

## **Week Eight Reading Guide: The March 4 movement, the founding of the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the fate of MIT's Special Laboratories**

This week, three students will present 15-minute summaries of their final paper concepts. We will also have as guest speakers two MIT faculty members familiar with the March 4 movement, the founding of the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the broader context of MIT in 1969: Aron Bernstein and Heather Lechtman. You can get a sense of the times from [this MIT admissions video](#). The older man appearing repeatedly throughout was [Walter Rosenblith](#), who at the time held the important role of Chair of the Faculty. The film also includes Noam Chomsky, Shirley Ann Jackson (co-founder of the Black Students' Union), math professor Alar Toomre bar-tending in 18.01, and more.

The focus of the readings this week is on the counterpoint of student and faculty activism in spring, 1969 at MIT. The nation was still in shock after the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. The level of activism at MIT and around the world was larger even than now, yet there was also lots of opposition to the protests. Still, MIT and many other universities around the world approached a tipping point where concessions had to be made, which happened later as a result of the more vigorous protests in the 1969–70 academic year, discussed last week.

### **October 30, 2019**

**Moore, K. 2008, *Disrupting Science: Social movements, American scientists, and the politics of the military, 1945–1975* (Princeton University Press), Chapter 5 (only the section on the March 4 Movement, pp. 137–46).**

Who wrote “MIT and the Warfare State,” what MIT department did it criticize, and why? When students began to organize anti-war efforts in the fall of 1968, what departments did they come from? Who were the faculty they worked with to organize the March 4 actions? What were the steps they took that were most effective in gathering support?

How many universities participated in anti-war demonstrations inspired by or similar to those urged by the MIT Science Action Coordinating Committee (SACC)? Were the protests all non-violent? What kinds of tensions arose between student organizers and MIT faculty? Why were the faculty “timid”?

Summarize the planning that occurred between January and March, 1969, for the March 4 movement. Why was there so much concern about what to call the March 4 event at MIT? Explain how this was related to students' questioning the political neutrality of MIT, and whether scientists advising the government on technical issues were morally complicit.

Why did MIT faculty create the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)? How were they influenced by SACC? Comment on the statements released by SACC and UCS on pp. 143–4. Were they polarized on the question of whether science is political or apolitical?

Moore writes, “Concerns about freedom of speech represented, at a superficial level, debate about rules of discourse. But they were also a microcosm of the much larger problem: could scientists serve as

neutral providers of information if they did not use rational and disciplined discourse?” Earlier she notes the discussion about “civility,” an argument that is often used to support existing power structures by suppressing dissent.

### **Founding Document of the Union of Concerned Scientists.**

Browse the UCS website and note the size of the organization today, the issues it addresses, and how it addresses them. Does it participate in nonviolent direct action? How does it seek to advance justice?

**Nelson, B., “MIT’s March 4: Scientists Discuss Renouncing Military Research,”**  
***Science* 163, 1175–1178; <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.163.3872.1175>;**  
**Articles and letters in *The Tech*: [February 25, 1969](#); [March 7, 1969](#).**

Plans for the March 4 research stoppage at MIT began with physics graduate students speaking to sympathetic faculty in their department. Quickly it became a much larger and more contentious affair. The article in *Science* and those in *The Tech* reveal different perspectives. There are at least three groups with different views portrayed in these materials. Who are they, what are their positions, and what role did they play in the March 4 events? Do any of the MIT UA presidential candidates discuss these issues? How was March 4 different at Stanford compared with MIT?

### **November 4, 2019**

**MIT review panel on special laboratories final report (“Pounds Report”), 1969,**  
**[online](#) (read at least pp. 1–26 and 88–106).**

SACC called for MIT either to divest from its labs doing classified research (the Instrumentation Lab in Cambridge and Lincoln Lab in Lexington), or to convert them to unclassified non-military research.

Before reading the Pounds Report, read about its formation in *The Tech* of [April 29, 1969](#), including the letter from President Howard Johnson. The short deadline given the Pounds Commission indicates the urgency that Johnson felt.

What did the Pounds Report recommend for the special labs? Do you think the result was pre-ordained? Who dissented, why, and how?

**Fate of the Instrumentation Lab—articles in *The Tech*: [May 2, 1969](#); [January 9, 1970](#); [May 22, 1970](#) (be sure to read the several articles and letters on pp. 4–5).**

Summarize the interaction between SACC and MIT President Johnson regarding the I-Labs. How might the events of [January 15, 1970](#) influenced the outcome? Why does Johnson say he divested the Instrumentation Lab? Why were some activists unhappy with this decision? Which student group won the Karl Taylor Compton Award in 1970?

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

WGS.160 / STS. 021 Science Activism: Gender, Race, and Power  
Fall 2019

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.