged in hostilities with American forces. ... By this irresponsible action I believe he has done a disservice to the causes of freedom of dissent, freedom of travel, and conscientious pacifism."<sup>13</sup> Privately Brewster asked the History chairman if Lynd was meeting his academic obligations. The answer was yes, although the chairman was surprised to find that Lynd had scheduled all his weekly teaching on two consecutive days.<sup>14</sup>

Was Brewster in effect making Lynd's position at Yale untenable and thereby violating the principle of academic freedom? Lynd later so charged. But Laurence R. Veysey, Yale alumnus and historian of higher education, praised Brewster for upholding academic freedom by his

courageous stand in not allowing irrelevant pressures to affect the retention and possible promotion of Professor Staughton Lynd. The only relevant issue is the quality of his teaching and his scholarly publications. How he spends the rest of his time is nobody else's business. For recognizing this and thereby honoring the true meaning of academic freedom, you deserve the gratitude of every alumnus who is concerned with Yale's ultimate reputation as a scholarly institution.<sup>15</sup>

The course of events, however, yields an ambiguous answer. The academic year 1965-66 was Lynd's last as a Yale teacher. He had a Yale Morse Junior Faculty Fellowship on full pay for 1966-67 and an unpaid leave for 1967-68 to "explore new patterns of vocation in Chicago" involving a combination of social work and college teaching. During that year he sought history positions at several colleges and universities in the Chicago area and was repeatedly rejected. He did receive an offer of an associate professorship at Chicago State College. But the Board of Governors of Illinois Colleges and Universities vetoed the appointment because of Lynd's trip to Hanoi. Meanwhile, the question of Lynd's possible Yale promotion was not scheduled to be considered until the spring of 1968, although all six of the nontenured American historians, including Lynd, had been told by the chairman that the University's current no growth policy made tenure extremely unlikely. At this point The Columbia University Forum

published the text of a speech Lynd had delivered in Chicago charging that Yale was violating his academic freedom. He said he believed President Brewster was pressuring the History Department to get rid of him, - "when push came to shove, they have chosen to protect Yale rather than me." Lynd added that he wanted a tenure offer from Yale only for the satisfaction of declining, but "I intend to oblige Yale, If it wants to get rid of me, to fire me and say why." Lynd also recalled that when he had first been offered a position at Yale In 1962 the then chairman of the History Department warned him not to leave his briefcase in his car because of the proximity of "darkdown" or look for housing in a certain neighborhood because so many "sons of Abraham" lived there.[16](#)

The Forum article incensed the new chairman of the Department, Howard R. Lamar, and other full professors. Lamar wrote but did not send a scorching letter to the Forum's editor. Instead Professors Morgan and C. Vann Woodward replied to Lynd. They denied that the Department was under pressure. "If Yale were the kind of place that Mr. Lynd says it is, neither of us would wish to stay .... In our opinion he has acquired by his unfounded accusations ... a reputation for martyrdom which is undeserved."[17](#) The Forum article also led the History graduate students to conduct an investigation of accusations which, if true, meant that Lynd had been wronged; if false, that the Department had been defamed; and if resulting from misunderstanding "then the misunderstanding had been disastrous."[18](#) The investigating committee concluded that the Department "had always treated Lynd fairly and even generously," but found President Brewster's public criticism "very wrong." The committee hoped "that the present bad feeling will soon subside, and that a place for Lynd will be found at Yale, for he has much to contribute to the community."[19](#)

In March 1968 the tenured members of the Department voted not to recommend Lynd for promotion and in May Lynd wrote that he did not intend to return for the final year of his appointment. The Department considered this a resignation. The Lynd issue was officially over, but his name would linger in memory, especially among conservative Yale alumni, for the rest of the century.[20](#)

The only opponent of the Vietnam war more prominent than Lynd was the University chaplain, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. Bill Coffin-Yale College 1949 and Divinity School 1955- came back to Yale in 1958 as University Chaplain and brought the external world with him He was 34, a veteran of World War II and the early years of the Central Intelligence Agency, a fearless man of conscience with a dramatic command of words and a taste for adventure. His ministry challenged the morally complacent and infuriated the targets of his criticism. He was also a many-layered Blue: his uncle the Rev. Henry Sloane Coffin had been president of Union Theological Seminary and a fellow of the Yale Corporation from 1921 to 1945. His father, class of 1900, was a successful business man. In his youth Bill had lived In Manhattan, California, and Europe before graduating from Andover in 1942 In the same class as George Bush. He joined the Army, was assigned to intelligence, and was given a crash course in Russian In order to serve in a liaison unit dealing with the allied Red Army at end of the war in Germany. Under orders flowing from a high level agreement Anglo- American-Soviet agreement, he was a junior officer involved with the roundup of Russians in that part of Germany under American control and repatriating them against their will into Soviet hands. Some of the Russians had been prisoners of war, but others had fought against the Soviet Union. Coffin knew that most of these men faced a Siberian gulag or execution once they were turned over, but he carried out his orders. He wrote afterward that what he did "left a burden of guilt I am sure to carry the rest of my life. Certainly it influenced my decision in 1950 to spend three years in the CIA opposing Stalin's regime. And it made it easier for me in 1967 to commit civil disobedience in opposition to the war in Vietnam." [21](#)

In the CIA, 1950-53, Coffin trained exiles from Eastern Europe for clandestine operations Alas, these agents disappeared after being parachuted behind the Iron Curtain--probably betrayed by a Soviet mole in British or American intelligence. Then back to New Haven and the Divinity School followed by a year as chaplain at Andover and one at Williams College-where "two drunken 'Dekes'" fired a double-

barreled shotgun into his living room after he denounced fraternities for excluding blacks and Jews. At that point President Griswold asked Coffin to come to New Haven and be "Yale's conscience."[22](#)

The new chaplain provoked right wing outrage by his prominent role in the "freedom rides" challenging segregation and the oppression of black people in Mississippi and Alabama during 1961-62. President Griswold answered irate alumni by saying that Coffin was acting on "his convictions as a Christian and the promptings of *his* conscience as an ordained minister *of his* faith." He did not represent Yale, and was exercising a freedom guaranteed to all citizens. "Yale has taken no position in this matter." Griswold was a believer in institutional neutrality. Some alumni would not be assuaged. One wrote that Coffin's "effort to compel forced integration was only one of a series of events... all of which evidence sympathy with the programs of communist Russia in the United States."[23](#)

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a victory for racial justice, made it easier for Coffin in 1965 to refocus his moral energy on the escalating war in Vietnam. His first step was to take a lead in organizing the National Emergency Committee of Clergy Concerned about Viet Nam (the name was later changed to Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Viet Nam). Non-violent civil disobedience to the segregationist laws of Alabama and Mississippi had worked because the laws were blatantly unconstitutional and the Federal government was on the side of the protestors. Now Coffin said would employ civil disobedience only with misgiving because of the difference between challenging the blatantly unconstitutional laws of segregation and defying the full power of the United States government in the conduct of foreign policy.[24](#)

In 1966 Coffin took on President Brewster for his criticism of Lynd, asking "is it proper for you to take a stand on another man's words and deeds without taking a stand on the situation that prompts them? And if the situation is as serious as many of us believe, then the epithets of an assistant professor may not be as reckless as the silence of university presidents." A less tolerant and open-minded president than Brewster would have quickly rid himself and the University of this troublesome priest. Instead Brewster replied that he was particularly incensed by Lynd's comparison of the American government with the Nazis. "When a member of our faculty has achieved notorious public identification with this University, I have no hesitation in letting the public know it if I believe his manner and style seem unfitting for his calling." And as for

my silence about the war .... This is simply because I have not had a confident notion about what I would do tomorrow morning at nine o'clock if I had the responsibility for United States policy. Until I do have such a confident notion, I do not find it appealing simply to say that the war is horrible or that peace is desirable .... In fact to pretend that ends without means constitute a position seems to me bad teaching and bad spokesmanship.[25](#)

As the war intensified Coffin became ever more troublesome to Brewster, although the two never reached the point where they could not discuss their differences. Increasingly during 1967 Coffin concentrated on preaching civil disobedience and supported the young men who turned in their draft cards. When in October Coffin raised the possibility of declaring Battell Chapel a sanctuary for resisters or the site of a large demonstration of civil disobedience, Brewster said no, vehemently no, and called the chaplain before the Yale Corporation. The result was a slap so hard that a less confident man than Coffin would have resigned. Brewster told Coffin that the chapel was university property and thus under control of the Yale Corporation; as chaplain Coffin was a university employee directly responsible to the President and Corporation; and in his role pastor of the Church of Christ at Yale he was responsible to the senior deacons. Brewster wrote:

our concern stems from very real doubt about the propriety of urging or exploiting conscientious objection for political ends .... Anyone who is not himself subject to the draft



suffers a moral handicap when it comes to urging others to take a course which not only involves serious legal penalty but bears the suspicion that it may not be motivated by conscience and involves putting the burden on someone else to to serve in his place.

A university chaplain, or any other officer of the university, should be more concerned with the very difficult personal tension which is inevitably involved in the competing claims of the social order and the claims of individual morality rather than with dramatic potentialities for public effect. It seems morally distasteful to seek to exploit the conscientious dilemma of the selective service objector for political purposes.

While we would express these misgivings, the entire Corporation would not only permit but would honor and respect those who would, not for political effect but for personal, private reasons, witness their conscience by a willingness to pay the price which society exacts in order to assure itself that the motivation is truly conscientious rather than self serving.[26](#)

The letter was marked "personal", but three weeks later Brewster repeated most of it word for word in public remark to parents of undergraduates on "Parents' day." He expanded on the criticism by quoting a letter in the Yale Daily News from a freshman:

Such a drastic choice as civil disobedience must be an individual one, as one suffers the consequences alone. One cannot allow himself to be sucked into the frenzy of a mass sign-in. One must be absolutely sure that he is not only opposed to the War in principle but is willing to suffer years of imprisonment, a certain degree of public shame, and a specter that will follow him until he died .... I defend my right to be undecided-to carry my Indecision right up to the day of my induction, if necessary.[27](#)

For good measure Brewster worked through Delaney Kiphuth--a senior deacon, director of athletics, and Brewster's classmate--to assure that the deacons also barred the use of the church as a sanctuary. Coffin wrote later that "I accused them of behaving more like 'true blues than true Christians.' They squirmed but weren't about to change their minds.... I realized I was licked."[28](#)

Three months later Coffin was to experience "the price which society exacts." On January 5, 1968 he, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Marcus Raskin, Michael Ferber, and Mitchell Goodman were indicted by a Federal grand jury for conspiracy to counsel, aid and abet draft resistance. Rightwing alumni howled that the chaplain, indicted for something tantamount to treason, should be fired. In fact, some decision had to be made because Coffin's appointment was up for renewal. In April 1968, before the trial began, the Corporation debated the issue with considerable passion on both sides. One Corporation member--Edwin F. (Ted) Blair, famous for his passionate support of football--reported to friends that the record "will show that I, and several other members of the Corporation, voted against the reappointment .... I registered my dissent in tones loud and clear."[29](#) The decision, on a rare split vote, was for reappointment but with the possibility of termination on a year's notice or immediately if the outcome of the Federal trial "or the factual basis for it had some bearing on the Chaplain's fitness, for his duties."[30](#) In June 1968 Coffin and all but Raskin were found guilty by the jury and the appeal process began. In July 1969 the appeals court reversed the convictions of Spock and Ferber and ordered a retrial for Coffin and Goodman on the grounds of imprecise instructions to the jury. Coffin's fate remained uncertain. But then the government decided to drop the charges. Bill Coffin remained chaplain of Yale until December 1975 when he retired to become senior minister at the Riverside Church In New York City. In the 1980s he was a leader in the movement against nuclear weapons.

## **The Draft and the Rise and Fall of ROTC**

Two controversial issues of military service entangled the university with the war. draft deferments and the Reserve Officers Training Corps of the Army and Navy.

During the Vietnam war the number of young men drafted into military service rose rapidly through 1968, tapered off during the "Vietnamization" phase of the Nixon administration, and ended with the return to an all-volunteer Army In the 1970s. Full-time students in good academic standing were deferred even during the worst months of the war. Deferments posed ethical problems for Yale and all universities. President Brewster, who served on a national commission studying selective service, said of the deferment system "it is unfair, it is antidemocratic; and-worst of all-it fosters a cynical disrespect for national service and corrupts the aims of education."[31](#)

The second problem was that a student separated from the university for academic failure or disciplinary reasons was liable to be drafted immediately and sent to fight and perhaps to die. A faculty member's decision on a single grade could make the difference. One professor simply gave all students in his course As. Ell Clark, professor of law and master of Silliman College, recalled afterwards feeling responsible in the case of an expelled student, the son of a man he knew, who under threat of the draft joined the Marines and was killed.[32](#) Of course, the majority of Yale students who went to Vietnam returned, wounded perhaps but alive. John Kerry, president of the Political Union in 1966, became a leader of veterans opposed to the war and went on to become United States Senator from Massachusetts. A few returned to finish their studies at Yale. One student expelled for a prank became an infantry officer, participated in ferocious combat in 1967-68, and then was readmitted to Yale where in 1970 he took the author's course on the history of American foreign relations In 1970. Invited to speak to the whole class about the war, he said his combat experience could be summarized In three principles. "If it runs, It is VC [Vietcong-the Communist enemy], waste it. If It hides, it is VC. Waste it. If It is dead, it is VC. Count it and wait for your promotion."[33](#)

The Yale College faculty In January 1967, after listening to Brewster explain his opposition to student deferments, resolved to provide no information on academic standing to draft boards except at the student's request. The faculty also voted to urge the end of student deferments, but defeated by a four to one margin an amendment declaring: "This action should not be taken to imply support by the Yale College Faculty for the use of Selective Service in carrying out the policy of the National Administration for the war in Viet Nam."[34](#)

The third problem was the opening the selective service system provided for Federal government intrusion into the university. For a coincidental reason having nothing to do with Vietnam, the FBI was particularly active, openly and covertly, in gathering information about Yale individuals and groups opposed to the Vietnam war. Back in 1960 Yale was embarrassed when more than a dozen students were found to have had oral sexual relations with a teenage girl smuggled into one of the residential colleges. President Griswold blamed the old-fashioned avuncular campus police for permitting the scandal. He hired John W. Powell, then head of the FBI regional office for southern New England, as "director of security and associate dean of students." Powell modernized the campus police, but also hung a portrait of J. Edgar Hoover in his office and began to keep files on the political activities of students and faculty, a practice revealed by the Yale Daily News, in 1962.[35](#) The majority of students and all but one faculty member writing letters or interviewed In the News said Powell's behavior must not be countenanced. Professor Basil Duke Henning, master of Saybrook College, was the lone dissenter. "If there are communists at Yale, we should have some record of it," he said.[36](#) Powell was publicly reprimanded by Provost Kingman Brewster (Griswold was in the hospital for cancer surgery-he would die the following April). Brewster ordered Powell not to investigate or maintain records on the political views or activities of students or faculty or to provide Information to outside authorities "except when requested In the course of a legitimate investigation or enforcement action."[37](#) Clear enough.

But Powell did not change his spots and by 1967 the Vietnam war made his behavior a serious concern again. John Hersey, master of Pierson College, feared that the civil rights of students were being compromised by the campus police under Powell's command. Another master said Powell should be fired<sup>38</sup>—and he was. Provost Charles Taylor determined that Powell was still keeping political records because "he couldn't get the FBI out of his blood ... I fired him, and we reorganized the police department."<sup>39</sup>

Powell or no Powell, the unannounced appearance of FBI agents to interview students was in the opinion of faculty an unwarranted and intimidating practice. The two law professors among the college masters—Eli Clark and Ronald Dworkin—said students needed to be forewarned and explained their rights. An unexpected visit from the FBI, said Dworkin, can have an ominous chilling effect and students, forgetting their rights, might say things of serious consequence in later life. Accordingly, the masters informed students that students were under no obligation to say anything to the FBI and that they should consult a lawyer before deciding to make a statement. Furthermore, students should be aware that anything they said to a non-lawyer was not privileged. Such a person could be compelled to testify. Clark and Dworkin proposed that the council of masters retain lawyers who would be available for preliminary conversations with students. That idea was vigorously and successfully opposed by Master Horace Taft—professor of physics, son of Senator Robert A. Taft, and a future dean of Yale College. He would not be party to any arrangement which could be seen as payment by the council of masters to lawyers to assist draft-card burners.<sup>40</sup>

Another type of potential government intrusion involved punitive inductions by local draft boards of students judged to have engaged in anti-draft and anti-war activities. Here Brewster took the lead in preparing a letter signed by all the presidents of the Ivy group urgently imploring President Lyndon B. Johnson "to make crystal clear that there is no intention to use induction as a punishment,.. to let local boards assume the judicial role of determining the legality of individual conduct, . . . [or] to undercut or bypass fundamental processes." The Ivy presidents quickly received the desired assurance from the White House.<sup>41</sup>

Then in 1969 Robert Finch, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Nixon administration, reminded all colleges and universities that Congressional legislation required the withdrawal of all Federal aid from students found to have violated criminal laws during disruptions. Brewster used this reminder to state Yale's policy both toward Federal intrusion and the handling of disruption by students. On the first point:

the effort to use loans and scholarships to regulate local conduct seems to me repugnant to the spirit of the United States Constitution. I don't think that the spending power should be used as a subterfuge for extending the federal police power. In the particular case of educational institutions there is the special concern about academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

On the second point, Yale would continue to protect "dissent no matter how extreme" but with no "compromise on the basic proposition that forcible coercion and violent intimidation are unacceptable ... as long as channels of communication and the chance for reasoned argument are available."<sup>42</sup>

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The most visible and symbolic institutional change at Yale resulting from the Vietnam war was the expulsion of the Army and Navy Reserve Officers Training Corps programs in 1969-70. The University maintained that the end of ROTC after more than half a century was solely the result of a disagreement over academic issues between Yale and the armed services. Conservative alumni and faculty said Yale

had dishonored its obligation to serve the nation by caving in to radical opponents of the Vietnam war. A review of the history of military training at Yale demonstrates that neither claim was correct.

ROTC was a problem from its inception in 1917 when Yale converted its privately organized and financed artillery training program for which no academic credit was awarded into a unit staffed and controlled by the United States Army.<sup>43</sup> A skeptical Yale College faculty acquiesced in granting course credit because President Arthur Twining Hadley said it was the right and proper thing to do in time of war. The faculty also acquiesced in a peacetime program with officers assigned by the Army and Navy (beginning in 1926) and holding professorial titles as members of the Yale faculty. Neither the faculty nor University officers had the opportunity to assess individual qualifications or say yes or no to these appointments. Courses were hardly fare for the inquiring mind. For example, in Military Hygiene and Battery Administration freshmen learned about camp sanitation, record keeping, discipline, and handling men. Sophomores in Field Artillery Horses and Tractors heard "lectures on shoeing, grooming, stable management, horsemanship, and training artillery horses and studied "trucks, tractors, gas engines etc." juniors moved on to maps and gunnery; seniors to tactics, maneuvers, and military history. In all there were eight semester courses meeting for three hours a week. Students also were required to devote five hours a week to physical training or varsity sports and to attend military camp for three summers. The naval program consisted of four years of seamanship, navigation, ordnance, and gunnery with tactics, strategy, and international law for juniors and seniors. The two programs changed very little throughout the interwar period. As late as the 1930s the Army still taught how to handle horses.

Yale deans disparaged the quality of ROTC instructors, snorted over the intellectual poverty of the courses, complained about schedule conflicts with the regular curriculum, and were bothered at the requirement to withhold of degrees from students who had not fulfilled non-academic ROTC requirements. One dean proposed that the programs should consist of courses already being taught by regular faculty supplemented by one hour a week of non-credit military Instruction "plus vacation or post-graduate practical courses as the Army and Navy might consider necessary." <sup>44</sup> But no one at Yale cared enough to make an issue of the anomaly of awarding credit for a Yale degree for work that was the antithesis of liberal education, taught by individuals with slight qualifications as teachers assigned by the Army and Navy without review by the faculty. There were barely enough students enrolling in ROTC to sustain the two units. For Yale to close the units would deprive those students of needed financial assistance and the free choice of serving the country. Also ROTC was strongly supported by a few prominent alumni and faculty.

After Pearl Harbor the ROTC programs were replaced by full military training, under the V-12 program for the Navy and a variety of army programs. The students were members of the armed forces first and Yale students incidentally. Then with the end of the war, the Navy proposed a peacetime program threatening the University's academic autonomy. The Navy would select students and decide which institutions they would attend. The students would wear uniforms at all times, live in separate quarters, and be under naval discipline in everything they did. The Navy would tell them what courses to take. The best performers would be transferred to the Naval Academy after sophomore year. changes which for the first time produced serious resistance from Yale. Norman S. Buck, dean of Freshman Year, said this would mean "a small segment of Annapolis within the walls of Yale."<sup>45</sup> Yale College Dean William C. DeVane, agreeing entirely, set forth Yale's conditions for the return of NROTC. First, the acceptance and rejection of students must be done entirely and exclusively by Yale. Second, the University must control the curriculum. The faculty would grant credit for four year-long courses, but anything more would be "an intolerable encroachment." Third, Yale cannot contemplate accepting students who will "be sent to another institution at the end of their second year." Fourth, "Yale cannot contemplate the presence of a group of students in peacetime who are marked off by uniforms, or by more serious but less visible differences, from the regular student body."<sup>46</sup> President Seymour accepted these arguments and joined Presidents James B. Conant of Harvard and Harold Dodds of Princeton in

protesting. He also used the full power Yale's old-boy network to persuade the Navy to back down.<sup>47</sup> But Provost Edgar S. Furniss feared nothing could be done. "I hope the University will refuse to cooperate," he wrote Seymour, "even at the cost of losing the NROTC and suffering some unfavorable publicity. It is apparently too late to get the plan revised and eliminate its objectionable features."<sup>48</sup>

The Navy did back down. Its program was re-established on Yale's terms. The Army, less of a problem, also returned. In 1949 the Air Force, now a separate service, also opened a unit. It lasted a few years and then closed down because of Yale's inadequate facilities. With the Cold War under way criticism from deans abated and the place of ROTC seemed secure.

In 1948 President Seymour set up a committee of the University Council on military and naval affairs.<sup>49</sup> Its mandate was to suggest ways to increase student interest in ROTC, provide a fuller welcome to the officer/professors, and communicate with government officials and Congressional committees-in short, to bind Yale more closely to the military. Four of the five members were active or reserve officers. A comment by its highest ranking officer, Major General C. C. Haffner, Jr., class of 1919, set the tone:

The administration of Yale University, and most of the Yale alumni (particularly the Eastern alumni) heartily endorse the international approach of our administration in Washington whereby we will become involved in most any difficulty which appears anywhere in the world .... The corollary of this national policy must certainly be a strong national military establishment .... one of the critical items in our military establishment is the development of reserve officers. In peace time these must largely be obtained from our educational institutions. Yale, therefore, has an obligation to support generously its ROTC program.

The committee urged that a high Yale official be assigned responsibility for ROTC and related matters.<sup>50</sup> Reuben A. Holden, assistant to the president and soon to be Secretary of the University, became the man, serving as Yale's representative on an advisory panel to the Defense Department. Ben Holden, an army colonel during World War II, would fight until the end to keep ROTC at Yale.

The peak of enrollment in the ROTC programs came during and immediately after the Korean war when every Yale undergraduate in good physical shape assumed he would have to serve in the military. Most preferred to become an officer rather than be drafted as an enlisted man. ROTC was a fact of college life and not a problem and while the likelihood of being drafted remained high. Two years as a peacetime lieutenant in Germany or as an ensign sailing along the coast of Asia was not bad duty.

Then the climate began to change. In his presidential inaugural of April 1964 Kingman made a proposal: "If the Peace Corps is the best national outlet for the larger active purposes of the oncoming generation, perhaps it should be given no less academic house room than military and naval training. Lest zeal be squeezed out of the academic process, we might well establish a Peace Reserve Training Corps."<sup>51</sup> At that time there were around 20,000 American military "advisers" in Vietnam. One year later Yale College Dean Georges May, no radical, was worried by faculty comments in the course of study committee. He told the professors that neither the committee nor the faculty had any jurisdiction over the agreements on ROTC between Yale and the Department of Defense, but only over the content of courses for which credit was given. "But," he wrote to Brewster, "the line is a thin one, and I would not care to have to report to you in the future that the Committee wishes to discontinue giving credit to courses in Military and Naval Science." May also told Ben Holden that reform was necessary to enable "our undergraduates to earn a reserve commission, if they so wish, without seriously damaging the integrity of their academic programs."<sup>52</sup> Nothing happened.

By 1967 radical anti-war students throughout the country were attacking ROTC as evidence of institutional complicity with immoral aggression. Radicals at Yale were slow to get organized, but in

October 1967 the Yale Chapter of the SDS demanded that the University eliminate the Army and Navy programs and sever all connections with the U.S. military establishment. SDS supported its manifesto with a day of picketing outside the ROTC buildings. The first months of 1968 were the most violent of the Vietnam war. The Vietcong and North Vietnamese attacked with the Tet offensive in February. General William Westmoreland, commander of US forces, asked President Johnson for another 200,000 troops--above the more than 500,000 already in Vietnam.

Only then did the course of study committee begin a serious review of ROM "The issue of credit for ROTC courses," said committee chairman William Kessen, "is an academic curricular matter with no implications for national policy."<sup>53</sup> The purely academic goal was to identify and remove credit from "how-to" courses, such as photography for beginners. When committee actually looked at course manual it found an almost total emphasis on memorization of procedures and no call for critical thinking. Another issue was that the recent reduction of the number of semester courses required for graduation from 40 to 36 had the effect of increasing the percentage of overall graduation credits occupied by ROM. A third issue was elitist. The Yale ROTC programs were open to students from the University of New Haven and Southern Connecticut University. How, wondered the Yale faculty, could courses geared to such students be worthy of Yale men? Also, the possible elimination of academic credit for ROTC courses led the course of study committee to a logical argument for ending the anomaly of military officers with professorial rank. If they were no longer teaching courses in the curriculum, they need no longer to be faculty.

In November 1968 the Harvard equivalent of the course of study committee stole a march on Yale by recommending the elimination of credit for ROTC courses. Harvard's action energized the opponents of ROTC at Yale. The SDS announced it was organizing a student movement to oust ROTC. Professor John P. Trinkaus, master of Branford College and vocal supporter of the left, joined the attack. "Much of the philosophy of the military runs counter to that of a university, and, besides, low-level trade school courses have no place at Yale."<sup>54</sup> Reuben Holden, writing as Secretary of the University, answered the critics by saying "that students in a free society ought to have the choice of taking military courses if they wish .... To deny this freedom is to deny a basic academic freedom which students and faculty groups demand on every campus I know of."<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation briefed the advisory panel to which Holden belonged on the "dissident activities of the New Left" and the Department of Defense asked FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to provide more information to the panel on "individuals and groups who are having disruptive and harmful effects on the ROTC on our campuses."<sup>56</sup>

In January 1969 the course of study committee recommended to the full faculty that ROTC courses "be given extra-curricular status without academic credit", that officers of the ROTC units no longer be designated as members of the faculty, and that the President and Fellows of the Corporation be requested to "initiate early negotiations with the Department of Defense" to effect these changes. The faculty approved the recommendations by a four to one margin and also asked the president to appoint an ad hoc committee to examine and report on all aspects of ROTC, because the course of study committee's mandate dealt only with the issues of credit and faculty rank for military officers. Not all faculty agreed. One voted against the resolution because it meant yielding to political pressure and abandoning "the responsibility we have for the education of the armed forces." Another challenged the idea that the military courses were too vocational, when compared with what the faculty had approved in the new seminars in the residential colleges. A third said that a politically motivated action might be a violation of academic freedom.<sup>57</sup>

In February 1969 the Yale Corporation instructed the president to negotiate with the government in order to give effect to the faculty resolution. Brewster, however, went out of his way to stress that the faculty and the Corporation wanted to keep ROTC at Yale. Whatever might be done with respect to

academic credit, he said, reserve training is not only an important opportunity for students, but hopefully an important contribution to the quality of the armed services. They ... need to have a fair contribution from our best educated young men."[58](#)

The occupation by Harvard students of University Hall and the ensuing violence on April 9 alarmed the Yale administration, excited student radicals, and was followed by a month of political theater. A tumultuous Yale College faculty meeting on April 24 requested the President to call an open meeting of the Yale community as soon as possible to discuss ROTC. Brewster welcomed the idea. Since 1965 he and his aides had been closely following and trying to learn from the disturbances at the University of California at Berkeley, Columbia, and Harvard. He concluded that the best course called for candor in criticizing those with whom he disagreed such as Bill Coffin combined with giving students the fullest possible opportunity to speak out. Thus, he called the SDS "Students to Destroy Society .... revolutionaries ... wanting to destroy social life as it exists today .... the worst thing about the revolutionary is that he turns all the rest of us into counter-revolutionaries."[59](#) But he would always listen carefully--to anyone. And he believed that the use of police against dissent almost always made matters worse. The meeting took place in Ingalls Hockey Rink on May 1 with nearly 4000 students, faculty, and others including the majority of the Yale Corporation. The climax was a vote on whether the University to sever all connection with ROTC. The result was 1286 in favor, 1286 opposed. It truly was. The crowd laughed and the meeting adjourned. The next day the College faculty endorsed the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on ROTC appointed by Brewster. In addition to ending credit for ROTC courses and faculty status for officers students in ROTC must not be prohibited from majoring in certain subjects (the military barred anthropology, art, drama, music, and religion) and should be allowed to resign from ROTC at any time without penalty (separation in 1969 often led to immediate induction into the service as an enlisted man). Also, the government should pay the full cost of the program (Yale at the time provided space without charge).[60](#)

The Corporation on May 3 endorsed the faculty action. Yale negotiated for a few months with the two services, but the gap between Yale's conditions and what the services would accept was too wide. ROTC came to an end as it did in many private universities. Had the services agreed to continue on an extra-curricular basis would the agitation against ROTC have ended? Probably not.

### **The Conversion of Kingman Brewster, Jr.**

When it came to the Vietnam war, Kingman Brewster, as we have seen, tried to balance academic freedom as he understood it with the need to listen to the opponents of dissent as well as to the dissenters. He deplored civil disobedience and on several occasions came close to saying that a professor and a chaplain who engaged in disobedience forfeited the right to be associated with the university. He was troubled by the war, but through 1967 and into 1968 he saw no better alternative for the United States than staying the course. For a long time he accepted the White House line about maintaining credibility lest a foe miscalculate and there be nuclear war. For example, in declining in 1967 to participate in a "Convocation on the National Crisis", he said "I hope I am no less sensitive to the horrors of the present war and the great danger to civilization which it entails. Thus far, however, the alternatives proposed seem to me to increase the risk of ultimate nuclear holocaust."[61](#) He said often that he would not criticize until that day when, imagining himself President of the United States, he knew confidently what else to do. Kingman Brewster was an honest but not a humble man.

He repeatedly invoked the liturgy of institutional neutrality and said that individuals at Yale had the right to express controversial opinions but spoke only for themselves, never for the university. Through 1968 he hoped that there might be a negotiated end of the war as the closing achievement of President Johnson (who had withdrawn as a candidate for re-election in March in order to concentrate on a solution). But the administration of Richard M. Nixon did not bring peace any closer. In 1969, Brewster

was angered by what he saw as Nixon's deliberate disregard of dissent and discouragement of "open critical discussion."

Brewster's test came in the autumn of 1969. Students, faculty, and local citizens were planning New Haven's and Yale's role in a nationwide "moratorium" in opposition to the war scheduled for October 1st.. The organizers asked that Yale be closed for the day. Brewster read to the Yale College faculty a statement he was about to issue:

I recognize and personally sympathize with the widespread and deeply felt concern about the prolongation of the war in Vietnam.... In my official capacity, however, I cannot give positive University sanction to the interruption of normal educational activities. Yale should not forfeit its institutional neutrality for a political cause, no matter how widely backed.

However, he would encourage faculty and supervisors to make special arrangements with students and workers "as long as the educational and other functions of the place are not unduly hampered." Some faculty agreed. If Yale takes a political position, said Professor of Chemistry Harold Cassidy, it will suffer the fate of European universities. Others said the war was too great an evil to permit neutrality. Art historian Vincent Scully, a prominent opponent of the war, said the University must take a stand against what it knows to be evil.[62](#)

President Brewster issued his statement on institutional neutrality and said he would speak at the moratorium in his personal capacity, not as a spokesman for Yale. Law Professor Eugene V. Rostow--who had served as Under Secretary of State In the Johnson administration and with his brother Walt was a mid-level architect of Vietnam policy from 1966 to 1969--plead with Brewster not to advocate withdrawal in defeat. "Our educational system, and our national experience, give few Americans a disciplined view of the hard problems of peace and war In their setting of history." We must not abandon the people of Vietnam. We can not regain "the effortless security of the nineteenth century .... A balance of power is the only conceivable foundation for peace."[63](#) Rostow was almost the last voice at Yale to believe the Vietnam war as a necessary continuation of American efforts to thwart Hitler in World War II and Stalin in the Cold War. Brewster's assistant Alfred B. Fitt, recently hired after being in charge of ROTC affairs In the Defense Department, disagreed vehemently with Rostow and offered his own suggestions for what Brewster might say at the moratorium:

what does it take for people like Rostow to recognize a national catastrophe when they see it, and what does it take for them to realize that what we are sacrificing in Vietnam are the lives of men, women and children? Older men can comfortably send younger men off to their deaths when an identifiable national interest is present, but I happen to be one older man who thinks that the young men of this country do not owe their lives for the preservation of the Thieu and Ky government.[64](#)

The next day more than 50,000 people gathered on the New Haven Green. A sound-truck carrying counter-demonstrators circled the Green with the sign: "Destroy, Not Appease." Brewster spoke last with remarks reflecting his meditation on what both Rostow and Fitt and said to him.

Let us admit that it is not easy to stop short of victory in a cause for which so many have fallen In the line of duty.

Let us say simply that we cannot tolerate the abuse of their memory as a justification for continuation of the killing and the dying at the behest of a corrupt Saigon government which rejects both democracy and peace.



Let us admit that it is not easy to abandon the anonymous masses of South Vietnamese who have relied upon us.

Let us say simply that their interest as well as ours can no longer be served by the perpetuation of terror and death.

Let us admit that the retreat of our power in face of a persistent enemy night Invite other aggressors to doubt-and, doubting, to test-- our will to help keep the peace-in Europe, in the Middle East, In Asia.

Let us say simply that our ability to keep the peace also requires that America once again become a symbol of decency and hope, fully deserving the trust and respect of mankind.

The speech, lasting less than five minutes, was widely quoted. Anthony Lewis of the New York Times called Brewster's phrases "almost Gettysburg-like in their simplicity after so much oratory" and hoped that the Nixon administration would listen.[65](#)

Had Brewster sacrificed Yale's institutional neutrality? Was it sufficient for him to say he was speaking only as a private individual, not the president of the university? Can a president or a professor ever speak publicly on a controversial Issue without being identified with the Institution?

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The moratorium assembly of October 15, 1969 was climax of the Vietnam war's impact on Yale. The war, of course, continued until American combat forces withdrew in 1973 and the Saigon regime fell in 1975. Teach-ins, petitions, trips to Washington continued (and would require a chapter twice as long to chronicle). The Nixon administration's extension of the war into Cambodia led to the lethal shootings at Kent State in May 1970 and at Yale blended with the "May Day" protests over the trial of Black Panthers accused of murder.

The policy of "Vietnamization" reduced the casualties among American ground troops but meant more bombing of North and South Vietnam. Brewster continued to speak out. In April 1972 he joined all the Ivy League presidents plus the president of M.I.T. in calling for an end to bombing and withdrawal. The presidents said they supported non-violent, constructive opposition to the war as long as it was "not at the expense of the rights of others or at the expense of the ... educational and scholarly activity of universities and colleges."[66](#) But Brewster refused to alter the academic calendar to make it easier for students to attend demonstrations or work for political candidates opposed to the war. To do so would be a violation of institutional neutrality.

In 1973 Brewster looked back on his ten years as president, and implicitly reflected on Chaplain Coffin's challenge in 1966 that he end his silence. What he wrote exposed the fictional distinctions between speaking personally and officially and between acting on moral conviction (good) and acting to achieve a political objective (not good). He now admitted, In effect, that there were times when the university should not hide behind the cloak of institutional neutrality.

I took the considered risk of speaking my mind on issues such as the war and the draft and the legal harassment of black revolutionaries. These were matters which racked the entire university community. My decision was not a simple self-indulgence of my right of free speech. It was the result of a deliberate balance of judgment about what degree of speaking out was best for the University under the circumstances: how to avoid excessive

exploitation of the presidential office, and how to avoid being a moral eunuch on a morally anguished campus.<sup>67</sup>

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- 1 "Survival Is Not Enough," Atlantic Monthly (April 1951), reprinted in Griswold, Essays on Education New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 1125.
- 2 Papers of Raymond Kennedy, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, manuscript group 1046, box 1 folder 9.
- 3 The best analysis of Lyndon Johnson's costly and avoidable decision is Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War: The last Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)
- 4 Kai Bird, The Color of Truth-- McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy: Brothers in Arms (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 54-70.
- 5 Remarks before alumni in Detroit, May 17, 1965, quoted in the Detroit News Brewster papers 58:1.
- 6 Yale Daily News. February 1965 17,1965.
- 7 Harold C. Syrett to Edmund S. Morgan, November 23, 1960, Yale History Department files.
- 8 Lynd to George W. Pierson, March 26, 1962, ibid.
- 9 Staughton Lynd, "Coalition Politics or Nonviolent Revolution?", Liberation June-July 1965. See also John Corry, "Spokesman for the New Left," The New York Times Magazine. January 23, 1966.
- 10 Brewster to Lynd, June 2, 1965, and Lynd to Brewster, June 6, 1965, Brewster papers, box 68, file "Staughton Lynd".
- 11 Brewsterto Nelson A. Howard, Jr., June 9, 1965, ibid.
- 12 Henry (Sam) Chauncey to Brewster, February 11, 1966, enclosing letter of John W. Castles, Jr., to all Alumni Fund class agents, Brewster papers, box 138.
- 13 Brewster statement, Yale News Bureau release #227, January 19, 1966.
- 14 John M. Blum, April 15, 1966, to Dean Georges May and Sam Chauncey, Brester papers, box 138.
- 15 Vesey to Brewster, June 13, 1966, ibid. Vesey, class of 1953, told Brewster that he had never given to the alumni fund, but would do so now.
- 16 Columbia University Forum, X, fall 1967, pp. 23-28.
- 17 Ibid., 1968, pp. 42-3.
- 18 Daniel T. Rogers for the Charles Andrews Society to Howard R. Tama October 13, 1967, History Department files.

19 Undated committee report, *ibid.*

20 Lynd did some part-time teaching, earned a law degree at the University of Chicago, and entered a second career in labor law.

21 William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Once to EX= Man: A Memoir (New York: Atheneum, 1977), pp. 77-78.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 129-33.

23 Form letter used during by President A. Whitney Griswold in response to letters of criticism of Coffin and representative incoming letter, February 15, 1962, Griswold papers, 108:985.

24 Coffin conversation with the author at the time.

25 Coffin to Brewster, May 5, 1966, and Brewster to Coffin, May 9, 1966, Brewster papers, box 61.

26 Brewster to Coffin, October 7, 1967, Brewster papers, box 61.

27 Brewster remarks at Parents Day, October 28, 1967, Brewster papers, MS 572, 1:10.

28 Coffin, Once to Every Man. pp. 257-58.

29 Blair to William P. Bomar, July 10, 1968, copy in Brewster papers, box 61.

30 Brewster form letter of April 25, 1968 in the great volume of mail about Brewster, *ibid.*

31 Statement given to the Yale Daily News, May 18, 1966, Brewster papers, MS 572,1:7.

32 Griswold-Brewster oral history transcripts, interview with Eli Clark, [check precise date 1991 or 1992]

33 I tried to find this individual in order to ask his permission to cite him by name, but Yale had no record of his address.

34 Minutes of the Yale College Faculty, January 5 and April 27, 1967.

35 Yale Daily News, articles by Robert G. Kaiser, November 26-December 3, 1966. Kaiser went on to a prominent journalistic career with the Washington Post.

36 Yale Daily News, November 28, 1962.

37 Text appended to the Minutes of the Council of Masters, November 30, 1962, and printed in modified form in the Yale Daily News, December 3, 1962.

38 Minutes of the Council of Masters, May 26 and October 27, 1967.

39 Griswold-Brewster oral history transcripts, Taylor interview, November 2, 1962.

40 Minutes of the Council of Masters, October 27, 1967.

41 Brewster (with signatures of all Ivy presidents) to Johnson, December 21, 1967; Joseph A. Califano, Jr., special assistant to the president, to Brewster, December 26, 1967, Yale University New Bureau #197 for release December 31, 1967.

42 The statement, circulated to all students and faculty and widely reprinted, took the form of a letter dated April 6, 1969 from Brewster to John Perry Miller, dean of the Graduate School.

43 From 1863 until 1893 the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale was Connecticut's land grant college under the Morrill Act and as such was host to casual military training-usually no more than six lectures to seniors. After the Connecticut legislature reassigned the land grant designation to its agricultural college in Storrs (later the University of Connecticut) there was no sustained military training connected with Yale until 1915 when through the initiative of President Arthur Twining Hadley Yale established its own artillery training battalion lightly affiliated with the Connecticut National Guard. In 1916 Congress authorized the modern Army ROTC program. Yale was the first to sign up.

44 Charles H. Warren, dean of the Sheffield Scientific School, to President James R. Angell, February 1, 1927, records of the provost's office, 57:549.

45 Buck to President Seymour, April 12, 1945, Seymour papers, 140:1177.

46 DeVane to Seymour, June 13, 1945, :ibid.

47 Two alumni were especially helpful-F. Trubee Davison of the Army Air Staff and Under Secretary of the Navy Artemus L. Gates. Both were members of Skull and Bones as was Seymour and both had belonged to Yale's privately financed naval air unit during World War I.

48 Furniss to Seymour, August 28, 1945, Seymour papers, 140:1177.

49 The University Council, established in 1947 as somewhat analogous to the Harvard Board of Overseers, was composed of prominent alumni. Its committees were to report on different areas of the University and make recommendations to the President and Corporation.

50 Preliminary Report of the Committee on Military and Naval Affairs, University Council, May 6, 1949, Seymour papers, 164:1390.

51 Yale Alumni Magazine. May 1964.

52 May to Brewster, April 20, 1965; May to Holden, May 27, 1965, Brewster papers, box 226.

53 Yale Daft News March 13, 1968.

54 Ibid., December 6, 1968.

55 Holden to the Yale Daily News, draft of December 3, 1968, in records of the University Secretary, 4-A-13, 264:853.

56 John Slezak, Department of Defense, to Hoover February 11, 1969, copy in records of the University Secretary (Holden), 264:853.

57 Minutes of the Yale College Faculty, January 30, 1969. The residential college seminars had just

been established. They were on topics suggested largely by students and often taught by non-academics. Conservative faculty found them of dubious quality.

58 Brewster, "Special Report to Alumni", February 22, 1969, Brewster MS 572 papers, 1:14.

59 Transcript of Brewster's remarks at panel during alumni reunions, June 15, 1968, Brewster papers, box 61.

60 Minutes of the Yale College, April 24 and May 2, 1969.

61 Brewster to Professor Charles Sellers, University of California, May 23, 1967, Brewster papers, box 215 folder "University of Chicago".

62 Minutes of the Yale College faculty, October 2, 1969.

63 Eugene V. Rostow, "Three Questions for President Brewster and Mayor Lee", October 14, 1969, Brewster papers, box 219, moratorium folder.

64 Fitt memorandum for Brewster, October 14, 1969, *ibid*.

65 Anthony Lewis, "A Thoughtful Answer to Hard Questions," New York Times October 17, 1969.

66 Yale University News Bureau release #225, April 19, 1972.

67 The Report of the President the Decade 1963-1973 (New Haven, 1963), p. 3.