

Students for a Democratic Society's Definition of Democracy

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The 1960s are recalled as a time of societal, cultural, and political unrest. In the midst of this, the group Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, began at the University of Michigan. Civil rights issues and a call for the end of involvement in Vietnam ignited the movement, which then spread through campuses around the country. This presentation is focused on the rhetoric within SDS to examine the group's definition of democracy. SDS was a prolific organization leaving speeches, newsletters, and publications. These sources formed the basis for my research. Democracy, according to SDS, is not a passive belief, but rather a process and a set of aspirations. SDS tried to create democracy by becoming more educated, more involved, and pursuing equality for all. In modern day America dissent groups are often cast as anti-American. The research I have conducted has revealed SDS as a group that contradicts this rhetoric. Contrary to the notion of destroying an American ideal, SDS was attempting to reclaim and redefine the inherently American value of democracy.