

A 'DTH' Special Report

Politics at UNC

Activism of late '60s sandwiched by calm of '50s and '70s at UNC

By MARK STINNEFORD
Staff Writer

May 6, 1970. A sea of student protesters filled the lawn between South Building and Wilson Library, their chants soon growing into a roar: "On Strike. Shut it down."

Later that day, more than 4,000 students flowed onto Franklin Street, forming a column of marchers that at one point stretched from Columbia Street to Spencer residence hall. Students at the front of the ranks carried coffins. A midnight march the night before attracted 2,000 students and ended on the lawn of UNC President William C. Friday.

UNC had been jarred by an incident several hundred miles away — the slaying of four students at Kent State University by National Guardsmen.

"These were middle-class college kids just like us (who were killed)," said Thomas Bello, student body president at the time of the protest. "If it could happen at Kent State, you felt it could happen here at UNC."

About 60 percent to 70 percent of the student body joined a strike on classes. Clenched fist symbols were spray-painted on campus buildings. The faculty voted not to join the strike but agreed not to punish students who did.

History professor George V. Taylor said the atmosphere produced a sense of intellectual excitement among students who decided to remain in his French Revolution class. The disturbances on campus had given students a new perspective on that turbulent period in French history.

"I was hard-pressed to answer their questions," Taylor said.

As strikers attempted to disrupt the history class by tossing leaflets through the doorway, students simply moved closer to the front of the room.

"I'm sure students who had never marched were out marching (after Kent State)," said Bello, now a teacher and a free-lance writer in Arlington, Va. "We were lucky enough to keep the lid on. If troops had come on campus, the situation might have exploded."

The protest over the Kent State

shootings was the culmination of a decade of sporadic unrest in Chapel Hill, a town known for its progressive attitude and liberal mindset. The years of heightened activism were sandwiched between eras of relative calm — the so-called "silent '50s" and the "me generation" of the 1970s and early 1980s.

The party raid was the most radical activity in which students of the 1950s were likely to be involved, said Hamilton Horton, 1952-53 president of the student body. Policies such as the U.S. involvement in the Korean conflict went largely unquestioned.

"We were still Southern and all that implies — pro-nation and jingoist," said Horton, a Winston-Salem lawyer.

Concerns of the era would be familiar to today's students, said Ron Levin of the Class of '55. "Students wanted to make good grades and get a good job with GE," said Levin, who now owns his own marketing firm in Greenville, S.C.

"The thing that bothered me was that my fellow students did not take chances," he said. "They played it safe."

An anti-segregation petition circulated by Levin in 1955 gained about 700 signatures, but an opposing petition was signed by three times as many students. Levin's fraternity brothers urged him not to make waves.

"I was an anomaly; it was almost as if I didn't belong in the period," Levin said.

But John Sanders, student body president in 1950-51, said the students of the '50s actively discussed issues such as war and the economy. There was considerable opposition to Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who led a long campaign to root out communists from public life. An anti-McCarthy rally held in 1954 drew 400 students. An April Fools' edition of *The Daily Tar Heel* in the mid-'50s featured a picture of McCarthy examining the rear end of a horse.

"UNC was not the kind of place you would expect his kind of demagoguery to get a lot of support," said Sanders, now director of the Institute of Government.

A few years later, the calm of Chapel Hill life was shaken by the civil rights demonstrations of the early 1960s. A

small group of students made themselves known in sit-ins and pickets at segregated restaurants, theatres and shops in the area. By the time the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, local police had made more than 700 arrests as a result of the demonstrations.

Gary Blanchard, *Daily Tar Heel* editor in 1964-65, described the Chapel Hill civil rights movement as being powered by a few students who simply got fed up with segregation.

"There was a determined minority of people who, like a religion, knew what was right and what wasn't," Blanchard said. "They knew not to take the crap anymore and hit the picket line."

But the demonstrations were probably shrugged off by much of the campus, said Blanchard, who is now a senior trainer in the Governor's Certified Public Manager Program in New Jersey.

"There was an awful lot of business as usual," he said. "The fraternities were still roaring on Saturday night."

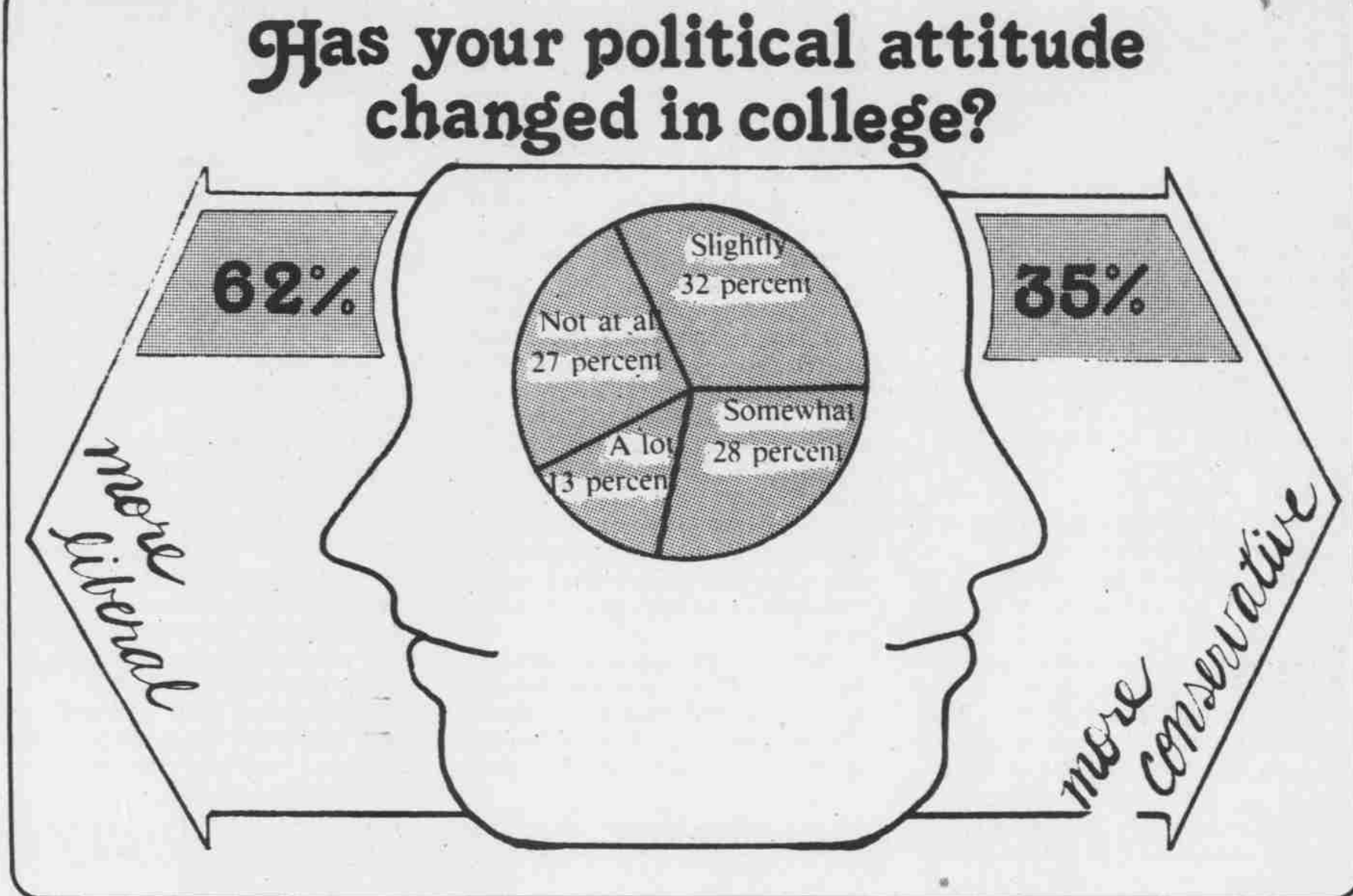
"There's no question that only a handful were out there (protesting) and that only a handful of a handful were out there in an active way."

For the civil rights protesters, the threat of violence loomed even larger than that of arrest. Students were beaten and doused with lye and ammonia during some of the more serious confrontations. In one instance, a waitress at the segregated Watt's Cafe urinated on a demonstrator. "They put their bodies on the line: people came after them," Blanchard said.

Later in the decade, student activists championed the cause of University employees. The Black Student Movement was the force behind a month-long strike by UNC cafeteria employees in 1969. The BSM organized a student boycott of University cafeterias and set up an alternate food service in Manning Hall.

Helmeted, club-carrying police closed the University's Lenoir Hall cafeteria after a group of 70 black and white students began overturning tables and throwing chairs in the building. When the cafeteria was reopened, state troopers flanked the entrances.

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On campuses nationwide

Student activism at a standstill

By KYLE MARSHALL
State and National Editor

When the Texas state legislature considered a tuition increase for the University of Texas earlier this year, about 700 students marched on the state capital in Austin to force lawmakers to reconsider. Eventually, the tuition hike was voted down, partly because of the intensive lobbying effort of the students.

Six months later, following the U.S. invasion of Grenada, students at Texas organized two demonstrations against the American action. Only a few people showed up.

The events at Texas underscore what college administrators and student leaders across the nation are saying: Today's students care most about the things that hit close to home — grades, getting a job after graduation and paying the bills. Moreover, political activism on campus is at a standstill, and few people expect to see a return to the protests of the 1960s and early 1970s.

According to a survey of UNC students conducted by *The Daily Tar Heel*, 56 percent of UNC students can be classified as "politically inactive." A measure of political activities showed that the most common method of showing interest in political affairs was registering to vote.

And in response to the question, "How concerned are you about being able to find a job after you graduate?" 51 percent said they were very concerned, while only 23 percent expressed no concern.

The current mood at campuses across the nation represents a shift in attitudes from the Vietnam era, when it seemed most students were getting involved in political causes. In the 1980s, the search for a job — and all the academic training that goes into it — has become the No. 1 priority for college students.

"It would take a large swing in the opposite direction to get political activism back to what it was during the late '60s," said Andy Smith, director of student activities at the University of Pittsburgh. "Generally, I would categorize activism at Pitt as being very calm, as it has been for the last several years."

The situation at Pitt probably is not much different from the trends in political activism at UNC, said Smith, who used to live in North Carolina.

"Not many students are willing to get involved in any type of political cause," said Mark Koide, student body president at Brown University. "They don't want to take a stand on either side of a political issue. It seems to be much the same here as it is across the country."

Tom Stafford, acting vice chancellor for student affairs at N.C. State University, said activism on the N.C. State campus has "virtually disappeared."

"I see very little sign of political activism. I've hardly heard a peep."

Though students may be unwilling to take an active role in any political event these days, there's no shortage of worldwide unrest that could arouse feelings at college campuses. Not only the invasion of Grenada, but also the bombing deaths of 239 U.S. Marines in Lebanon and the Marines' continued presence in the war-torn country, U.S. intervention in Central America, particularly Nicaragua and El Salvador, and deepening tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union all have been the focus of recent political debate, both at home and abroad.

Although few students at the University of Texas participated in the demonstrations against the Grenada invasion, that doesn't mean students weren't concerned, said Students' Association President Mitch Kreindler.

"I don't think they don't care. It's just that they're more concerned with their own affairs, rather than with getting involved in a political cause. But I think that's also true for society as a whole."

Similar scenes were reported at many campuses across the nation. At Kent State University, where National Guardsmen opened fire on Vietnam protesters in 1970 killing four students, only 30 people showed up for the Grenada protest in October.

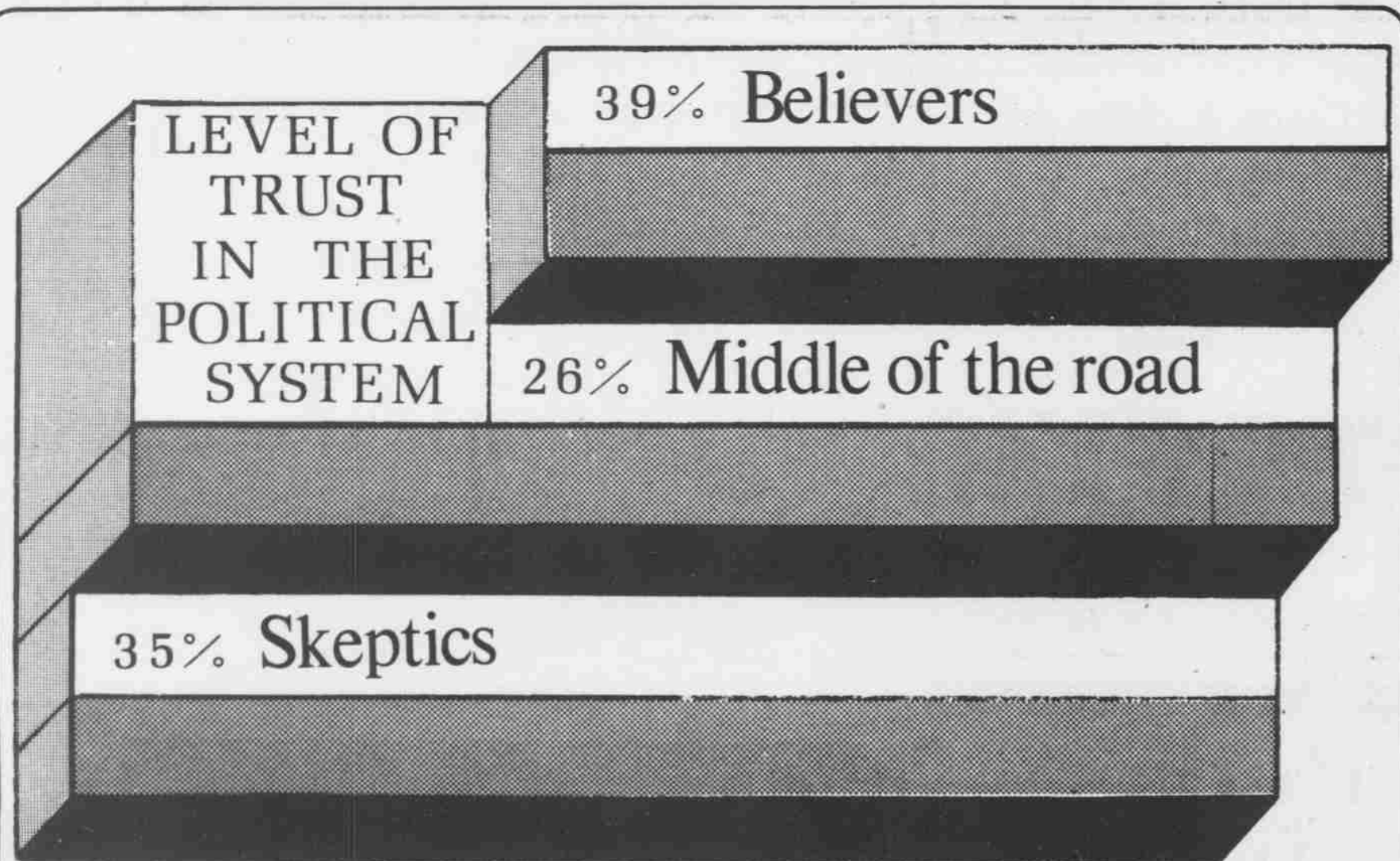
For the liberal student groups that organize protests, the question now is whether it is useful to try to motivate students into becoming involved politically.

"Recently, I've been encouraged by an increase in student interest in political issues," said Michigan Student Assembly member Tom Marx. Marx, a recent graduate of the University of Michigan, is now an employee of the MSA. He also keeps up his membership in the Progressive Student Network, a national organization, of liberal student activists.

"I used to think this was a dead campus. But now there seems to be a new awareness among students. They're voicing their concern over local issues and local implications of world events. Instead of saying 'What can I do that will affect national policy,' they're thinking local."

George Ward, an assistant professor in the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University, has studied political and social beliefs of college students. His conclusion is that students are more conservative than they used to be, more career-oriented and less willing to take strong stands on political issues. But that doesn't mean that students aren't aware of political events, he said.

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An index of how much students trusted government was derived by measuring their responses to three statements on the effectiveness of campus and federal government. Students were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with: University officials usually consider the welfare of the students before making a decision which affects them; the government is pretty much run by a few big interests; you can generally trust government in Washington to do what is right.

Poll

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higher level of knowledge about state newsmakers than those on a national level.

Eighty-three percent of the students could name Jesse Helms as one of the two U.S. senators from North Carolina. Fifty-eight percent could name both Helms and John East as the state's two senators. And 68 percent could identify Jimmy Green as North Carolina's lieutenant governor.

On the other hand, fewer people knew that George Schultz was the U.S. Secretary of State than knew that Christopher C. Fordham III was UNC's chancellor. And even fewer people could identify Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko than could identify Student Body President Kevin Monroe.

"More people probably know Helms because of the negative connotations associated with him, not so much because he's a senator from North Carolina," Monroe said.

Other results of the survey showed that students who classified themselves as liberals were more politically active than conservatives or moderates, with 61 percent of liberals being active. Also, non-Reagan supporters were more likely to be active than those who support Reagan. Half of the Reagan supporters were active compared to 37 percent of the non-Reagan supporters.

Students were defined as politically active if they engaged in at least three of the following activities talking to people to persuade them to vote for a particular candidate or issue; writing a letter to any publication or public official giving an opinion about something that should be done or changed; attending a political meeting, rally, dinner, or other such activity for a political party or candidate; attending a march, rally, or demonstration about a controversial issue; belonging to a special interest political group; and contributing money to a political group of any kind.

Almost half of male students were active, compared to 39 per-

cent of the females. Graduate students were more active than undergraduates, with two-thirds of the graduate students and 37 percent of the undergraduates falling into that category.

Out-of-state students were more active than students from North Carolina. More than half, or 55 percent, of the out-of-state students were politically active, compared to 38 percent of in-state students.

Survey results also showed that membership in a fraternity or sorority increased the chances of political activism among UNC students. Fifty-seven percent of all Greeks were active compared to 42 percent of non-Greeks.

"Greeks tend to be active in more than one thing, so it's not surprising that they are more politically active than other students," Cramer said.

The results of the survey suggested several reasons why students were politically knowledgeable but not politically active. One possibility is that students tend to use mainstream activities to achieve political goals. They attend political dinners rather than demonstrations, and they talk to friends about politics rather than joining special interest groups.

The survey also suggested that college no longer was seen as a place where political beliefs are challenged. Almost one-third of the students said their political attitudes had not changed since they came to college. Only 13 percent of the students said college had changed their attitudes a lot.

And while a majority of the students do not support Reagan, do believe that the government is run by a few big interests, and disagree that the federal government generally does what is right, they are satisfied with the way things are run on campus. More than 69 percent agreed that the UNC administration usually considered students' welfare.

More than half, or 51 percent, were concerned about finding a job after graduation, according to survey results. Twenty-five percent said they were somewhat concerned, and 23 percent said they were not worried at all.

