

Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement (Perspectives on the Sixties series)

By Melvin Small



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"Small . . . finds, rather, that the media had a built-in bias against [Vietnam] protesters—in particular, the television reports sought out scenes of violence, and hence gave disproportionate emphasis to even the smallest counterdemonstration. Small is methodical, indeed, comparing carefully what was supposed to happen, what actually did happen, what the media said had happened about what had happened, and about what 'two thin-skinned presidents,' Johnson and Nixon, thought about what the media said. . . . This study . . . should be valuable to students of the media, or to those who believe that all questions are political and to be settled by counting heads."—Rapport

"Melvin Small's invaluable book persuasively analyzes media coverage of the antiwar movement and in doing so shatters the persistent and mischievous notion that the media lionized the antiwar movement and undermined support for the War."—George C. Herring, University of Kentucky

It is commonly believed that, during the Vietnam War, journalists relayed a favorable image of antiwar protesters. Melvin Small explodes that myth. Journalists may do their best to be fair, but even fair reporters learn to focus on the violent and bizarre activities that make for dramatic news. They may capture behavior on the fringes of a march, rather than the tone of the march as a whole. They may ignore the arguments of the movement's leaders, which seem boring in comparison to action shots.

Small's commentary effectively portrays the battle between activists and the media while painting a compelling picture of Americans' inclination to accept the media's caricaturing lens.

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