



The exhibit, *The Vocal Majority: 1969*, is on display from Feb. 22 through May 31, 2023.

New Exhibit Offers Fresh Context for May 4, 1970

In 1969, at least 2 million Americans joined in nationwide protests against the Vietnam War, including Moratorium Day (Oct. 15), the March Against Death (Nov. 14) and the March on Washington (Nov. 15).

This spring, a temporary exhibit at the May 4 Visitors Center, *The Vocal Majority: 1969*, depicts the anti-war demonstrations that led to the events of May 4, 1970. It highlights an assortment of anti-war artifacts from that era, including posters, photos, videos and other memorabilia such as buttons and armbands.

“The title contradicts what President Nixon called a ‘vocal minority’ versus a ‘silent majority,’” says Skylar Wrisley, a graduate student in history who curated and wrote the exhibit. “Anti-war protesters believed they represented the majority of Americans, and they took to the streets of D.C., San Francisco, Kent and many other cities to show it.”

Wrisley intends the exhibit to provide additional context around the May 4 shootings and to remind people of their responsibility toward social change and the government’s obligation to follow the will of the people. Another goal was to find connections between the struggles of the late 1960s and those of the 21st century.

“These protesters [in 1969] learned that demonstrations are not sufficient on their own,” she says. “It takes mass action based on a commonly shared consciousness to create change.” She hopes the exhibit provides lessons for student activists today to “take from history, but then also implement it for their own cause.”

Wrisley researched the 1969 protests for a writing seminar last spring, and Lori Boes, MLIS ’11, interim director of the May 4 Visitors Center, encouraged her to turn it into an exhibit. To help with the design, they brought on Jen Goubeaux and Ariel Bradford, senior visual communication design majors.

After months of working on the exhibit, the students say they have a deeper understanding of what it means to work in a team, which included Liz Campion, May 4 archivist and assistant professor; Cindy Kristof, copyright and scholarly communication librarian; and Boes.

“I had a ton of support throughout the entire project, and I want to continue working in exhibit development and museum education,” Wrisley says. “I believe museums should advocate for social justice and promote cultural relevance. And I think the May 4 Visitors Center totally aligns with that.”

—Mateo Martin, senior public relations major from Youngstown, Ohio

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The exhibit includes photos and excerpts from articles that ran in newspapers and magazines in 1969, as well as posters, flags, armbands, buttons and other memorabilia from the anti-war protest movement.