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## Ramming Capitalism: Protest and Dissent at the University of Rhode Island, 1961-72

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# KEVIN HART (History, Political Science)

## **Ramming Capitalism: Protest and Dissent at the University of Rhode Island, 1961-72**

*Sponsor: Erik Loomis (History)*

The University of Rhode Island, like many other universities, is a fertile ground for the reproduction of human capital. It houses strong engineering, computer science, and pharmaceutical programs, all highly profitable fields. Though protest and resistance are not the norms on the URI campus today, this was not always the case. Wherever capital is reproduced, so is class struggle.

The 1960s saw a new wave of dissent and protest spread throughout the globe. One of the largest movements during this period was the student movement. University students became the vanguard of a “new left.” One that dissented from the old and archaic communist parties of the 1930s and 40s and embraced new and exciting ideas. This new left would even permeate through the often apolitical campus of the University of Rhode Island. The university would see its own organization form, the Students for Democratic Action (SDA). Like its parent organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the group took on issues surrounding racism, poverty, compulsory army reserve training, and the doctrine of In Loco Parentis. The SDA’s campaign against such issues was not an easy one, however. The group encountered stark resistance from the student population and a university administration headed by two critical presidents: Francis Horn and Werner Baum. By no means would the campus become a rallying place for all forms of dissent, but in many ways, this is what makes it an interesting case study. By examining protest and dissent at the University of Rhode Island during the 1960s, not only can another case study be added to the scholarship surrounding student protest, but also a picture of dissent at an average state university can be painted, something the literature has not been able to do properly thus far.