

**CALVIN HILL DAY CARE CENTER:
A CASE STUDY IN STUDENT ACTIVISM & CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF CHILD
CARE**

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Today, Calvin Hill Day Care Center sits situated in a renovated firehouse on 150 Highland Street. The day care center is a respected model for early childhood education, as a private, Yale-affiliated preschool and kindergarten program for students, employees, and faculty as well as for some community families from the Greater New Haven area.¹ Upon entering the child-proofed gates, visitors would be greeted with a warm and welcome site; twenty preschoolers romping across the floor of a converted firehouse, all engaged in various forms of developmentally-appropriate activities, from stamping letters out of playdough to crafting short storybooks out of white paper and markers. However, Calvin Hill Day Care Center did not always have a home up on what Yale University students colloquially term “Science Hill”. Rather, Calvin Hill Day Care Center began temporarily out of the basement of St. Thomas More Chapel in 1971, staffed by only five employees.² Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Calvin Hill Day Care Center began instead as an idea borne in the undergraduate dining halls of Davenport College in Yale University. In the fall semester of 1969, Kurt Schmoke (co-founder of Calvin Hill) and his roommate of the time, Jim Rohrbaugh, both recognized a pressing need that needed to be addressed amongst their co-workers in the dining halls: childcare.³ Calvin Hill emerged from the tumult of radical student activism and idealistic undergraduate action. The founding and creation of Calvin Hill daycare represents a grander push for greater childcare throughout the nation while exemplifying student activism at Yale. The bylaws and circumstances under which Calvin Hill was conceptualized ultimately encompass an expanding definition of health serving low-income communities.

¹ *Calvin Hill Parent Handbook* (n.p., 2017-8), 4.

² Calvin Hill Day Care, Calvin Hill Day Care Center, Kitty Lustman-Findling Kindergarten, accessed December 16, 2018, <http://www.calvinhilldaycare.org/>.

³ Kurt Lidell Schmoke, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 14, 2018.

The late 60s and early 70s were tumultuous times at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Yet, comparatively, Yale University, the third oldest, “one of the richest, and among the most esteemed in the United States”, remained relatively calm in comparison to similar universities around the country engaged in fierce student activism surrounding the Vietnam War, civil rights, and more.⁴ However, the university still faced its fair share of student activism. Specifically, Yale University’s branch of the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) was particularly active during this time.⁵ The SDS pushed on many fronts: full coeducation, workers’ rights, and a fair trial for the Black Panthers in the spring of 1970.⁶ The action that led most directly the conception of the idea to push for childcare for low-income employees arose from SDS’s action and collaboration with dining hall workers. According to Mary Pearl, co-founder of Calvin Hill Day Care Center, her and Kurt Schmoke were primarily motivated to begin the day care during this “time of labor unrest”.⁷

According to a pamphlet released at the time by the SDS detailing action on Yale’s campus, the SDS was primarily concerned by the fact that Yale was not increasing its full-time work force while increasing enrollment of student managers and short-term hires. This action was termed a “speed up”, putting greater pressure on dining hall employees.⁸ Specifically, the SDS asserted that Yale “concentrates black, Puerto Rican, and women workers in the worst job categories where the pay is lowest and the conditions are miserable” and that this “enables Yale to make super-profits off black workers, especially black women, and the wage differential keeps

⁴ John Taft, *Mayday at Yale: A Case Study in Student Radicalism* (Boulder, Col: Westview Press, 1976), 1.

⁵ Yale University, "Yale Alumni War Memorial," Yale University, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://visitorcenter.yale.edu/book/yale-alumni-war-memorial>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

⁸ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

the wages of all workers down.”⁹ In response to this problem, the SDS obtained jobs in the dining halls whenever possible and began to develop friendships with existing dining hall employees. The SDS formed a committee of the Campus Worker-Student Alliance (CWSA) to discuss their short and long-term goals; it was then that they heard the story of Colia Williams.¹⁰ Colia Williams, a thirty year old black woman, had recently been fired after throwing a cup of cranberry juice into her managers’ face after several days of harassment by the white student dining hall manager.¹¹ The manager had reportedly said, “if that bitch ever touches me again, I’ll kill her” and responded to her retaliation by making her clean the entire dining hall by herself.¹² However, Williams had not been working for Yale long enough to join the union and regain her job.¹³ She needed to complete a 90-day probationary period to qualify for membership at the Local 35 of Federation of University Employees, Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union.¹⁴

The SDS decidedly mobilized around Williams’ cause. This primarily culminated in a march in November of 1969 upon the office of Henry Krenski, the personnel director of the time, to demand the rehiring of Williams with all back pay restored. Around 200 students occupied the office and held its business manager, dining hall manager, and Krenski hostage for around three hours until 44 students were suspended.¹⁵ The university rehired her a day later. However, this occupation and protest was not the only initiative that was borne out of Williams’ cause; when a

⁹ A. W. Capitman et al., *Racist Yale Gives In*, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/pl-fight-racism.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Schwartz-Weinstein, "Broken Window," School Info System.

¹² Capitman et al., *Racist Yale*.

¹³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴ Schwartz-Weinstein, "Broken Window," School Info System.

¹⁵ Capitman et al., *Racist Yale*, 23.

student and a Yale employee first visited Williams to gather her story, she expressed how her primary financial difficulties arose from her five children. Her income was not much higher than subsistence welfare, especially because working meant that she was accruing extra expenses from “babysitters and nursery school.”¹⁶ This sentiment was not uncommon at the time; it was only around this time frame that the concept of widespread day care for preschool-age children was begin to percolate throughout the government and the reappraisal of welfare led to the growing awareness of the need for programs for mothers who could not afford to care for their children.¹⁷

According to an e-mail correspondence with Kurt Schmoke, the larger unrest on campus coupled with the “plight of food service employees, many of whom were poor, single mothers” served as a source of motivation to create some sort of action.¹⁸ Mary Pearl specifically recalls how Schmoke and her were “having a meal together in the Davenport Dining Hall” upon hearing of the occupation by the SDS; she and Schmoke agreed that they “seemed to be like spoiled kids” as it seemed more of a “self-preoccupation and membership recruitment drive activity” than something of “actual assistance” and instead desired to do something tangible for the workers.¹⁹ Schmoke and Pearl began to strategize around the effort. They circulated a survey to better solidify the needs of the labor union families; of the 500 workers contacted, 38 families indicated a need for daycare.²⁰ They spoke to several officials at Yale, including the president of

¹⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷ Erika Streuer, "Current Legislative Proposals and Public Policy Questions for Child Care," in *Child Care - Who Cares?: Foreign and Domestic Infant and Early Childhood Development Policies*, by Pamela A. Roby, student ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 49.

¹⁸ *Calvin Hill Day Care Center: 30th Anniversary*.

¹⁹ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

²⁰ Richard M. Schwartz, "'Day Care Power': Hill Speaks at Concert," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), May 11, 1970, 1, <http://digital.library.yale.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/yale-ydn/id/11326/rec/1>.

the university, Kingman Brewster, Yale administrators, and the head of the Local 35, the local union representing dining hall workers. At first, the union leadership was not happy with the idea of Yale management providing the day care, as it would not be a beneficial to their collective bargaining strategies.²¹ However, all did convey the message that a daycare center was necessary and welcomed, but that such a day care would need separate, private financial support.²²

This fundraising need manifested in having the center named after an individual well-respected by both the Yale community and the larger New Haven community. At the suggestion of William Sloane Coffin, the Chaplain of Yale University, this person was Calvin Hill.²³ Calvin Hill was a recent graduate and a renowned football player as part of the Dallas Cowboys; he held both the magnitude and the respect needed in order to garner support for an organization that would need the financial support if it were to be able to support low-income employees of Yale.²⁴ By having Calvin Hill become the namesake of the center, Schmoke also expressed his desire to have the day care center to become a unifying source of pride for the “town and gown” of the New Haven community as Hill was well-liked by all.²⁵ Calvin Hill agreed to give his name to the center (manifesting in later years with a young child asking him: “why did your mom name you after a day care center?”) and to help with the fundraising efforts.²⁶

The next steps were primarily accomplished through undergraduate student activism that a daycare was able to established and meet the needs of low-income employees. Several

²¹ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

²² Kurt Lidell Schmoke, "Founding of Calvin," e-mail message to author.

²³ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

²⁴ Kurt Lidell Schmoke, "Founding of Calvin," e-mail message to author.

²⁵ *Calvin Hill Day Care Center: 30th Anniversary*.

²⁶ Susan Gonzalez, "Newly Retired Director of Calvin Hill Day Care Reflects on Long Career," Yale News, last modified January 21, 2016, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://news.yale.edu/2016/01/21/newly-retired-director-calvin-hill-day-care-reflects-long-career>.

undergraduate students began to strategize around fundraising and finding a location for the daycare. Fundraising efforts, at first, were difficult; they needed \$36,000 to open and operate the center, and the location of the daycare also swung from one place to the other.²⁷ Small pledges were made from several student organizations (a college council, a senior secret society, and more) but none were substantial enough to truly meet their fundraising needs.²⁸

Funding for Calvin Hill Daycare Center truly began to gather support from Yale as an institution as a result of making common cause with other activists during the May Day protest and strike of 1970. In spring of 1970, just a semester after SDS actions about dining hall employees, concerns surrounding the Black Panther and Bobby Seale trials in New Haven were escalating at a dramatic rate. The past year in May 1969, Alex Rackley, a member of the Black Panthers, was tortured and murdered in New Haven. Bobby Seale and other Panther leaders were charged with orchestrating the murder; when it was announced that they would be tried in the summer of 1970, the national focus suddenly came upon New Haven.²⁹ After much tumult, a Strike Steering Committee (SSC) assembled with William Farley, a black sophomore as the chairman, to put forth five main demands from the Yale administration. The five demands encompassed a number of issues: the first being the dismissal of charges against the Panthers in the trial, the second that Yale disclose future plans of expansion into New Haven, and the third being the ceasing of construction of a Social Science Center and Institute. However, the other two demands directly pertained to issues involving blue collar employees: first, that Yale establish an adequate wage and compensation with retirement plans for their employees. The

²⁷ Richard M. Schwartz, "New Day Care Center at DKE to Be Named for Calvin Hill," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), March 5, 1970, 1, <http://digital.library.yale.edu/cdm/ref/collection/yale-ydn/id/11140>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Henry Chauncey et al., *May Day at Yale, 1970: Recollections the Trial of Bobby Seale and the Black Panthers* (Westport, CT: Prospecta Press, 2015), 18.

second, that Yale University would “establish adequate free day care facilities for Yale employees and the rest of the Yale community.”³⁰ Mary Pearl and Kurt Schmoke were able to successfully have the call for the day care center for the children of labor union workers listed as part of the student demands.³¹ The call for childcare is not new; earlier in the organizational demands, moderators of the Black Student Alliance at Yale (BSAY) similarly demanded from the United Front for Panther Defense (UFPD) that the university contribute to the Panther breakfast program for as many black children as there are black students at Yale and that “health and day care centers be established for the children of Yale employees.”³² Childcare was already a central focus for the strikers, because of Schmoke and Pearl’s previous activism and employees’ need for a daycare at an affordable rate.

The May Day Strike happened on Earth Day (Friday, April 31st) of 1970. The event drew radicals from all around the country; even renowned beat poet Allen Ginsberg came and was reported to be reciting poetry on Old Campus.³³ However, even during the strike, the need for a daycare was reflected in the types of amenities provided for the protestors. According to Sam Chauncey, President Kingman Brewster’s aide at the time, all the radicals who came in for the protest were invited to stay in the courtyards of the residential colleges. Several colleges were set up as stations for the strike; Davenport College in particular became a temporary daycare for the demonstrators who brought their young children, becoming set up to hold “two dozen youngsters” where undergraduates “played babysitter all day.”³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 73.

³¹ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

³² Chauncey et al., *May Day at Yale*, 52.

³³ Taft, *Mayday at Yale*, 132.

³⁴ Chauncey et al., *May Day at Yale*, 27, 58.

According to Schmoke, this was one moment that further cemented the need for childcare for low-income employees. As Dr. Seymour Lustman, the head of Davenport of the time, had allowed him and other students to host the children during the demonstration, he saw this as “underscoring” the “need for day care at Yale”.³⁵ Clearly, there needed to be a place where younger children could be safe.³⁶ After all, someone needed to be able to care for the children and babies of the demonstrators as they did their work.³⁷

Following May Day, the strike soon faded from the memories of students as the summer approached. In fact, one student asserted how this is how they knew that “students here are full of shit!” because of how quickly the demands of May Day left the attention of the general Yale populace.³⁸ However, there remained a “great desire on the part of faculty and staff” to demonstrate solidarity with the causes presented by the strike.³⁹ Of all of the demands the steering committee presented Brewster, one in particular was accepted. Namely, Brewster agreed to that Yale would match, dollar for dollar, “any funds raised for the Calvin Hill Day Care Center,” perhaps because it was one of the least controversial.⁴⁰ Under the advice and guidance of Kitty Lustman, the director of the Yale Study Center’s nursery school, and Sy Lustman, the head of Davenport College of the time and a child psychiatrist, Calvin Hill’s licensing was obtained and the daycare became official after a summer of fundraising by Mary Pearl.⁴¹

The first days of Calvin Hill in St. Thomas More Chapel reflected the students’ original justice-oriented sentiment of providing childcare for the blue collar workers of Yale. The initial

³⁵ Kurt Lidell Schmoke, “Founding of Calvin,” e-mail message to author.

³⁶ Chauncey et al., *May Day at Yale*, 27.

³⁷ Taft, *Mayday at Yale*, 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-3.

³⁹ Mary C. Pearl, “Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center,” e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

⁴⁰ Taft, *Mayday at Yale*, 162-3.

⁴¹ Mary C. Pearl, “Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center,” e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

board of Calvin Hill was assembled with the intentionality that the parents, at the time only labor union employees, would form the majority of the board of directors of the center with Yale students and administrators forming the rest.⁴² The board initially was comprised of seven labor union parents, three Yale administrators, two students, and one childcare professional.⁴³ Calvin Hill Day Care Center, unlike its current iteration that is open to other employees' families, was only open to the blue collar workers of Yale.⁴⁴ Mary Pearl discussed how Calvin Hill was a manifestation of the prevailing concern for many students at Yale as to how to enact justice in all of the conflict happening in New Haven.⁴⁵ Calvin Hill Day Care Center was founded with the idea that this group of idealistic students would create a "safe, nurturing, and inexpensive way for working parents to give their children a promising start in life."⁴⁶ In many ways, the founding of Calvin Hill encompassed a broader view of health in caring for the lifestyle and social needs of employees of Yale.

However, the emergence of Calvin Hill Day Care Center was not an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary, broader conversations across the United States had been in the works regarding the role of childcare and the provision of childcare to the poor. In the late 1960s, the reappraisal of the welfare situation in the United States was spurred by a growing awareness of a need to provide programs for the growing numbers of working-class mothers who couldn't afford to care for their children. This resulted in a number of radical changes in attitude in regards to child-care and the role of the government in providing child-care programs because of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Richard M. Schwartz, "Calvin Hill Center: Day Care Begins," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), September 24, 1970, 1, <http://digital.library.yale.edu/cdm/ref/collection/yale-ydn/id/194905>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Calvin Hill Day Care Center: 30th Anniversary*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the changing demographics of working mothers, as well as emerging research surrounding the importance of the first five years of development.⁴⁷ The emergence of Head Start in 1965, a comprehensive early childhood education program for low-income children and their families, could have contributed to this growing understanding of the importance of childcare; a March 1969 memo to the Advisory Committee on Head Start asserted that Head Start had created “an unprecedented amount of national interest in the importance of early childhood development.”⁴⁸

Several arguments of the time could be linked to why child care became tied to government involvement as well as to the low-income families of America. First was the prevailing view that the expansion of day care availability could be a potential solution to welfare issues, because it would allow “welfare mothers to be able to take jobs or obtain training in order to get off the welfare rolls -- thus cutting welfare rolls in the short run.”⁴⁹ The second is that generally child care, especially for children “between 15 months and three years of age”, was seen as a potential avenue to allow children in poor areas to have a head start and gain more intelligence in the long run in comparison to having not received an early childhood education.⁵⁰ The third is that the demographics of the workforce were transforming with the growing number of working women. In June of 1971, a press release from the government argued there were “five million preschool children in the United States whose mothers work, yet day care services are available for only 641,000 of those children”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Erika Streuer, "Current Legislative Proposals and Public Policy Questions for Child Care," in *Child Care - Who Cares?: Foreign and Domestic Infant and Early Childhood Development Policies*, by Pamela A. Roby, student ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 49.

⁴⁸ Andrew Karch, "A Watershed Episode: The Comprehensive Child Development Act," in *Early Start: Preschool Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1qv5ng7.7>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

This general mode of thought is reflected in the types of legislative proposals and governmental reform related to child-care that were introduced in the late 60s and early 70s. In total, in the first eight months of the 92nd Congress in 1971, ten child-care related programs were introduced; perhaps the most well-known is the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, which would have given priority to economically disadvantaged children by reserving funds equal to those given for Head Start programs, as well as funding children whose families have an annual income below the living standard budget.⁵² However, Richard Nixon, president at the time, vetoed the program in December of 1971; this provided the stimulus for the introduction of other related bills, but none would become law.⁵³ Nixon cited that his veto was due to the act's "fiscal irresponsibility, administrative unworkability, and family-weakening implications."⁵⁴ He described the act as wrong in that it would "commit the vast moral authority of the national government" to "the side of communal approaches" over and against the family-centered approach.⁵⁵

This growing discourse around child care was reflected in demographics of children who attended early childhood education programs. Before the late 1960s, kindergarten was viewed as the "stepchild of elementary school" but by 1968, around 70% of children eligible to attend kindergarten were doing so.⁵⁶ Day care was being seen as "more than baby-sitting"; one participant of the White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1970 made a statement that broadly reflected the sentiments of those who supported childcare reform in asserting that day

⁵² Ibid., 68.

⁵³ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁴ Karch, "A Watershed," 82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 62.

care “must build on what we know about child growth and development, about the developmental tasks of children. It is education, health, nutrition, socialization, and more.”⁵⁷

Although perhaps not directly derivative of the larger national conversations around childcare, Calvin Hill still stood at the crossroads of the national debate surrounding the role of childcare, low-income families, and developmentally appropriate curriculum. According to an interview with Carla Horwitz, who was the director of Calvin Hill Day Care Center for forty years from 1975, day care “had a whiff of the ‘custodial’ around it.” She asserted that, “there weren’t that many professional women working at the university” and that “those with means sent their children part-time to nursery school, or their children were taken care of by family members”. As a result, day care was seen as a “a social service” predominantly for poorer children rather than a place of learning.⁵⁸ Calvin Hill, then, began first conceived as an almost segregated institute, serving the needs of the poor. However, Calvin Hill soon evolved into a model for child development. Today, Calvin Hill has 60 children and is a nationally respected for providing intellectual, social, and emotional care for children.⁵⁹

Calvin Hill today still embodies the original impetus behind creating a daycare for labor union employees. Examining the mission and the goals of Calvin Hill as an institution reflects how this initial idea, budding from that of radical student activism in the 70s, has persisted into the modern day despite now serving children not only from low-income families. From the parent handbook of 2017-8, Calvin Hill includes in its mission a goal of providing “high quality, affordable child care” and that its Board of Directors is committed to “ensuring that the

⁵⁷ Karch, "A Watershed," 64.

⁵⁸ Gonzalez, "Newly Retired," Yale News.

⁵⁹ Nancy Polk, "Day Care: What Works, What's Needed," *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 25, 1997.

community of families enrolled is economically diverse.”⁶⁰ The day care center does so primarily by financially subsidizing Yale-affiliated families and some families in the Greater New Haven area; the ratio of which is approximately 75% Yale to 25% Greater New Haven families.⁶¹ Specifically, Calvin Hill provides subsidized tuition to 66% of their current families, at a financial loss of their own of \$150,000.⁶² It is the only Yale-affiliated child care program that allows this type of affordability through a sliding tuition scale.⁶³

Calvin Hill Day Care Center today stands as at the forefront of early childhood education programs. It no longer only serves the children of blue-collar workers; now, it has three integrated classrooms of threes, fours, and fives that house the children of professors, graduate students, dining hall staff, and more. Calvin Hill Day Care serves as a nation-wide model for what developmentally appropriate daycare can be, having been one of the first day care centers to be accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children in 1987.⁶⁴ The origins of Calvin Hill Day Care Center are rooted in “an expression of solidarity with the workers at Yale”.⁶⁵ The founders of Calvin Hill represented a middle class, educated, and integration-oriented coming together of students to change the nature of student attitudes toward Yale employees from one of “ignorance and neglect” to “concern and action”.⁶⁶ From the impetus of these student activists, changing nation-wide conversations of welfare and childcare,

⁶⁰ Calvin Hill Day Care, Calvin Hill Day Care Center, Kitty Lustman-Findling Kindergarten, accessed December 16, 2018, <http://www.calvinhilldaycare.org/>.

⁶¹ Gonzalez, "Newly Retired," Yale News.

⁶² *Calvin Hill*, 16.

⁶³ Calvin Hill Day Care, Calvin Hill Day Care Center, Kitty Lustman-Findling Kindergarten.

⁶⁴ Gonzalez, "Newly Retired," Yale News.

⁶⁵ Mary C. Pearl, "Founding of Calvin Hill Day Care Center," e-mail message to author, December 16, 2018.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

and the tumult and radicalism on campus, emerged the first college-based day care center for the children of workers.

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