Students for a Democratic Society (Sds) Encyclopedia Article

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Students for a Democratic Society (Sds)

SDS was one of the largest and most militant organizations to oppose the Vietnam War. It grew from a small group of young socialists to an organization of over 100,000 members, with chapters on over 350 college campuses. The small Student League for Industrial Democracy became Students for a Democratic Society in 1960, and 1962 saw the publication of its Port Huron Statement, a manifesto critiquing American society and proposing student activism as a solution to the problems identified. The document was circulated widely, causing student interest in SDS to grow significantly.

In 1964, some SDS chapters organized demonstrations against the growing American involvement in Vietnam. As the war intensi-fied, so did SDS opposition, including attacks on ROTC programs, the occupying of campus buildings, and student strikes. Media coverage of these protest activities tended to focus not only on the most disruptive and violent acts, but also on the most radical SDS spokesmen. The coverage was to the group's disadvantage—it tended to attract the most politically extreme young people (thus radicalizing SDS even further), and it gave the impression to middle-class Americans that SDS consisted entirely of violent would-be revolutionaries.

In 1968, SDS participated in the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. SDS president Tom Hayden was one of the "Chicago Seven" who were later tried on federal charges of conspiracy to riot. In 1969, internal dissension caused SDS to self-destruct, leaving only a core of its most radicalized members, who soon began to call themselves the Weathermen.

Further Reading:

Gitlin, Todd. *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980.

Miller, James. *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago.* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. *SDS.* New York, Random House, 1973.