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“Peace Capital”: American Media's Coverage of May 1968 in Paris

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors
in History

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

Burlington, Vermont

April 17, 2015

Introduction

The crisis of May 1968 has been studied by historians frequently for numerous reasons. Many consider Paris during May to be one of the most important events to study in order to understand youth radicalism. Student and youth power surged during the 1960s all over the globe. But in Paris, the effects of this movement were magnified into a national crisis. The scope of May 1968 made its influence enormous, as much of the world was fixated on Paris and what would become of France. The American print media took a great interest in the crisis of May, as most front-pages were dominated by the events in Paris. Studying the depiction of May 1968 through the print media raises two major factors which are often studied in a much broader context.

Firstly, the print media's coverage of May 1968 provided an in-depth look at the media perception of youth radicalism. The student power movement in Paris was not a singular event, as many American universities were struggling with the same issues. Although the students considered themselves to be part of a global movement, the American media held a different opinion of the French students. The print media portrayed the French student radicals an isolated group without connections to American students. Many Americans feared what the domestic student movement was capable of and their fears were furthered by the reports coming from Paris. Accounts of riots and fights with police worried citizens that this could happen in the United States. The print media's depiction of Paris attempted to dispel this fear by carefully constructing an image of the French students as dangerous political radicals, which was often tied directly to communism; this was contrasted with depictions of American

students who were portrayed as misguided kids. The coverage of May 1968 elucidated the fears Americans had of radicalism and the media attempted to mitigate those fears through their presentation of the events.

The second important consideration in studying the American media's coverage of May 1968 was the American treatment of President Charles de Gaulle. Prior to May, de Gaulle was often portrayed as anti-American, since he frequently opposed US foreign policy. This negative perception of de Gaulle initially skewed his presentation during May. De Gaulle was frequently blamed during May for causing the crisis through his own negligence and inaction. As May drew to a close, the American print media was reporting that de Gaulle's reign was over. When President de Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly and announced new elections, the American media quickly changed their tune, and reported that de Gaulle had made a great stand against Communism and was an admirable fighter. With de Gaulle's poor record in the eyes of Americans, a large scale national crisis was not the type of coverage to remold his image. Although exiting the crisis of May 1968, de Gaulle's image in the American media was more favorable than before entering into the crisis.

Studying May 1968 through the lens of the American media provides a unique cross section of French and American history. Instead of approaching the crisis directly through student or strikers' accounts of the events, the American media's coverage of the events provides American perceptions of France and youth radicalism. The presentation of the crisis of May in the American media was not reflective of the actual events and was instead based upon

America's foreign policy against Communism. The coverage caters to the concerns of the American audience instead of providing a full picture of the crisis.

France and the United States Under President Charles de Gaulle

As the Fourth Republic collapsed, Charles de Gaulle reemerged into the political scene to take control of France and save the nation from a political mutiny. De Gaulle founded the Fifth Republic in 1958 taking place of Prime Minister until he was officially elected as President in late 1958.¹ De Gaulle's policies were directed to reassert France's status as a global power, which often flew in the face of American policy leading to a tense relationship between the two nations. One of President de Gaulle's first moves was to demand greater representation within the NATO command structure. This action was taken because de Gaulle thought the United States would not protect the interests of Europe. When his request was ignored he began the withdrawal of French forces from NATO; in February of 1959, the French Mediterranean Fleet was withdrawn to display de Gaulle's displeasure.² With no movement from the United States or Great Britain de Gaulle continued the withdrawal of French forces and demanded that U.S. nuclear weapons be removed from French territory. By 1963 the Atlantic Fleet was withdrawn from NATO. In 1969 de Gaulle announced France's total military disengagement from NATO.³ President de Gaulle did not want his military and foreign policy dictated by wishes of United States government, which was effectively running NATO.

¹ Edward Arnold, *De Gaulle and Twentieth Century France*, ed. Hugh Hough and John Horne (London: Hodder Headline Group, 1994), 71.

² Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Allied Command Structures in the New NATO* (National Defense University Press, 1997) 50.

³ Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Allied Command Structures in the New NATO* (National Defense University Press, 1997) 50.

In 1960, France created its first nuclear weapon, which provided defense against the Soviet Union.⁴ Acquiring nuclear capabilities allowed France to continue its withdrawal from NATO. The supposed supremacy of a nuclear defense emboldened de Gaulle, as he thought France was capable of defending its soil without the aid of The United States. De Gaulle stressed that national defense was “raison d’être” for the government.⁵ This was part of the justification for the ‘France first’ mindset.

Gaullism appeared at odds with American policy and this became very obvious in 1967 during the Six-Day War. Three days prior to the outbreak of the war, de Gaulle declared an arms embargo against Israel. This would end Franco-Israeli relations under de Gaulle which had been deteriorating since the Suez Crisis, prior to de Gaulle’s return to power. Before the break between the two nations, France had aided Israel to begin its nuclear program providing materials and blueprints.⁶ For the past decade, France had been a primary seller of military arms to Israel. De Gaulle’s break from Israel was masked as a response to the perceived aggression of Israel which he expressed to Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban on May 24th, “Don’t make war. You will be considered the aggressor by the world and by me. You will cause the Soviet Union to penetrate more deeply into the Middle East.”⁷ Behind the façade of creating peace de Gaulle’s primary reason for his move against Israel was to gain favor in the Arab world which was an important aspect of his foreign policy plan. The United States was

⁴ Jean-Mark Regnault, “France’ Search for Nuclear Test Sites, 1957-1963” *The Journal of Military History* 67 (Oct. 2003): 1223-1248.

⁵ Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 10.

⁶ Leonard S. Spector, *Nuclear Proliferation Today* (New York: A Vintage Original; 1984), 119-125.

⁷ Edward R. E. Sheehan, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East*, (New York: Reader’s Digest Press, 1976), 31.

opposed to this move because it left the United States to fill the void left by France's withdrawal. Though the arms embargo had little effect on the Israeli war effort because the United States supplied Israel with arms, the embargo did showcase a major divide between the foreign policy goals of the United States and France. Since President de Gaulle had taken power the two nations had been steadily drifting apart as de Gaulle favored building regional goodwill, which often flew in the face of American international policy.

Peace Talks

The Vietnam War furthered the division between France and the United States. The lack of cooperation between the two nations had led to an antagonistic view of de Gaulle's France in the American media. De Gaulle's criticism of America's involvement in Vietnam led him to be depicted as anti-American within the domestic media's coverage of France. The peace talks between Americans and the Vietnamese were scheduled to take place at the start of May in Paris. De Gaulle loomed as a dangerous specter that could potentially influence the outcome. This coverage of the peace talks directed many observers to initially misjudge the student conflict with the university. American coverage of the May 1968 crisis began with the media focused on Paris because of the peace talks, not the student protests.

Paris was a suitable location for the talks because it offered a safe environment for the Vietnamese, yet was still in the West. The *New York Times* noted that waiting to decide on Paris worked in favor of the United States, "It was worthwhile waiting, for other reasons. They believe hasty acceptance of Phnompenh or Warsaw would have meant negotiations for many

months in an unfriendly environment.”⁸ US officials saw Paris as a more hospitable environment than Warsaw or Phnom Penh which were capitals of communist nations. In the eyes of *The New York Times* the choice of Paris seemed like a success for American negotiators, as they would not have to work in an extremely hostile environment. The *Boston Globe* provided a more detailed report on how Paris was decided on as the location for the talks; it noted the United States had offered fifteen alternative locations which had all been rejected by North Vietnamese officials.⁹ None of these locations were the city of Paris, as the Vietnamese delegation finally offered it as a compromise. The *Boston Globe* reported that although it was not a top choice for the United States, it was still acceptable, “The President noted that France met his meeting place criteria as a country in which participants ‘should expect... fair and impartial treatment.’”¹⁰ This statement from President Johnson shows how the relationship with France had changed during the past decades. Instead of viewing France as a close ally, France had become a neutral nation in the eyes of the United States Government.

Nevertheless, a cautionary sentiment over the decision to host the talks in Paris was echoed by many news sources. *The Wall Street Journal* went so far as to state that France may perhaps be more favorable to the Vietnamese delegation. Reporter Ray Vicker noted that most of the “Red Vietnamese” officials had been educated in Paris and had grown to love the city. Vicker went on to write that Paris was place for Communists to hone their tricks, “In their formative years in Paris, the Communists may have polished their talent for diplomatic

⁸ “Peace Talks Set for Paris; A Role for de Gaulle Forecast by French,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1968, p. 1.

⁹ Tom Lambert, “U.S., Hanoi Agree to Talk in Paris: May 10th Meeting Stirs Cautious Hope,” *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰ Lambert, “U.S., Hanoi Agree to Talk in Paris,” *Boston Globe*, p. 1.

legerdemain here, a land where the art has long flourished.”¹¹ Here clear anti-French sentiment is present in the American media, as Vicker viewed Paris as incubator for leftist sentiment. He offered a summation of the French people, saying that they would be pulling for an American withdrawal from Vietnam. De Gaulle’s frequent jabs at America and that conception that, “anti-American demonstrations are so popular you can receive a half-dozen instruction books on starting one,” led the reader to think Paris was a dangerous place for American negotiations.¹² This article by Ray Vicker was published on May 6, only a couple days into student uprising in the Latin Quarter. The following month would come to prove Vicker correct as Paris succumbed to leftist student groups followed by a nationwide worker strike. Even though observers predicted it would hamper negotiations the real restraining factor was the delegation’s failure to see eye to eye.¹³

Aside from a fear of French citizens and their anti-American sentiments, the media in early May was wary of what influence de Gaulle could have over the peace talks. The past decade had shown that Gaullism was often at odds with American foreign policy goals and this was reflected by many in the American media. De Gaulle had repeatedly pressed for North Vietnam and The United States to come together to reach a peace agreement, as de Gaulle opposed the American presence in Vietnam.¹⁴ Many within the media worried that de Gaulle could potentially influence the peace agreements as seen in an article titled, “A Role for de Gaulle Forecast by French” published in the *New York Times*. In the piece observers noted that

¹¹ Ray Vicker, “Paris Is Viewed as More Congenial to Reds Than Americans for Vietnam Peace Talks,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 1968, p. 13.

¹² Vicker, “Paris Is Viewed as More Congenial to Reds,” *Wall Street Journal*, p. 13.

¹³ Darius Jhabvala, “Formal Peace Talks Will Begin Monday,” *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁴ “Relief, Optimism Greet Accord on Talk Site,” *Boston Globe*, May 4, 1968, p. 3.

they predicted de Gaulle would play a major role in reaching a settlement.¹⁵ The fear that the French would attempt to influence the talks led many media members to assume the student protests in early May were a direct result of the peace talks. The assumption that the French were violently anti-American shaped the initial coverage of the crisis of May 1968. Instead of May being considered as a domestic crisis the American media's coverage of the peace talks framed the civil unrest as an attack on American international interests. The conception of May 1968 as a significant international event by the American media would be present at the beginning and end of the crisis. However, the reasoning behind this would shift during the crisis.

The Events of May 1968

May 1968 would be remembered as a defining moment in the Fifth Republic's history. The events of May challenged de Gaulle's ability to lead the nation and exposed a vein of citizens who opposed Gaullism and culture it empowered. May 1968 was called 'a revolution' as millions of citizens attempted to topple de Gaulle's government. Over 11 million workers went on strike during May, which totaled over 20% of the population. Weeks of striking left the economy on the verge of collapse. Although the workers monopolized the government's attention at the time, May 1968 would also be remembered for its origins in the Sorbonne. A student uprising challenged the university administration, which ignited a firestorm of anti-government protests.

¹⁵ "Peace Talks Set for Paris; A Role for de Gaulle Forecast by French," *New York Times*, May 4, 1968, p. 1.

On May 2, 1968 the University of Paris located at Nanterre was shut down due to months of conflict between students and the administration. These issues were mainly related to the perceived failings of the university to adequately provide for the massive student population in Paris. Students desired more say in university policymaking and wanted classrooms that allowed discussion and interaction between professors and students. On March 22 students had occupied a university building to hold a discussion over issues afflicting modern French society; these issues were quite broad, spanning class discrimination to the bureaucratic control of the university system. One of the students, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who took part in the 'Movement of March 22', became a key figure in the student movement in May. The leftist radicals who orchestrated the events of March persistently fought the university administration by holding rallies on campus and defying university rules.¹⁶ The hostility between the radical students and the university eventually became too much as the University at Nanterre was closed in an attempt to remove the instigators. In response to the closure on May 3 students gathered at the University of the Sorbonne in Paris to protest. This student gathering also protested against the expulsion of the 'Nanterre Eight', a group of students charged with being the ringleaders of the student radicals.

After seeing the student response at the Sorbonne, the administration moved the police into Nanterre to remove radicals from the university, completing the shutdown of the university. The Sorbonne was quickly occupied by the police as a measure to prevent protests from getting out of hand and to protect university property. This ultimately failed, as on May 6 hundreds of students clashed with the police in the center of Paris after harassment and large-

¹⁶ Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), 62.

scale arrests of students. This police action drew the attention of the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF), which joined with the university teachers union to march on the Sorbonne in protest of the police invasion. This quickly expanded the demonstration making it more visible to both the foreign and domestic media outlets. Over 20,000 students, teachers and sympathizers marched on the Sorbonne and were met with violent police resistance.¹⁷ Upon sight of the marchers the police charged them with batons beating them back, leading to widespread conflict throughout central Paris. Marchers dug up paving stones and hurled them at police along with improvised gas bombs; in response, the police brought out tear gas and forcibly shut down major parts of central Paris. Barricades were erected in the streets and many noted that Paris had not looked this bad since the war, "Some policemen described the street fighting as the worst since the liberation of Paris in 1944."¹⁸ The violence only subsided for the night as marchers returned on May 7 in greater force and were met again with violent police resistance. Demonstrators began a running battle with police throughout the small streets of the Latin Quarter around the Sorbonne.

The demands of the teachers and students were threefold. They wanted the criminal charges levied against the students to be dropped, they wanted the police to cease their occupation of the universities, and they wanted the administration to reopen both the Sorbonne and Nanterre. After a couple days of unsuccessful negotiations, another major march was scheduled on May 10 that would take the marchers to the Sorbonne even though it was occupied. The CRS, riot police, were waiting for them. This confrontation led to fortifications to

¹⁷ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 128.

¹⁸ Lloyd Garrison, "Students in Paris Battle the Police: Scores Injured as Radicals Riot Over Drive to Win More Control in Schools," *New York Times*, May 7, 1968, p. 1.

be made right outside of the Sorbonne.¹⁹ At 2:00 am the CRS attacked these fortifications. The fighting lasted until dawn resulting in hundreds of injuries and arrests. The events of the early morning were spread over radio broadcasts and televisions in the morning, showing the destruction and violence which occurred during the night. Rumors that the police might have instigated the violence through undercover 'provocateurs' generated support for the students.²⁰ All of the bad publicity that surrounded the CRS caused many leftist unions to come out against the government, including the CGT and CGT-FO. In response to the events of May 10, these leftist unions called a one-day solidarity strike on May 13. The CGT saw the unrest stirred up by the students as a moment to press their own agenda as the government was flustered by the students.²¹

On May 13, over a million French citizens marched through the streets of Paris in protest of the violence exhibited by the CRS against the student marchers. Unlike the previous marches, the police stayed out of sight and out of the way. Prime Minister Georges Pompidou personally announced that the Sorbonne would be reopened and student prisoners would be released in hopes this would calm the crisis and restore order to the Latin Quarter. This appeared to be the end of the civic strife as the demands laid forth by the students had been met. Ultimately, this was not the case as the protesters in fact became emboldened by their victory. Students occupied the Sorbonne quickly after it was reopened in defiance of the administration which had attempted to forcibly lock them out by force.

¹⁹ Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (London: Berghahn Books, 2004), 96.

²⁰ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 142.

²¹ Seidman, *Imaginary Revolution*, 118.

After the occupation of the Sorbonne, the focus of the May movement shifted from students to workers. Starting on May 14, sit-down strikes began all over France with the workers locking management out of factories. By May 18 over two million workers were on strike and the following week saw the number rise to over ten million workers, which totaled over two thirds of the French working class.²² Unlike the strike on May 13, these were not sanctioned by workers' unions. These wildcat strikes left the unions in an awkward position since the goals of the striking workers were not shared by the unions. When the CGT initially accepted an offer from the government, which gave a pay increase and a rise in the minimum wage it was refused by the striking workers. The CGT's actions showcased what the workers thought was a problem with the unions, as they too willingly compromised in order to cater to the government and businesses instead of representing their constituents. Instead of a simple wage increase, the striking workers wanted political reform. This change ranged from greater workers' rights to a call for de Gaulle to step down from the presidency.

In the last days of May it seemed quite clear that the workers were not willing to accept the wage increases continually offered by the government and accepted by the unions. Without many options President de Gaulle left the country in secrecy to meet with General Jacques Massu in Baden-Baden, Germany.²³ At this meeting de Gaulle was reassured that he had military backing if it was necessary to reestablish order. Meanwhile in Paris many thought de Gaulle was preparing to resign and that the revolution had succeeded. On the contrary de Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly and called for new elections to be held on June 23,

²² Seidman, *Imaginary Revolution*, 172.

²³ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 198.

affirming he would not be bullied out of office. This announcement rallied Gaullist supporters to march down the Champ-Élysées in support of de Gaulle and the government. In his announcement, de Gaulle threatened a state of national emergency if things were not returned to a state of normalcy. This threat was backed up with the presence of the military on the edges of Paris. De Gaulle had backed the leftists into a corner, by leaving them in control of their demise. Either they could succumb to an electoral defeat, or a violent military defeat.

The revolution was effectively over on May 31, as the CGT relaxed their political demands and became willing to negotiate labor settlements with the government. Although revolutionary students still held the Sorbonne and rallied to support pockets of striking workers, the widespread struggle was over. The end of the general strike allowed the CGT to focus on branches of labor and negotiate deals to get workers back on the job. By June 5, strikes were almost at an end with the railways, gas, electricity and coal mines reopening.²⁴ With most of the striking workers back on their jobs only a few pockets of strikers remained. These last holdouts were addressed through violent takeovers by the CRS. At a Peugeot factory in Sochaux, two workers were killed on June 12, when workers were fired upon by government strike breaking forces.²⁵ In response the CGT only offered a token strike as the union had clearly moved past the large scale striking and was instead turning to the upcoming election. The Sorbonne was retaken by police on June 16 and the student occupation along with the crisis was officially over.

The Students' Revolution May 2-May 13

²⁴ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 204.

²⁵ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 209.

The activity of leftist student groups began the crisis of May 1968, and they were initially singled out by the American media as dangerous instigators. The violence which began on May 6 drew the attention of most major print news outlets. The early coverage focused heavily on the violence in the streets. What emerged from the reports were two different views of the students. The most common view was that these students posed a dangerous leftist threat to France. On the flipside a few outlets passed the students off as harmless demonstrators.

The *Chicago Tribune* gave a detailed account of the action in the Latin Quarter noting the multiple starts and stops in the fighting. The organization of the students seemed a surprise to the *Tribune* writer as, "Student leaders directed attacks and withdrawals with whistle calls. Roving student lookouts on motorcycles reported on the latest police movements."²⁶ This piece titled "Students, Cops Clash in Paris" seemed to equate the two foes as equals. The students utilized paving stones and improvised gasoline bombs, and in response the police fired tear gas grenades in an attempt to disperse the students. The *Chicago Tribune* did not cover the motives behind the students' actions; it only provided one sentence about the demonstrators protesting the arrest of their leaders. The focus of the article depicts the Latin Quarter as a place of civic strife caused by leftist students.

The distinct organization of the demonstrators alarmed some reporters who thought that it symbolized a greater danger behind the student movement, "At the heart of the rioting," wrote the report for *The Christian Science Monitor*, "have been sinister signs of expert organization and agitation. French observers call this motivation 'political,' meaning

²⁶ "Students, Cops Clash in Paris," *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1968, p. 15.

Communist.”²⁷ This comment shows the immediate jump Americans had become accustomed to making between radical students and communism. Although the Parisian students were leftist, they associated themselves as members of the New Left who held anti-authoritarian Marxist ideas. Obviously this distinction did not matter to the observer as most leftists were thought of as dangerous Communists during this period. Later in the article the author would tie the student demonstrations taking place in the Sorbonne as a response to the Vietnam peace talks taking place in Paris. Though the students were politically interested in Vietnam, it was not a major issue leading to the conflict between students and the police. University policy was the primary issue at stake with the students, this however was not conveyed clearly in the coverage, “The Paris disorders are described as the worst in the last quarter century. They had their beginnings in a student quarrel over Vietnam.”²⁸ This statement does not accurately describe the student movement and it clearly is intended to alert Americans that these students pose a threat to America’s involvement in Vietnam. The coverage of the peace talks had led reporters to instantly assume that any civil unrest in Paris was the result of anti-American activists. Paris and de Gaulle were perceived to be a threat to America’s negotiations with the Vietnamese. The rapid jump the media made between the student protest and the peace talks signaled how negative the perception of de Gaulle’s France was in the eyes of the American media.

Aside from endangering the Vietnam peace talks, many media accounts of the student riots in early May highlighted how a sliver of revolutionary students were endangering the work

²⁷ Carlyle Morgan, “Student riots blur Paris Vietnam role: Gaullists criticized Examination period Leaders arrested,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 1968, p. 2.

²⁸ Morgan, “Student riots blur Paris Vietnam role,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 1968, p. 2.

of the rest of the student body. *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that many students actually opposed the actions of the leftist revolutionaries, “Many of the 35,000 students enrolled there express disgust with the violence. They regard it as hurting the chances of all students in the examinations. They also say it is directed against a university which provides scholarships, cheap meals, and other aid to needy students.”²⁹ Depicting the demonstrators as disconnected from the rest of the student body was an effective manner of portraying ‘good’ students and ‘bad’ students. By using such a large number it makes the revolutionaries seem small in the greater student population. Even for their small size the *New York Times* shows the effect they had on the university population, “At the school, about 800 leftist students succeeded in paralyzing a campus with a body of more than 11,000.”³⁰ The print media’s early portrayal of the protesters wanted to depict them as dangerous bad eggs with ties to Communism.

Not all media outlets choose to give a superficial overview of the students’ motives. The *New York Times* acknowledged the students’ affiliation with the New Left, branding them as a mix of socialists, anarchists and Marxists who admired Che Guevara.³¹ What the *NYT* actually did unlike most other newspapers was acknowledge the actual goals of the radicals, “The New Left students... are demonstrating for greater student control of the university administration and, in general, the violent overthrow of the ‘capitalist establishment.’”³² Although the depiction was accurate the *NYT* focused heavily on how power hungry the students were,

²⁹ Morgan, “Student riots blur Paris Vietnam role,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 1968, p. 2.

³⁰ Lloyd Garrison, “Students in Paris Battle the Police: Scores Injured as Radicals Riot Over Drive to Win More Control in Schools,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1968, p. 1.

³¹ Garrison, “Students in Paris Battle the Police,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1968, p. 1.

³² Garrison, “Students in Paris Battle the Police,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1968, p. 1.

instead of simply acknowledging their desire for greater student representation within the university system. The radicals' supposed desire for the "violent overthrow of the capitalist establishment" was a clear link between the students in Paris and the Kremlin. Any leftist political activity seemed to be tied to Moscow even if radical leaders like Cohn-Bendit detested French Communists which he referred to as "Stalinist swine".³³

Even though much of the coverage of Paris was dominated by the image of the dangerous leftist student, it was not the only depiction of the radicals in Paris. The *Boston Globe* described the students as being repeatedly attacked by the police, instead of waging a running battle between rioters and police. The *Globe* did not give much coverage to Paris, as its story on the capital was tucked into the "Around the World" section, but it did depict the students as meek victims of police brutality, "As they were bombarded with tear gas grenades, the students, at least half of them mini-skirted girls, replied with bricks, cobblestones firecrackers and chairs."³⁴ The feminization of the radicals reflected a lack of respect for the student protesters. Describing the demonstrators as, "mini-skirted girls" detracted from the image of a real political radical. The *Boston Globe's* initial coverage of the events seemed to reflect that it did not think much would come of the student riots. This type of coverage seemed to have been an exception as almost all other outlets seemed more concerned about what the radicals were doing. The image of the dangerous Communist radical was the most common depiction of the students in Paris as they fought with the police in the first week of May.

³³ Roger Ricklefs, "Spirit of 'Participation,' French-Style," *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1968, p. 14.

³⁴ "Around The World: Rioting In Paris," *Boston Globe*, May 7, 1968, p. 9.

The earliest depictions of the radical students in the American media were not highly surprising as Cold War tensions and the domestic anti-war movement had led many Americans to worry about radical youths and their affinity for far-left politics. By the second week of May the media's views on Paris of the media began to shift away from a criticism of the students and instead onto de Gaulle's government. Radical students were not a new phenomenon as multiple American universities, like Berkeley and Columbia had previously dealt with radical student factions. In April of 1968 a group of students had occupied an administrative building at Columbia University. These students barricaded themselves in the dean's office in protest of university policy, much like what was to come at the Sorbonne. The student activity in Paris was not even unique to Europe as the *Boston Globe* noted, "Student demands are the old familiar list, perhaps with more grievances and reason in France than many other places in Europe."³⁵ Once the initial uproar passed and the ties to the Vietnam peace talks were severed, the media viewed the protests as something which could have been predicted following the pattern seen throughout Western democracies. Outlets like the *New York Times* were quick to attack the government's denial that these students were somehow linked to Berlin, Berkeley and Columbia:

The Government's first reaction was summed up by one of President de Gaulle's most dedicated lieutenants, 42-year old Alain Peyrefitte, the Minister of Education. To Mr. Peyrefitte, the violence was the work of a mere handful of 'nihilists' and 'troublemakers' and it had nothing to do with similar student uprisings that have recently swept Europe and the United States.

He was mistaken on both counts.

"The Americans have had their Berkeley, the Germans have had their Berlin," commented one student as he dug up paving stones on the

³⁵ "France Blames Peking As Youth Riots Soar," *Boston Globe*, May 12, 1968, p. 1.

Boulevard St. Germain, his eyes streaming from the pall of tear gas.
 “And now,” he declared triumphantly, “you can add Paris to the list.”³⁶

The media wanted to link the student activities in Paris with those occurring elsewhere in the West. The linkages made it seem that de Gaulle was not going through anything unique and that other nations had previously addressed similar issues. The *Boston Globe* mocked de Gaulle for his inability to provide a “Peace Capital” for the Vietnam talks, “What started out as student demonstrations of the kind which almost every big city in Europe has been experiencing now had erupted into a highly embarrassing spectacle for the ‘peace capital.’”³⁷ President de Gaulle had openly criticized the American war in Vietnam, calling for peace in the region. In response, the media was quick to point out de Gaulle’s failure to make peace in his own nation while he criticized the United States for dragging out the war in Vietnam.

Amidst the intensifying violence reports began to surface, of what was motivating the radicals. This was highly intriguing for the American media, who were hungry for a link between Vietnam and the student movement. Reports began to surface that the French government was accusing Red China of instigating the civil unrest through foreign agents among the student radicals. Many major outlets picked up on this story giving it significant coverage. However, the American print media did not share the same assessment of the situation as the French government. Reports dismissed these conspiratorial views that Peking was attempting to disrupt the peace. Instead they shifted the blame for the events onto the government’s inaction. Articles titled “France Blames Peking” made it clear that this opinion was only held by

³⁶ Lloyd Garrison, “French Students: They Take to the Streets,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1968, p. E2.

³⁷ “France Blames Peking As Youth Riots Soar,” *Boston Globe*, May 12, 1968, p. 1.

the French government. American media reported that these views were not shared by foreign observers or the students.³⁸ Showcasing the French government's inability to control its students and searching for an exterior instigator was a slight at de Gaulle. Months prior de Gaulle had dubbed Paris as the 'peace capital'; but in the first weeks of May he and his government seemed unable to deal with the same issue numerous other Western nations had previously resolved.

In the second week of the crisis more attention was given to the students' demands across most US news outlets. Instead of summarizing the students as battling against the university administration, outlets begin to look at the facts behind the students' cries for change. The *New York Times* linked the Parisian students' demands to those of American students, "Like their student power counterparts in the United States, they want far more say in the making of day to day university policy. They want an end to intolerable over-crowding of classrooms. They want to abolish the policy of all-or-nothing year-end exams, which can make or break student's careers."³⁹ The listing of individual demands made the students appear as reasonable critics, as their grievances seemed legitimate. Aside from listing student demands the education system was reviewed by some reporters who looked at the facts of the situation, "While enrollment in universities has more than trebled since the war, construction has not kept pace. Students are said to resent not only overcrowding but also many teaching practices that date from the 19th century."⁴⁰ This gave further credence to the students' calls for reform, as the university system appeared out of touch with the modernizing nation. This was a

³⁸ Lloyd Garrison, "Students backed by French Unions: 3 Biggest Federations Call 24-Hour Strike Tomorrow -- Paris Riot Toll Heavy French Strike Called to Back Students," *New York Times*, May 12, 1968, p. 1.

³⁹ Lloyd Garrison, "French Students: They Take to the Streets," *New York Times*, May 12, 1968, p. E2.

⁴⁰ Lloyd Garrison, "Students backed by French Unions," *New York Times*, May 12, 1968, p. 1.

complete flip from the previous week's coverage which reported that the protesting students were in fact out of touch with the majority of the student body. This reversal was due to the domestic support the students received once the story picked up steam. As moderate or conservative citizens gave support to the students it became clear to American observers that this was not simply a radical fringe movement. The shift away from the coverage of the peace talks made the American media focus on the domestic implications of the crisis as it became clear that the student movement was not an anti-American event.

The presence of major union support was another aspect which shifted the attitudes of American media. In response to the police violence against the students many unions scheduled a one day strike. The teachers sided with the students and showed support with the presence of the Federation of National Education (FEN). The support of the teachers' union meant that almost all classrooms in France were empty on Monday May 13. The widespread call for change amongst the French populace was reflected in the reports coming out of American observers in France. No longer were the radical students a small sliver in opposition to the education system. Now the Minister of Education Peyrefitte appeared as a holdout to change being called for by the majority of those involved in the education system.

The shifting views on the students would also lead to a change in the way the police and CRS were portrayed in the American media. Previously, the police had combatted radical students to maintain order in Paris. This was reflected by the detailed coverage of the students' guerilla tactics in the first week of May; the use of improvised weapons and firebombs against the police made the students appear as a real threat to civil society. In the second week the

police appeared to have become the problem in Paris. No longer were they restoring order, but instead repressing citizens, “The authorities lost their nerve and closed down the departments [the Sorbonne and Nanterre]. From then on it was a chain reaction... These students were still a minority: the situation was not yet out of control. But once again the authorities opted for repression.”⁴¹ This piece by the *Boston Globe* placed the blame for the situation in Paris on the police and thus on de Gaulle. The police’s heavy handedness did not deter the radicals and instead drew moderates to their side. Repression brought very negative connotations to the police who were not maintaining order, but instead inciting violence.

Initially the events of May were categorized as a leftist scare tactic to interfere with the Vietnam peace talks. Many in the American media agreed with this perspective and reported the events as if the student protests were a direct result of American involvement. By the second week of the crisis the linkages between the peace talks and the student movement were dropped in favor of a pro-student and anti-government based coverage. In spite of the shift, American observers were still wary of the student movement and the ramifications it could have within the United States. The favorable coverage of the students seemed to be more anti-government than pro student, as the blame for the crisis was being shifted away from the students onto de Gaulle’s government. This anti-government focus highlighted the reservations the media had about student activism.

Comparisons between American and French Students

⁴¹ Marueen McConville, “Paris Students Discover Power,” *Boston Globe*, May 12, 1968, p. 74.

During the continued coverage of May numerous commentators linked French student activity with American students. These links were also shared by French students who acknowledged that they were part of a larger phenomenon of youth unrest.⁴² American commentators were not so quick to group the students as they argued there were fundamental differences between French and American students. These differences were numerous as some commentators argued that the flaws in the French education system had led to such a violent and strong outburst. Others thought that the issue of race made the student power movement in the United States unique from Europe's student movement. Many different views of the students existed but most observers shared the idea that what was occurring in France because of the student movement could not occur in the United States.

Fears over the possibility of a large-scale student movement were present in America as only a month prior students had occupied administrative buildings at Columbia University in protest of university policy.⁴³ Beside Columbia, a news report entitled, "Turmoil around the World" in the *Boston Globe* published on June 2, listed six American universities that had dealt in the past month with or were still dealing with student radicals.⁴⁴ Berkeley and Columbia did not seem like isolated incidents in the American media during 1968 as the American student movement was present all over the nation. Internationally the American media reported on multiple large-scale student uprisings all over the globe. In Tokyo students prevented Prime Minister Eisaku Sato from leaving on a diplomatic trip to Saigon in protest of the war in Vietnam. This wave of radicalism extended to Madrid, Bonn, and Berlin as it seemed no nation

⁴² Lloyd Garrison, "French Students: They Take to the Streets," *New York Times*, May 12, 1968, p. E2.

⁴³ Sylvan Fox, "1,000 Police Act to Oust Students from Five Buildings at Columbia; Move in at University's Request: Mediation Fails," *New York Times*, April 30, 1968, p. 1.

⁴⁴ "Turmoil around the World: Columbia University," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1968, p. A5.

was immune to the power of youth radicalism.⁴⁵ The most concerning report was that in Italy demonstrations in support of the French cause had caused similar clashes between demonstrators and the police. The perception that a domestic crisis could spread from one nation to another through the international student power movement worried many observers.

A method the media used to differentiate American students from international students was to focus on the issue of race. Reports were very careful to illustrate how American universities were dealing with students who were affiliated with civil rights, not international anarchy. The description of the Boston University incident illustrated the focus of the students:

Black students stage blockade in administration building in defiance of college officials chaining off doors of building. Their take-over was to dramatize their demands for stepped-up scholarship and admission plans for Negro students. April, 24 1968. Several hundred students involved.⁴⁶

The issue that caused this student uprising was drastically different from those which caused the May crisis. This account of Boston seems tame when compared to the description of Paris:

Hundreds of thousands of protesters against the de Gaulle regime surged through the heart of the city May 13, 1968, in the climax of a day of general strike and demonstrations across France. Workers, students, people of all ages and classes marched amid chant of "de Gaulle Assassin!"⁴⁷

These two stories were situated right beside each other on the newspaper page and asked the reader to make a comparison between the two. Clearly the incident at Boston University seems trivial when compared to Paris. Its size and scope are miniscule when compared to, "hundreds of thousands of protesters against the de Gaulle regime." The issues were distinct as well, in

⁴⁵ "Turmoil around the World: Columbia University," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1968, p. A5.

⁴⁶ "Turmoil around the World: Columbia University," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1968, p. A5.

⁴⁷ "Turmoil around the World: Columbia University," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1968, p. A5.

Boston the issue of racial advancement is the reasoning behind the student protest, while in Paris the demonstrators were calling for the President to be removed. From a causal reader's perspective it would be difficult to link these two stories as they appeared so drastically different. Even though both uprisings were caused by the student power movement, the domestic issues at play in the United States seemed much less significant in comparison to the crisis in France.

Blaming the French education system was another method observers used to demonstrate that French and American students were not alike. At the root of the student uprising in early May was a conflict between the students and the university. Reporters honed in on that fact and used it as their justification behind the large-scale movement. *Time* magazine published an article in early June titled "Education: French Students: Far From Columbia" which addressed the major difference between the French and American university systems. The article provided harsh depictions of student life in Paris, unlike anything experienced by American students:

"Nobody cares about the students here," says Mary Jane Overall, 20, an American University coed who is studying international relations at Paris' Institut d'Etudes Politiques. "The French live in the past, and the kids are expected to respect the old traditions. A boy I know rents a room so small that it just has a bed, a window, a door and a faucet. When he needs a desk, he sits on the bed and holds a board on his knee. There is none of the 'Yay, yay, let's go to the frat house' stuff. You walk and you talk, and you look at things, and you talk."⁴⁸

The image *Time* presents of the French student was of a neglected member of society. The description of the student's room was akin to a prison cell, not an educational setting. This harsh depiction gives a great deal of credence to the French students, as they should expect

⁴⁸ "Education: French Students: Far from Columbia," *Time*, July 5, 1968.

better from their government. The fact that only 72% of students could get a meal plan because the budget was not large enough made it seem like France had severely neglected the Sorbonne.⁴⁹ The article went on to compare the student makeup at French universities, displaying that it was reinforcing major class divides:

Elite Institutions. In their rallies, students often argue the necessity of increasing the percentage of university enrollment drawn from the lower economic and social levels. Today barely one student in ten comes from the working class, and the students believe that as long as the university is primarily peopled by an elite, neither it nor the society that supports it can be significantly transformed. At present only 16% of the students who finish secondary school go on to higher education (compared with 40% in the U.S.) and of those who do enter the university, 43% fail to graduate.⁵⁰

The perceived lack of social mobility in France was illustrated by this fact as most working class students never even made it to university. In comparison the United States appeared more egalitarian as it offered higher learning to a greater percentage of high school graduates. This point was intended to diffuse fears that American universities were hotbeds for class conflicts. The issue of societal equality had been a major issue for the French student movement and it motivated them to reach out to other groups like the UNEF and the CGT to expand their fight beyond the university. In comparison the US student movement is depicted as only concerned with university policy.⁵¹ *Time's* depiction of the French university system is akin to a time bomb of unrest. With all the problems facing French students it was inevitable change would be demanded.

⁴⁹ "Education: French Students: Far from Columbia," *Time*, July 5, 1968.

⁵⁰ "Education: French Students: Far from Columbia," *Time*, July 5, 1968.

⁵¹ "Student Power: The Big New Force in All Nations," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1968, p. K4.

In comparison to the violent French students, outlets like the *Boston Globe* ran stories about studies finding American students were not violent. The open statement addressed the very concerns many Americans had about the events in France, “Little evidence exists that student discontent in the United States will lead to a rebellion next Fall of the kind that recently shook France.”⁵² This statement got right to the point for the reader that students in The United States did not pose the same threat as those in France. The study presented findings that showed that even though students were perceived to be mavericks and out of step with society, their views were actually paralleled by the general population. The example given was 50 percent of college students said Vietnam was a mistake and 49% of the country as a whole shared that view.⁵³ This image helped to dispel the perception that American university students were dangerous radicals who were not compatible with modern society.

During the second week of May the American media began to ease up on the students as their criticism was shifted toward de Gaulle’s government, although the media would never completely side with the student radicals. The fear of student radicalism constantly shaped the coverage of May as the crisis worsened. On May 14 workers began to strike which made the media reconsider its view of the students. The second week of May was the most favorable coverage the student movement received in the American media. As the crisis worsened during the third week of May harsher views of the students reemerged along with the narrative that American and French students were not of the same thinking.

The Workers Revolution: Beginnings May 14-May 24

⁵² George Gallup, “Poll Finds Students Not Violent,” *Boston Globe*, June 29, 1968, p. 1.

⁵³ George Gallup, “Poll Finds Students Not Violent,” *Boston Globe*, June 29, 1968, p. 1.

In studying the crisis of May 1968 historians have categorized the beginning of the “Workers Revolution” on May 14, as this date wildcat strikes began at large factories near Nantes and outside of Paris.⁵⁴ The American media’s coverage of the workers did not really pick up until after the weekend of May 18-19. This was most likely because most observers did not think these isolated strikes would amount to much, as striking was not unusual in France. Prior to the weekend the coverage of the workers’ movement was rather mixed as outlets covered student activity one day and then worker activity the following day. This flip-flopping coverage between May 14 and May 18 reflected the uncertainty held by observers. After Prime Minister Pompidou’s speech relinquished police control of the Sorbonne, the future of the student movement seemed uncertain as it appeared that the students had won. The mixed coverage between the students and the workers reflected the American media’s confusion over who was initially leading this popular movement.

Police violence against student protesters rallied domestic support to the students and their movement. In the American media the students also began to take on a more positive light, as they were depicted as victims of an unfair system. The blame for the violence and civil unrest was instead shifted onto de Gaulle’s government which was ultimately forced to end the police occupation of the Sorbonne. This rapid change in the media’s perception of the students would again flip after the students continued their protests and occupied the Sorbonne. Previously victims of the heavy-handed French government, students were now again depicted as dangerous civil agitators. This contempt for the students was reflected by the media’s description of their occupation of the Sorbonne, “Thousands of students who earlier today had

⁵⁴ Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, 156.

swarmed into the Sorbonne, center of the 800-year-old University of Paris, tonight were turning the majestic building into a massive flophouse.”⁵⁵ The *Chicago Tribune’s* summation of the occupation harked at the students’ lack of civility. Only days prior the *Tribune* reported on the important political discussions the students raised about the French university system and French society.⁵⁶ Following the occupation of the Sorbonne the uncivilized student reemerged in the media’s portrayal of the students. Media returned to a focus on the actions of the students, and ignored the politics behind their movement; this allowed them to recreate the image of the radical student as an agitator of civilized society.

Even though workers had begun to strike across France on May 14 they continued to take a back seat to student activity in the American media until May 18, when the general strike had fully developed. On May 16 reports about students overtaking the Odeon Theater emerged instead of reports on the wildcat strikes spreading across the nation. The student occupation of the theater was attributed to the lenient treatment of the ‘insurgents’ by the government, “The students have paid little attention, apparently feeling they have the upper hand after the government offered concessions.”⁵⁷ The depiction of students as uncooperative reinforced the image of the dangerous radical who was unwilling to work within the system to achieve change. Although the American media may have agreed with the students’ call for education reform, it did not agree with the continued use of ‘guerrilla tactics’ to occupy historic Parisian

⁵⁵ Arthur Veysey, “Mob in Paris Takes Over the Sorbonne,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 15, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Arthur Veysey, “General Strike Hits France: Concessions Rejected by Protesters,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁷ “Paris Students Seize National Theater Branch,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1968, p. 4.

landmarks.⁵⁸ The specific use of the term 'guerrilla' carried a negative connotation, as it reminded readers of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. The rhetoric used in American media to describe student activity after Pompidou's concession speech returned to the image of the student as a political combatant. The fight for territory in Paris between students and the government isolated the remaining occupiers from the massive coalition which had shown support for the movement on May 13. Paris again became a battlefield in the eyes of the American media, except this time the students were unchecked, which was a dangerous proposition.

As strikes spread across France the American media began to shift their coverage away from the students. By the weekend of Saturday May 18 the American coverage of France was focused on ever growing strike movement. Reports of student activity were dropped in favor of the developing economic crisis. This transition was reflected in the *New York Times's* report on Paris titled "French Workers Take over Plants as Unrest Widens – Student Actions Abate."⁵⁹ Even though students continued to occupy the Sorbonne and other Parisian landmarks their time in the spotlight appeared to be over and replaced by a new workers rebellion.

The sharp distinction between the workers and the students was an important aspect to the American coverage of the "Workers Revolution". The *New York Times* reported that the strikes were related to the events of the previous two weeks, "The strike had been called

⁵⁸ Carlyle Morgan, "'Urban guerrillas' worry France: Appeals for order *'Urban guerrillas' vex France Workers join in Discontent focused," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 18, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Henry Tanner, "French Workers Take Over Plants As Unrest Widens: Dozens of Factories Being Held by the Strikers -Red Flags Are Raised: Student Actions Abates: Some Air Flights Canceled After Orly Employees Call a 48-Hour Stoppage," *New York Times*, May 18, 1968, p. 1.

several days ago, however, and it is not directly linked to the current tide of social unrest.”⁶⁰

This assessment was not completely accurate. Although the workers were striking for their own goals, the prior student revolt must be understood as a causal factor for wildcat strikes. The refusal to acknowledge the linkages between the students and workers showed the lack of respect the media was giving to the student movement. Even though the student movement was supported by CGT, who joined in a solidarity strike on May 13, the wildcat strikes by workers which began the following day are not understood to be linked. The inaccuracy of the *NYT's* report is unique as the *Los Angeles Times* viewed the events of May as a progression, “In the last 24 hours, the student turbulence that has gripped the Sorbonne and other French universities for two weeks has suddenly spread like a prairie fire. It has spread to workers in factories and industries from one end of the country to the other in a seemingly spontaneous pattern.”⁶¹ This contradiction in coverage highlighted the controversial nature of the student radicals. The American media applauded their actions earlier in May, but once things became too radical that support faded. As many Americans worried about domestic student radicals, the French students were viewed as a terrifying possibility if student power was unchecked. Discrediting the students’ accomplishments restored the view that these students were only reckless kids, not a dangerous political entity.

The separation between the students and workers was primarily displayed by the depiction of the unions and their treatment of the students. The conflict between the students and unions was central to the coverage as highlighted in headlines like, “Strikes Spread Across

⁶⁰ Tanner, “French Workers Take Over Plants As Unrest Widens,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1968, p. 1.

⁶¹ “De Gaulle Returns to France and Worst Chaos in 10 Years: President Cuts Short Visit to Romania; Turmoil That Grippped Sorbonne Spreads to Industry All Over Nation De Gaulle,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1968, p. 11.

France; Unions Reject Student Support” which was published on May 18 in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁶² Both the students and the unions had political goals and the two groups battled over who would control the popular movement. The tension between the students and government was downplayed in favor of the tension between the unions and students, “It was evident the Communist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT) was using the strike wave for its own anti-Gaullist ends. But the unions have made clear that they feel the students can best help by causing no provocations and staying out of union business.”⁶³ In France the student movement was rapidly taking a back seat to workers and unions during the economic crisis. This was echoed by the American media. This again detracted from the image of the student radicals, as it robbed them of their accomplishments. The story of the crisis was being morphed into a narrative of the workers and the unions in the American media with the students being phased out.

The struggle between the maverick leftists and the CGT was another major focus moving into the third week of May. The disorganization of the tense political climate was often the central aspect to American coverage. On May 18 students attempted to support striking workers, much like how workers had previously supported the students on May 13. Students marched to the outskirts of Paris to the Boulogne-Biliancourt Renault factory but were violently repelled at the gates by striking workers. The initial justification for the attack was to prevent CRS police from intervening. However many American observers thought there was a deeper political reasoning, “The real reason, it is believed, is that the worker’s organization and

⁶² Arthur J. Dommen, “Strikes Spread Across France; Unions Reject Student Support: French Strikes Spread; Unions Rebuff Students,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1968, p. 1.

⁶³ Dommen, “Strikes Spread Across France; Unions Reject Student Support,” *Los Angeles Times*, May, 18, 1968, p. 1.

especially the professional revolutionaries of the Communist party do not want a promising social revolt to be spoiled by romantic young amateurs.”⁶⁴ The political climate was ripe for change and multiple groups were jockeying for position to initiate their societal fixes. As the crisis worsened, the American media turned its focus towards ‘realistic’ instigators of change. Again the students were being phased out of the narrative of May.

As the number of striking workers reached over one million, media outlets began to blame de Gaulle’s inaction as the reason this minor student rebellion had blown up into a national crisis. Previously during the wave of student and police conflict American observers faulted de Gaulle, as they reported he was out of touch with the university system. This attitude remerged as the strikes began to make waves in national and international news. De Gaulle’s actions were followed closely and most observers were not impressed, “President de Gaulle at his critical moment is again out of the country. He is on a goodwill visit to Romania. His speech in Bucharest May 14 is making only secondary headlines in French papers. It was in line with his already familiar idea of building broad European unity.”⁶⁵ Previously during the student protests in early May, de Gaulle was in Iran on a similar diplomatic visit; however this time, many critics voiced their outrage that de Gaulle had chosen to go on another diplomatic mission without first resolving the domestic crisis. His pledge for European unity seemed farcical in the face of an escalating domestic crisis.

Critics of de Gaulle’s actions were numerous, but specifically critics from within the Gaullist bloc received significant coverage in American media. Rene Capitant, a Gaullist deputy

⁶⁴ Tanner, “French Workers Take Over Plants As Unrest Widens,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Carlyle Morgan, “Gaullists under fire over student riots: Dramatic presentation Police action criticized University reopened Professors threaten,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 1968, p. 7.

and former cabinet minister, appeared in multiple American newspapers: *The Boston Globe*, *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*. Capitant planned to vote in favor of a censure motion in order to bring about a new round of parliamentary elections. This was not a direct strike at de Gaulle, but rather at his government led by Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. Capitant was quoted as affirming his allegiance to de Gaulle and the Gaullist movement. However he felt the current crisis was the current government's doing, "A long series of government errors were responsible for 'the troubles that France has known, the street fighting and devastation of the Latin student quarter first, then the immense chain of repercussions among the working class and unions.'"⁶⁶ This appeared to be the first acknowledgement of fault to be published in the American media. Capitant was merely expressing his opinion, but the story gained traction and appeared in multiple reports across different outlets.⁶⁷ Previously de Gaulle's government had been denounced for its poor handling of the student crisis; however no one was accusing the government of creating the crisis. The workers' crisis was understood as a continuation of the student upheaval; but Capitant had observers thinking differently, as he put the blame for the worker's crisis on de Gaulle and his government's handling of affairs. If other nations had experienced student uprisings why was France the only nation to experience a large social crisis? Capitant's criticism led readers to think de Gaulle actions were the decisive factor between a simple student rebellion and national economic crisis. The perception that de Gaulle and his government were at fault for the May crisis had generated a great deal of momentum through the weekend of May 18. De Gaulle's early return from Romania and grumblings from

⁶⁶ Louis Nevin, "Strikes, Upheaval Shake France," *Boston Globe*, May 19, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Carlyle Morgan, "Crisis swirls around de Gaulle: Crisis swirls around de Gaulle Opponents call out Statements delayed Alternatives outlined Popular referendum?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 21, 1968, p. 1.

within his own bloc signaled he needed to regain control over the situation, as six million workers were on strike by May 21.⁶⁸ Once the “Worker’s Revolution” geared up de Gaulle became the central focus of the American media, as all of his actions were scrutinized and frequently criticized.

President de Gaulle Speaks Out: May 21-May 24

After returning from his diplomatic travels, de Gaulle and his government were faced with the task of settling the general strike. Over the week of May 20, nothing had been accomplished between the unions and the government. All the while the number of striking workers rose to over eight million.⁶⁹ Criticism of de Gaulle’s inaction continued to mount as the situation did not appear to be improving. During de Gaulle’s silence, a censure motion failed to pass in parliament.⁷⁰ This motion would have dissolved the government forcing de Gaulle to remake his cabinet and removing Pompidou from power. Even though the vote failed it stirred up a great deal of animosity towards the Gaullist bloc. Communists denounced typical Gaullist action to maintain their authority, “You won’t get out of this crisis by a presidential speech and by waving the old scarecrow of communism.”⁷¹ When Pompidou alluded to a foreign presence creating domestic unrest in a speech he delivered to the National Assembly, he was challenged by a Communist deputy to elucidate his point. A quick retreat followed from Pompidou as he declined to name a specific nation. This report on the parliamentary discussion eased the fears

⁶⁸ Carlyle Morgan, “Crisis swirls around de Gaulle,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 21, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Donald H. Louchheim, “De Gaulle Seeks New Mandate: Gives No Details May Fuel Unrest De Gaulle, on TV, Calls For Referendum in June Mendes-France Appalled Threat Less Strong,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1968, p. A1.

⁷⁰ Arthur Veysey, “11 Votes Save de Gaulle Cabinet: Premier Bids for Parleys with Unions,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1968, p. 1.

⁷¹ Veysey, “11 Votes Save de Gaulle Cabinet,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1968, p. 1.

of American observers that the threat of foreign communists was affecting the crisis in France. The censure vote and massive general strike highlighted that domestic issues were central to the ongoing crisis. With the students fading from the picture, the specter of foreign radicalism seemed to have been dropped as an issue by the America media. Although this fear was frequently brought up in the discussion about France, it had been suppressed since the false allegations that the students were tied to Peking. Only in the first week of coverage did the fear of foreign influence gain traction in the coverage of France; this was mainly because of the linkages between civil unrest and the ongoing Vietnam peace talks. As the crisis continued American media observers no longer presented the revolution as a result of a foreign threat in France.

Domestic critics of de Gaulle accused his government of poor economic planning, which the American media found to be rather farcical. During de Gaulle's time as President, France had seen increased productivity, coupled with a conservative spending policy which allowed money to be reinvested into the economy. De Gaulle's foreign policy received blame for draining the French economy. However American economic observers did not agree, "It is tempting for American critics of General de Gaulle to blame his foreign policy. But there is little evidence that this was a direct factor."⁷² Critics were quick to attack de Gaulle when he was away during the beginning of the general strike, but his foreign spending was not the reason that French workers felt they were receiving an unequal share of the economic prosperity. This same observer, John Hess of the *New York Times*, praised de Gaulle for building up France's

⁷² John L. Hess, "The Workers Want A Bigger Share," *New York Times*, May 26, 1968, p. E1.

gold reserves, as he had created a solid foundation for economic growth.⁷³ American observers did not report that de Gaulle's economic policies were bullet proof. One criticism of de Gaulle's government was when France vetoed British admission to the European Economic Community.⁷⁴ American observers thought France had lost an opportunity to ensure a strong European marketplace by denying one of Europe's largest economies from the EEC. Even though the government's economic policy had shortcomings, observers remarked that domestic critics of de Gaulle did not offer innovative solutions to ensure ever-rising prosperity; critics of de Gaulle's economic policy only seemed to attack him in hindsight.⁷⁵ Although the situation in France was not perfect, it did bother some reporters how de Gaulle was blamed for a problem which was not entirely the fault of his government, "None of this fully explains how a people can manage to bring a whole civilized nation practically to paralysis. As an air of collective irrationality hangs about the French crisis."⁷⁶ Hess, who was writing for the *New York Times*, seemed troubled that workers were driving cars to and from their public housing yet still claimed that they are not getting their fair share. Multiple outlets' take on the economics behind the general strike held a strong pro-business attitude. Through the common market France had prospered, which allowed for social programs such as social security and public housing. American observers seemed to think that these left-leaning strikers did not understand the economic ramifications of their actions, as France's economy was not operating without its workforce.⁷⁷ De Gaulle and his government were not without fault as each report acknowledged no economic plan was without shortcomings. But the previous decade had seen

⁷³ Hess, "The Workers Want A Bigger Share," *New York Times*, May, 26, 1968, p. E1.

⁷⁴ "Crisis in France," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1968, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Hess, "The Workers Want A Bigger Share," *New York Times*, May, 26, 1968, p. E1.

⁷⁶ "Crisis in France," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1968, p. 18.

⁷⁷ Hess, "The Workers Want A Bigger Share," *New York Times*, May, 26, 1968, p. E1.

General de Gaulle, “pull a key nation back from the edge of chaos.”⁷⁸ As the crisis worsened it appeared that France was slipping back toward that very same chaos.

Even after a victory in parliament for the current government, the situation in France continued to look bleak as workers and students continued to call for political reform. On May 24, de Gaulle broke his silence and released a televised speech in the wake of the unrest spawned by the failed censure motion. This presidential speech announced a referendum that would be held in June. The proposed referendum offered the people a choice, “Yes to de Gaulle and continued stability, prosperity and progress; or No to de Gaulle and a vote for anarchy and bloodshed.”⁷⁹ Reports of the speech described the vagueness of de Gaulle’s proposed referendum, as it did not set out anything to immediately address the problem. Interviewed French citizens displayed how de Gaulle would not resolve this crisis with only words, “Workers have not been demonstrating for a referendum, but for better working and living conditions.”⁸⁰ The split between political and economic demands meant that de Gaulle and Pompidou did not satisfy anyone with this announcement.

After President de Gaulle’s speech was broadcasted, a wave a violent backlash occurred. This isolated the extremists from the general striking population in the eyes of American observers. Many of these extremists were students; however during the weeks of civil unrest, violent agitators had congregated in Paris looking to join in the chaos. Amidst negotiations between unions and the government on May 25, and into the early morning of May 26, marchers and police clashed in the streets of Paris. This was all initially set off on Friday May 24,

⁷⁸ “Crisis in France,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1968, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Donald H. Louchheim, “De Gaulle Seeks New Mandate: Gives No Details,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1968, p. A1.

⁸⁰ Donald H. Louchheim, “De Gaulle Seeks New Mandate: Gives No Details,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1968, p. A1.

as rioters set ablaze the Bourse financial center, as they decried de Gaulle's inaction.⁸¹ The following day, further melees ensued and Pompidou gave orders to break up any rioting and claimed, "That agitators were trying to start a civil war."⁸² The clash on May 25 was the most violent since May 10-11 when sympathy for the students had peaked in the face of extreme police brutality. Unlike the earlier outbreak of violence, this time sympathy was directed at the police and civilians, not the rioters. Rhetorically, it is important to note the use of the term 'rioter' as opposed to 'protester' or 'marcher'. During the student revolt, demonstrators were referred to mainly as 'protesters' or 'marchers'.⁸³ The use of the term 'rioter' spoke to the devolution of the student movement; due to the importance of the general strike, the student occupation of the Sorbonne was ignored, and their cause was lumped into the grievances held by the workers. When the referendum was announced many American observers felt the students had accomplished their goals, as de Gaulle acknowledged the need for education reform during his televised speech.⁸⁴ The violent outburst seemed petty of the rioters, as civil negotiations were underway between many of the revolutionary factions. The unions attempted negotiations, even though they were also disappointed with de Gaulle's announcement. The coverage of the May 25 riots did not focus on the demands of the rioters, but rather on the destruction they created in the capital. The reports of the attempted kidnapping of the Interior Minister Christian Fouchet showcased how distant the riots were

⁸¹ Arthur, Vessey, "Set Paris Bourse Aflame: Vote New Power or I Quit: De Gaulle Plant Anarchy Flag Atop Stock Exchange," *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1968, p. 1.

⁸² Gwen Morgan, "French Union Terms Told Premier Suspends Right of Assembly: Report 36 Pct. Minimum Pay Hike Is OK'd," *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1968, p. 1.

⁸³ Arthur Veysey, "General Strike Hits France: Concessions Rejected by Protesters," *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Donald H. Louchheim, "De Gaulle Seeks New Mandate: Gives No Details," *Washington Post*, May 25, 1968, p. A1.

from the student led protests of early May.⁸⁵ When looking for the cause of all this unrest the usual suspects were not blamed, “Both the government and the students said that the violence was being perpetrated by young toughs who were not students.”⁸⁶ The chaotic situation in Paris had opened the door for opportunists to move in and make the most of the situation. This statement seemed to be an acknowledgement that things had gone too far in the eyes of American observers. No longer were just students fighting for change in their university, now outsiders were coming in and destroying the Latin Quarter, a place sacred to students and Parisians. This idea that things seemed to have gone too far was illustrated by the report that police and students were working together in the cleanup, “Students in the Latin Quarter meanwhile helped police to clear the rubble and barricades by the bloody riots, and students and teachers’ union leaders urged their followers to renounce violence.”⁸⁷ This image of police and students working together to clear away some of the destruction showed that not all students were violent radicals. Two weeks prior, students had protested in favor of educational change, which was supported by UNEF and CGT. During the initial protests, no unions decried the students’ actions and instead blamed the police for their heavy-handedness. By May 25, the cries for educational change had been heard and the UNEF had gained some political momentum to press for a system favorable to the students. Violence was not going to accomplish anything constructive, and pockets of students recognized this. The American depiction of the remaining student holdouts branded them as rioters separate from the

⁸⁵ Gwen Morgan, “French Union Terms Told Premier Suspends Right of Assembly,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Gwen Morgan, “French Union Terms Told Premier Suspends Right of Assembly,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Gwen Morgan, “French Union Terms Told Premier Suspends Right of Assembly,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1968, p. 1.

students engaged in cleaning up after the riots. These rioters were anarchists only interested in destruction of the system. While the students involved in the pick-up were actually interested in reforming the university. The oscillation of the American media's views on the student revolution mirrored the amount of popular support the students received domestically. By May 26, Parisians were tired of waking up to news of more destruction and violence in the Latin Quarter. This was echoed by the American reports of the destruction and violence of the rioters.

Forecasting President de Gaulle's Fall, May 29

After the civil turmoil from May 25-26, it was clear that de Gaulle's proposed referendum failed to appease the politically motivated workers and students. Negotiations took place between union leaders and the government over the span of May 26-28, during which a settlement was finalized. The deal was brought to factory workers who rejected it and demanded that a new regime without de Gaulle needed be erected in order for the strikes to end.⁸⁸ This rejection led many American observers to conclude that de Gaulle's reign was over. All the anti-Gaullist rhetoric in France gave observers the impression that de Gaulle would not win the referendum in June and would follow through on his threat to resign if the nation no longer wanted his guidance.⁸⁹ Some American observers thought de Gaulle must step down no matter the result of the referendum, "Even if General de Gaulle does not step down, it was accepted by all commenters that the crisis could not be resolved except by a change of

⁸⁸ Donald H. Louchheim, "De Gaulle Leaves Paris as Cabinet Prepares to Quit: Showdown Awaited In Session Today," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, May 30, 1968, p. A1.

⁸⁹ Drew Pearson, Jack Anderson, "France Faces Worse Bedlam: Political Emotion Exit de Gaulle Rightist Battle in Calif.," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, May 29, 1968, p. B15.

regime.”⁹⁰ The *Chicago Tribune* went so far as to title their coverage on May 30 “Press de Gaulle to Resign: Paris Throng Parades and Sings ‘Adieu.’” Which truly displayed the lack of faith the American media had in de Gaulle to weather the crisis.⁹¹ Much of this speculation was based on of de Gaulle’s disappearance and retreat to his country home in Colombey.

The other possible option observers saw for de Gaulle would be to dissolve the National Assembly and call a new election. This option was not viewed as likely since observers predicted that workers would not end the general strike without an immediate change. The current strike was estimated to cost \$1 billion a week and a parliamentary election was not a rapid solution to the predicament.⁹² Crisis was upon de Gaulle’s government and it did not seem that he had the time or support to weather it. Observers thought de Gaulle’s resignation was the optimal solution to end the current crisis as all of de Gaulle’s attempts at appeasement had failed and things were only getting worse.

De Gaulle’s Counter, May 30

After numerous reports surfaced that de Gaulle was planning to retire, he reappeared in Paris on May 30 to announce he would not resign. Instead, de Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly and scheduled new elections. This answered the cries for a new regime as it was now in the citizens’ hands. During the past month, de Gaulle had taken a battering in the media as almost every decision his government had made worsened the situation. Vocal opposition in the streets allowed the media to portray the majority of the French as major critics of de

⁹⁰ “De Gaulle Goes to Rural Home Amid Speculation He Will Quit; Rival Factions Seek Successor: Early Move Seen: Left Appears to Back a Coalition Behind Mendes-France,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1968, p. 1.

⁹¹ Arthur Veysey, “Press de Gaulle to Resign: Paris Throng parades and Sings ‘Adieu’: President Flies to Rural Home,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1968. p. N1.

⁹² Louis Nevin, “Secret De Gaulle Trip Spurs Reports He’ll Quit,” *Boston Globe*, May 30, 1968, p. 1.

Gaulle. After his statement that he would not resign in the face of adversity, Gaullist supporters took the opportunity to take to the streets. The coverage of these Gaullist marchers highlighted a France which had not been seen during the coverage of the May crisis. Cries of 'Adieu de Gaulle' were replaced with shouts of 'Clean up the Sorbonne'.⁹³ The march was only estimated at 300,000-600,000 demonstrators which did not equal the march held on May 13, which featured over 1 million demonstrators. However the message was clear – de Gaulle was not alone in this crisis. The description of teary-eyed citizens furthered the image of de Gaulle as the champion of the moment, "Signs denouncing the communist-led General Confederation of Labor were popular but any portrait of General de Gaulle drew strongest waves of emotion. There were tears in the eyes of some men and women as they waved and hailed a huge photograph of the head of state."⁹⁴ The depiction of President de Gaulle as a hero had not been present during the month of May, as he was primarily blamed for the crisis's development. This one action shifted the perception of de Gaulle from a beaten old man to a fighter ready to combat left-wing political leaders and the communist unions.⁹⁵ This moment marked the shift in the American media's coverage of France, since a degree of normalcy seemed to be returning and the impending election quelled political activists.

In one day, de Gaulle went from having one foot out of the door, to a President with a plan to combat the civil unrest in his nation. Reports that the army was ready to restore order

⁹³ Gloria Emerson, "Hundreds of Thousands Rally in Paris Streets to Support and Cheer de Gaulle," *New York Times*, May 31, 1968, p. 15.

⁹⁴ Gloria Emerson, "Hundreds of Thousands Rally in Paris Streets to Support and Cheer de Gaulle," *New York Times*, May 31, 1968, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Arthur Veysey, "De Gaulle Defies Strikers: Refuses to Quit, Disbands MPs, Calls Elections," *Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 1968, p. 1.

quieted the rumors that the Communists might be attempting to start a civil war.⁹⁶ American reaction to de Gaulle's announcement reflected that de Gaulle's leadership was more desirable than the alternative, a popular front government which included French Communists.

Washington Post writer Chalmers Roberts noted, "There was relief that the President had pulled his nation back from the brink."⁹⁷ Anti-Gaullist sentiments disappeared from the American media, as the alternative to de Gaulle seemed much worse. For the previous two weeks de Gaulle received major criticism for allowing leftist radicals to run rampant over his country; but his stand against a communist overthrow on May 30 was celebrated by American observers, "There was relief here yesterday that de Gaulle had refused to resign, that he had decided to fight it out, with force if necessary. There was admiration for the way he was trying to isolate the Communists."⁹⁸ Admiration had not been a term used to describe de Gaulle at all during the month of May, but entering into June, a new perspective on de Gaulle appeared due to his firm stance against the radicals. His inaction during May caused observers to lose faith he could manage the crisis, but in a two-day period, he had managed to stay afloat after being declared a lame duck by the media. The American media was forced to eat its words, as on May 30 it was declaring that de Gaulle appeared here to stay. Reports that de Gaulle planned to stay made waves in Washington as officials were quoted as relieved that de Gaulle appeared to be 'over the hump'.⁹⁹ The US government had been silent on the crisis throughout May. But as

⁹⁶ Arthur Veysey, "De Gaulle Defies Strikers: Refuses to Quit, Disbands MPs, Calls Elections," *Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 1968, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Chalmers M. Roberts, "U.S. Sees de Gaulle More Desirable Than Communist-Tinged France," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1968, p. A13.

⁹⁸ Roberts, "U.S. Sees de Gaulle More Desirable Than Communist-Tinged France," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1968, p. A13.

⁹⁹ Roberts, "U.S. Sees de Gaulle More Desirable Than Communist-Tinged France," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1968, p. A13.

signs that the worst was over appeared, small statements of support for de Gaulle emerged in the media.

Resolution of the Workers' Crisis

Reports of a scheduled return-to-work began to appear in early days of June as negotiations were completed.¹⁰⁰ This was received as good news by reporters as this was an important step on the return to normalcy. The failed negotiations of May 27-28 were a result of the political stance taken by the Communist strikers and the CGT, with de Gaulle remedying the political issue with the election announcement, negotiations could actually take place between the unions, workers, and the government.¹⁰¹ During the first week of June, numerous reports were published about successful negotiations putting workers back on the job.¹⁰² The CGT pledged that their goal was to get workers better pay and back on the job which was a shift from their rhetoric in late May.¹⁰³ Negotiations immediately netted a 10 percent pay increase for government workers and saw the minimum wage rise by 35 percent.¹⁰⁴ This resolution got workers back on the job and allowed American observers to speculate what the past month meant for France economically.

Day by day throughout the first week of June more workers returned to their jobs, which signified that the worst was over. Economic analysts tried to quantify what three weeks

¹⁰⁰ John L. Hess, "Cabinet Aides in France Open Talks With Unions: Leadership of the French Unions Is Pressing for Industry-by-Industry Settlements," *New York Times*, June 1, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Donald H. Louchheim, "Danger of War in France Appears Over: News Analysis France Gets 3-Day Breathing Spell New Elections Set Looking to Tuesday," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1968, p. A1.

¹⁰² Donald H. Louchheim, "France Gropes for Economic Recovery as Strikes Ebb: Strikers Evicted Effect of Settlements Campaign to Open," *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1968, p. A25.

¹⁰³ William L. Ryan, "Labor Leaders Scorn June Referendum," *Boston Globe*, May 25, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ John L. Hess, "Cabinet Aides in France Open Talks With Unions: Leadership of the French Unions Is Pressing for Industry-by-Industry Settlements," *New York Times*, June 1, 1968, p. 1.

of striking meant for the French economy. Reports had already been released that each week of work was estimated to have cost the economy \$1 billion.¹⁰⁵ This capital was effectively gone since only a little amount could be recouped through overtime work. The pay hikes were what analysts really focused on as it would significantly harm France's economy in the coming year. Economists predicted that an increase in labor costs would cause the cost of living to increase by as much as 5% when compared to the numbers prior to the crisis.¹⁰⁶ This cost of living increase could have a major effect on France's exports as its goods would become less competitive on the global market with the rise in costs. In order to restore faith in the Franc the French government withdrew \$745 million of its reserves from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ever since the general strike began and the economy came to a halt investors had been trying to get out of France for fear of a market crash.¹⁰⁷ This massive withdrawal from the IMF signaled that things were getting back to normal and that the French government was determined to kick start the economy as soon as possible. The massive withdrawal caused some analysts to question what was in store for the French economy in the coming month of June. Don Cook of the *Los Angeles Times* did not think that \$745 million would be enough to cover the losses of May and June, as the economy would not be back at peak production even by the end of the month.¹⁰⁸ Although analysts were split on exactly what was in store for the French economy, it displayed that American observers felt the worst of the crisis was past for

¹⁰⁵ Louis Nevin, "Secret De Gaulle Trip Spurs Reports He'll Quit," *Boston Globe*, May 30, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ "Half of French Strikers May Be on Jobs Tomorrow as Government Restores Order," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 1968, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ "France Withdraws \$745 Million From IMF As Workers Begin Returning to Their Jobs," *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 1968, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Don Cook, "France Forced to Draw \$745 Million From IMF: Cost of Catastrophic National Strike Mounts With No Real Break Yet in Sight," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1968.

France and the remaining strikers were of little importance. These holdouts received mention but reporters saw an economic return to normalcy as inevitable.

Resolution of the Student Occupation

Once the general strike was effectively over by the end of the first week of June the government shifted its attention to the student rebels. The students had stayed politically active during the general strike but dropped from the American coverage as the economic crisis was much more pressing. As the government began to crack down on the students the American media took notice and often sided with the government in its treatment of the more extreme students.

In order to break holdout strikes the government resorted to employing the CRS to violently remove workers from occupied factories. Students rallied to the holdouts' aid like on June 12 in Sochaux. At this factory a youth demonstrator was killed during a battle between strikers and police.¹⁰⁹ This sparked outcry amongst the student camp as, "About 10,000 students yelling 'hang de Gaulle' swept through Paris Tuesday... They threatened to lynch a gendarme, burned police trucks and erected new barricades in the Latin Quarter."¹¹⁰ The return of violence to the heart of Paris was unwelcome and led to a severe response from the regime. Riot police again returned to the Sorbonne on June 12 and began to fight student demonstrators. A rather infamous depiction of the protests was of students pulling a police officer from his motorcycle and beating him amidst the crowd. Many were calling for him to be

¹⁰⁹ Alan Priaulx, "10,000 Paris Students Riot for Second Night," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Alan Priaulx, "10,000 Paris Students Riot for Second Night," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1968, p. 1.

lynched, but he was saved by onlookers who dragged him away.¹¹¹ This was perhaps the most violent depiction seen of students to date. In the past month they had battled back police or occupied government buildings, but in the midst of the June recovery their extreme violence seemed out of place. The American coverage of the students made them appear out of touch with most of the nation which was attempting to recover from the crisis.

The idyllic image of the Sorbonne as a peaceful commune would be ended by outlets like the *Chicago Tribune* which detailed a story of students fighting and expelling a mercenary group from the Sorbonne. A group referred to as the 'Katangese' had begun to exert quasi-police control over the Sorbonne which led the student committee to forcibly remove them from the Sorbonne.¹¹² This story continued the image brought about by the May 25-26 riots, that opportunists were using the student movement as a front to take part in the chaos. In mid-May the students received respect from the media for addressing major flaws in the university system. In June talk of the student's political ideologies had disappeared and faults of the anarchic student movement comprised the coverage they received in the American media.

The eventual recapture of the Sorbonne happened rather peacefully, a surprise compared to the past month of student police interactions. What began the recapture of the Sorbonne was a police investigation over a stabbing victim linked to the students.¹¹³ The link between the Sorbonne and anarchic violence was an important image in the American media as it depicted the student movement as doomed to fail from the beginning. The Sorbonne did not

¹¹¹ Alan Priaulx, "10,000 Paris Students Riot for Second Night," *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹² Edward Rohrbach, "Rebels Oust Mercenaries at Sorbonne: Battle 30 'Katangese' to Regain Control," *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1968, p. 7.

¹¹³ Eric Wentworth, "Police Force Surrender of The Sorbonne: France Ousts Rebels From the Sorbonne," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1968, p. A1.

seem as peaceful to American observers as it did to the students who occupied it. The Sorbonne was described as a place to harbor petty radicals, "Inside the Sorbonne, where thousands of people milled around every day, the sense of crusade spilled into every corner, and any grievance, not even related to student reforms, was aired by someone, at some time."¹¹⁴ The remains of the student radicals were not given the same respect they had received by outlets like the *New York Times* previously in May. Now the student's radical political thoughts were likened to wasteful complaints in a dysfunctional utopia in the Sorbonne. Observers reported that Parisians had moved on, and the radicals were seen as destructive entities instead of students suppressed by de Gaulle's government, "The sympathy for David against Goliath turned to annoyance, a wish that David would simply call it quits."¹¹⁵ France had moved on and the American media shared the same perspective, the student rebels had run their course and had caused enough commotion.

Conclusion

As France returned to a state of normalcy, the American media became disinterested in the recovery process. The print media's most in-depth coverage of France was at the height of the crisis, when it appeared de Gaulle would not make it through the month. With an American student movement, many citizens worried about the potential for unrest on American university campuses. The American media's coverage reflected that fear, as initial reports assumed that the student protests were a response to the Vietnam peace talks. The media

¹¹⁴ Gloria Emerson, "Sorbonne in May: Gay, Exotic Fort: Colored Flags and Posters Gave It a Festive Air," *New York Times*, June 17, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Eric Wentworth, "Police Force Surrender of The Sorbonne: France Ousts Rebels From the Sorbonne," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1968, p. A1.

combined the two preconceptions about leftist radicals and French anti-American attitudes to forge a narrative of US interest endangered in France. As this narrative was quickly disproved, the coverage shifted to a more favorable depiction of the students. As a popular movement began to develop, criticism was turned onto de Gaulle's government and its failure to modernize the university system. Instead of being portrayed as radicals, the students had become oppressed citizens. This image was rapidly broken when the students occupied the Sorbonne and wildcat strikes began to spread across France. The students were no longer depicted in a positive light; instead they again became dangerous radicals in a span of one week.

As the crisis worsened the American media became concerned with their own student movement. Multiple methods were taken to separate student power from the crisis. Many reporters wrote the students out of the narrative of May; instead making the crisis about workers and the government. Others within the American media used a more direct method to sever the connection between French and American students. This was accomplished by releasing articles about how unique the two student movements were. No matter the method, the message was always the same; the student movement in America was not equivalent to the French student movement. Thus the crisis in France was not possible in America

President de Gaulle was the central figure in the coverage of the crisis of May. Initially, he was accused of harboring anti-American citizens and attempting to influence the Vietnam peace talks. This image of de Gaulle was built on of the prior history between de Gaulle and the United States, as he frequently opposed US foreign policy. As the crisis unfolded many in the

American media blamed de Gaulle for allowing the student movement to get so out of control. Observers seemed to enjoy de Gaulle's struggle to maintain order after he had dubbed Paris the "Peace Capital". As the crisis worsened and the workers became involved, more criticism was heaped onto de Gaulle for his inaction and mishandling of the events. In late May, de Gaulle appeared at his lowest in the American media coverage, as his government was on the verge of collapse in the face of a domestic communist threat. The rapid recovery of de Gaulle in France was mirrored by a shift in the media's depiction of the president. De Gaulle became a hero as he stood firmly against communism, although only days prior de Gaulle had been called an 'old man' who was unfit to govern. During the crisis of May, de Gaulle's image in the American media appeared to hit an all-time low. Exiting the crisis, de Gaulle appeared remade in the American media as he again had rescued France from crisis.

In the American media's presentation of May, two major themes guided and shaped the coverage. The fear of student radicals constantly loomed in readers' minds as the crisis unfolded. In response, the American media presented the events of May in a manner which attempted to dispel this fear. The coverage of May 1968 was shaped more so by American concerns than the events in France. The American media reflected nation's preoccupation with Communism. Secondly, de Gaulle was blamed for the crisis throughout the month of May. But when a Communist takeover seemed possible the American media changed their tune and praised de Gaulle for his stand against leftist political aggression. Both of these issues reflected a much larger issue in the United States which were tensions brought about by the Cold War. As students drifted toward leftist political thinking, many Americans feared what would come from those radical students. Those fears were heightened because of Paris as the government

almost collapsed under pressure from the political left. However, in the end de Gaulle reestablished order, thus preventing a communist takeover. This action made him a hero in the eyes of Americans even if he had been viewed as anti-American for the past decade. The tension between the United States and France were ultimately inconsequential when confronted with the possibility of a communist-controlled government in Western Europe.

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