



Office of the President Emeritus

They were called the Greatest Generation by Tom Brokaw in his best-selling book of the same title (Random House, 1998). Surely part of the greatness came from ordinary women and men rising to meet the challenges in extraordinary times. So it was at the creation of the National Student Association.

For America's college campuses the times were challenging as well. Enrollments were exploding. Returning veterans first questioned and then rejected many of the conventions and constraints of the past. The concept of student self-government was energized and coming alive. One common thread was an awakening of interest in things international. In the early '50s at Shepherd College I joined a handful of other students to form the International Relations Club. We managed to send a letter to all incoming freshmen inviting them to join. Much to our amazement, nearly half said yes. Over-night we had the largest and most engaged student organization on campus.

The founding of the National Student Association was part and parcel of that same era. *American Students Organize* gives voice to many of the "...young men and women on U.S. college and university campuses in the years immediately following World War II and to the administrators and faculty who lent them support, who believed that students should participate in self-government, and who joined in efforts to improve American life and to secure world peace."

The excitement of this book is in the many stories it tells, 85 separate voices, speaking a half century later, giving abundant insight and rich detail from a unique era of American history. One senses the shared ideals, visions, and aspirations of the times; the innocence of youth; the excitement of a new and inspired global perspective; an undying belief in democracy and the right to self determination; and the energetic engagement with the timeless struggles played out even today. Most exciting are these 85 very special lives and the ways they coalesced in the 50 years that followed to shape the world we know today.

I am pleased to join in the celebration of the publication of *American Students Organize*. For students of higher education, of government and politics, of international affairs, and for historians and journalists seeking context and perspective, the book is a priceless resource.

Stanley O. Ikenberry

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