

## Curriculum Materials: The 1970s & Violence at the University of New Mexico

<b>Curriculum Summary</b>	
Title	The 1970 Protests & Violence at the University of New Mexico
Photo/Images of Art to Use	Images available for download through curriculum
Content Areas	Historical Event, Photography
Subject	Documentary Photography, Protests, Vietnam War
Grade Level/Age	8 <sup>th</sup> /9 <sup>th</sup> /10 <sup>th</sup> /11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Resource Materials (Downloadable)	Photos (Zip file), lesson plan (included)
Objectives	Students will explore the events of the 1970 protests against the Vietnam war that occurred on the University of New Mexico Campus. They will learn about the context of the protests, and the sequence of events that led to an excessive display of police violence from the National Guard. They will be provided with photographs of the protests and be asked questions to encourage discussion and critical thinking.
Key Skills	discussion, critical thinking, visual literacy
Lesson Plan	A short history of the 1970 protests at the University of New Mexico is provided below. Teachers should feel free to use this as a lecture resource or draw from it in any way that they find useful. This text provides an overview of the chronology of events that happened on the UNM Campus and a brief review of the events at Kent State University and the broader state of protest around the Vietnam War. Photographs from the collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art provide additional visual information and help to frame questions about the role of documenting such events. While the events depicted are from 1970, the questions about protest, reactions to protest, and the role of documenting such events can be used as a basis for discussion about more recent events.
Cross-Curricular Connections	history (esp. state history), politics, art studies, social studies

Essential Questions	When is protest and different responses on behalf of the state used, and why? What is the value of documenting these events? Who decides what gets told as history, and what interests may decide that?
Classroom Materials Needed for Lesson Plan	N/A
Academic Vocabulary	Protest, Strike, Violence, Non-violent

**Summary:**

Protest, civil disobedience, war, and the right to a free press are all threads that are woven through the tapestry of United States history. This module uses samples from the New Mexico Museum of Art’s photography collection to tug on those threads through documentary photography. The images depict locations and events on the campus of the University of New Mexico in May of 1970 when protests against the Vietnam War began. This module explores the national events leading up to the protests on the UNM campus, the methods employed by the protesters, and the response brought to those protests.

**Content:**

**1970 Protests at the University of New Mexico**

In 1970, the Vietnam War was ongoing. Many viewed the war as an improper invasion of an independent country and a waste of American and civilian lives. In the United States, opposition to the war was especially widespread among the younger generation, as well as among progressives and civil rights advocates. When President Nixon ordered an invasion of Cambodia, on April 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970, it sparked a series of nationwide student protests, which grew into one of the largest protest movements in U.S. history. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970, student protests on the Kent State University campus ended in violence after the Ohio National Guard was called in. The Guard fired upon the protesters, killing four and injuring multiple people. This led to further outrage and action on behalf of the student protesters. On the same day, Jane Fonda, the actress and anti-war activist, came to speak at the University of New Mexico, advocating for peaceful protest against the war, and an all-student strike was called for, to protest both the war and the killings at Kent State, beginning May 6<sup>th</sup>.

Marches began to take place a day earlier, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, with around 250 students marching on the Air Force ROTC building and 75 occupying it. The question of calling in the national guard was raised by Gov. David Cargo in response to the occupation of the ROTC building, but the idea was rejected by University President Ferrel Heady. President Heady instructed students to leave the building by 6AM, May 6<sup>th</sup>, threatening arrest if they didn’t comply, and the students departed by the morning, ending the occupation peacefully and avoiding arrest.

The majority of the university administration opposed the May 6<sup>th</sup> strike, and President Heady initially refused to close down the campus in accordance with the strike leaders’ requests. Gov. Cargo issued a warning that if student protesters interrupted the Republican National Governor’s Conference being held in Albuquerque, he would have them “run out” by the National Guard. The goal of the movement was to force the administration and state government to take action against the war. A

notable moment on the first day involved nearly 800 students marching upon the anthropology lecture hall, blocking a biology exam from occurring. The strike was intended to be nonviolent, but it quickly escalated, with a stabbing breaking out over a dispute about the lowering of the American flag, and a later incident in which a man drove his car into a crowd of protesters, injuring four. The school administration closed the campus in response to the stabbing. A large group of strikers began occupying the student union shortly afterward the campus closure, occupying the union throughout May 7<sup>th</sup>. According to student newspapers at the time, strike leaders urged the protesters in the union building to remain nonviolent.

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, a group of fifteen student protesters traveled to Santa Fe to speak with Gov. Cargo regarding the strike and were able to extract the promise that the National Guard would not be called in unless there appeared to be a serious threat to life or property. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, a discussion was held among the University Regents regarding the occupation of the Student Union, with the decision being made that legal action should be taken to end the occupation, and the process to obtain an injunction began. On that same day, Gov. Cargo, following a request from Police Chief Martin Vigil, placed the National Guard on alert for potential action and gave Chief Vigil the authority to call out the Guard.

That day, President Heady visited the Union to request that the strikers comply with the court order. After debate, around 130 students decided to stay in the student union, while around 300 departed to march on downtown Albuquerque. Although the regents made the subsequent decision to allow the building to remain open until the 11<sup>th</sup> and to postpone any forced evacuation, in an apparent failure of communication between the university and the police, the city and state police moved to clear the Union on the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> in accordance with the court order. Chief Vigil also called in the National Guard to assist with this process. The police were the first to arrive, and 131 protesters were arrested in total. According to reports, there was no threat of violence, and the strikers did not resist arrest. However, shortly after the police arrived, the National Guard also arrived on campus.

While the police were arresting protesters, a crowd had gathered outside the union, a reportedly peaceful one that included news reporters, teachers, and uninvolved observers. Upon arrival, the National Guard set up a defensive line of bayonets, before rushing the crowd, stabbing those in their path. 10 people were injured in total, including Bill Norlander, a television reporter, Sonny Flowers, a student on crutches, Steve Sullivan, a student who was stabbed as he attempted to help Flowers, and Mary Borkless, a student photographer attempting to document the event. This show of force worked to both quickly clear the crowd, as well as dissuade protesters from continuing their activities.

Following these events, the university, the state government, and the police all faced a great deal of criticism. Calls were made for President Heady's removal, although he denied any knowledge of the National Guards' plan to come to the campus. The university re-opened shortly afterwards. Both the State Police and Chief Vigil defended the events that took place, with the police claiming that the actions were justified due to false reports of strikers possessing weapons. Several of the victims of the stabbings sued the state later in the year, but the case was dismissed due to the argument that the state was not liable for the actions of the National Guard.

### Discussion Questions for Students:

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- Why do people protest? Do protests work? Is there a better way to advocate for change? Has anyone here participated in a protest?
- Why do you think that the National Guard was called out to subdue the protests? Was it necessary? If it wasn't necessary, then what other reasons could there be for calling in the National Guard?
- In some of the photos you can see that pro-war protesters seem to be aligning themselves with a certain idea of America. Why do you think that they are doing this? What is the context and political value of this stance?
- In order for the photos that we see to exist, someone had to choose to take them in the middle of a hectic moment. Why do you think that whoever took these photos chose to do so? What value does a photo have in documenting moments like these? Should the photographer have intervened instead of taking the photo?
- When considering these photos, keep in mind that someone made a choice to take them in the way that they did. Think about the way that the photos are framed, or what perspective they are from. What message do we think that the person taking the photos was trying to get across?
- Have you heard about these protests before? If not, why do think you haven't heard about this?

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