

THE QUAD

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MISSOURIAN

At the height of anti-war sentiment, the Quad was a center for dissent, demonstrations

Bill Wickersham, a former MU professor, recounts how he was arrested in front of thousands at an anti-Vietnam War protest in 1970.

Multimedia by **Sydney Miller**; text by **Lukas Udstuen**



May 11, 1970: Bill Wickersham is arrested along with about 30 other professors and students during the height of anti-Vietnam War protests in the United States. | Missourian archive photo

Listen | Bill Wickersham, a former parks and recreation professor, recounts the protest and his arrest.

Just as Bill Wickersham was about to administer a master's examination on May 8, 1970, a colleague rushed to him and urged him to head over to Jesse Hall.

"Your students are sitting in," he was told.

"I found them, yes indeed, sitting, blocking the chancellor's office," Wickersham said.

Days earlier, former university Chancellor John Schwada had threatened to fire sociology professors who voted to cancel classes in support of a student-led anti-war demonstration.

"Much of this started because the sociology professors — most of the Sociology Department, not all ... did dismiss classes," Wickersham said.

By that afternoon, the crowd grew to more than 2,000 students, becoming one of the largest student protests ever held on the Quad.

The previous week, President Richard Nixon announced the war in Vietnam would spread into Cambodia. Anger over the expansion of the war was further fueled when an anti-war protest at Kent State University in Ohio resulted in four student deaths and nine injuries.

On the night of what has come to be known as the "Kent State Massacre," protesters at MU painted "Kent State" on the base of two of the six Columns on the Quad, according to Wickersham's book, "Reflections of a University of Missouri Peace Activist."

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A brief history

Anti-war protests on the Quad

April 30, 1970: President Richard Nixon announces he is expanding the war in Vietnam into Cambodia.

May 1, 1970: About 500 students gather at noon at Kent State University for an anti-war rally, which turns violent and forces Kent Mayor Leroy Satrom to declare a state of emergency.

May 2, 1970: In the evening, Kent State students join in an impromptu march. An old ROTC building is set on fire, according to the May 4 Task Force at Kent State University.

May 3, 1970: Kent State demonstrators defy a curfew, and the Ohio National Guard fires tear gas from helicopters. Guardsmen use bayonets and clubs on some demonstrators.

May 4, 1970: "Kent State" is painted on the base of two of the six Columns on MU's Francis Quadrangle after the National Guard fired at students at Kent State, killing four.

May 6, 1970: Members of the MU Sociology Department vote 16-6 to cancel classes to give support to a student-proposed strike against Chancellor John Schwada.

May 8, 1970: Students protest a Board of Curators meeting; as many as 200 follow Schwada across campus and begin a "sit-in," which grows to 2,000.

May 9, 1970: More than 60,000 march on Washington, D.C., in an anti-war demonstration,

According to the book, at Friday morning's rally at Jesse Hall, students had four basic demands. Among them were that the MU administration take a position against the war. Students also demanded that MU stop punishing professors who had decided to strike and that amnesty be granted to all those arrested in peaceful protests.

The suggestion that the MU administration should take a moral stance on the war was later removed from the students' request, as reported by *The Maneater*.

"The unfair thing was to ask the chancellor to take a position, the position we wanted, on the war," Wickersham said, reflecting on the protest. "You do not do that in an academic institution. Unfortunately, that was one of the so-called demands."

Wickersham said the demonstration used a model of nonviolent protest, inspired by Thoreau, Gandhi and King.

"Months later, they would refer to this as the 'MU Riots,'" Wickersham said. "There was no such thing. We went to great lengths to make sure things did not get violent."

according to "Congress and the People" by Donald R. Wolfensberger.

May 11, 1970, 8 a.m.: On a rainy morning, Bill Wickersham, then an MU professor, begins to lead an anti-war protest.

10:30 a.m.: The protest grows to 500 students and faculty. Dean of Students Jack Matthews stands on the balcony of Jesse Hall and says any gathering of three or more persons is prohibited.

11:30 a.m.: The demonstration grows to more than 3,000 participants. A school bus with about 30 demonstrators is taken to Columbia police headquarters.

May 13, 1970: About 3,000 students assemble on Rollins Field (now Stankowski Field) to decide to accept or reject the "Joint Statement on Campus Problems," endorsed by two-thirds of the students.

April 23, 1973: The American Association of University Professors votes "unanimously to censure MU for its treatment of the seven sociology professors and Wickersham for the anti-war demonstrations in May 1970," according to "Reflections of a University of Missouri Peace Activist" by Wickersham.

— Lukas Udstuen

Sources: PBS, Kent State University, The Maneater, Digital History, University of Illinois, "Congress and The People," "Reflections of a University of Missouri Peace Activist."

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