

The Rhetorical Fantasies of the Kent State Rioters:

A study of SDS Peripheral Influence

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Strategic Communication

At Liberty University

April 2016

Committee

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## Dedication

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, ESV).*

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8, ESV).*

The completion of this thesis is a promise answered by God. I did not intend to continue my education, but God has a plan for my life and He will see me through. I never could have done this alone and I am excited for the future.

Thank you to my parents, Robert and Jo Ann Abrams, for always supporting and encouraging me. You are a blessing in my life.

Thank you to my husband, Eric Stanley, for your love and belief that I could do this. You are an answer to prayer!

To my children, Talia and Colin, you inspire me and I am grateful to be your mom. I love you!

Thank you to all my family and friends who believed in me and kept me going. I am truly blessed by your love and friendship.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 1960s and early 1970s, American colleges were shaken by a group whose collective view of the country was so abhorrent that they tried, through word and action, to tear the country apart. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) created and sustained a vision that was shared by thousands and fueled by stories of members who travelled the country recruiting college students to carry out the organization's mission of war against society. The words spoken in speeches and written in publications created by the SDS demonstrate the power in a shared vision and served to create unity amongst the people who considered themselves supporters of the SDS. Analyzing the verbiage in documents produced by the SDS through the application of symbolic convergence theory will provide insight into the rhetorical vision of the organization. This thesis will specifically explore documents pertaining to Kent State University and the riots that occurred in May 1970. What was the world of reality of the rioters? Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality? What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters?

Most people enjoy a good story. If this was not true, the entertainment industry wouldn't exist. No one would pay \$10 to see a movie and people would not set aside funds for Internet, cable, Netflix, and Hulu in their monthly budget. Researchers such as Bales (1970) and Bormann (1985) agree that people are natural storytellers. Athletes love to tell about the big game, couples enjoy recounting the story of when they met, and a mom will tell anyone who will listen about the birth of her child. Stories bring people together.

Ernest Bormann and his students studied the use of storytelling, or fantasy, in a group dynamic. The outcome was the development of symbolic convergence theory (SCT), which

explores how a compelling fantasy, whether true or false, can bring people together causing the fantasy to grow within the group and serve as the groups' identity and message. "[SCT] assumes that human beings are social storytellers who share fantasies and thus build group consciousnesses and create social realities" (Bormann, 1985, p. 136).

People generally use stories to shape their world (Bormann, 1985). When members come together to create a group, a story forms and is shared between members. Consider the phenomenon which occurs when a television drama becomes popular. The show is discussed around the office, at home, with friends, and online. The fans of the show start to take sides between contrasting characters and make predictions of plot outcomes. They discuss the actors' personal lives and related previous work. This is similar to what develops when groups share fantasies of events that happen to group members, of the group's formation, the mission, detractors, and future outcomes (Borchers, 2013). Bormann proposes that rhetorical visions are formed much like a drama, with actors, settings, plotlines, sanctioning agents, heroes, and villains (Dickerson, 2008). These components come together to form a reality for the group and help to motivate members to action. "The practice of cooperative fantasizing leads to enhanced group cohesion and, ultimately, the emergence of a group mind" (Dickerson, 2008).

Symbolic convergence theory was first developed through study of small group communication (Larsen, 2013). However, the theory has been used in research from all genres of communication study. This thesis will apply symbolic convergence theory to the study of the May 1970, Kent State riots and the fantasy themes of the Students for a Democratic Society.

*Kent State University and the Students for a Democratic Society*

Campus unrest was a phenomenon in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Kent State University in Kent, Ohio was not immune to this phenomenon. The culture was changing in America. Music had become more political. Entertainers like the Beatles, the Doors, and Bob Dylan were writing less about love and relationships and more about current events and politics. Fashion was changing, as well, as skirts got shorter and hair got longer. Television shows no longer portrayed a father who knew best, but instead viewers were watching series like “The Mod Squad” and “The Flip Wilson Show.” Counterculture groups were forming with the objective of shaking up the status quo. The Students for a Democratic Society was not the only counter culture group of this time, but they are one of the most well-known. Their level of activism and the number of members across the country makes the SDS possibly the largest counterculture group in American history. By 1968, there were nearly 100,000 members (Students for a, n.d., para 1).

SDS members travelled the country and recruited students to join in their mission to radicalize the American societal, economic, and political norms (Isserman, 1991). This study looks at the rhetorical vision of the protestors at Kent State and the SDS members, which may have served to escalate peaceful protests to violent riots and contribute to the death of four students, and the injury to nine more. A qualitative study of documents from that time will serve to open discussion of how campus rioters and members of the SDS created a rhetorical vision that incited audiences to join their cause.

Articles and books abound on the riots at Kent State and the events preceding the May 4, shootings. Detailed descriptions of the days, weeks, and even years before the tragic events tell

of angry protests, riots, acts of arson, vandalism, and violence against law enforcement (Steidl, 2014; Lewis & Hensley, 1998.; Mischner, 1971). The three days before May 4, were fraught with destruction to both Downtown Kent and the University campus. When the small police department was unable to squelch the protests, the Ohio National Guard were brought in to regain order. There is much speculation about the course of events, including the development of conspiracy theories, but most researchers point to a proliferation of radical activity on the Kent Campus in the years before the shootings. The most prominent radical group on campus was the Students for a Democratic Society.

There is also a great deal written about the SDS and the impact this group had on the events before and during the incidents that led to the shootings (Isserman, 1991; Murphey, 1993). This study will look at the language of SDS documents to examine the patterns and fantasy themes that make up the rhetorical vision of the organization. By doing so, readers may better understand the motivation of the SDS to carry out acts of violence and to disrupt the American higher education system.

### *Justification of Study*

The impact of such a study may have relevance to understanding not only the Kent State incident, but also may correlate to current events in the U.S. both on and off campuses, as protests and riots unfold. The justification of this study is two-fold. The rhetorical vision of the SDS should be studied to understand the environment leading up to the May 4 riots, thus providing a clearer picture of the students' mindset during the four days of riots. Additionally, this thesis will give insight into the movement of a counterculture group, which bears a striking resemblance to the activist groups of today.

The SDS was a counterculture group, which found significant support among college-age adults. Their impact was palpable as they sought to reform America from the bottom up. Understanding the fantasies of the SDS will add perspective to the study of their words and actions. The publications and speeches of this organization provide evidence of the conviction held by the members. They were not passive in their beliefs, but instead called for action against what they perceived as the evils of the world. The SDS members believed they were justified in their movement because they were fighting for justice. There was a war raging. The SDS was the hero and everything they fought against was villainous.

The events on the Kent State Campus during the weekend beginning May 1, 1970, seemed chaotic even though much of the protests were planned. The recounting of individuals who were involved or witnessed the chain of events at the time was conflicting. Four-and-a-half decades later, there is an established general timeline, but the details are still hazy. Also unsettled are the motives of the protestors, as well as the Guardsmen. Studying the rhetoric of the SDS is like putting a piece of the puzzle in place. Understanding the fantasies of the organization and the influence the members had on the Kent State rioters helps the American public get closer to what really happened during that fateful weekend. The entrance to the May 4 Visitors Center at Kent State University features a quote by Allison Krause, one of the four students killed during the tragic events. "Dates and facts are not enough to show what happened in the past. It is necessary to delve into the human side of history to come up with the truth. History must be made relevant to the present to make it useful." This study will add to the existing research, whose focus is to uncover the truth. Put together, perhaps these studies will help prevent future tragedies like the one at Kent State.



Another important reason to study the rhetoric of the SDS and the scope of their influence is to identify the correlations between popular movements of the time and what is happening in the United States now. There are parallels in culture that are significant. It may not be clear if the movements of the 60s continued to gain momentum throughout the years or if there is resurgence, but many of the issues Americans are struggling with presently are the same issues the counterculture groups were bringing to light 45 years ago. Issues such as race equality, income equality, gender equality, foreign affairs, and perceived police brutality are just as volatile as they were in the days of the SDS protests. Several groups formed out of the necessity for young adults to feel like they were standing up against injustice. The SDS, The Black Panthers, the NLF, and many other groups struggled to make their voices heard. Their members called on the youth in America to become active in the causes they held dear so America would see change. These groups varied in their radicalism, but many of them, including the SDS, were not opposed to raising awareness through violent means. Eventually, these groups died out, but their legacy lives on. The counterculture groups of the 1960s may have found new life in recent years, along with the emergence of similarly-focused groups. Unfortunately, Americans are seeing the same methods of protest in the forms of riots, destruction, anger, hate language, and blame.

For decades, the SDS existence, while discussed greatly, lay dormant. Former members were left behind when the organization factioned off in 1970. However the organization and its goals were not forgotten. In recent years, new support has emerged to not only reignite the SDS, but to form two organizations with ties to the former radical group. In 2007, two past members of the original SDS teamed with another like-minded individual to form the Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS). This group consists of former SDS members and other adults who

share the same goals. The leaders of MDS embrace the radicalism of the later years of SDS and the faction of Weatherman, a counterculture group known for more violent methods such as bombings and riots. Phelps (2007) writes that this group has continuously experienced dissention amongst members who feel that violent forms of protest do not serve their purposes. Phelps quotes Mark Rudd, a former leader of the original SDS and Weatherman, who spoke at a MDS public meeting. Rudd was critical of past methods, saying that violence and property destruction is politically self-defeating. However, MDS secretary, Thomas Good, called himself “an unrepentant Weather supporter” (Phelps, 2007). This internal struggle has led to instability in the organization.

At the same time the MDS was coming together, two high school students, who had met on an antiwar phone hookup two years prior, decided to resurrect the SDS organization in the hopes of reshaping the existing left (Phelps, 2007). The two girls contacted former SDS leaders and formed ties with the MDS, which created and supports the New SDS web site. However, after witnessing the division amongst MDS members, the New SDS has distanced them from the organization.

Although the success of both the relaunch of the SDS and the MDS is questionable, there appears to be some support on college campuses for the New SDS. According to Phelps (2007), the main link between the original SDS and the newly formed version is the principle of participatory democracy, where the people of the United States are free from oppression and capitalism. The group is loosely formed with no national office or publication and no membership dues. Each chapter is free to support causes of their choosing. The belief system varies greatly between members and chapters, as some chapters simply serve as a voice for

students and some chapters are more radicalized (Phelps, 2007). The reaction the New SDS has received also varies.

Isserman (2007), a former SDS member, writes about the development of the new SDS and makes known his hesitation about a group who would resurrect an organization with such a contentious past.

I felt that even if the organizers were determined to avoid a repetition of past disasters, it would still prove a mistake to revive an organization whose very name imposed on its members the necessity of constantly explaining to skeptical outsiders that, no, it wasn't the SDS of 1969 they sought to emulate, but that of earlier, saner years. Moreover, the whole idea of seeking to revive SDS, dead and gone for nearly four decades, seemed to me, well, very unSDS (Isserman, 2007, p 1-2).

Todd Gitlin, former SDS president, agrees in Isserman's article that the re-formation of the group was ironic and perhaps misled.

Despite the skepticism of past members, the new SDS' website boasts 29 chapters at colleges across the country and hosts a national convention annually. The organization supports many of same issues as the original SDS, such as ending police brutality, cutting all ties between colleges and military research, and ending U.S. intervention in other countries. New areas of focus include protesting Presidential candidate Donald Trump, rallying against student debt and higher tuition costs, and supporting the feminist plight.

The new SDS has stated that they stand alongside organizations such as Black Lives Matter and The People's Collective, much like the original organization's stance with the Black

Panther Party. The organization's most recent call to action was a week-long protest against police brutality beginning March 6, 2016. This protest was launched after the officer-involved killings of two black men, one in Salt Lake City, Utah and the other in Raleigh, North Carolina. Although no specific actions were called for, the New SDS' web site stated,

We will not stop marching, protesting, or organizing until this justice is won. We also stand against the prison system, discriminatory policies, and housing and loaning practices that throw African-Americans into jail and bar them from universities. We will not stop organizing until the African-American people in the United States, particularly those concentrated in the South, are free (New SDS, 2016).

Other such protests have been cited on the New SDS' web site including, demonstrations against Donald Trump, presidential candidate. The New SDS claims to be non-partisan, but the chapters are standing up, in the form of rallies and piñata bashes, against what they call Trump's hate speech. "SDS is anti-war, anti-racist, and supports legalization and tuition equity for all undocumented immigrants. It would be against everything SDS stands for as a progressive student activist organization, to not challenge Trump's agenda or encourage people to stand up and fight back!" (New SDS, 2016). Thus far, the New SDS has shown commitment to the early day's mission of the original SDS and is utilizing peaceful methods of dissent. Phelps (2007) speaks to a New SDS member about a protest event where other organizations destroyed property. The SDS member explains that this method of protest served to alienate more people than it inspired. The New SDS is more interested in unity and movement-building.

The original SDS began with an organized, non-violent mission to cause change in the world. Unfortunately, the mission became chaotic and the leadership turned toward violence as a

method to raise awareness. The new SDS purports to align itself with the original intentions of the SDS; however, it is beneficial to study the rise and fall of the 1960s version as a cautionary against the possibilities of a group seeking to emulate a radical, tumultuous counterculture organization.

Like the new SDS other groups have formed with great similarities to those of the past. In 2014 and 2015, protests and riots raged in Baltimore, Maryland and Ferguson, Missouri, much like those in Oakland, California in the 1960s. The citizens of both cities, who are predominantly black, were acting out against law enforcement for years of perceived racism and ultimately the death of black men at the hands of white officers. The riots continued for days destroying parts of their cities and many of the businesses within. In the months following, several other cities experienced protests and riots against law enforcement. Born from these events is a black-rights activist group called Black Lives Matter. There are numerous parallels between this new group and the Black Panther Party of the 1960s. Both are militant groups aimed at destroying racism through disruption, counter-racism, violence, and defiance.

One advantage the counterculture groups of the 1960s did not have was the support of the media. The revived and new groups of today are able to spread their message through a willing media, and boast the support of celebrities who act on the organizations' behalf. The halftime show of Super Bowl 50 is evidence of this. Beyoncé Knowles, popular R & B singer, entered the field with an entourage of dancers all dressed in a tribute to The Black Panther Party, including afro wigs and black leather jackets modeled after those worn by Black Panther members. At least one dancer carried a sign in support of Black Lives Matter, thus supporting both groups at the same time. The stunt garnered media coverage on the main news stations as well as commentary from independent columnists, bloggers, and law enforcement leaders. Media has

also been generous to the Black Lives Matter organization in coverage of their protests and disruptions to political events. These new counterculture groups also have the benefit of the Internet and social media to aide in recruitment and the dissemination of their message.

In the United States, there are an increasing number of social conflicts, such as students protesting on campuses and citizens rioting in inner cities. These conflicts may be fueled by the influence of advocacy groups, politicians, and other communities, who may or may not be operating under a rhetorical vision of truth. The conflicts of today are very similar to those this country experienced nearly 50 years ago. Studying the components of symbolic convergence theory in the case of the Kent State University riots may have application to the conflicts of today.

The weekend of May 1 through May 4, was chaotic. Forty-five years later, speculation remains regarding the motives of the rioters, why the National Guardsmen shot and if they shot first, and the influence of the SDS. By using Bormann's symbolic convergence theory to study the materials written by SDS members and speeches given by leadership, a drama begins to unfold that paints a picture of the environment in Kent, Ohio. It is possible that the SDS was able to influence a large group of college students, who then acted out the drama in accordance to the SDS' fantasies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into three parts. The studies presented are meant to provide insight into the past research on symbolic convergence theory, the riots at Kent State University, and the Students for a Democratic Society.

### *Symbolic Convergence Theory*

The mark of a strong group is in the unity of its members. The cohesive message that is shared among participants defines who they are and becomes ingrained in their belief system. Group members take pride in adding to and sharing the message with one another and with future members. Over time, this message grows into what Bormann describes in symbolic convergence theory as a fantasy (1972). These fantasies are not always rooted in truth, but to the group members, they are gospel. Fantasy is a reflection of the group's point-of-view and the way group members process the world around them. Groups throughout time have sworn their allegiance to and have espoused fantasies that have caused these groups to earn their place in historical record, for good or bad.

Study of the development and progression of fantasies in group dynamics has generated new insight into the theory of symbolic convergence. "The scholar using fantasy theme analysis begins with symbolic convergence theory and demonstrates how the messages under study relate to the consciousnesses of various communities that comprise the audience for the messages" (Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 1994, p. 275). In the nearly 45 years since its inception, symbolic convergence theory has been applied to the study of rhetoric from historical leaders, popular culture figures, famous texts, business leaders, news media, public relations strategists, and more.

Bormann, Cragan, and Shields (1996) studied Cold War rhetoric from the perspective of symbolic convergence theory to demonstrate the cycle of a rhetorical vision, from creation to decline. Their research was aimed at explaining the specific components of rhetorical vision and identifying the characterizing principles of each component. The authors present the stages of rhetorical vision as consciousness creating, consciousness raising, and consciousness sustaining.

The study looks at what the authors identify as the three rhetorical visions of the Cold War and maps the life cycle of each based on the three stages. The research was conducted as a case study of the rhetoric and related history of the time from 1947 to 1990. The study also served as a means of meshing previous symbolic convergence theory studies to explain the life-cycle of rhetorical vision.

SCT has also been utilized to study other significant events in history. In 1981, the American hostages in Iran were released on the same day as President Ronald Reagan's inauguration. Bormann (1982) studied coverage of the news, which overwhelmed reporters at the time, and more specifically the rhetoric of President Reagan's inaugural address in terms of SCT. Bormann analyzes the media's dramatization of the hostage release and the coinciding fantasy theme of restoration as a key message in the inaugural address. Reagan's fantasy presents the values of the original founders of the nation and the subsequent failures of the government and society. His speech promises restoration to the standards of the original founders. "Reagan's restoration fantasy directed the nation to return to its original basis and rightness" (Bormann, 1982, p. 136).

The study looks at the influence of the media in its reporting of the hostage release and the inauguration in supporting the fantasy of restoration. Bormann explains that television



coverage of a speech contains multiple levels of fantasy, that of the reporter, the surrounding drama, and the speech itself. The audience can accept or reject any level of the fantasy. The revolutionary will have a more difficult time in accepting Reagan's fantasy of restoration as this group seeks to destroy the structures of established society and its villains, while creating a new hero in a utopian society. The conservative will likely accept the fantasy of restoration while relying on already established heroes and villains. Bormann found through study of articles and letters to the editor that the media, by reporting the stories together, helped audiences accept the fantasy theme of restoration. While news reports give the impression of objectivity, the photos and stories come together to form a dramatization that is chained out to viewers.

Several years after studying the rhetorical vision of an American President, Bormann (1997) presented research on the rhetoric of another politician and radio orator, Huey Long. As Bormann explains, Long was a U.S. Senator and possible presidential candidate in the 1920s, who received free radio airtime from a friend who owned an influential radio station in Louisiana. Long would speak for hours about anything and everything. His political rhetoric and style is something that has been refined over the years and still copied today.

In his research, Bormann looks at the two rhetorical visions portrayed by Long in his broadcasts. The first vision was that America was a land of poverty where only a few shared wealth while the rest suffered without adequate food and clothing. The second vision centered on Long's unparalleled ability to redistribute wealth and assure that all Americans received their fair share. Bormann analyzes Long's "Share the Wealth" speeches in text and recording through the lens of symbolic convergence theory. Bormann found that Long's vision was without foundation and truth. However, Long was able to use persuasive techniques to bring the listening public into his rhetorical vision. His genius created a vision that portrayed himself as the hero and the

existing administration as the villains trying to keep middle- and lower-class Americans from prosperity.

SCT has been a useful tool in studying historical roots. The theory can be applied to messages of current leaders, as well. Pressley (2010), in her master's thesis, analyzed the rhetorical vision of Beth Moore, prominent Christian author and speaker. Pressley focused on Moore's message in *The Breaking Free* Bible study DVDs in an effort to identify fantasies within the message. The goal of Pressley's research is to discover what fantasy themes can be identified in Moore's message, and subsequently what rhetorical vision is created by the fantasies. Finally, Pressley discusses the consistency of Moore's vision with that of an evangelical Christian doctrine.

Using Bormann's fantasy theme analysis, Pressley puts forth a drama based on Moore's teachings, with a villain, Satan, and a hero, God. Pressley identifies seven fantasy themes reflecting Moore's desire to help women find liberty in Christ. She then ties these seven fantasies together to form a rhetorical vision centered on women embracing God completely in order to become spiritually fulfilled. Pressley also finds that Moore's teaching align with the evangelical Christian principles as proposed by the Baptist Faith and Message doctrine.

Symbolic convergence theory began as a tool for analyzing small group communication. However, the theory's use has evolved over time and can be helpful in both interpersonal communication and large group, as well. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) began in 1935 as a small group and has grown to more than two million members world-wide (For the media, 2015). Ford (1985) applied symbolic convergence theory in the study of Alcoholic Anonymous' "The Big Book", which is the text used by all members of AA. The purpose of the study is to understand

the images, symbols, and messages conveyed in “The Big Book” in an effort to identify the social reality held by AA. Ford reasons that understanding the messages of this group will help define the world view held by group members.

The study examined the text of most chapters of “The Big Book” under the criterion of identifying dramatic messages and classifying indicator language for rhetorical vision. The resulting rhetorical visions were then classified as pragmatic, social, or righteous. Each classification of rhetorical vision contained the elements of actors, plotline, setting, and sanctioning agent.

SCT has been proven useful in organizational marketing and business planning, as well. Cragen and Shields (1992) used SCT to guide corporate positioning, marketing, and advertising. The study followed an agricultural company going through transition resulting in restructuring departments and layoffs. The longtime rhetorical vision was destroyed and a new vision had emerged around the employees’ belief that job stability no longer existed. The new rhetorical vision “chained out” to contractors who immediately broke ties and signed on with competing companies.

Symbolic convergence theory was used to create a new vision, which included a company name change, positioning, and new sales and marketing stories. The agricultural company adopted most of the suggestions based on the outcomes of studies applying SCT. The studies took 24 months and included regular data testing. Specific events were held internally to raise support of the new rhetorical vision amongst management and employees. The company made changes to its target audience, launched a proactive advertising campaign, and introduced

new products, amongst other tactics. Sales increased 18 percent during a time when the farming economy was in recession.

Although SCT has been applied to studies in numerous areas of group study, the theory is not without its detractors. In 1994, Bormann, Cragan, and Shields offered a defense of SCT point by point. Their article focuses on four topics frequently raised in dissent of SCT, which are as follows: 1) The basic assumptions that form the basis of the theory have not been clarified; 2) SCT only applies to small group communication; 3) SCT's insights are researcher-dependent not dependent on the theory; 4) SCT is simply a new name for old concepts (Borman, Cragan & Shields, 1994).

Below is a synopsis of the authors' rebuttal to the criticisms, point by point.

1. The basic assumptions that form the basis of the theory have not been clarified. Bormann provided the following presuppositions in 1972, and reiterates them in this defense:
  - a. SCT was meant to take on a grounded approach to theory building, in that current and future studies would frame the concepts of the theory as opposed to the study of previous writings. The theory would evolve through study of group communication.
  - b. SCT can account for irrational facets of rhetoric while explaining the source and practice of the rational elements.
  - c. The audience is an important part of the rhetorical equation. In the early 1960s studies separated the audience from the process of rhetoric. SCT reconnects the audience as part of the process.

d. It is possible and important to make generalizations about SCT based on previous scholarly work.

2. SCT applies only to small group communication

SCT builds upon work done by Robert F. Bales, a Freudian, therefore the assumption is that the theory must be Freudian as well, which makes the theory only useful in application to small group communication. However, the theory does not include Freudian terms, and Bormann denies any link to Freudian influence.

Therefore the theory is appropriately classified as a general theory which can be used in study of large group communication. Furthermore, there are a number of studies that support the generalizability of sharing group fantasies e.g., Bantz, 1975; Bormann, 1973; Hensley, 1975; Ilkka, 1977; Kidd, 1975.

3. SCT's insights are researcher-dependent, not dependent on theory.

Critics claim that study results are more a credit to the researchers' insight and intelligence than to the application of the theory. What is true is that researchers will look for evidence supporting the perspective with which they view the subject. For example, a feminist will look for evidence of women being victimized by men.

"Rephrasing the results of studies into a different set of terms does not remove the powerful force of the original theoretical perspective that guided the enterprise" (Bormann et al., 1994, p. 276). Fantasy theme analysis guides the researcher to the imaginative language and SCT provides a clear framework for the analysis of that language. SCT gives researchers a method of analysis of a group's public consciousness.

4. SCT is simply a new name for old concepts.

Symbolic convergence theory has evolved over the years and developed through continuous study. The elements of the theory have been given technical meanings, such as fantasy theme and rhetorical vision, and the concepts grew out of “careful and rigorous social scientific methods applied to the study of communication episodes” (Bormann et al, 1994, p. 278). There are precise differences in the vocabulary of SCT and the loose definitions of words used in the past. For example, the use of the word persona describes much more than just a person’s name and term narrative does not hold the same meaning as a fantasy theme, which is a specific story-line.

The article concludes with a statement of the authors’ hope that work with symbolic convergence theory will continue to progress and that unsupported criticism will no longer stifle the development of important research.

There exists a broad scope of studies applying SCT to group communication. The preceding review provided a sample of existing research. This thesis will add to the research with a study of the rhetorical vision of a 1970s counterculture group and subsequent “chaining out” of this vision to students at Kent State University. The following section offers a detailed historical context and a review of the studies exploring the events at Kent State.

*Kent State Riots, May 4, 1970 “The day the war came home”*

The 1970s were a time of change in the United States. Marginalized groups such as women, blacks, gays, and lesbians, were speaking out for equality. College campuses experienced unrest as students protested the Vietnam War. The American public lost faith in politicians and what they stood for. Society was changing as those individuals and groups

protesting for change came up against what was termed “the silent majority” who embraced traditional conservative values and rejected the counterculture (The 1970s, n.d.). Conflict became a way of life for some groups as they struggled to change minds and ultimately societal norms. The way we handle conflict has a tremendous impact on the outcomes. The movements of the 1970s showed the country that poorly handled conflict can have a long-lasting effect on society.

One of the most prominent movements in the 1970s involved campus unrest. Students and organized groups fought for or against issues that divided the nation. They gathered in the name of civil rights, destruction of the military and police, an end to the Vietnam War, and a general overthrow of the American government. Many of these protests and rallies were held on college campuses and are attributed to the rise in dissent among college-age Americans. On Thursday, April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia. Students at schools across the country were outraged and held protests to voice their dissent (Lewis & Hensley, 1998). The protestors cited the inhumanity of the war in Vietnam and the ever-growing death toll of both U.S. soldiers and Vietnamese civilians as reason for their anger. This anger, and a fervent desire to cause change, helped spur the rise in violence and destruction on college campuses. In fact, more than twenty campuses saw riots in the days after President Nixon’s announcement of the invasion of Cambodia. Additionally, 760 campuses experienced serious disruption causing several hundred universities to close for the remainder of the spring semester, and the National Guard was called out in Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Kentucky, and Ohio (Murphey, 1993).

The protests at Kent State University, in Kent, Ohio, are possibly the most well-known college protests of that time. The situation at Kent State was a conflict between students and law

enforcement that had lasting repercussions for the students, their families, and the community. Four days of protests and violent riots, including vandalism to downtown businesses, the burning of the campus ROTC building, and violence against police, ended with four students losing their lives, and nine others injured.

There are numerous written accounts of the events at Kent State University, which began on May 1, and culminated on May 4, 1970. Although there were strong emotions in play at the time, and for some these emotions still exist, many who look back on the history compress the events into a story about the one hour before the Ohio National Guard shot and killed several students. “Our collective national memory is selective and iconic. We reduce complicated eras to a few compelling and dramatic images” (Isserman, 1995, p. B1). There is much more to the story at Kent State, which encompasses days and even years before May 4. A brief synopsis of the weekend prior to the events is as follows, keeping in mind that this was the culmination of years of active dissent amongst students. Friday afternoon, student protestors buried a copy of the United States Constitution as a protest of the Vietnam War. A subsequent rally was planned for Monday afternoon. That evening students gathered in downtown Kent, started fires in the streets, vandalized numerous businesses, and sought violent action against police. The mayor of Kent, Leroy Satrom, declared a state of emergency and reached out to the Ohio Governor, James Rhodes, who called in the National Guard (Lewis & Hensley, 1998; Michener, 1971). Saturday ended with the campus ROTC building burning to the ground and a continuation of riots, confrontations between police and students, as well as efforts to keep firefighters from extinguishing fires, including cutting firehoses. Sunday saw a continuation of the destructive actions, with confrontations, tear gas, attacks on police and guardsmen (Murphey, 2010). After Friday’s rally, students planned to meet again at noon on Monday. The law enforcement officers



were under the impression by the Governor that all rallies and protests were cancelled and prohibited. The students began gathering at 11 a.m. and the General of the Ohio National Guard began ordering the students to disperse. A Kent State police officer made announcements to disperse from a jeep driven by guardsmen. The presence of the National Guard further angered the students, who retaliated with angry shouts and by hurling rocks. Because of the protestors' refusal to disperse and the escalation to violent acts, the General ordered the guardsmen to lock and load their weapons, M-1 military rifles, and begin throwing tear gas into the crowd of about 1,000 people (Kifner, 1970). The students began to disperse, but some students continued to rail against the police and guardsmen. The tear gas canisters were picked up and thrown back at law enforcement while students cheered and chanted to get the "pigs off campus" (Kifner, 1970). The guardsmen huddled on the football field for about ten minutes and then began to retreat up a hill and regroup.

What happened next is a controversy that still exists today. The guardsmen, who were interviewed and who testified in investigations, are adamant that they heard gunshots like that of a sniper. Students and bystanders swear there were no such gunshots, and others say they heard sounds like fireworks or rocks hitting targets. Sound or no sound, the members of the Ohio National Guard shot into the crowd, 61 to 67 shots in 13 seconds (Lewis & Hensley, 1998). Four students were killed and nine others were injured in possibly the most infamous moments of the counterculture movement.

Many of the articles written about the riots at Kent State are by students or faculty who were involved in or witnessed the events as they transpired. The situation has been analyzed moment-by-moment from the perspective of the students, faculty, Guardsmen, and police. John Kifner (1970), a reporter on campus at the time of the shootings, wrote an account of the events

for *The New York Times* in which he details the days leading up to the shootings and the actions taken by the National Guard as he stood with a group of students watching in disbelief. “As the guardsmen, moving up the hill in single file, reached the crest, they suddenly turned, forming a skirmish line and opening fire. The crackle of the rifle volley cut the suddenly still air. It appeared to go on, as a solid volley, for perhaps a full minute or a little longer” (Kifner, 1970). Dean Kahler’s testimony in the civil suit was documented in the *Chicago Tribune*. Kahler describes the events of the night before when a group of students marched to then-president Robert White’s house to discuss the presence of the Guardsmen on campus. The students were met with tear gas causing them to disperse (Kent State student, 1975). Kahler’s life changed dramatically the next day, as he became the most critical of the nine wounded students. He was permanently paralyzed from the waist-down.

In addition to the testimonies detailing the events, the Kent State riots have drawn considerable attention from scholars, as well. Studies have been completed in the areas of history, sociology, psychology, communication, and conflict management. William Gordon (1995), a former student at Kent State, spent 19 years investigating the events that transpired at the University. Gordon’s book *Four Dead in Ohio: Was There a Conspiracy at Kent State?* was the culmination of more than 200 interviews and extensive research into the trial transcripts and the FBI’s investigative file. The author seeks to answer the question of whether or not the National Guard shootings were the result of a conspiracy either between the National Guardsmen or government officials. Gordon found no evidence of a conspiracy; however, he was able to bring to light a wealth of information not previously known to the public. This includes the evidence that both the FBI and campus police covered up information about a student who was initially suspected of firing the first shot, and who had dubious ties to the FBI, and information

about six campus police officers who approached administrators with allegations that the police chief was too intoxicated to stop the arsonists involved in the ROTC fire on May 2 (Gordon, 1995).

DeBrosse (2013) looks at the role of the media in the events that transpired at Kent State. His research focuses on the May 4, shootings by the Ohio National Guard and the assumption by students that the rifles being used contained blanks, not live ammunition. DeBrosse asserts that this assumption was ill-gotten, and he uses the guard-dog theory of the press and Chomsky's propaganda model to show that the media failed to do its job in informing the community.

Officials warned during a press conference prior to the shootings that order would be maintained on campus by any means necessary. DeBrosse writes that at least two journalists covering the events at Kent State were aware that the guardsmen were armed with live ammunition. After a review of 24 newspaper articles and radio broadcasts from the May 4, weekend, which would have been available to students and faculty, DeBrosse found only one slight reference to the guardsmen's ammunition. Further research was conducted by reviewing more than 60 news articles, live audio recordings, oral histories, and archived radio broadcasts from the weekend of May 1, through May 5, 1970 (DeBrosse, 2013). Interviews were conducted with eyewitnesses and news professionals who covered the events, as well. DeBrosse found very few references to live ammunition being used by the guardsmen and when they would be inclined to use their weapons. Many of the reporters with whom he spoke explain that the events were happening so quickly and they were going by the information given to them by authorities. The reporters admit they made many mistakes. DeBrosse's consensus is that the reporters' lack of information left the students "uninformed of relevant facts that may have helped spare the lives of four of them and the pain of nine others" (p.48).

There is a wealth of information aimed at solving the mysteries tied in with the fateful weekend in May, 1970 (Isserman, 1995; Michener, 1971; Barbato, Davis & Seeman 2012; Caputo 2005). Other scholars have looked not only at what transpired on May 4, but at the after-effects of the tragedy. Steidl (2010) studies the Kent State riots to frame research on collective memory. Her study looks at the narratives surrounding the events as they have transformed from 1970 to 2013. In doing so, Steidl identifies three main components of commemorative narrative as actors, events, and events' context. The research presented focuses on changes in narratives by reviewing archival materials produced throughout the four decades, as well as, participation during the annual May 4 commemorative weekends (held at Kent State), and Steidl's own field notes.

Steidl's research findings suggest that there are three distinct shifts in collective memory in relationship to the Kent State riots. What starts as fragmented form of collective memory, shifts to multivocal as the University moves away from individual memorials to one location dedicated to commemorating the events of 1970, and to referring to the events simply by date, May 4, in an attempt to neutralize conflicting views. Finally, as time passed, the University entered a phase of what Steidl identifies as the integrated commemorative field as numerous narratives emerged connecting and changing fragmented narratives and spaces.

Many of the studies and articles written about riots at Kent State focus on the timeline of events, the plight of the protestors, and the cultural significance of the tragedy. One researcher takes a completely different approach and questions the legality of the presence and authority of the National Guard on the Kent State campus. David Engdahl (1971) is a professor and attorney who was involved in the Kent State case and has written a considerable amount about the shootings and the legal implications of using military troops in civil disorders. Engdahl's 1971

paper argues that military force does not constitute due process and should not be used in suppressing civil disorders. This principle dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was integral to framing the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. In the past century, however, the use of military force domestically has become custom for suppressing civil disorders.

Engdahl states that riots and other destructive means should not be tolerated. However, the participants must be dealt with in accordance with due process of law. Military armaments have no place on city streets, maneuvering as though on a battlefield. Engdahl believes it is entirely possible and necessary to return to the law and tradition of dealing with riots and other civil disorders without the use of military force. It will take the recognition that the standards of due process bound us all and that the officials in command during a civil disorder must be local civilian officials. Engdahl recognizes the need for changes in training and strategy for civil disorders, but concludes that the death of four students at Kent State University, who were killed by soldiers of their own country, should have been spared according to the principles set forth in the United States Constitution.

Engdahl provides a unique look at the history of domestic military action and its effect on the student protestors in the Vietnam War era. Dwight Murphey (1993) also looks at the Kent State riots through the lens of American history, but with the goal of framing the country's historical truth. Murphey's article shows the campus riots, especially Kent State's, in a different light than many of the other articles, which paint the riots as a stand-alone event where Guardsmen shot at students unprovoked. Interviews of students and law enforcement show that the Kent State riots were long-planned and heavily influenced by non-student organizations. Murphey focuses on the influence of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the

revolutionary activism present at Kent State. He provides a history of the organization and the effect the members had on the May 1, through May 4, events at Kent State.

Murphey's research coincides with the writings of Mischener (1971), Isserman (1991), and McMillian (2008). The Students for a Democratic Society were a powerful force on college campuses. Murphey outlines the groups' foundation in communism and militant radicalism.

The preceding section provided context for the study of the fantasies of the Students for a Democratic Society and the environment at Kent State University, where the organization was arguably most active. The following section provides historical background on SDS and their goals at Kent State. The organization had several demands of Kent State Administrators, and the information presented will offer insight into the SDS recruitment of students and their actions toward achieving their demands. The section will conclude with insights on the organization's eventual disbandment.

### *Students for a Democratic Society*

The influence of the SDS was palpable. "SDS was the main vehicle for campus radicalism in the 1960s and perhaps the most significant radical student organization in American history..." (Isserman, 1991, p. 1448). The SDS was originally founded in 1959 as a student branch of the League for Industrial Democracy, and primarily focused on civil rights. The organization's membership did not begin to see significant numbers until the U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated. Following a national march on Washington in 1965, the actions of the members of the SDS began to take on a militant style, which included occupation of college administration buildings. By 1968, the organization had more than 300 chapters and approximately 100,000 members. This does not include the individuals who claimed affiliation

with SDS, but did not pay membership dues (McMillian, 2008). In the late 1960s, the SDS split into several factions, each with different foci (Students for a, n.d.). The most infamous faction was known as the “Weathermen” or “Weather Underground,” which believed that peaceful protests were ineffective. This off-shoot of the SDS were known for violent action, including bombings, which they felt were necessary to get the attention of the American people (The weather underground, n.d.). These violent tendencies can be seen in the riots at Kent State. The Students for a Democratic Society were fully represented on that campus long before the May 4, 1970 tragedies. According to Dwight Murphey (1993), the SDS embraced communism and members of the leadership regularly travelled to Cuba to meet with communists from both Cuba and North Vietnam. In addition to travelling outside of the country, members of the SDS traveled from campus to campus gaining followers of their leftist manifesto. Not every member of the SDS was a full-time, degree-seeking student. James A. Michener (1971) writes in his book, *Kent State: What Happened and Why?*, that members of the SDS would enroll in one, once-a-week course to gain access to other students and the campus without arousing suspicions.

By 1968, the SDS had a significant presence at Kent State, holding conferences and rallies, organizing walk-outs of political events, presenting demands to University Trustees, and causing confrontations. Militant activity was responsible for the burning down of West Hall in 1968, and an SDS leader threatened to burn down the entire campus if a revolutionary film festival was not cancelled. In 1969, another leader ran through classrooms while waving a Vietcong flag and yelling slogans (Murphey, 1993).

Some of the members of SDS genuinely wanted to change the world for what they felt was better, through whatever means they felt necessary. The SDS members wanted to bring the war home and demonstrate their solidarity with Vietnam and minorities in America. The national

organization was active in the causes of the Vietnam War and the draft, civil rights, wealth redistribution, and university education reform. At Kent State, the SDS had more specific demands for the University's administration. The four demands outlined below are taken from an SDS document titled *The War at Kent State*, and are repeated in multiple documents.

1. Abolish ROTC, the SDS' reasoning is three-fold:
  - a. The military program produces leadership for an army, whose purpose is to protect "imperialism" and suppress change both in America and abroad.
  - b. ROTC is only available to college students, which is discriminatory against "ordinary" people. Those who cannot afford college tuition are not able to participate in the ROTC program, reinforcing the view that the underprivileged are not worthy to lead the nation.
  - c. ROTC members are operating under the delusion that the only alternative to the draft is to go through ROTC and graduate a second lieutenant, which was deemed a safer rank in terms of injury during war. However, statistics showed that those holding this rank were killed at a high rate during the Vietnam War.
2. End Project Themis Grant to the Liquid Crystals Institute

Kent State was one of two institutes in the U.S. developed to study liquid crystals, which could be used in sophisticated weaponry against enemies of the United States, or as SDS terms, people struggling for their freedom. Liquid crystals, being sensitive to heat, can be used to detect campfires in jungle areas and even body heat at long range. SDS believed that liquid crystals were used to find Che Guevara, a revolutionary from Cuba and icon of the SDS leadership,



who was then killed. SDS demanded that Kent State reject the government grant and end all study of liquid crystals for the military.

3. Close the Law Enforcement School

SDS believed that police officers merely supported the current society and the oppression against minorities and movements seeking change. In November 1969, the SDS, in an effort to support black rights and enroll more black students, shut down a recruitment visit from the Oakland Police Department. The Oakland Police had recently arrested Huey Newton, the Black Panther Minister of Defense, and SDS members led rallies and posted Free Huey signs throughout campus and the city of Kent. Seeing that trouble was afoot, the University asked the Oakland Police Department to leave before interviews could be completed (Mischener, 1971; The War at, 1970). SDS leaders would not be satisfied, though, until the Law Enforcement School was closed permanently, thus contributing to the end of police brutality against minorities.

4. Close the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab

The demands three and four go hand-in-hand. The Northeast Ohio Crime Lab is utilized by all police departments in Northeast Ohio for criminal identification and lab processing, providing evidence for police officers to use in criminal investigations. The SDS believed that these processes were used to skew evidence and incarcerate innocent victims of police discrimination.

The SDS at Kent State felt that, while their demonstrations and publications were gaining the attention of students, the administration was failing to heed their demands. More action was necessary to not only get the attention of the administration, but the American public as well.

Rallies and protests raged across campus in the months leading up to the May 4, weekend in 1970. On April 8, 1970, approximately 400 students gathered for a rally, followed by 200 of the students marching to the Administration Building in support of the SDS demands. This caused the campus charter for the SDS to be suspended, as well as the suspension of seven students. The subsequent trial for the seven students caused additional protests, violence against campus police, and 58 arrests (The War at, 1970).

Kent State was not alone in its struggles. The SDS, along with other counterculture groups, were fueling fires at college campuses across the country as America saw a shift in the values held by the college-age generation. Ten days after the shooting at Kent State, police officers killed two student protestors at Jackson State University in Mississippi (The 1970s, n.d.). The violence did not last, though. By the fall of 1970, the antiwar movement had lost steam. The troops began coming home from Vietnam. What was dubbed the New Left turned into underground factions and life on college campuses became quiet again. “The splintering of the New Left and the winding down of the war were no doubt major factors in the cooling of mass revolutionary violence, but ‘Kent State’ was the most ostensible turning point” (Murphey, 1993, p. 248).

Kent State library’s oral history archives offer audio interviews from many of the individuals directly affected by the tragedy at Kent State. The distinct presence of the SDS is mentioned in many of the testimonies. An anonymous interview with the daughter of a Kent police officer reveals that the FBI warned the department at least two years prior to the riots that something was coming. “...there was a groundswell of radical activity going on... They couldn't tell them in what form, when it would happen, but this was just simply a pre-warning that it was a potential, potential happening” (Halem, 2000, p.1). Based on radical activity on campuses

around the country, these counterculture groups like the SDS were taking the students' idea of peaceful protest to the level of violent riots. This same interviewee also shared the following in regards to the outside groups, "They were anti-establishment, they were anti-everything: anti-law enforcement, anti-free enterprise, just the whole thing. About the only thing that they were not anti on was violence. And they had a real ability to influence many of the young people on campus. And they worked the crowds" (Halem, 2000, p.1). These groups had the ability to influence the student protestors because of their sheer mass in numbers. They were national organizations which allowed them the resources and mobility they needed to reach campuses across the country with their rhetorical vision.

McMillian (2008) wrote of the SDS' propensity to publish numerous documents almost daily in efforts to spread their message to whomever they could get to read their propaganda. "Various and multihued pamphlets and flyers, densely printed newspapers, crude bulletins, circular letters, and delicate, smudgy carbons – this was the stuff from which SDS aimed to change the world" (McMillian, 2008, 86). Melodramatic zeal was a calling card for the organization, and as the 1960s drew to an end, the SDS' publications represented such violent emotion that the writers began calling their pamphlets "shotguns."

McMillian's study suggests that the process behind the production, distribution, and transmission of SDS publications is really what drove the organization's style of decision making. McMillian praises the SDS manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, for its timing more than its content. The statement was released at a time when discontent among the college generation was growing, and gave students the catalyst to not only participate, but be a driving force in social change. The SDS' propensity to share the details of group conversations, events, thoughts, and goals in written form became a standard the group members carried throughout the

organization's existence, so much so that an outsider asked if anyone had considered that they were inventing a "new literary form" (McMillian, 2008). According to McMillian, the SDS was known as the group that "Passed the charisma around" and their publications are a strong factor in how they accomplished this.

The importance of the SDS' publications is undeniable, but also important is the venue for distribution. The members of the SDS went further than hosting rallies and speeches. Dorm chats, where members would visit the campus dorms and talk with whomever would listen; communes, where potential members would stay for weeks in the summer and learn about SDS; and work-ins, where members would take jobs in factories to ingrain themselves with the plight of the working man, also provided SDS members with opportunities to share their fantasy and rhetorical vision (Mischener, 1971; Work In, 1968).

Walsh (1993) studied the recruitment methods of the SDS and the importance of studying all utilized channels when identifying a general theory of rhetoric in movements. Walsh seeks to demonstrate the difference between only analyzing public and mass communication versus analyzing the entire range of a movement's communication. In his study, which is restricted to the six years between 1960 and 1965, Walsh examines SDS documents including bulletins, newsletters, mailings, letters, notes, and memoirs, as well as interviews with SDS leaders and organizers.

The list of documents examined by Walsh is testament to SDS' dedication to producing numerous publications to aide in spreading their message. To distribute these publications, Walsh explains the SDS used five tactics to garner addresses of potential members: exchanging address lists with like-minded organizations, obtaining names of friends from existing members,

networking within coalitions, work-ins, and projects, attending conferences, and by talking with students on college campuses. However, Walsh's study finds that face-to-face contact was the most successful way SDS recruited members. Recruiters listened to their audience members' desires and attempted to make a connection by describing what the SDS had done elsewhere and their plans to continue action on that specific front. The use of publications is merely supplemental to recruitment through interpersonal communication. This discovery differs from what would have been concluded in a study of only mass and public channels of communication.

Walsh presents two caveats to his conclusion, the first pertaining to monetary resources available to the organization. SDS had limited resources, but an organization with greater financial backing may have had more success with mass communication. Also, SDS received little media coverage, which may change findings in a study of an organization more prominent in the media.

Many of the studies of the SDS and the tumultuous time of the 1960s explore the upswing of the movement and the reasons behind the organizers' and students' desire for change. David Barber's (2008) book, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why it Failed*, researches the downfall of the SDS and why the shootings at Kent State signified the end of the movement instead of the catalyst for increased interest.

Barber suggests that the SDS and similar New Left movements failed because of their inability to separate themselves from their traditional, white upbringing.

The New Left failed because it ultimately came to reflect the dominant white culture's understandings of race, gender, class, and nation. While all these elements are inextricably intertwined, race is the key element in understanding the trajectory of the

New Left...But the young white activists of the 1960s never succeeded in decisively breaking with the traditional American notions of race. The New Left's failure fully to come to terms with its own whiteness finally doomed its efforts (Barber, 2008, p. 5)

Barber goes on to say that the tremendous growth of the SDS led to a lack of structure in the leadership, as well as an egocentrism amongst the existing leaders. The leaders saw the increase in membership as a result of their prolific abilities, and failed to give credit to the existing civil rights movement and the support of black rights groups.

In contrast, Murphey (1993) attributes the diminishing presence of the SDS to the end of the Vietnam War. Also a significant factor was the splintering of the SDS into factions, including the Weathermen, a group dedicated to the revolution of the United States through violent means. During the summer months of 1970, the Weathermen organized and executed several bombings of buildings around the country. Three members of the Weathermen were killed while manufacturing a bomb that accidentally exploded. The bomb was meant for detonation at a dance on an Army base in Manhattan. The violent activity of the Weathermen made them a target of the FBI and forced members to go underground, thus changing their organization name to the Weather Underground (The weatherunderground, n.d.).

The official SDS organization may have come to an end, but the legacy of this counterculture group lives on. The SDS leadership was able to affect a generation of young men and women who are now established in their careers and family. Their memories, actions, and ideals have been passed down to their children and grandchildren. They are teachers, college professors, business owners and leaders, and voters. These former SDS supporters still have the ability to shape the American culture, even if they are not part of an organized group. Some

members may have left the SDS ideology back in the 60s, but we can be sure that some more dedicated individuals still espouse the beliefs. Their influence may also be seen in the counterculture groups of today.

Given the tremendous impact of the SDS, it is beneficial to understand the group members' vision. What was the world of reality of the rioters? Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality? What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters? This literature review served to provide understanding of the theory of symbolic convergence, as well as a historical background of the 1970s, the environment at Kent State, and the development of the Students for a Democratic Society. The subsequent methodology will serve as a means to possibly discovering the answers to the proposed research questions.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The conflicts that occurred across campuses in the United States in 1970 have been discussed as a social phenomenon. The struggle of an entire generation to change society, tradition, culture, and the course of their own lives, has been analyzed by researchers in nearly every field. This study will look at the events that unfolded at Kent State University from May 1 through May 4, from the perspective of learning how the actors connected to cause a ripple effect of conflict. Not only was the tragedy at Kent State not a stand-alone event, it was also not spontaneous. The counterculture groups served to infiltrate and influence students all over the country. This thesis will explore the effect of fantasy by one group in particular, the Students for a Democratic Society, on the actions of the students involved in both the events preceding and during the May 4, shootings of 13 individuals, four of whom died, at Kent State University. Bormann's symbolic convergence theory will be applied as a method to answer the research questions previously presented. What was the world of reality of the rioters? Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality? What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters?

This study is qualitative in nature using Bormann's symbolic convergence theory, also known as fantasy theme analysis. Qualitative research focuses on "...understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences" (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p.22). The conflicts at Kent State University will serve as the case study for this thesis. Flyvbjerg (2006) describes case study as the detailed examination of a single event which can be used to help researchers learn about humanity. Case study as a form of research has increased over the past thirty years and is beneficial for understanding complex social phenomena (Yin, 2013). "...A case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full



variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations, beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study (Yin, 2013, p. 12).

Researchers often use case study to examine communication theory. Thomson-Hayes and Moore (2012) utilized a case study approach in representation of theory through film. The study draws a relationship between the film *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000) and the account-making model developed by Harvey, Orbuch, Weber, Merbach, and Alt's (1992). Price (2011) studied visual communication theories in a case study of the 2006 political advertising in South Dakota. The research primarily looked at the visual rhetoric in the advertising for both sides of an abortion ban issue. Price's methodology included analyzing the 12 ads run during the 2006 campaign and developing a code book to identify and group themes, tone of the ads, symbolism, and use of sources (statistical information). Type of production and demographics of models was also studied. This qualitative case study is similar to the methodology which will be utilized in this thesis.

### *The Researcher's Role*

As the researcher in this study, I am the primary data collector. This role calls for the disclosure of any personal values and biases. I was raised in Macedonia, Ohio, approximately 15 miles away from Kent. As a child and young adult, I occasionally heard stories of the conflict from teachers and those who remember the events that occurred. My father was a police officer during that time and has shared his insights of the events and the perspective of law enforcement. In addition, my father explained some of the advances in police training that are a result of the May 4, shootings at Kent State.

### *Bounding the Study*

### Available Resources

The Kent State University library, in Kent, Ohio, has a collection housed in more than 300 cubic feet dedicated to the events of May 4. This collection includes transcribed audio interviews of students, faculty, residents, police, and National Guard members, as well as photographs, documents, flyers, transcribed speeches, newsletters, and more. A portion of the collection can be viewed online, however site visits to Kent State will be necessary to understand the full scope of the events that transpired. Kent State also operates a May 4 museum on campus, which is dedicated to providing insight into the culture of the 1960s, the events of the May 4, weekend, and the after-effects of the tragedy. Beverly Warren, Kent State president, writes of the museum in the walking tour map, "...it will provide an accurate and balanced account of the history that happened here. In the process we offer compelling evidence of the never-ending need to appreciate and protect the democratic values of free expression, civil discourse and non-violent social engagement" (Kent state University, n.d.).

### Processes

Using Bormann's theory of symbolic convergence, this thesis will follow specific steps, to identify the rhetorical vision of the SDS and the chaining out of that vision to the students at Kent State University.

Step 1: The setting of the events will be described from news reports and witness testimony. The research will include close study of events culminating in the conflict at Kent State on May 4, 1970. Not only will the study look at the conflicts during the weekend prior to the shootings, but special attention will center on the campus unrest that existed for two-to-three

years before. A site visit to the University and surrounding area will aid in understanding the spacing and timing of each event.

Step 2: These resources obtained will be used to write a dramatization of the events highlighting the heroes, villains, scene, plotline and other related aspects of the events. The study will focus on writings and speeches from the students at Kent State University and the members of the Students for a Democratic Society.

Step 3: This study will explore the rhetoric of the SDS through analysis of speeches and propaganda materials used to form and chain out fantasies in an effort to recruit students at Kent State University. As noted before, the SDS was known for recording their daily happenings and distributing their viewpoints and goals throughout the organization. There is a plethora of materials pertaining both to the national SDS and, more specifically, to the Kent State chapter.

### Ethical Considerations

The study of any conflict requires sensitivity on the part of the researcher. In this case, several people were injured and four individuals lost their lives. This research will employ a great deal of sensitivity as to not cause further pain to the individuals, families, and loved ones who were affected by the conflicts at Kent State, or any campus.

### Data Collection Strategies

Data collection will involve the analysis of multiple written examples of rhetorical vision sharing from the SDS. Background research will entail analysis of materials describing the events involving SDS and the mission of the organization. Newspaper articles, previous studies, propaganda materials, and books written about the mission and methods of the SDS will also be

studied. In addition, photographs of the events at Kent State and the aftermath will be examined for the presence of information related to the SDS.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative methods often result in immense amounts of data. Researchers are challenged to see the overall picture, while extracting significant facts, distinguishing relevant themes, and discovering the meaning beyond the facts (Dierckx de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon & Denier, 2011). The data collected in this study will be organized by category and chronologically. Themes will be hand-recorded, which will lead to coding the data by key terms. The data will be reviewed repeatedly. The following steps to coding the data will be utilized as follows.

1. Artifacts from SDS and the rioters at Kent State will be carefully read and notes will be taken and categorized into themes.
2. Themes will be used to put together dramatizations of the SDS
3. Themes will be used to put together dramatizations of the Kent State rioters.
4. Analysis of the overlapping themes will be identified to show where fantasies overlapped
5. Reasoned analysis will show how the SDS themes were chained out through the rioters.

Once the data has been analyzed, an interpretation of the meaning will be presented based on the application of symbolic convergence theory.

### Verification

“There is a general consensus, however, that qualitative inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are credible” (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). To demonstrate the validity of this study, the research will engage the following strategies:

1. Data will not be limited to one source, as interviews, documents, photographs, and articles will all be analyzed.
2. Repeated review of data and site visits to the University will ensure accurate analysis.

The methodology described, using symbolic convergence theory, will provide the necessary evidence to formulate responses to the research questions presented in this study.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

To understand the events that transpired on May 4, 1970, at Kent State University, it is necessary to look at the preceding days, weeks, and months. The SDS was a strong force on the campus and their rhetoric was passionate enough to reach hundreds of students. A detailed study of the rhetorical vision of the SDS is provided in an attempt to answer the research questions presented in this thesis. What was the world of reality of the rioters? Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality? What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters?

The Students for a Democratic Society was a national counter-culture organization with more than 200 chapters in 1968. The national office for the SDS, located in Chicago, produced materials and provided support and resources for the local chapters. The SDS in Kent, Ohio applied for, and was granted, recognition by Kent State University in February 1968. In the SDS' application for Kent State University recognition of their student organization, the SDS constitution reads as follows. "It seeks to promote the active participation of young people in the formulation of a movement to build a society free from poverty, ignorance, war, exploitation and man's inhumanity to man" (Constitution for SDS, 1968, p.1)

While the Kent chapter of SDS fought for the same goals as the national organization, the leadership in Kent had additional goals not common to other chapters. The specific demands of the Kent SDS either are printed in whole or at least referenced in nearly all of the chapter's publications. The demands have been described in detail in the Literature Review section of this study, but a brief list is provided here.

1. Abolish ROTC

2. End Project Themis Grant to the Liquid Crystals Institute
3. Abolish the Law Enforcement School
4. Abolish the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab

In order to identify the fantasy themes of the Kent chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society, more than 50 examples of the organizations writings and speeches were studied. These samples were chosen because of their demonstration of the conviction and passion of the SDS. It is clear that the leadership of the Kent SDS felt strongly about their causes and the need for quick movement. The manifesto written in the early days of the national organization, reassures members that their actions, and the passion behind them, are necessary to the cause. "If we appear to seek the unattainable...then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable" (Port Huron Statement, 1962, p.1). Many of the members of SDS became engrossed in the movement spurred on by their fantasy so much so that they felt anyone who was not involved was ignorant of reality. McMillian (2008) interviewed a former SDS member who described his mindset during those years as group-centered. He perceived non-members as individuals with empty lives and a false perception of what was really happening in the world. Another former SDS member remembers the extreme focus on political nuances with little room for interests outside the organization (McMillian, 2008). This level of focus contributed to the advancement of the SDS' rhetorical vision and the chaining out of the fantasies held by the organization.

Through the study of both the national SDS and the Kent chapter of the organization, a main fantasy theme of the members becomes clear, as well as three related, but different, fantasies. These fantasy themes tie in with the four demands of the Kent chapter, but are much larger in scope. The organization's publications and speeches are all related in topic, and use

repetitive terminology to emphasize their objectives and relay the writers' passion to the audience. Oftentimes, several subjects are addressed in one publication or speech. Words such as, repression, oppression, liberation, exploitation, and struggle, are all used frequently in an effort to engage the attention of the audience and "chain out" the message to potential recruits.

The following is a description of the four fantasies held by the members of the Kent SDS chapter.

#### Fantasy Theme 1

*The U.S. is an imperialist country trying to control the world in an effort to make more money for the American ruling class.*

The SDS consisted of largely white, middle class college students. The members were primarily raised with traditional values, religion, respect of the law, and love of family. "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit" (Port Huron Statement, 1962, p.1). The SDS leaders were fully aware of their own advantages; however, their main goal was to break away from what they knew and reject the traditions of their parents. The members despised the capitalist system and what they perceived America stood for, which was helping the rich get richer and the poor stay poor.

It is the system of capitalism which is above all classes. It defines the classes and the roles of the people in each of them. It should be clear that if the exploitation of the people of America and the rest of the world is to be ended, the system of capitalism which necessitates it must be destroyed (Who Rules Kent, 1969, p. 19).



When studying the works of the SDS, the terms imperialism and ruling class are repeated throughout each piece, for example “Imperialism is a fact” (Origins of Vietnam Policy, 1969, p.1); “the ruling class are the only real criminals in this society” (untitled publication, n.d.). The ruling class is defined by the SDS as the top money earners in the country, usually business leaders, who oppress the rest of the nation by making people work for unfair wages or by keeping minorities out of the job market. In addition, this ruling class extends their business dealing outside of the United States, thus taking their oppression to the poor people of other countries by forcing them to work for low wages making items they could never afford to buy themselves. The ruling class was so powerful that they owned the media, schools, police, military, and of course, business. “Through its domination of the public opinion formation, education, the political parties, and other major institutions affecting the daily and long-term quality of life in the United States, this class asserts itself as a ruling class” (Who Rules Kent?, 1969, p. 1).

The SDS viewed the United States ruling class as the villains and themselves as the heroes meant to fight for victory. Victory for them would be the overthrow of the existing American society. A quote by a Columbia University student to one of his professors, printed in an SDS document, demonstrates the SDS’ feelings toward the preceding generation. “We do not see you as the enemy because you are ‘old’ and we are ‘young.’ We see you as the enemy because your values, your actions, the institutions you represent are at the root fundamentally corrupt” (Youth Exploitation, n.d.).

Many of the leaders of the Kent SDS are proud communists, which they believe is a more just economic system than capitalism. They rally behind the ideologies of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Mao Tse-Tung, known communist leaders, often quoting them in their publications.

SDS leadership travels regularly to Cuba to meet with leaders from both Cuba and North Vietnam. During a radio interview on August 30, 1969, with Cleveland's WJW, SDS leader Mark Rudd answered interviewer Bob Franken's question about the SDS being communist-inspired by saying, "We're not communist-inspired. We're communists." SDS members believed that all people are equal and should be treated as such. There should be no economic divide, no class structure, no ghettos or mansion neighborhoods. In other words, no matter a person's skill set or how hard he or she works, everyone should earn equally. The SDS members believed this ideal would be accomplished through a communist structure. The SDS fought to bring down the capitalist system and rid the United States of imperialism. Their intent was evident in the following quotes.

"Capitalist pig power structure, that's what it is. Corrupt, evil and it should be destroyed...in fact, smashed" (transcript WJW interview, 1969, p.1).

Because we understand there is this world-wide system, this world-wide system of exploitation and imperialism. And there's this world-wide war against that system and what we have to begin to do in the white-mother country is to open up a front against imperialism. We have to show the people of the world, the people of this country that we are dead serious...that we're gonna fight until imperialism is destroyed. And we're gonna do that through concrete actions wherever we find imperialism...to fight, to open up a front, to bring the war home (transcript WJW interview, 1969, p.3).

"What we've got to understand now is that the only way to respond to ruling class repression is to fight back...We must continue to fight against the repression that's coming down" (rally flier, 1969, p.1).

The SDS members believed that American imperialism stretched beyond the country's borders. Their fantasy saw America's ruling class as "vicious aggressors, bent on continuing the exploitation of workers and peasants throughout the world" (Origins of Vietnam Policy, 1969, p.1). Because of their allegiance to the communist system, the SDS was against United States involvement in wars around the world, including in Vietnam. Not only were they against the military draft and the killing of innocent civilians, but the SDS took the stance that the United States was stopping the spread of communism to South Vietnam. By doing so, the U.S. was ensuring the longevity of the countries' interests in that region of the world while putting the Vietnamese people at risk. Vietnam provided a gateway for expansion throughout the region and a pool of cheap labor for American industry. "The Vietnamese war is part and parcel of the system of US imperialism, a system based on the driving need of big business to make the highest profits possible. A system which makes profits primary, people secondary" (Origins of Vietnam Policy, 1969, p.1). The SDS firmly believed that the U.S. was not at war to help the people of South Vietnam, but to help the United States and its ruling class continue to rise in power.

The national SDS office pushed to chain out the message of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam, as well as other third-world countries. Kent SDS served as a conduit by publishing multiple flyers and brochures with messages of revolution against the ruling class.

It has become all too clear: In response to the increasing struggles for national liberation, the United States has responded with escalating military violence – counter-revolutionary violence—to suppress the just demand for freedom by the people of the world. It is, of course, the only response the US ruling class can make to protect its business empire abroad and its stranglehold on the black colony at home (Dare to Struggle, 1969, p.1).

Just as prominent as the SDS' fight against U.S. involvement in Vietnam, was the call to stand with the black community's fight against racism. Although the SDS consisted of primarily young white men and women, they embraced the civil rights movement and spoke out for equality between all races. SDS members regularly wrote about the struggles of black people in their fight against imperialism. In a rally in front of the Union building on the Kent State campus, Joyce Cecure, an SDS member, spoke about the inequality of black people in America,

...the people in the black community know one thing, that someone is making their life miserable. The white racist businessman. What the businessman does to them is called colonize. He systematically pays them lower wages for the jobs they do get. He denies them any kind of a decent education so they can get a better job. He just takes them for everything they've got (Transcript In Front of the Union, 1969, p.1).

The cry to "Free Huey," the Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, a militant African-American group who fought for revolution within the black community, was regularly heard at rallies and read in publications, such as the "Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win" flyer, the "Bring the War Home!" brochure, and the radio interview with WJW. The SDS' support of the Black Panther Party is evident in the flyer "The People's Fight is our Fight," which reads, "People are fighting for their freedom. ...The Black Panther Party, in the face of killings and frame-ups committed against them by the courts and the cops, carry on the leading battle for black liberation in the colony at home" (n.d., p. 1).

The SDS messages encourage young people to join in the struggle of not only the black community, but the Puerto Ricans and other minorities, as well. An unnamed rally flyer for Kent SDS provides their explanation of a new revolution bringing previously segregated young people

together in a movement to end imperialist oppression. “So it is that young blacks, young Puerto Ricans, greaser kids and white students are beginning to understand why they’ve been so alienated and frustrated. Not all (or many of them) can articulate what they feel. But together they’re forming a revolutionary youth movement that is fighting the U.S. ruling class which has fucked them over” (n.d., p. 1). The SDS’ fantasy of American imperialism both at home and abroad includes a reality where they are joined in their movement by countless others. They believe their actions are persuading young people all over the country and are having a positive effect against the ruling class.

The SDS stood with the minorities against the oppressive ruling class, but their movement did not stop there. The members of both the national organization and the Kent chapter believed that the ruling class’ repression extended to the working class, mostly those working in factories. According to the SDS, the men and women of the working class were subject to paltry wages, increased work hours, and racist environments. In the late 1960s, factories across America, such as in Chicago, San Francisco and New York, were experiencing labor disputes and strikes. The SDS joined in these disputes on the side of the worker. In the summers of 1968 and 1969, the SDS developed a student work-in program, where they assisted members in finding summer employment at local factories. The Kent SDS chapter participated in these work-ins. According to SDS literature, the main goal in developing this program was to eliminate the isolation from the working class that college students experience and to be more involved in the increasing militant workers’ movement. Many of the participants desired to break out of their middle-class mentality and to learn from working people while experiencing the realities they face. “We have been taught to look down on the tens of millions of workers who

have not only built our schools, but who keep the whole society functioning, and therefore have the power to shut it down” (SDS Summer Work-in, 1969, p.1).

This power may have been a more compelling reason to join with the factory workers. The SDS viewed the workers as an open audience for their rhetorical vision. Some participants wanted to win the workers over to their own political point-of-view. Evidence of this includes the passages in “Work-In 1968” that describe distributing SDS materials to workers in order to raise questions, stimulate political discussion, and present SDS as pro-working class. This same pamphlet explains that timidity was a mistake in the previous work-ins. While the SDS members were there to learn, they were also most successful when they “put forth their ideas in frank clear and relevant ways...In these cases we made the deepest friendships, gained real clarity about fellow workers’ real ideas and learned to make our analysis understandable in terms of their life experiences” (Work-In 1968, 1969, p. 2).

The members of the SDS held a fantasy that the imperialistic ruling class of the United States was the root of all society’s problems. Racism, class division, gender inequality, and war were all a product of the ruling class’ need for increased riches and power. A passage in the pamphlet “Bring the War Home!” summarizes the SDS’ fantasy of U.S. imperialism and the organization’s desire to change what they perceive as the traditions and culture of the country.

It’s a system that steals the goods, the resources, and the labor of poor and working people all over the world in order to fill the pockets and bank accounts of a tiny capitalist class. (Call it imperialism.) It’s a system that divides white workers from blacks by offering whites crumbs off the table, and telling them that if they don’t stay cool the blacks will move in on their jobs, their homes, and their schools. (Call it white

supremacy). It's a system that divides men from women, forcing women to be subservient to men from childhood, to be slave labor in the home and cheap labor in the factory. (Call it male supremacy.) And it's a system that has colonized whole nations within this country – the nation of black people, the nation of brown people – to enslave, oppress, and ultimately murder the people on whose backs this country was built (Call it facism.) (n.d., p. 3).

The fantasy of the SDS routinely refers to their movement as a war. There was a clear good and evil. The SDS believed they were the good force and they intended to win the war. Their slogan, "Dare to struggle, dare to win," emphasized the SDS' belief that their actions and the consequences they faced were temporary means to an end in which they were the victors. The ruling class must fall. "It is a war in which there are only two sides...And it is a war in which we cannot resist; it is a war in which we must fight (Bring the War Home!, 1969, p.8). If you were not with them, you were against them. All Americans must take a side. "A revolution is not a spectacle! There are no spectators! Everyone participates whether they know it or not" (Bring the War Home!, 1969, P. 7) At an April 1969, rally in front of the Music and Speech building on the Kent State campus, a man identified as Father Begin, known as the "rebel priest" who regularly spoke out against the Vietnam war, racism, and poverty, spoke to the crowd (O'Malley, 2009).

Unless you realize what is happening in this world, you're going to be duped into becoming the new Nazi nation...We really believe, don't we, that we got something to say to the whole world. That we can dominate their economics. That our lives are better than theirs. That's Hitler, folks. ...If you have any sense at all and want an education, you're not going to be fighting each other as students. But you are going to band together

as students to change this world...And you out there better make a choice because the revolution is going to roll right over you if you get in the way (Rally Before Music, 1969, p. 6).

To the SDS, the Vietnamese and the “black and brown communities” were on the right side of the war. “White people in this country have to decide which side they’re on the side of the people or the side of the pigs” (Bring the War Home 2, 1969, p. 1). Mark Rudd, SDS leader, was very clear in his interview on WJW that the dividing line was between oppressed people, such as blacks, working class, and people of third-world countries, and the ruling class, which was the upper 10 percent of the American economic class. “Now what we’ve said is, as white people, we’re joining with black people. And we’re joining with the Vietnamese. And we’re going to fight on their side and we’re gonna choose their side in this war” (transcript WJW interview, 1969, p.2).

The SDS members’ fantasy was that the ruling class of the country was repressing everyone outside of their class circle in order to sustain their own status. The men of this class support one another in business, in addition to socializing in the same circles. They belong to the same restricted clubs and are listed on the social register, a printed listing of wealthy elite in 12 cities around the United States (Who Rules Kent?, 1969, p. 1). The acceptance of this ruling class and their effect on every aspect of society leads to the expansion of related SDS fantasies.

According to the SDS, the ruling class had a significant impact on the structure of higher education in the United States. The colleges and universities across the country were built and run specifically to shape young minds into future members of the ruling class’ enterprise. The



following section focuses on the SDS fantasy and the rhetorical vision the members chained out to their audiences in regards to education.

### Fantasy 2

*Higher Education is a creation of the ruling class to produce more skilled labor for the benefit of their own companies.*

The SDS believed that all colleges and universities were created purely to provide for the needs of big business. “There are three basic ways in which the American universities serve the imperialist and racist needs of the ruling class: The production of manpower and research for racist and imperialist war-making and the perpetuation of ideological justifications (telling lies) in order to get away with racist and imperialist exploitation (anti-communism, for example)” (The People’s Fight, 1969, P.1).

The SDS fantasy saw students coming into the schools, learning how to think like the ruling class, graduating and going on to work in one of the ruling class’ businesses. However, the SDS members had no interest in graduating from college and working a 9 to 5 job for the rest of their lives. This is evident in an unnamed flyer released by Kent SDS stating, “20 years of schooling and they put you on the day shift.” The SDS viewed the higher education system as a “knowledge factory” producing skilled labor and intelligence for the use of the major corporations, government, and military (An Introduction, 1969, p. 6).

The choice for high school students is clear. Schools are jails. They fill our minds with lies: they prepare us for shit jobs or worse: and they pit white students against blacks so that whites won’t join together to fight with the black students. High school students

really only have one choice: to side with the Vietnamese and blacks against pigpower (Bring the War Home 2, 1969, p.1).

Another publication encourages students join the SDS at for a day of information and films on liberation to teach students how to break free from the “meaningless education” provided by Kent State. “We are liberating ourselves from carrying out the jobs we have been channeled into by a system which is unresponsive to our needs. . . .We are giving birth to a movement of young people. We will create our own jobs and through our movement resist the systems which we feel are nil” (unnamed flyer, n.d., p.1).

The Kent SDS chapter had some specific grievances with Kent State University, which included inadequate and depersonalized educational programs, intolerable campus housing prices, and impersonal dormitory living conditions and rules. In a flyer titled, “Leaflet for All,” the SDS criticized the Kent State Administration for the students’ lack of say, control or channels with which to make their presence known. “It is the student’s university, yet the student is not listened to” (1969, p. 1). In an effort to create an alternative to the traditional college experience, the Kent SDS chapter participated in a program called the “Free University,” which offered such courses as Zen Buddhism, Marxism, Guerilla Warfare, Marcusian Social Theory, and The Revolution – Where It’s At – Where It’s Going. The objective of the week-long program was to emphasize a democratic relationship as opposed to the traditional student-teacher confrontation. The members of the SDS also were trying to break away from what they perceive as the ruling class’ educational agenda.

The SDS’ fantasy declared that universities were pawns of the ruling class. In an effort to prove their claims, the Kent SDS leadership investigated the relationship between the ruling class

in Kent and Kent State University. The Kent chapter of SDS spent several months researching the key members of what they call the ruling class in Kent, Ohio, many of whom are on the Universities Board of Regents. They printed a listing of each member of the Board and a description of their business positions around Kent and the country. The publication is titled, "Who Rules Kent?" and begins with a few pages of why the SDS felt the students at Kent should be aware of this cohesive group.

The Board of Trustees, like the Board of Regents, can be seen to be dominated by members of the ruling class. In that these boards have total control over the functioning of Kent State University, it should be clear the university is within the domain of the ruling class (Who Rules Kent?, 1969, p. 15).

The SDS members' attempt to raise awareness of the political influence over the University not only served to enlighten students of the system they should be fighting against, it also provided justification for the actions of the SDS and the vilification of the school's administration. As was stated before, the Kent SDS charter was suspended after a rally in April 1969, where students were accused of storming the Music and Speech building in effort to force open hearings of fellow SDS members accused of inappropriate behavior in a previous rally. Sixty students were arrested for assault of police, disruption of the teaching function, and breach of piece. Following the rally, Dean Robert Matson, Vice President for Student Affairs, wrote a letter to the officers and members of the Students for a Democratic Society, informing them of his suspension of the Kent chapter's charter. Matson (1969) wrote, "Given the activities of today, it is apparent that the Students for a Democratic Society pose a continued threat to the disruption of the educational processes at Kent State University" (p. 1). The SDS responded with a

scathing legal-sized flyer titled “Kent Thugs” which painted a picture of the administration and the police as the aggressors and the SDS as simply trying to exert their legal right to protest.

We have to start calling them the thugs that they are. We’ve been laying it down about the racist and imperialist function of this university – a thug school. The ruling class, the enemy of 2/3 of the world’s people, represented right on this campus by the Board of Trustees, are using it and us to further their profits and political power. They’re worried. They know people can dig what it is and struggle against it when they get themselves together. We are not worried. We can struggle a whole lot – together (Kent Thugs, 1969, p. 1).

Another flyer addressing the events of the weekend in April 1969, echoes the SDS’ sentiment that the administration is repressing the just rights of the SDS.

But what they cannot tolerate is students who challenge – through struggle – the very nature of the university itself. They cannot tolerate students who understand that the oppression of the young people in America – the draft, the sterile classes, the bullshit jobs – is only part of a much larger oppression created by US imperialism. They cannot tolerate students who see this university for what it is – and are willing to move against it (Maybe Next They’ll Try, 1969, p.1).

The Kent Student Senate responded to the events, including the suspension, as well. The Senate conducted a week of interviews with SDS leadership and the Kent Administration and viewed films taken of the events. They commended the police for their use of restraint and both the SDS and the administration for their willingness to hold discussions, however they questioned the revocation of the SDS’ charter and why the student government was not consulted

on the suspension of students. The senate vowed to continue their investigation and to take an active stand on their findings (Student Senate flyer, 1969, p. 1).

The Kent SDS considered the events of the weekend, including shutting down the hearings, a victory. The rhetorical vision that they chained out to their audience portrayed the SDS as the “underdog” who was struggling to overcome the villain. They won the battle, and are now trying to win the war.

To win a war, the SDS leadership knew they needed fighters on their side. The language used at rallies and in literature produced by the SDS clearly sent a message to both the students they were trying to recruit and the administration of the University. Words like fight, struggle, thugs, and repression are regularly used to convey the passion held by the SDS members and their desire to overcome and ultimately reform the evils of the university system.

The third fantasy of the SDS is strongly related to the first two fantasies. The actions of the SDS often led the University Administration to call the local law enforcement. The SDS’ fantasy of US imperialism, which included the functions of the university system, also encompassed the motives of law enforcement agencies.

### Fantasy 3

*Police officers only enforce the laws that oppress the poor and disenfranchised, especially in black neighborhoods, in an effort to keep the distinction between the classes.*

Two of the four demands SDS had of the Kent State University Administration involved the functions of law enforcement. SDS wanted Kent State to abolish both the law enforcement school and the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab, which was located on Kent’s campus, stating at a

rally. "...cops will beat people up – cause that's their jobs, now that's the kind of people that the law enforcement school turns out..." (Transcript In front of the Union, 1969, p. 7). The fantasy of the SDS saw the police agencies as an extension of the ruling class, in as much that the officers' job was to oppress the black community in an effort to keep the class division intact. This served the ruling class by allowing business owners to pay black workers less than white workers. "We can't emphasize enough that the major task of the whole police network in this society – to protect the interests of the ruling class particularly at the expense of black people – must be fought" (Now is the time, n.d., p. 4).

The SDS, as well as other counterculture groups, dehumanized police officers by referring to them as pigs. "The pig's role is to protect the ruling class from the people. The pig is not expected to be human, he is expected to obey orders... To be human, the pig would have to protect the people and the pig does not protect the people" (The Last Hurrah, 1969, p. 1). The SDS' fantasy saw the police officers, protecting the ruling class, as the villain, and the SDS members as the heroes standing up for the oppressed and the disenfranchised. The SDS members passionately believed that police officers were so evil that the people they targeted had no choice but to commit crimes for survival.

The pimps, prostitutes, and hustlers who fight for their liberation by fighting for their survival are only using the best means they have to get what they need. The thief fights for his liberation by stealing for his survival. The rapist or murderer who strikes out against his oppression by overpowering someone is trying to prove to himself that he does in fact have some power; that he is a man (The Last Hurrah, 1969, p. 1).

The SDS wanted all young people to stand against law enforcement. They felt that they must defend themselves against the very people who should be defending them. Their publications accuse police of military violence against blacks (Now is the Time, n.d.), enforcing unjust laws (The Last Hurrah, 1969), and repressing any threat to the status quo (Now is the time, n.d.). “Cops are used as a white occupation army to protect the property of the supermarkets, slum landlords, etc who exploit black people” (The People’s Fight, n.d., p. 1). Because of the fantasy held by the SDS, which portrays all police officers as racist, unhuman bad guys, the SDS stood firm on their demands of eliminating any support to police agencies through the law enforcement school and the crime lab.

Closing the law enforcement school would significantly impede the local law enforcement agencies’ ability to find trained officers. This fact was not lost on the SDS, as they continuously fought for the closure of the school and the restriction of recruitment of students by agencies. In 1968, the SDS protested against and shut down a recruitment event which was to bring the Oakland, California police department to the campus to interview law enforcement students. In a flyer titled “Why We are Confronting the Oakland Police,” the SDS cited four reasons why the police department should be barred from campus.

The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) asks everyone to confront themselves and choose a role in the context of this reality

Because

- This country practices black genocide under the slogan “law and order”
- The police forces in America are used as instruments of repression in a politically closed society

- The maintenance of order is equated with the threat of official violence
  - The Oakland Police Department is a central example of militarized racism,
- We feel the University should not be complicit in channeling students into racist institutions (Why We are Confronting, 1968, p.1).

In addition to closing the law enforcement school, as a method of limiting the police agencies, the SDS demanded the closure of the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab. The crime lab served area law enforcement agencies by providing identification, lab processing techniques, and analyzation of ballistics and drugs for evidence gathered at crime scenes. The SDS believed the crime lab helped police officers frame black people for crimes they did not commit. “It develops sophisticated weaponry and techniques of counter-insurgency to be used against the people- particularly blacks” (The People’s Fight, n.d., p.1). The crime lab made targeting blacks “more efficient and quiet” (Maybe Next Time, 1969, p.1). The SDS viewed the crime lab as a weapon for the other side in the war in which they were engaged.

The SDS fantasy presented the police agencies as a key component in the ability of the ruling class to sustain their power over everyone outside their circle. Without the police to continue oppressing the working class and black people, the ruling class would be in danger of losing their control. Therefore, the Kent SDS demanded of the administration to close the law enforcement school and the crime lab. In the SDS’ rhetorical vision, the fulfillment of these two demands would give the organization a distinct advantage in their fight against the oppression wielded by police all over the country.

The Kent SDS had two more demands for the Kent State Administration. These two demands, like reforming the educational system and eliminating law enforcement, were aimed at



crippling the imperialism of the United States. The final steps were to destroy the U.S. military force.

#### Fantasy 4

*The military exists solely to aide in American imperialism both abroad and at home.*

The SDS members' fantasy of the ruling class, an elite group of men who set the standards of society, was bolstered by the fantasies that these men used law enforcement and military to protect their business interests both in the United States and abroad. The military, according to SDS ideology, served one purpose, to forcibly take land and resources needed for the ruling class to expand their empires. The war in Vietnam was proof of this belief. "These anti-war actions were definitely in support of the struggles of the Vietnamese people, who have been valiantly fighting against foreign imperialists who rob them of their resources and labor. The U.S. fights wars in Vietnam and around the world to protect their investments" (Demonstrate, n.d., p.1). According to the SDS, the United States military did not engage in the war to protect the people of South Vietnam and stop the spread of communism. Instead, they were there take over a country that had valuable resources and a primary location advantageous to United States businesses. The rhetorical vision of the SDS included ending the draft, closing ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) programs on college campuses, terminating any university military research, and limiting the scope of the military in general.

The United States' draft was a process by which males were chosen to enter the military in times of war, regardless of their own desire to do so. In the late 1960s the draft was a cause of fear for thousands of men across the country. Many men chose to avoid the draft any way they could. College students were able to defer the draft, and the SDS deemed this racist because

lower income males were not able to afford college. The members also felt this alternative fueled the imperialist educational system by routing students into courses designed to provide the ruling class with more labor for their companies. "...the primary coercive function of the Draft is "channeling" the lives of millions of young people outside the Military into lifelong vocations deemed "essential" by corporate military elites rather than freely chosen by themselves" (An Introduction, 1969, p. 5).

The Kent SDS developed a committee to address the inequality of the draft system and to educate students on the alternatives to the draft. A flyer titled, "SDS Draft Committee," outlines the reasons for this movement. "We should attack the deferment system on the basis of its channeling function and because of the racist manner in which it operates. We should attack the use of the military to repress the popular movements of other countries and to oppress political dissent domestically" (n.d., p. 1). This flyer states that the committee took their agenda to the student dorms in the form of film showings, talks, and counseling sessions aimed at educating the students on the alternatives to the draft, which included desertion.

The ROTC was another method of avoiding the draft. College students were able to enroll in the training program, thus deferring their entrance in the war, which trained participants while attending college. Graduates earned a degree and the class of First or Second Lieutenant in the Army. The first, and foremost, demand of the Kent SDS was to end the ROTC program at Kent State University. The SDS knew that the lack of college graduates from the program would have a negative impact on the Military's ability to fight in the war.

The SDS' reasoning for eliminating the ROTC program was three-fold. The first reason, as stated, being the limitations on the military's success. "It [ROTC] provides the leadership for

an army engaged in imperialist aggression against popular movements at home and abroad. The caretakers of imperialism must be stopped” (Now is the Time, n.d., p. 2). The second reason for abolishing the ROTC program centers on racism. Only those young adults who could afford to attend college could enter the ROTC program. This practice discriminated against black people and the working class. “Particularly ideologically it strengthens the view that ordinary working people in America are unworthy to guide the nation’s destiny (Now is the Time, n.d., p. 2). The ROTC program perpetuated the distinctions between the social classes and the races. The final reason for dismantling the ROTC program, given by the SDS, is that the program itself is oppressive toward its participants. The soldiers are taught to take orders from leaders who only have the ruling class’ interest in mind. “They just take orders. And they get screwed while doing so. ROTC is only an alternative to the draft. Second lieutenants are the highest single casualty in Vietnam” (unnamed flyer, n.d., p. 1).

The SDS called for the termination of the ROTC program in numerous publications, *Now is the Time*, *The People’s Fight*, *The War at Kent State*, *Combat Liberalism*, and many more. The SDS held rallies with the goal of increasing awareness of the unjust and immoral actions of the military and the ROTC program. “Smash ROTC,” was a regular cry of the protestors. A rally in front of the Union on Kent State’s campus in April 1969, focused on the ROTC program and the goal of shutting it down. Speaker and Kent SDS leader, Howie Emmer, spoke of the need to end the oppression and hypocrisy of the ROTC. In describing the route of the march to follow the rally, Emmer states, “We’re gonna go past the ROTC fields that serve the function of that fucking military that kills Vietnamese and then we’re gonna come back and we’re gonna march on those trustees” (Transcript In front of the Union, 1969).

The Kent SDS did succeed in their fight against ROTC, if only symbolically. On Saturday, May 2, 1970, during the fateful weekend of riots, the ROTC building was burned to the ground. However, these actions did not result in the end of the program. Kent State University currently offers both Army and Air Force ROTC programs.

The ROTC program was not the only military function on Kent State's campus with which the SDS found fault. The second demand of the SDS involved the Liquid Crystals Institute, one of only two in the Nation, which studied the uses of liquid crystals. The institute was financed in part by a defense research grant called Project Themis. The research being conducted involved finding military uses for liquid crystals which were extremely sensitive to heat, making them ideal for detecting fires and body heat. It is believed that liquid crystal detectors were used to locate Che Guevara, a revolutionist hero to the SDS, in the Bolivian jungle. "Kent State is part of Project Themis' spidery web of institutions which are currently developing sophisticated weaponry to be used against people's struggles for their freedom" (Now is the Time, n.d., p. 3).

The SDS members did not want to attend a school that provided any military support, neither through personnel nor research. Along with their rallies and marches against ROTC, the organization moved to both programmatically and physically close the Liquid Crystals Institute. In a flyer dated May 23, 1969, and titled, "Liquid Crystals Chained Shut!" a Kent SDS writer describes the actions of a group of protestors who began by marching on the Commons where ROTC men were engaged in drills. The protestors moved on to the Liquid Crystals Institute where they chained the doors shut and posted notices explaining why the institution must be closed.

The Project Themis grant was not the only funding the Institute received. There were other military grants, as well as one from NASA and one from the National Institute of Health for cancer research. As the SDS writes, though, the closing of the Institute despite the cancer research is justified. “How many poor or black old people live long enough to die of cancer anyway? Everything benefits the thugs in the ruling class” (Liquid Crystals Chained Shut, 1969, p.1).

The SDS’ rhetorical vision defined the draft, ROTC, and the Liquid Crystals Institute as components of the military, whose only purpose was to defend the ruling class, and deserving of immediate termination. “We are demanding the abolition of these ruling class weapons on the Kent State campus. ...It is the beginning of a struggle at home – the struggle to build a massive anti-imperialist, anti-racist freedom movement within the belly of the monster itself” (Dare to Struggle, 1969, p.1).

The Kent SDS presented their demands in publications, at rallies, and during confrontations, but they in no way wished to have open discussions or alter their demands. “The SDS demands are non-negotiable because the freedom and self-determination of the world’s people is non-negotiable” (Now is the Time, n.d., p. 4).

Unfortunately for the SDS members, none of their four demands were successful on the surface. As stated before, the ROTC program and Liquid Crystals Institute are both still part of Kent State University. The Law Enforcement School has been renamed Criminology and Justice Studies and offers six concentrations for job specific training. While the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab no longer exists on Kent State’s campus, the area law enforcement agencies have more advanced resources available both regionally and at the State level. Despite the SDS’ inability to

see their demands come to fruition, the members were able to create a fantasy and chain that fantasy out to hundreds of students at Kent State and significantly more across the country.

The four fantasies presented above are tied together by a common theme. The reality held by the Kent SDS chapter members described a United States ruled by a small circle of wealthy men, who dictated the structure and norms of society to their own benefit. These men used law enforcement, the educational system, and the military to fuel and protect their way of life. A class system rampant with racism was enforced at home and domination over third-world countries offering labor and resources was acceptable. The United States was an imperialist country run by a ruling class.

The Kent SDS was not alone in their fantasy. They were influenced by the National SDS leaders and the members of the 200 other chapters of the organization. Regional travelers for the SDS made frequent visits to Kent to provide encouragement and resources for the Kent leadership. The SDS printed newsletters and magazines telling of the movement and the specific struggles of each chapter. Documentary-style videos such as *Coronation*, *Intrepid Four*, *Now*, and *Free Huey* were distributed for use at teach-ins, rallies, and talks and provided another voice to echo the messages of the SDS. In addition, there were numerous other counterculture groups with similar motives to the SDS, such as the Black Panther Party, NLF, WHORE, and Black United Students.

The rhetorical patterns of the SDS come across clearly in their publications and speeches. The pattern of using the same words repeatedly demonstrates the members' level of passion for their causes and their anger that the demands were not being met. Words like war, fight, struggle, oppression, and freedom are used throughout the SDS materials, as are insults toward the groups

the SDS members feel are the villains. The police officers, National Guardsmen, and Kent State Administrators are often referred to as pigs or thugs, thus making them seem not human and worthy targets of anger and even violence.

This violence played out on the weekend of May 1 through May 4, 1970, and quite possibly was the result of anger over unmet demands. William Gordon (1995) describes the May 3, evening rally in downtown Kent in his book *Four Dead in Ohio*. Gordon does not name the protestors as SDS members, but the passage below describes a listing of demands that are nearly identical to those of the SDS. If the students were not SDS, the organization succeeded in chaining out their fantasy.

At 10:30 p.m. one of the students borrowed a bullhorn from the police and issued a list of “nonnegotiable demands.” The student demanded that:

- the war be stopped (apparently before all the students went home that night);
- the university abolish its ROTC program; and
- the National Guard be removed from the campus.

For good measure, the student also demanded that everyone’s tuition be reduced; that all future demands of the Black United Students, whatever they might be, be met; and the curfew be lifted in town (Gordon, 1995, online version).

Shortly after this speech, the law enforcement officers on scene issued the Ohio Riot Act and moved curfew from 1:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. This angered protestors, who began throwing rocks and cursing the Guardsmen.

The anger demonstrated by the students during the protests and riots of the May 4 weekend had been growing over the years. The rhetoric of the SDS established a level of emotion that they chained out to their audience. As their demands were not met and their rhetorical vision was rejected by those in authority, the members of the SDS changed the strength of their rhetoric and their methods of protest. No longer were they engaged in a struggle, but now it was war. The SDS was fighting for good and anyone against them was on the side of evil. This escalation had a significant impact on their own reality and that of the messages they spread to other students.

The fantasies of the SDS were not shared by everyone in Kent, Ohio. However, their idea of good versus evil and their desire to change the world had a tremendous effect on the events that played out in spring 1970 and the conversations that followed.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Future Research

There are many reasons to study the 1960s and 1970s. Culture was changing. Young people were less likely to embrace the traditions and way of life of their parents. No longer did some college students want to graduate and work a nine-to-five job for the rest of their lives. Music, television, movies, and fashion were all reflecting the new philosophy of freedom and choice in everything from jobs to love. While World War II brought Americans together, the Vietnam War was tearing the country apart. Trust in politicians and big business was sharply declining, as was the attendance at local churches. Civil rights was a hot button topic in every area of life. In some places in America, these changes may have been subtle if not for the spotlight brought by counterculture groups like the Students for a Democratic Society.

The SDS served to bring many of these issues to the forefront of the American community through word-of-mouth, rallies, protests, written publications, and, in later years, riots and bombings. Their style of persuasion was anything but reserved as they spread their message to students across the country.

### *Conclusions*

The purpose of this study is to discover evidence in response to three research questions. What was the world of reality of the rioters? Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality? What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters? The investigation into these research questions has involved a thorough examination of documents and speech transcripts of both the national SDS organization and the Kent, Ohio chapter. Hundreds of documents provided by the Kent State University library's May 4 Special Collection were reviewed and more than 50 documents became the focus of this thesis.

What was the world of reality of the rioters?

The world of reality of the rioters becomes clear when reading the SDS' publications. The passion and urgency in the message stands out, as does the finality of their thinking. Everything was black and white, and there were never any gray areas to any issue. The beliefs held by the SDS members were their reality. Everyone who didn't think like them was ignorant. They were right and everyone else was wrong.

Although often vague in their rationale, the SDS saw America in the following manner. The ruling class in the United States existed and set the standards for society. Every agency from education to law enforcement and from media to politics catered to the ruling class. A class system with unabashed racism was enforced at home and domination over third-world countries offering labor and resources was acceptable. The SDS leadership saw themselves as the heroes who were going to change American society for the better, one campus at a time. They were going to build an army to fight a war of oppression and free the world from the evil ruling class. The actions of the SDS were necessary to enlighten America to the oppression of blacks, factory workers, women, and people of third-world countries like Vietnam and Guatemala. Through this enlightenment, a new society would emerge.

The American system of capitalism would be destroyed and communism would be the replacement. The leaders of the SDS believed that communism was a more just economic and social system. Their idea of communism saw all individuals being treated equally, with equal pay and equal job opportunity. Even though communism has been proven to be corrupt, unjust and a detriment to all countries suffering under communist leadership, the SDS felt this economic system would cure the United States of imperialism and oppression. The SDS members believed

that if they influenced enough young people to join them in their demands of change to those in authority, that they had the power to reform the United States government, which had been fighting against communism for decades.

The SDS also had a vision for a new educational system, one where teachers and students were on the same level and learning together. There would be no formality in the classroom setting. The traditional method of earning a degree by completing a set structure of courses would be eliminated. Students could decide to learn about whatever they found interesting, not necessarily adhering to a degree plan, but exploring subjects of their choosing. The course selection would widen to include topics deemed enlightening, such as Zen Buddhism and Marxism. Upon graduation, young adults would follow their free will as opposed to being a slave to a job or a paycheck.

Were there peripheral factors from the SDS that contributed to the Kent State rioters' reality?

It was this rhetorical vision that influenced the reality of the rioters at Kent State. The Kent SDS chapter did not succeed in having their four demands met, but they did manage to cause great upheaval on the campus in the form of riots, violence, and disruption to everyday activities. The Kent SDS was not alone in their fantasy. They were influenced by the National SDS leaders and the members of the 300 other chapters of the organization. Regional travelers for the SDS made frequent visits to Kent to provide encouragement and resources for the Kent leadership. The Kent SDS produced flyers, newsletters, pamphlets and other printed publications on a regular basis and disseminated them across the campus. The members often held teach-ins, offered viewings of free documentary movies, visited the dorms to talk with

residents, and hosted open meetings to share their fantasies. The SDS generated a commotion wherever they gathered. It is possible that the students at a small college in rural Ohio found this exciting. The passion of the SDS and their seemingly informed messages caught the attention of hundreds of students. The SDS members gave the impression of an ingroup and anyone who wasn't in agreement was part of the outgroup. There existed a significant amount of peer pressure in the SDS' methods of recruitment. The members' call to "smash ROTC" and "fight the power" encouraged Kent State students to act in any means necessary to get the people in positions of authority to take notice. This can be seen in the four days of riots at Kent State and in the downtown streets of Kent, Ohio from May 1 through May 4, 1970. Speculation occurs as to whether or not the SDS leadership incited the riots, but it can be argued that their influence on the students over the past several years was demonstrated on those tumultuous days.

What were the rhetorical patterns used to convey the vision of the rioters?

To be able to influence the rioters at Kent State, the SDS leadership was sure to be very specific in their rhetorical patterns. Not only were a number of particular words used repeatedly, but often the same word was used multiple times in a paragraph, and even in the same sentence to convey strong emotion. The pattern of using the same words repeatedly demonstrates the members' level of passion for their causes and their anger that the demands were not being met. For example, in the Origins of Vietnam Policy document, the word imperialism appears seven times and in "The Last Hurrah," the SDS refers to police officers as "pigs" 16 times. Other words used continually include oppression, exploitation, struggle, fight, revolution, ruling class, and racist. These words paint a negative picture intended to make audiences feel like the SDS is fighting on the side of good and the government, educational system, military, and law enforcement are all grouped together on the side of evil. Not many people would want to be on

the side of racism and oppression toward the working class and black people. Not many students would want to feel like they were being channeled into a career that would make them miserable while bolstering a ruling class, which held all the riches and power in society. Young people entering the military would be less likely to want to fight in the Vietnam War if they thought the cause was not really about the spread of communism, but for the expansion of a ruling class. The rhetorical patterns of the SDS helped shape their fantasies, which were a negative perspective on the culture in America. These fantasies were chained out as reality, and many students were influenced by strong rhetoric. The SDS was able to recruit hundreds of students at Kent State University into their movement.

The success of the Students for a Democratic Society can be measured in varying ways. They did not see the work toward their four demands of the Kent State Administration come to fruition. The organization splintered off into factions, and the Weathermen, a more extreme counterculture group, took over the SDS leaving those dedicated to the original purposes behind. The Weathermen became the Weather Underground once their violent actions caused them to become targets of the FBI. Many of those individuals have come out of hiding and served what time in prison they were ordered. As stated before, though, at least two of the Weather Underground members are now professors at Universities in the United States. Although the original SDS is defunct, their legacy lives on, which may be viewed as a form of success. The organization is still studied, as evident in the research for this thesis. Additionally, there have been marginally successful efforts to revive the organization. The events of May 4 have been the subject of numerous books, articles, studies, and conversations over the past 45 years. Kent State University offers a special collection in their library for continued study of the events, as well as

a dedicated May 4 Visitors' Center. There does not seem to be an end to the speculation around the SDS and their actions.

If success is measured by the legacy left behind, the SDS was victorious. The organization earned a place in history by persistently promoting their rhetorical vision and influencing a generation to join their struggle. Members of the SDS, which totaled nearly 100,000 nationally, participated in lectures, rallies, protests and riots. They were shaped by their experiences. These members went on to graduate from college, start careers, and have families. Many of the former members may still hold the same beliefs and are conducting business, voting, and advocating in a manner consistent with the values of the SDS.

The reality of the fantasies of the SDS is debatable. The language they used and the stereotyping of groups of people, such as police officers, were strong. Their methods of activism are often criticized. The SDS leaders had strong beliefs and they felt urgent, visible movement was needed to convince others to accept their fantasies. This included marches, rallies, protests, and, when needed, violence. The SDS leadership believed they were fighting a war, and they wanted to win by any means necessary. Therefore, shouting profanities, throwing bricks and rocks, and physically fighting with the enemy was justified. One wonders if they would have been more successful in their demands at Kent State if they had been more dignified in their approach, but perhaps that success was small in comparison to what they achieved overall.

The SDS' mission was not entirely misinformed. They stood for equality for all men and women, fair wages and working conditions for the working class, and increased participation in decisions regarding campus life. These issues are still hot buttons today. Perhaps if the SDS had

not laid the groundwork for the students of today, the country would be experiencing a greater level of turmoil, such as what was seen in the late 1960s.

The SDS began as a group of people with good intentions for change, but unfortunately morphed into a much more unfocused, violent version of itself. Maurice Isserman (2007), a former SDS member who currently teaches history at Hamilton College, wrote “But in retrospect one thing is clear: The legacy that SDS left for future generations of American radicals is dark and complicated, a cautionary example of good intentions gone awry in the midst of a decade defined by tragic and unintended consequences” (p. 1).

The SDS members held four fantasies, which they chained out to one another and to future members. Using Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory to study more than 50 documents produced by the SDS, this thesis describes in detail the rhetorical vision held by the SDS. The main theme of the rhetorical vision centers on U. S. Imperialism and the existence of a ruling class. The three additional fantasies branch from this notion and include the belief that the higher education system was created to support the ruling class’ empire, the law enforcement agencies protect the ruling class by oppressing the black community and the working class, and the military helps spread U.S. imperialism to third-world countries whose resources are need to expand ruling class business.

The theme of U.S. imperialism and the covert actions of the universities, police, and military is woven throughout the SDS’ documents. The Kent SDS chapter uses these themes as reasons to create the four demands they make of the Kent State Administration. They adamantly believe that the abolishment of the campus ROTC program and the closures of the Law Enforcement School, the Liquid Crystals Institute, and the Northeast Ohio Crime Lab would

advance their cause and greatly hinder the oppression brought on by the ruling class. The national SDS believed success at Kent State University would cause a domino effect across the country leading to a full awareness of the American people and ultimately destruction to the capitalist system.

To be successful, it was imperative for the rhetorical vision of the SDS to be chained out to the rioters at Kent State University. The SDS needed the support of the students to create enough of a disturbance that people would take note. It was not enough for the SDS to gain the attention of the school administration. They wanted the media, the government officials and the American public to understand why they were fighting. The SDS movement needed to be so big that everyone in America, and possibly in other countries, knew who the SDS was and for what they stood.

The SDS achieved this goal on Monday, May 4, 1970, when four days of riots, violence, and chaos ended with the death of four students and injury to nine others. Hundreds of students were gathered that day, and their lives were changed forever.

### *Future Research*

This organization alone could provide subject matter for studies ranging from persuasion to terrorism. This study focused on the rhetorical vision of the Kent SDS chapter and the influence the members had on the May 4 weekend. While attempting to answer the three research questions proposed, many other questions came to the forefront, which could provide a foundation for study. Future research could span several areas of concentration. For example, interviews with former SDS leaders to discover if their viewpoints have changed over the years. At the time, the SDS' actions were often written off as a youth movement. Individuals of the



older generations believed the members of counterculture groups to be immature, spoiled, ignorant, and irresponsible. Many people felt the younger generation would “grow out of it,” and gain wisdom with age. Conducting interviews to gain understanding of the current values held by former SDS members and even their business and political positions would give insight into the counterculture-type of movements and their longevity.

Taking that study further, future research could look at the influence the SDS movements had on society as former members entered business and politics, and had families of their own. Did the SDS’ rhetorical vision influence a generation and help shape society throughout the past 40 years? A correlation could be drawn to several specific areas of society. In 1970, the civil rights movement was still gaining momentum. The SDS actively protested for the equality of all men and women and professed their belief that the educational system, law enforcement agencies and the military were all used to oppress the black community. Did the SDS’ support of the civil rights movement help shape member’s ideals and ultimately improve race relations in America?

A similar study could be conducted in regards to the country’s educational system. Many of the graduate students involved with SDS taught courses at the colleges while protesting their existence. Additionally, several leaders of the SDS, such as Bernardine Dorhn and Bill Ayers, went on to become tenured professors at their respective colleges. Their influence over students and their impact on the structure of the colleges may be why conservative groups have formed counter-counterculture groups. Organizations such as the Leadership Institute have formed to combat the leftist colleges’ practices by increasing the level of conservative activism. Multiple stories have peppered the news in recent months in regards to liberal colleges and the anti-conservatism taught by professors. Future studies could look at the correlation between the SDS rhetorical vision and the number of colleges now considered liberal institutions.

There may also be correlations to some of today's popular culture movements, such as evolution of organizations such as Black Lives Matter, the presidential run of socialist Bernie Sanders, and the passage of universal healthcare coverage. Many of the movements of today echo the same message the SDS was churning out decades ago. The influence of this organization, and others like it, may extend beyond the events of 1970.

An additional area of study could continue to analyze the rhetoric of the SDS, but in relation to contradictions. The members of the SDS were college students who wanted to tear down the educational system. At rallies, they chanted, "This is our school!," but their words and actions show that they wanted to destroy it. Documents refer to Kent State as a "thug school." During the protests and the riots leading up to and including the May 4 weekend, the members of the SDS made no qualms about damaging University property, as demonstrated in the burning of the ROTC building. If they were not proud of the education they were receiving and they felt the colleges and universities were "pawns for the ruling class," why did they continue to attend? Was it simply to avoid the draft? They could have reached the students in other ways instead of paying tuition to a school they despised. Instead, they continued to insult their own education.

Also contradictory was their rhetoric regarding soldiers. The SDS members were very clear in their descriptions of ROTC members, National Guardsmen and soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War, describing them as fighting for the wrong side and ignorant of the world. They just take orders. They're pigs and thugs just like law enforcement officers. However, the SDS publications also encourage a breakdown of barriers between themselves and the soldiers. They wanted to spread their message to their "brothers in uniform." This type of contradictory rhetoric may have been a factor in the SDS' demise.

Future research could also look at the SDS organization from a psychological standpoint. The founders of the national SDS office came together in 1962 to compose a manifesto for existing and future members to adopt. Research shows that these original members spent a great deal of time travelling both within the United States and to other countries. They spread their fantasy to hundreds of thousands of other people, encouraging unity, commune-living, and a separation from past traditions. The leaderships' tendency to shun people outside their circle and to focus solely on their movement could be classified as a cult, which is defined as a group with great devotion to a person, idea, object or movement that has beliefs regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Studies by Sears (1986) and Chanel and Chichilnisky (2009) have shown that college-age people are more susceptible to persuasion especially if they are fearful of retaliation or other negative consequences. The message of the SDS was so powerful and emotional that it may be possible that the members were able to strongly influence other young adults to join their cause even if they were not initially in agreement. Over time and through activism in the organization, members may have become more indoctrinated.

The Students for a Democratic Society has provided scholars with numerous aspects to study. The organization as a whole and the rhetoric and actions of the members will continue to fascinate researchers, especially as the country experiences new counterculture movements that are eerily similar to those of the past.

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