

THE PSU STUDENT STRIKE: A LEGACY OF COLLABORATION
AND NONVIOLENT PROTEST

by

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Although an important and crucial aspect of Oregon's history, there is a lack of academic attention devoted to the antiwar movement at Oregon campuses. This thesis is an in-depth analysis of the antiwar movement at Portland State University from 1967 to 1971. Over those five years, multiple student organizations formed on campus with the goal of ending the war. Although ideologies varied among and within groups, a level of collaboration existed at Portland State that was unseen on a national scale, due in large part to the small size of PSU's antiwar movement. As the antiwar movement fell apart, and growing frustrations led many to consider violence, activists at Portland State committed to working together despite ideological differences. This resulted in a nonviolent movement, incredibly significant at the time and today. This thesis utilizes oral history interviews, newspaper articles, and contemporary literature to tell the story of this movement.

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Introduction

On May 11th, 1970, hundreds of police officers marched through the South Park Blocks next to Portland State University. After a weeklong student strike protesting the escalation of the Vietnam war and the killings at Kent State University, the city and the police had finally had enough. Sanitation crews tasked with clearing the park were met with little resistance as they took down barricades constructed from park benches, scrap lumber, and tables from the nearby student union building. However, tensions arose upon police's arrival at the makeshift medical tent set up in the middle of the park. Despite demonstrators producing a valid permit, police ordered forcible removal of the tent. Onlookers gathered to watch as activists linked arms and stood between the tent and the police. After shouting between sides, and despite bystanders pleading with the police to stand down, police proceeded to move in on the demonstrators, and beat them with clubs. Thirty one students were injured, the tent was removed, and the student strike and occupation of the Park Blocks was effectively put to an end.

This thesis explores the history of the 1970 student strike at Portland State. In many ways, the strike was a turning point for the university. Furthermore, it was a culmination of years of antiwar efforts. Its efforts and commitments to remaining nonviolent combined with the way it ended are widely remembered, and resulted in a lasting legacy. It also marked the beginning of a summer of activism in Portland, and was in many ways a catalyst for the formation of other, identity based movements at Portland State. Additionally, Portland State, and Portland's Left in general, are unique in the sense that groups with varying ideologies and beliefs, especially regarding violence in the antiwar movement, were able to set aside their differences and work together in a way that nationally, most of the left was not. This collaboration led to protests that were explicitly nonviolent, and to a commitment to nonviolence that, although not shared by

every individual, was collectively honored. This sets Portland State apart from the antiwar movement nationally, and is incredibly important to study, especially in light of the recent mobilization of student movements in solidarity with Palestine.

Interestingly, despite being so well-remembered, and despite its increasing relevance today, neither Portland State's antiwar movement nor the student strike have been given ample academic attention. Most scholarship on the antiwar movement focuses on schools like Columbia, where Students for a Democratic Society had a strong and militant presence, or on Berkeley, which was a hotspot for student activism for the entirety of the 1960s. Some scholars have also focused on activism at public state schools in the Northeast and Midwest. For instance, historian Kenneth J. Heineman argues in his book *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* that smaller, less prestigious state universities played a crucial role in the antiwar movement, and deserve more academic attention.¹ His book, however, focuses on Kent State, Penn State, Michigan State, and SUNY-Buffalo. While important, this book, along with most antiwar scholarship, omits any mention of the antiwar movement in the Pacific Northwest, and its impact.

The antiwar movement at schools like Portland State arguably had a great impact on campus, city, state, and even national levels. Still, only one source within the field of academia has devoted substantial attention to it. Dory Hylton's 1993 thesis, *The Portland State University student strike of May 1970: student protest as social drama*, is an excellent account of the strike, and relies heavily on interviews with students, faculty, and government officials. In her

¹ Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars : The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York University Press, 1993), 3-4.

introduction, Hylton also notes that strikingly little comprehensive and academic history on the student strike exists.² Over thirty years later, this still rings true.

It's even more surprising that so little academic attention has been devoted to Portland State's antiwar movement given the fact that their movement was unique in their commitment to nonviolence. The common historical narrative is that in the late 1960s, the antiwar movement turned towards violent forms of protest as a result of desperation and futility. Jeremy Peter Varon highlights this in his book *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, and states that over the course of the sixties, "local protest [escalated] into a major confrontation" across the nation, and that "the antiwar movement was posed for mass militancy" by 1970.³ At the same time, movements like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) fell apart and split due to ideological differences. So, in the late 1960s, within the antiwar movement, the crumbling of national leadership occurred at the same time mounting frustrations began to manifest as violence.

However, neither of these things had a great effect at Portland State. Although students involved in the antiwar movement had differing ideologies, they prioritized collaboration with each other over their individual beliefs. Portland State's SDS chapter agreed to remain together after the national split, and continued well into the 1970s, despite having people sympathetic to both sides of SDS. Some individuals within Portland State's greater antiwar movement held a very strong commitment to nonviolent protest, and some were sympathetic to or even involved with organizations like the Weathermen. That being said, since the movement was so small,

² Dory Hylton, "The Portland State University Student Strike of May 1970: Student Protest as Social Drama", (University of Oregon, 1993), vi.

³ Jeremy Peter Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 30, 131.

differing factions on campus prioritized working with one another. This resulted in a movement that was nonviolent. To summarize, Portland State's antiwar movement was unique both because organizations were able to stick together or collaborate with one another despite national leadership failing to do so, and because it remained nonviolent in spite of an increasing turn to violence within the movement. This is something that deserves attention both within academia, and from the public in general, especially today, when students at Portland State and all over the country are protesting university ties to Israel and the genocide in Gaza through methods like strikes, occupations, and encampments. This history remains incredibly relevant, and something to learn from.

In order to tell this story, it was necessary to draw from a number of sources, especially given the limited academic attention. In addition to Hylton's excellent dissertation, the book *Radicals in the Rose City: Portland's Revolutionaries 1960-1975* was written by two former members of Portland State's SDS chapter, and provides an account of Portland's left movements. These two books have served as the literary basis of my research centered around Portland State.

However, numerous other resources exist on this subject, especially primary sources. In the UO library archives, there is a booklet written by student activists detailing the events of the student strike, that includes the goals of student activists, the reasons for the strike, student testimonials, and art. A documentary called *The Seventh Day*, released in 1971, is available online, and contains footage of the student strike, and interviews with students, faculty, and bystanders. It specifically focuses on the final day of the strike and its aftermath. Additionally, newspapers like the *Oregonian* reported heavily on not only the strike, but on the antiwar movement at Portland State as a whole. There are articles well before and after the strike

detailing protests and demonstrations at Portland State that have proved to be very valuable and informative, and that also give perspective as to what views outside the movement were like.

More contemporary sources have also aided in my research. I have looked at accounts of the strike, and of the movement in general, in the *North Coast Times Eagle*, which was a newspaper published and circulated in the Astoria area by a Vietnam veteran who was involved with the movement. The *Portland State Magazine* has also devoted special issues to commemorate the anniversary of May 11th, and the year 1970, and those magazines often contain interviews with those involved in the antiwar movement, and the thoughts and recollections of alumni in general about events like the student strike. Additionally, speeches given at the 50th anniversary commemoration of May 11th and the student strike have been an excellent resource, both for information and for identifying individuals involved with the movement.

Identifying those individuals was an important aspect of the research done on this project. Because so little scholarship exists on Portland State's antiwar movement, it made sense to interview individuals involved and take an oral history approach to this project. Oral history is unique in the sense that it's more subjective, and much more person-oriented than most other research. Interviews are based around the interviewee's experience, meaning two people at the same event could, in theory, have opinions or experiences that widely differ. At the same time, this means that they make a historical event feel much more personal, and do a good job of showcasing differing perspectives around the event. For something like the antiwar movement at Portland State, where there's a lack of literature around the topic, oral histories are arguably the best method for gaining insights.

For this project, I conducted three oral history interviews with individuals involved with the antiwar movement at Portland State. Doug Weiskopf was an organizer in the student strike, and involved with the Yippie movement at Portland State. Matt Nelson was the chairman of Portland State's SDS Chapter at the time of the strike. Cathy Wyrick was also a key organizer for the strike, and was later involved with the women's movement. These three individuals shared their stories, and in some cases, provided ample additional resources and forms of information on the strike. This project makes extensive use of these interviews. They are the core and the foundation of this project, and have shaped my views and arguments on the antiwar movement at Portland State.

One way in which these interviews shaped the course of this project, which I feel is important to note, is through the focus on varying factions within the antiwar movement. There were several national and student organizations whose goals involved mobilizing to end the war in Vietnam. Several of these organizations had their own chapters or groups at Portland State. However, the accounts, both through oral history and through primary and secondary literature, cite Portland State's Yippie group and SDS Chapter as being most influential on campus. Especially given that the three individuals interviewed were part of these two organizations, it makes the most sense for this project to focus exclusively on them. This is not to discount or dismiss other antiwar or New Left organizations at Portland State. Organizations like the Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe) or Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) also had a strong presence on campus. However, research for this project centers around SDS and the Yippies, and in many ways explores how the two groups were able to navigate their respective differences.

With this in mind, it's also important to establish a context for everything that occurred at Portland State. In order to fully understand the importance of the movement at Portland State, an understanding of the antiwar movement at a national level is needed. Context such as the founding of the antiwar movement and of different organizations within it is necessary. Additionally, the story of how the antiwar movement began to consider violence as a means of protest and fell apart at a national level needs to be discussed in order to fully highlight how Portland State's movement was so unique. Thankfully, a large array of academic literature exists on the antiwar movement, and specifically New Left movements and militarism, on a national level. Works like *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* by Simon Hall and *There's Something Happening Here: the New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* by David Cunningham provide context and insight as to the origins of the antiwar movement, specifically within SDS. Mark Rudd's memoir *Underground: My Life With SDS and the Weathermen* has also helped to supplement these accounts of SDS. Additionally, Daniel Luck's *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* provides added insight to the intersections between the Civil Rights and antiwar movements. Finally, Jeremy Peter Varon's book *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* has proved valuable in its discussion of the sense of futility and subsequent turn to violence within the antiwar movement. These have aided me in establishing a national context in which to situate what occurred at Portland State in the years 1968-1972.

Overall, this paper covers a span of five years at Portland State, with a focus on the year 1970. Chapter 1 discusses the origins of the antiwar movement both nationally and at Portland State, and argues that Portland State's antiwar movement was unique in its abilities to

collaborate due to its relatively small size. Chapter 2's content all revolves around the year 1970, and the activism that led up to the student strike. It also discusses growing considerations of violence in the antiwar movement, and the splintering of national organizations such as SDS. This all ties into the larger discussion of the overarching commitment to nonviolence during the student strike at Portland State, and how that influenced the community, especially after the police attack on May 11th. Finally, Chapter 3 examines the aftermath of the strike, and activism that grew out of the antiwar movement both nationally and at Portland State.

Additionally, this introduction would be incomplete without giving attention to contemporary events. The antiwar movement has had a long-lasting legacy at Portland State, and is still widely remembered and taught. It has always been known, and relevant. However, it has arguably never been as important as it is today. In April 2024, the country has seen a mass student movement mobilizing to protest university complicity with the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. On almost 100 college campuses across the nation, student activists have set up encampments or occupied buildings.⁴ In several cases, they have been met with police brutality and violence supported by their administrations.

This is especially true at Portland State. Over the course of a week, students first occupied the South Park Blocks, then moved to occupy the Branford Price Miller Library on campus. Their demands included that Portland State “issue a statement condemning the genocide in Gaza with US-supplied weapons and demand a ceasefire,” and that they cut all university ties and partnerships with Isreal, and with Boeing. They also called for the disarming of campus police, and for increased education about Palestine, and more funding towards anti-racist

⁴ Jonathan Yerushalmy, Helen Livingstone, and Erum Salam, “Where Are the US College Campus Protests and What Is Happening?,” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/may/02/where-are-the-us-college-campus-protests-and-what-is-happening>.

programs and efforts.⁵ Portland State has since closed its campus, and after three days of occupation, Portland police and state troopers cleared the library and arrested over thirty protesters, while using force and by some accounts, tear gas.

The parallels between what's happening right now, and what happened in 1970 are undeniable. As was the case with the antiwar movement, Portland State has become a hotspot for pro-Palestine student protests. Portland State's history of activism, specifically with the antiwar movement, has never been more relevant as it is now. And here, studying the past is key to understanding the present, and the future.

⁵ Courtney Vaughn and Suzette Smith, "Police Arrest 30 during Portland State University Library Raid and Ongoing Protest," Portland Mercury, May 2, 2024, <https://www.portlandmercury.com/news/2024/05/02/47184449/police-arrest-30-during-portland-state-university-library-raid-and-ongoing-protest>.

Chapter 1

The antiwar movement was, and remains, one of the defining social movements in the history of the United States. With its origins in the Civil Rights and student movements, the antiwar movement polarized both the Left and the country as a whole, and gave birth to new identity-based social movements. While this has been widely accepted among historians as the story of the movement across the nation, there are certainly nuances to that. In the case of Portland State, different factions within the antiwar movement were able to set aside their differences, work together, and compromise, even as national leadership had all but dissolved. The relatively small core of leftists and antiwar activists in Portland agreed that there was strength in numbers, and actively made the choice to work together, despite differing perspectives. This fact is important in and of itself, and became increasingly important as violence as a means of protest increased in the antiwar movement, and as national leadership fell apart. In spite of these events, Portland State's antiwar movement continued to work together, and remained nonviolent. In order to fully understand the importance of this, however, local and national context needs to be given and established. Leftist activism existed both in Portland and across the country well before the antiwar movement.

In general, student movements across the country were mainly focused on issues of civil rights and nuclear warfare.⁶ The antiwar movement, in many ways, grew out of these causes and concerns. This, in several respects, started with the dynamic on college campuses across the country in the 1960s. In the years following World War II, more and more people started viewing college as an option, partially because of things like the GI Bill of Rights, which helped

⁶ Matt Nelson and Bill Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City: Portland's Revolutionaries 1960-1975* (Portland: Northwest History Press, 2013), 9.

veterans pay for school and partially because of the growing middle class. The two decades following World War II saw a huge increase in college enrollment. The number of students enrolled in college across the nation went from two million to four million between 1950 and 1960, and had nearly doubled again by 1968.⁷ The 1960s generation of college students was the largest group of college students ever seen in the United States, and had grown up with Cold War politics and the increase in suburbanization and the middle class. Additionally, they had grown up with a sense of optimism and faith in the United States that few had experienced prior to them. Following the end of World War II, economic growth and industry continued. In 1960, the United States was the richest and most powerful nation on the planet. John F. Kennedy's election in that year promised even greater economic prosperity under young and energetic leadership. College age students grew up with an increased sense of faith in their country and optimism in their own abilities to succeed.⁸

However, when they arrived at college, many began to notice ever prevalent injustices in their society, and express their dissatisfaction with those issues. In his book *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era*, Kenneth J. Heineman argues that the 1960s collegiate generation “[desired] to change the culture and politics of the nation and the university” and “rose up to challenge U.S. Cold War foreign policy and racism.”⁹

But what actually caused this desire for change? Heineman points to a couple of factors. In a very short period of time, the collegiate generation was inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, to the point where many felt compelled to take action themselves. In conjunction

⁷ Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: the civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 77.

⁸ David Farber and Beth L. Bailey, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 3-8.

⁹ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 1.

with that, the United States' increasing involvement in Vietnam reinvigorated a peace movement. Overlying all of this, students found that as they found ways to express their dissatisfaction with issues, the universities they attended, which were supposed to be esteemed places of education, frequently "denied students the right to champion political causes and speak freely on campus."¹⁰ To put things concisely, an increasing number of students was being made increasingly aware of national issues, and found that their universities, and American society in general, was not receptive to discussion of these issues.

These issues, however, did not emerge overnight. The Civil Rights Movement had been making great strides for the first half of the decade, and was by far the largest social movement in the nation for the first half of the decade. Many university students were inspired by what they saw, and for the first time, were compelled to join in on demonstrations, or in events such as voter registration or the Freedom Rides. A fundamental aspect of this was activists' (especially white activists) "faith in the underlying goodness of the United States"¹¹ and in their ability to make a difference in society. This faith, however, slowly eroded over the course of the decade, and in many ways, events activists witnessed and participated in within the Civil Rights Movement marked the beginning of that erosion.

Historian Simon Hall, author of *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s*, argues that "the radicalizing experience of civil rights work at the grass-roots level would help shape responses to the Vietnam war," where concerns were rapidly growing. As the decade progressed, as more and more American troops were sent to Vietnam, discourse on the Vietnam war increased both across the country and on college campuses. What was once a small country on a map became unavoidable, and somewhere everyone had a

¹⁰ Heineman, *Campus Wars*, 1.

¹¹ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 22

personal connection to.¹² President Johnson's decision to escalate the war with the implementation of bombing campaign Operation Rolling Thunder both politicized the war, and led to a resurgence in the peace movement, both on and off college campuses.¹³ This, in turn, sparked the beginnings of the antiwar movement.¹⁴ The movement first manifested as phenomena like teach-ins on college campuses, which "served to legitimize dissent" and consisted of lectures, debates, and conversations about the war in Vietnam, often facilitated by college faculty.¹⁵ The first teach-in was held at the University of Michigan in 1965, but quickly spread across the country. Soon, thousands of college students were being educated on America's involvement in Vietnam, and how it related to American imperialism, society, and structure. So, along with the issue of involvement itself in Vietnam, issues with university complicity in funding military research also emerged on college campuses.

At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement was struggling with how to keep their momentum, and whether that meant addressing Vietnam. As previously stated, student and activist experiences within the Civil Rights Movement helped to shape their involvement in the emerging antiwar movement. However, it's also important to note what was happening within the Civil Rights Movement itself. Some organizations within the Movement, most notably the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), decided to speak out against the war relatively early on. In early January 1966, activist Bob Moses stated that SNCC's criticism of America's involvement in Vietnam "[did] not come from what we know of Vietnam, but what we know of America."¹⁶ SNCC's response to the Vietnam war largely stemmed from outrage

¹² Cathy Wyrick, Zoom Interview, 2023.

¹³ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 22.

¹⁴ Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 1.

¹⁵ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 22.

¹⁶ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 22.

regarding the disproportionate amount of African Americans being drafted. In conjunction with this, many were enraged and disappointed in “the discrepancies between America’s claims to be fighting for freedom in Asia while denying millions of blacks basic democratic rights at home.”¹⁷ In other words, early civil rights criticisms of the war in Vietnam highlighted the hypocrisy of defending democracy abroad, while African Americans were both fighting for their own freedom at home and dying in a war in Vietnam.

Although SNCC publicized their feelings against the war relatively early on, these ideas were not initially widely held in either the Civil Rights Movement or in African American communities. According to Lucks, most Americans, regardless of race, “believed that matters of foreign policy were beyond the competence of Civil Rights leaders.”¹⁸ This, along with a feeling of indebtedness to President Lyndon Johnson for his passage of Civil Rights legislature, led prominent Civil Rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King Jr., to feel very conflicted about speaking out against the Vietnam war. Ultimately, King did not take a stand against the war until April 1967. However, his eventual choice to do so marked a turning point for both the Civil Rights and antiwar movements.¹⁹ By speaking against the war, King established that it was both his duty, and the duty of others involved in the movement and invested in equality and social change, to vocally oppose the war in Vietnam. Essentially, African Americans and Civil Rights leaders were beginning to connect “the black freedom struggle” with “larger currents of the 1960s.”²⁰ At the same time, students, including those involved in the Civil Rights Movement, were “beginning to see their possible involuntary participation in the war effort as connected to a

¹⁷ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 11.

¹⁸ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 3.

¹⁹ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 6.

²⁰ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 7

host of other issues in their local worlds.”²¹ This soon led to the formation of antiwar organizations, and the emergence of a larger student social movement.

The most important of these antiwar organizations was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).²² Their story begins in the early 1900s, when the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) was founded by Jack London and Upton Sinclair.²³ This group focused on addressing societal problems often related to labor. It later re-established itself as the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), and set up a student section, called the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID). By 1960, SLID was losing members, and in an attempt to gain more traction, changed their name to Students for a Democratic Society. Along with this name change, SDS essentially disaffiliated with the labor movement, and became more involved with civil rights, student rights and free speech, and outreach in low income communities.²⁴ According to Hall, their early efforts consisted of things like organizing an “‘interracial movement of the poor’ through a program of community organization model,” which was modeled after civil rights organization SNCC.²⁵ SDS recruited heavily in the Northeast and Midwestern regions of the United States, and to great avail.²⁶ Membership grew from roughly 250 to 800 members nationwide in the following two years, with a large concentration in the Northeast and Midwest.²⁷

²¹ David Cunningham, *There’s something happening here : the New Left, the Klan, and FBI counterintelligence* (University of California Press, 2004), 43.

²² SDS is widely regarded as the most influential, impactful, and important student antiwar organization in the 1960s. Multiple sources, including Hall, *Peace and freedom*, 23; Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 43; and Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 86 all detail this to some extent.

²³ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 86.

²⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 87.

²⁵ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 23.

²⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 87.

²⁷ Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 43.

By this time, SDS had undergone significant growth and changes in a relatively short amount of time. During the 1962 National Convention, members wanted to conceptualize their ideas and coherently express their values. There, they collectively drafted and finalized its manifesto, also known as the Port Huron Statement. This convention, and the manifesto that came of it, are considered to be a watershed event for student movements, and for what would come to be known as the New Left.²⁸ Here, SDS established demands for civil rights and social justice.²⁹ At the same time, two unique themes emerged.

Firstly, according to David Cunningham, author of *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence*, SDS, in its critique of aspects of American society, also laid out “a vision for reform that centered politically on a strong belief in participatory democracy.”³⁰ In other words, there were criticisms of American society, and there was simultaneously a great belief that those flaws could be fixed through political reform. At the same time, the Port Huron Statement also emphasized “an unerring faith in the university as a setting for social change.”³¹ This is especially interesting and important. The idea that the working class would be the driver of social change was fundamental to leftist organizations at the time. By asserting that the university could have this agency instead, SDS essentially broke with old, traditional leftist philosophy, and both initiated and paved the way for the rise of the New Left.

²⁸ Cunningham, *There's something happening here*, 43.

²⁹ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 23.

³⁰ Cunningham, *There's something happening here*, 43.

³¹ Cunningham, *There's something happening here*, 44.

As the decade progressed, SDS became increasingly involved in the antiwar movement. Early on, leaders “connected the issue of war with a larger critique of the American system.”³² At a speech at Columbia University in 1965, SDS president Paul Potter explained that SDS must

...build a movement that understands Vietnam in all its horror but as a symptom of a deeper malaise, that we build a movement that makes possible the implementation of values that would have prevented Vietnam, a movement based on the integrity of man and a belief in man’s capacity to tolerate all the weird formulations of society that men may choose to strive for... a movement that will not tolerate the escalation or prolongation of the war but will, if necessary, respond to the Administration war effort with massive civil disobedience all over the country, that will wrench the country into a confrontation with the issues of the war; a movement that must out of necessity reach out to all these people in Vietnam or elsewhere to find decency and control for their lives.³³

In other words, SDS very early on identified American involvement in Vietnam as an aspect of the American system that needed to be addressed and changed. Here, Potter makes clear the belief that in order to truly prevent Vietnam, or to prevent anything like it in the future, real social and political change was needed. SDS’s determination to prevent the war is clear here, as is the assertion that they are willing to do whatever is necessary in order to ensure they are not complicit in Vietnam, or anything similar. This determination, and the call for mass mobilization and civil disobedience is essential to understanding both SDS and the antiwar movement as a whole.

As the decade progressed, SDS became far more radical, militant, and eventually, ideologically divided at a national level.³⁴ However, their story, and the story of the antiwar movement in Portland, begins with these initial principles and values. Throughout the 1960s, Portland had a small but strong student activist presence. Early in the decade, Reed College was the hotspot for student protest and activism. Located in Southeast Portland and founded in 1908,

³² Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 42.

³³ Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 42-43.

³⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 87.

Reed was and is a liberal arts college renowned across the country for its students' politically progressive views.³⁵ This certainly held true from the beginning of the 1960s. Richard Healey, a student activist at Reed, recalls an early radical student group on campus called FOCUS, which was active in the 1960s.³⁶ FOCUS, Healey stated, was essentially a Marxist study group, where student activities primarily consisted of reading material and meeting to discuss it. Additionally, they participated in demonstrations, including Portland's newspaper strike in 1959-1964, and marches for nuclear disarmament within the peace movement.³⁷

In the following years, several student activist groups emerged at Reed. Most notably, an SDS chapter was established in 1964. As was the case with many SDS chapters at the time, Reed SDS worked in close collaboration with SNCC, and helped to organize voter registration drives. SDS also leafleted for Civil Rights marches across Portland, and helped UAW with union organizing drives.³⁸

Reed's antiwar movement continued to be active throughout the 1960s. However, Portland State University eventually emerged as the hotspot for student activism in Portland. This was due in large part to the founding of an SDS chapter at Portland State in 1967, the growing student body, and a downtown location ideal for protesting.³⁹ Initially called the Vanport Extension Center, Portland State was originally a two-year college founded in 1946 to meet the growing demand for higher education among World War II veterans. By 1955, it had been renamed Portland State College, become a four-year institution, and moved to southern

³⁵ Reed College, "Mission & History," Mission & History - About Reed - Reed College..

³⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 9. Healey also mentions that FOCUS was one of the first radical student groups in the United States, along with groups like SLATE at Berkeley, VOICE at Michigan, and ACTION at Columbia.

³⁷ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 9.

³⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 14-15.

³⁹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 77.

downtown Portland.⁴⁰ The new downtown campus was also located next to the Park Blocks, a twelve-block stretch of green space with benches and walking paths. These Park Blocks essentially connected the university to downtown, which proved to be optimal for campus demonstrations.

Still, Portland State was, and always had been a commuter school. Antiwar activist Doug Weiskopf remembers the majority of students were themselves from Portland, and lived far off campus. Usually, they would drive to campus, park, go to class, and then leave. Because of this, Weiskopf initially viewed Portland State as a “pretty apathetic place,” and one without a cohesive or community feel.⁴¹ However, enrollment increased throughout the decade, as did student movements. By 1969, Portland State had acquired university status and been renamed from Portland State College to Portland State University. This was in conjunction with the establishment of several student antiwar groups and a growing Black Student Union.⁴² With time, according to Weiskopf, Portland State started to feel like a “full campus,” where students had “a real sense that [they were] real college students.”⁴³

With the new growth, both in general and within student movements, it was, for Weiskopf, an exciting time to be at Portland State.⁴⁴ However, it’s important to note that the radical community there was still relatively small, especially compared to other schools on the West Coast.⁴⁵ According to Dory Hylton, there were about 25 “core activists” who were consistently involved with antiwar activity at Portland State.⁴⁶ Interestingly, within this activist

⁴⁰ “History,” History | Portland State University, 2024.

⁴¹ Doug Weiskopf, Zoom Interview, 2023.

⁴² Hylton, “Student Protest,” 100.

⁴³ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁴⁴ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁴⁵ Schools on the West Coast, especially the University of California, Berkeley, are widely known for leftist movements and a large hippie presence, both on and off campus.

⁴⁶ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 17.

group, students were associated with different factions of the antiwar movement. Core activists were affiliated with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe), the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and the Yippie movement.⁴⁷ These groups all interacted with each other and had the common goal of ending the war in Vietnam. However, they also had their own ideologies, and formed in very different ways. In order to understand these differences, though, it's important to first understand the formation of each group, and their respective values. For the purpose of this thesis, the following focuses on Portland State's SDS Chapter and Yippie group.

SDS was formed at Portland State in the fall of 1967, and continued until 1973, well after SDS had fallen apart on a national level.⁴⁸ Once established, their efforts centered primarily around trying to get students involved in demonstrations against the war, whether it was a city demonstration or on campus. Along with other campus antiwar groups, they participated in large-scale nationwide events. However, according to former SDS member Matt Nelson, they also found ways to demonstrate against "anything that the university had that [they] thought was connected to the war in some way through funding," the most notable example being a police institute affiliated with the university.⁴⁹

Additionally, SDS was involved with Portland's Black community, especially with the Black Panther Party. According to Nelson, "when they were having struggles with the police or doing community events, we tried to help them out the best we could and support their efforts."⁵⁰ Kent Ford, the leader of Portland's Chapter of the Black Panther Party, remembers the Panthers'

⁴⁷ Ibid; Matt Nelson, Zoom Interview, 2023.

⁴⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 87.

⁴⁹ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

relationship with other Left groups as being “excellent,” and recalls several SDS members from Portland State showing up to community events and to trials.⁵¹

These forms of activism undoubtedly had an impact, both on and off campus. However, the most influential and remembered method in which SDS was able to get students involved with the antiwar movement was through the Student Speakers Committee.⁵² This was a program funded by the university, with a committee chaired mostly by students. According to student activist Nancy Sanders, interviewed in the book *Radicals in the Rose City: Portland's Revolutionaries 1960-1975*, it was initially “a quiet little student committee no one knew about.”⁵³ However, since it was mostly run by students, SDS was able to join the committee in large numbers, and essentially “take over the university’s speakers program.”⁵⁴ Bill Nygren, who co-authored *Radicals in the Rose City* also remembers that students were able to get on the committee by attending three consecutive meetings.⁵⁵ They sent their members to meetings in large numbers, and eventually installed Matt Nelson as the Chairman. This opened the door for SDS to bring in “radicals” from all over the country to speak, thus exposing the student body to antiwar and anti-imperialism ideology.⁵⁶

It’s worth mentioning that these events were highly attended, and not just by those with more radical ideas.⁵⁷ With a budget of \$10,000, the Speaking Committee was able to bring speakers from all over the country, including SDS (and future Weather Underground members) Ted Gold, Diana Oughton, Bernardine Dohrn, and John Jacobs. Kent Ford of the Black Panther

⁵¹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 179, 184.

⁵² Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁵³ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 168.

⁵⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 93-94.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Party came to speak, as did many other prominent leftist academics and theorists.⁵⁸ Famously, SDS also brought Robert Kennedy to speak at Portland State in May of 1968, just a week before he was assassinated.⁵⁹ These events were exciting and intriguing, and were well-attended by the student body as a whole. Nelson characterizes this as “probably [SDS’s] biggest success” on campus.⁶⁰ In fact, the Speakers Committee, in many ways, spurred the Yippie movement into action at Portland State.

This was definitely the case for Weiskopf, whose interest in politics grew after witnessing Kennedy’s speech at Portland State. Along with several other students, Weiskopf began volunteering for Kennedy’s, and then Eugene McCarthy and Wayne Morse’s political campaigns.⁶¹ This group even decided to attend the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago that summer, both to support McCarthy and to partake in the Yippie festival of life.⁶² In addition to the Yippies, Mobe and SDS were also planning large scale demonstrations at the DNC. According to Cunningham, the goal of several of these organizations was to “expose the bankruptcy of the bipartisan electoral system,” and to show that simply voting for the best candidate within that system would not bring about change. Instead, the goal of demonstrators was to “encourage and help discontented Democrats to seek new and independent forms of protest and resistance.”⁶³ However, demonstrators were met with a huge police presence, and were outnumbered by police almost 4 to 1.⁶⁴ Over the week, police repeatedly attacked demonstrators, and according to numerous eyewitness accounts, “charged, clubbed, and beat

⁵⁸ For a more extensive list of speakers, see Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 110.

⁵⁹ Nelson, Interview, 2023; Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁶⁰ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁶¹ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁶² Weiskopf, Interview, 2023; Hylton, “Student Protest,” 53.

⁶³ Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* According to Cunningham, all 12,000 Chicago Police officers were on duty, as were 6,000 National Guardsmen. Additionally, 6,000 Army Soldiers were on call.

demonstrators for minor offenses or for no real offenses at all.”⁶⁵ By the end of the week, a thousand demonstrators had been arrested, over six hundred had been injured, and one was killed.⁶⁶ After witnessing these events, and after Nixon’s election that November, many Portland State students involved in political campaigns concluded that “electoral politics was a dead end at that point,” and formed a protest group on campus.⁶⁷

According to Hylton, this protest group was largely influenced by the “style and philosophy” of the Youth International Party, otherwise known as Yippies.⁶⁸ The Youth International Party was famous both for its antiwar intentions, and the playful way in which those intentions were conveyed. Additionally, Yippies were unique in the sense that they had no official membership, no leaders, and no dues to pay. At Portland State, as with Yippies all across the country, the protest group forming had no membership list, and according to Weiskopf, took pride in “being bound alone by loyalty to our cause and to each other.”⁶⁹ According to Hylton, the Yippie style of protest “attempted through symbolic actions to highlight the contradictions of war and peace, death and life.”⁷⁰ They did so through a combination of guerilla theater, celebration, and absurd actions. Most famously, founder Abbie Hoffman organized a ritual to levitate and exorcise the Pentagon in an antiwar protest in 1967. At the same time, those involved in the Yippie movement, and certainly Yippies at Portland State, were extremely committed to ending the war in Vietnam. Their playful style of protest “overlaid [their] deadly earnest intent.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 54.

⁶⁶ Cunningham, *There’s something happening here*, 55.

⁶⁷ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁶⁸ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 54.

⁶⁹ Doug Weiskopf, ‘Thanks, Sarah’, Email, 2023.

⁷⁰ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 54.

⁷¹ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 24.

However, for the newly formed PSU Yippies, the first few months were about learning how to work together, and figuring out how to organize.⁷² Additionally, they had to figure out their group's ideological values. This was no small feat at the time, especially given the increasing divisions within the antiwar movement. One commonality, though, was members' commitment to nonviolent protest. Hylton states that "acts of violence were antithetical to [the Yippies'] agenda," nationally, and especially at Portland State.⁷³ Figures like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Sun Tzu, who advocated for nonviolent resistance inspired Weiskopf and other members, and influenced their future protest actions.⁷⁴

Over time, the Yippies found their footing, and in the year after their formation, became the leaders of the antiwar movement at Portland State.⁷⁵ This position, however, was complicated, especially due to the small size of the activist core at Portland State. Both SDS and the Yippies rarely had more than a dozen members in either of their respective groups.⁷⁶ As a result, they, along with students belonging to other antiwar groups, often collaborated with events and held joint endeavors. As Hylton explains, "the Yippie influence overlaid most of the campus agitation, even though many events were joint ventures of the core activists."⁷⁷ It's important here to distinguish the difference between the activist core, and the respective groups it was composed of. Essentially, the activist core worked in collaboration with one another, despite belonging to different factions, and despite ideological differences. According to Nelson, both Portland and Portland State's leftist and antiwar movements were simply too small to afford large-scale ideological disagreements. In order for anyone to have substantial numbers within the

⁷² Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁷³ Hylton, "Student Protest," 26

⁷⁴ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

⁷⁵ Nelson, Interview, 2023. Protest action of the PSU Yippies will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷⁶ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023; Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁷⁷ Hylton, "Student Protest," 21

antiwar movement at Portland State, they had to work together on demonstrations and protests, and “[leave] their ideology for off campus.”⁷⁸

This dynamic is incredibly complicated and nuanced, especially around the issue of nonviolent protest tactics. Most in the activist core “experimented with essentially peaceful actions” within their respective factions.⁷⁹ However, as seen with SDS and within the antiwar movement in general, there were many who were beginning to shift to a more militant, even violent rhetoric. Portland State was not an exception to that, and per Hylton, a “passionate personal commitment to violent revolution” did exist among a few student activists.⁸⁰ That being said, since the PSU Yippies led the antiwar movement on campus, and groups needed to work together, this resulted in essentially no violent actions on the part of organized student antiwar groups. Activists, according to Hylton, “had a stabilizing influence on one another.” The activist core was large enough to host multiple factions with varying ideologies and commitments to nonviolence, but it was also small enough that these groups had to compromise and collaborate with one another in order to have a meaningful impact on campus.

This kind of collaboration was especially unique, because it was occurring at a time when national antiwar leadership was fracturing into factions, and unable to compromise among them. Following the split of SDS, and the increasing turn to violent protest, the collaboration among the activist core, and the relative commitment to nonviolence would prove to be especially important in the year 1970.

⁷⁸ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁷⁹ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 17.

⁸⁰ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 18.

Chapter 2

All over the country, the spring of 1970 was tumultuous, and filled with unrest. The expansion of the Vietnam war into Cambodia resulted in a surge in student protest. This wave of protest existed largely without national leadership, and at a time where, according to historian Jeremy Peter Varon, the antiwar movement was “posed for mass militancy.”⁸¹ At the same time, demonstrators were met with violence and brutality from police and even the National Guard, most notably at Kent State and Jackson State Universities.

The killing of four students at Kent State University on May 4th, 1970 triggered additional protests, and spurred a national student strike, in which Portland State took part. Like many others, their student strike ended in police violence. However, the student strike at Portland State was unique for a number of reasons. Despite a lack of national leadership, and the increasing factionalization of the antiwar movement, Portland State’s various antiwar groups continued to collaborate with each other despite ideological differences. Most importantly, the value of nonviolent protest, while not universally held, was maintained and strictly enforced throughout the course of the strike, and within the movement as a whole. Especially given that the movement nationally was growing to believe that violence could bring about change, this is incredibly significant.

However, the antiwar movement at Portland State did not start or end with the student strike. For the entire academic year leading up to the strike, both SDS and the Yippie contingent continued with their antiwar activism. In the months leading up to the student strike, raising awareness about the horrors of the war in Vietnam remained the top priority for activist groups. According to Doug Weiskopf, the goal of protesters throughout the year was to “[keep] the

⁸¹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 131.

Vietnam war protest movement in people's heads all that year."⁸² SDS leader Matt Nelson echoed this sentiment, saying that SDS's priority was to get as many students and faculty involved as possible.⁸³ These goals were reflected in different forms of action leading up to the strike.

Certain events united both SDS and Yippie affiliates from Portland State. The most popular example of this leading up to the student strike were the Moratoriums to End the War in Vietnam. These demonstrations emerged nationally, first as a push for a general strike and demonstration if the war had not ended. Over time, they evolved into a series of large-scale antiwar demonstrations that were highly attended across the country, by students and nonstudents alike. Both nationally and in Portland, the Moratoriums became an "outpouring of public dissent unprecedented in American history."⁸⁴

The first Moratorium march, held October 15th, was the largest antiwar protest ever in Portland, with 7,000 people in attendance. Classes were canceled at Portland State, and nearby University of Portland and Lewis and Clark Colleges.⁸⁵ At Portland State, students leafleted nearby areas and high schools to promote and raise awareness about the event. Some students also blockaded the door to the local draft induction center, which ultimately resulted in police using force to remove students from the center. The biggest event, however, remained the march through downtown Portland. Weiskopf remembers an "uproar of people" showing out to support the march.⁸⁶ Over the next three months, two more Moratorium marches were held in Portland, and well attended by both student activists and the community.

⁸² Doug Weiskopf, 'Results of the disciplinary hearing', Email, 2023.

⁸³ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

⁸⁴ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 116.

⁸⁵ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 56.

⁸⁶ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

Throughout this, a variety of antiwar and protest methods took place. Some students felt it was more effective to try to raise awareness about the war and the Moratorium by leafleting and engaging in conversation. Others took what they viewed as more militant action, and put themselves in a position of conflict, as was the case with blockading the induction center. However, students from all ends of this spectrum agreed that ending the war was important and saw the Moratorium as an opportunity to take different actions to achieve this goal. The combination of varying actions, and the massive turnout for the march goes to show both the nuances within the antiwar movement at Portland State, and the collaboration that still existed despite those nuances.

In addition to the Moratoriums, events also took place on campus-wide level. Students continued to organize marches throughout downtown Portland. SDS maintained their position within the Speakers Committee, which continued to draw large audiences of the student body, “radicals” or not. Additionally, students, specifically the protest group Weiskopf was involved with, began to protest the presence of Navy, Army, and Marine Corps recruiters on campus. Initially, they blockaded the rooms where recruiters spoke. When this resulted in a faculty-student hearing with probation threatened, they turned to other, creative methods of protest. Following the return of recruiters to campus, members of the protest group threw a mock homecoming celebration, complete with refreshments, a beauty contest, and dozens of kazoos playing “Anchors Away.”⁸⁷ When it was announced that meetings with recruiters would be by appointment only, student activists booked all the appointments, and took turns teasing and taunting the recruiters.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 27.

⁸⁸ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

These protest tactics were playful in nature but serious in intent, key characteristics of the Yippie movement.⁸⁹ Although events like the homecoming for recruiters were fun, there was an intentionality behind them. They were designed to attract the student body to events, and to have people join them in protest. As Weiskopf states, despite the comical approach, there was “a determinedly serious purpose to everything [they] did to protest the Vietnam War.”⁹⁰

These actions did not go without consequences for antiwar activists. During winter of 1970, for instance, Weiskopf and four other students were threatened with, and almost placed on probation for disrupting Navy recruiters on campus. However, during their disciplinary hearing, hundreds in support of what came to be known as the “PSU Five” showed up in support, with signs and costumes. The board dropped all charges of probation, and the “recruiting wars” continued on campus.⁹¹

That being said, as far as administrations went, Portland State’s was relatively supportive of antiwar activism on campus. Hylton argues that “as far as the administration was concerned, peaceful student dissent was tolerated, if not facilitated” by the administration, and by President Gregory Wolfe.⁹² Wolfe, in many instances, had vocally opposed the United States’ policy in Vietnam, and had stated publicly that he encouraged discussion and debate of war-related issues at Portland State.⁹³ By the end of the school year, Wolfe was familiar with the core activists on campus, and believed in their commitment and ability to protest safely and without violence on campus.⁹⁴ Over the course of the 1969-1970 academic year, antiwar activists at Portland State had relative freedom to carry out their antiwar activism.

⁸⁹ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 55.

⁹⁰ Doug Weiskopf, ‘Discipline in the ranks’, Email, 2023.

⁹¹ Doug Weiskopf, ‘Movie “Animal House” inspired by PSU ‘70’, 2023.

⁹² Hylton, “Student Protest,” 97.

⁹³ Ibid; Hylton, “Student Protest,” 104.

⁹⁴ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 98.

However, despite the consistent activism and huge turnouts at events such as the Moratoriums, an increasing sense of futility began to emerge, both at Portland State and on a national level. Events like the Moratoriums, which garnered an unprecedented and overwhelming amount of support, still had not succeeded in swiftly ending the war. As the war continued, seemingly with no end in sight, people became disillusioned with certain methods of protest and activism. Gary Waller, a sociology professor at Portland State, criticized the Moratoriums in an issue of *Willamette Bridge*, stating that

The traditional strategy for anti-war movements has rather clearly been a failure. The history of these movements in the last few years has been a cyclical one. We build towards large marches. This one will end the war. It does not. The movement collapses for a period of time and then we grid ourselves for one more round of large marches that will really end the war. They don't. Around and around we go. After each wave of protest we get a sop from the government. But we have gotten no real changes.⁹⁵

Later, Waller stated that in order to end the war and to make a difference, “build[ing] a movement composed of alliances among numerous groups” was necessary.⁹⁶ He argued that by building connections with groups that share similar views in problems, institutional change is possible. Waller wasn't alone in his views on the antiwar movement, or in his views on how to adjust and make a difference. Countless others felt and expressed that same frustration. However, others across the country began to view violence as a more effective method of ending the war. As Varon argues, “the frustrations of making modest demands... fed the more ambitious rebellion of the late 1960s.”⁹⁷ This was absolutely true of the antiwar movement, and had huge implications, especially for SDS.

⁹⁵ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 58-9.

⁹⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 59.

⁹⁷ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 24.

It's important to note that this was, in many cases, not violence for violence's sake. Those committed to ending the war in Vietnam, especially those involved in antiwar groups and organizations, were very dedicated to that cause. They felt profound outrage at their inability to end the war, and towards the system as a whole, which resulted in distrust and disillusionment of both the political system, and American democracy.⁹⁸ According to Varon, this resulted in a mindset where many felt that "there were very few wins... it was clear that something more radical was needed."⁹⁹ This manifested as violence, whether that was as a means of self defense, an expression of outrage, or an outright attack on a society which supported the continuation of the war.

In other words, violent expressions of outrage became political statements for many antiwar activists. Yippie founder Abbie Hoffman, who previously condemned violent protest, stated in 1969 that "outrage takes on new meaning when you throw a rock through a window," essentially characterizing violence as a real and valid way to express political anger.¹⁰⁰ In essence, as Varon argues, leaders of the antiwar movement began to "doubt the efficacy of peaceful protest" and to view methods of violent confrontation as vital not only for ending the war but for destroying the system responsible.¹⁰¹ Many felt that violence was making a "real contribution to the struggle of others," where words and other forms of protest were not.¹⁰² This was not just the case among isolated individuals, but also among entire student organizations

⁹⁸ David Horowitz, "Triangular Gridlock," North Coast Times Eagle, 2004. Horowitz was a faculty member and advisor to the strike committee at Portland State.

⁹⁹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 129-130.

¹⁰¹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 92, 113.

¹⁰² Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 91.

such as SDS. Increasingly, leaders of SDS began to believe that violence was necessary to end the war, and to change the system that was responsible for it.¹⁰³

At the same time, SDS was facing tensions. Despite being an organization known for its openness and its faith in participatory democracy, factions had formed over time, and people began to seriously disagree about what SDS stood for.¹⁰⁴ During the 1969 SDS National Convention, disagreements between the Progressive Labor Party (PL) and the newly formed Weathermen faction of SDS's National Office came to a head. PL believed that social change came from the working class and were focused on issues of class struggle, whereas the Weatherman faction believed in everyone's involvement in a violent revolution against imperialism.¹⁰⁵ These two perspectives contradicted each other and proved to be irreconcilable. According to former Weatherman and SDS leader Mark Rudd, leaders of the National Office and of the Weathermen declared during the convention that those that didn't agree with their ideology could no longer be members of SDS.¹⁰⁶ This essentially split SDS, the leading national and student antiwar movement. It also effectively isolated SDS and stripped the remaining members of their widespread support and collective ability to organize. Although Weathermen first viewed the split as a victory, according to historian David Cunningham, it truly "signaled the end of SDS as a viable mass movement."¹⁰⁷

After the split, SDS largely "faded away from the national spotlight."¹⁰⁸ The National Office eventually closed, and the Weathermen were not widely supported on college campuses.

¹⁰³ Mark Rudd, *Underground: My life with SDS and the Weatherman Underground* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 132.

¹⁰⁴ Rudd, *Underground*, 147.

¹⁰⁵ Rudd, *Underground*, 142-147.

¹⁰⁶ Rudd, *Underground*, 152.

¹⁰⁷ Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

However, Nelson states that at Portland State, the chapter “agreed to remain and to continue the activities it had been doing.”¹⁰⁹ Although members were sympathetic to both the PL and Weathermen factions, they agreed to continue working together.¹¹⁰ Still, Nelson views SDS’s national split as tragic for the antiwar movement.¹¹¹ Campus movements, from there on out, were operating for the first time without direction from central or national leadership.

This was especially significant given the events taking place in spring of 1970. There was already an overwhelming sense of frustration and futility within the antiwar movement.

However, these feelings mounted in late April, when Nixon announced the decision to expand the war into Cambodia. After promising in his campaign to get the United States out of Vietnam, and after policies like Vietnamization, which had been steadily reducing the amount of American ground troops in Vietnam, this announcement came as a shock to many. Reed College’s President acknowledged this in an interview with the *Oregonian*, stating that many Americans took Nixon’s Vietnamization policy seriously, and that he himself was among the population stunned at the Cambodia invasion.¹¹² Although Nixon characterized the invasion as a “necessary extension of the war,” this itself was met with outrage, especially within the antiwar movement.¹¹³

Almost immediately, students across the country reacted angrily in response to the invasion. Frustration present beforehand turned quickly into rage, and the days after Nixon’s announcement saw a huge increase in student protests and activism across the country. Headlines from the *Oregonian* just two days after the announcement included “Campus Peace Movements

¹⁰⁹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 87.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

¹¹² Frank Bartel, “College Presidents Examine Student Unrest,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹¹³ “US Troops Ordered Into Cambodia: Nixon Reveals Action Aimed at Red Bases,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

Take on New Vigor in Wake of Cambodia Drive,” and “Cambodia Plan Fuels Rioting on Campus,” and detailed events happening both in Portland and nationwide.¹¹⁴

At Portland State, students shared national sentiments of rage and frustration. However, it was the killings of four students at an antiwar demonstration at Kent State University that truly became a catalyst for mass student demonstrations. On May 4th, 1970, students at Kent State gathered to protest the invasion of Cambodia. The National Guard was called in, and ultimately opened fire on the protesters, killing four students and injuring several others. This news shook the country, and further incensed the student population. Almost immediately, “university actions across the nation were touched off,” and calls for a nationwide student strike began.¹¹⁵ Portland State was no exception to this. In the hours after the Kent State news broke, activists at Portland State formed a strike collective and began organizing with the goal of temporarily closing the university. Two days after Kent State, students were officially on strike.

However, this did not occur without issue or disagreement. During the initial meeting after the news of Kent State, students from varying perspectives and antiwar groups gathered, including SDS and Yippie affiliates. In a group of about fifty people, differing views emerged on what kind of action to take. While most agreed that there should be a boycott of classes “in order that the energies of faculty and students could be refocused from the classroom to the issues,” the issue of how to go about doing that proved to be a contentious one.¹¹⁶ SDS pushed for an educational program, and wanted to organize and mobilize the student population.¹¹⁷ Others sought a more politically oriented approach, and wanted to circulate petitions to get the attention

¹¹⁴ “Campus Peace Movements Take on New Vigor In Wake Of Cambodia Drive,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970; “Cambodia Plan Fuels Rioting On Campus,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹¹⁵ “Four Kent State Deaths Touch Off Nationwide Campus Demonstrations,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹¹⁶ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 106

¹¹⁷ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 119.

of Oregon senators. The vast majority, however, wanted to strike, shut down campus, and “express their outrage in spontaneous actions.”¹¹⁸ Concerns about issues like organization and lack of central leadership were all raised as a result. However, those looking to strike maintained in their manifesto that “what [they] would have gained in organization and direction [they] would have lost in energy.”¹¹⁹ A strike collective with leaders and committees was quickly formed, and despite disagreements and issues with organization, those who didn’t agree with the majority still agreed to help.

On May 6th, students at Portland State went on strike. Organizers immediately mobilized to take over the Smith Memorial Center on campus, and the Park Blocks adjacent. The Smith Center quickly became a sort of headquarters for the strike, where a phone bank and radio station were set up, posters and fliers were being made.¹²⁰ At the Park Blocks, barricades began to form, and protesters began to occupy the park. On the second day of the strike, classes at PSU were officially canceled, although buildings were allowed to remain open. An outpouring of people wanting to take part in the strike arrived on campus, such as students from Reed and Lewis and Clark Colleges, and dozens of nonstudents from the Portland area. Vietnam Veterans Against the War set up a medical tent in the center of the park. Those who lived in the neighborhood stopped to talk with park occupants. For a week, the fourth floor of Smith Center and the Park Blocks were the centers of the student strike.

¹¹⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 119.

¹¹⁹ Joel Weinstein and Cathy Wood, “PSU Strike,” Booklet, 1970.

¹²⁰ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 110.

In addition to the occupation of the Park Blocks, students also had other objectives. The strike committee identified four key issues as the rationale behind the strike.¹²¹ As with student strikes across the country, the main issues and reasons for striking were opposition to the invasion of Cambodia, and the continued escalation of the war in Vietnam, in addition to the mourning and protesting of the events at Kent State, and police violence on other college campuses. Additionally, Portland State activists included protesting the imprisonment of Black Panther Bobby Seale, and the unfair treatment of political prisoners as an issue. Finally, nerve gas shipments and distributions in the Pacific Northwest were listed as an issue.

All this was to say that “business at the university and in the country could not go on as usual.”¹²² The strike committee, in identifying these issues as the reason for their going on strike, meant to call attention to these issues, and to say that life should not be continuing as normal while issues such as the expansion of the Vietnam war were occurring. However, the purpose of the strike, as detailed in a booklet account of the strike written by committee members, was not only to protest these issues, but to educate people on them. Strike leaders identified the mission of the strike as “political education,” and sought to achieve this through a wide variety of methods.¹²³

In other words, activists mostly “sought to widen their support, to bring people from the campus and community into the antiwar movement.”¹²⁴ Students and faculty, including SDS

¹²¹ Many sources identify four issues of the strike. However, there are variations in the issues and in the wording. The four issues listed on the following page are the ones that were most repeated and emphasized throughout the documents. Sources listing key strike issues include: Andrea Janda, *Remembering May 11, 1970: A Commemoration of Portland State University's Legendary Protest of the Vietnam War and the Kent State Killings* (Portland, Oregon, Portland State University, 2022).; Doug Weiskopf, ‘The 4 PSU Strike Issues’, Email, 2023.; Hylton, “Student Protest”, 11.; Weinstein and Wood, “PSU Strike,” 1970.

¹²² Hylton, “Student Protest”, 103.

¹²³ Weinstein and Wood, “PSU Strike.”

¹²⁴ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 18.

affiliates, pushed for educational speakers, and set up a “radical university with teach-ins.”¹²⁵ Subjects were taught mostly by faculty, both outside and in occupied campus buildings, and subjects included things like imperialism and women’s liberation.¹²⁶ At the same time, marches took place throughout the week. Demonstrations occurred at City Hall, through downtown, and at the nearby induction center. Strikers went to local high schools to get youth involved, picketed outside of local grocery stores, and organized candlelit vigils to honor those killed at Kent State.¹²⁷ On multiple occasions, activists also marched to the docks in an attempt to persuade longshoremen to go on strike, since their union was antiwar.¹²⁸ Despite picketing for multiple days, and at multiple docks, this was met with little success.

Throughout all this, the city remained largely unsupportive. Mayor Terry Schrunk refused to acknowledge the strike’s demands, and called repeatedly for “law and order” to be maintained.¹²⁹ Additionally, Oregon’s governor Tom McCall repeatedly called for classes and campuses to reopen across the state, and offered to send the National Guard in to clear the Park Blocks at Portland State.¹³⁰ Wolfe’s administration, however, was more supportive of the student strike. Not only did Wolfe resist pressures from the governor and mayor to involve the National Guard and police, he created opportunities throughout to negotiate with strikers. He established daily meetings and forums, in which anyone from the Portland State community could come and share their thoughts on the strike.¹³¹ Although strike leaders deemed these forums irrelevant, and did not attend, Wolfe’s choice to make these available, combined with his resistance to police presence or force speaks volume. Although he may not have fully agreed with the strikers, there

¹²⁵ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

¹²⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 123.

¹²⁷ John Guernsey, “Longshoremen Ignore Student Strike Plea,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹²⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 124.

¹²⁹ John Guernsey, “Protest March Proceeds Calmly, Marred Only By Flag Incident,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹³⁰ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 145.

¹³¹ Hylton, “Student Protest,” v.

was enough of an understanding to the point where he did not wish to impede or interfere with the strike. This was due in large part to Wolfe's familiarity with and understanding of the core activists, which had built over the course of the year. The relative support of the administration, and the administration's reluctance to use violence, enabled the strike to continue for as long as it did.

Arguably, the most successful actions taken during the strike were those that were community oriented. Smith Memorial Center became the headquarters of the strike, and people were there around the clock creating posters or fliers.¹³² Strikers illegally set up a radio broadcast called Radio Free Portland, and broadcasted information about the strike and about the war, in addition to playing "alternative music of a radical nature."¹³³ The fourth floor of the student center became a hotspot for strike activity and outreach, and for parties later at night.

In the Park Blocks, barricades were manned at all times, and formed unique communities, also called "barricade families."¹³⁴ Barricades, in many instances, had names. One was named after Tricia Nixon as a joke, one in honor of Bobby Seale, and one for Alan Peterson, after a woman looking for a friend asked people at the barricade if they had seen him.¹³⁵ Here, person-to-person interactions and recruiting worked to a great effect and helped activists to achieve their goals of education and community outreach. Two women working on a banner called to a youth from the balcony of Smith Memorial Center and invited him to help.¹³⁶ One man recalled walking through the Park Blocks during the strike and feeling inspired to join strike activities

¹³² Hylton, "Student Protest," 109.

¹³³ Doug Weiskopf, 'Radio Free Portland,' Email, 2023.

¹³⁴ Weinstein and Wood, "PSU Strike."

¹³⁵ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 121.

¹³⁶ Hylton, "Student Protest," 110.

after hearing someone call out “brother, will you join us?”¹³⁷ Members of the community donated supplies, and joined in conversation with strikers.¹³⁸

Weiskopf remembers the Park Blocks as a place of music, debates, and discussion.¹³⁹ The *Oregonian* reported discussion at the barricades as consisting of a variety of things, from U.S. involvement in Cambodia, to racism, to Kent State, to where to get more wine for the evening.¹⁴⁰ Overnight, strikers lit bonfires to keep warm at the barricades.¹⁴¹ However, the strike was not without issues. Certain events, such as dances and parties, were held at Smith Memorial Center to bring in numbers of people, and for the enjoyment of strikers. These were attended heavily by both high school and college students, and often spiraled out of control. Issues of vandalism and drug and alcohol use prevailed throughout the strike.¹⁴²

Additionally, some remember the strike as “[suffering] from lack of organization.”¹⁴³ Nelson, to this day, calls into question whether the barricades and Park Blocks occupation were at all politically productive.¹⁴⁴ Specifically, members of SDS questioned the effectiveness and organization of the strike. However, members of SDS were also aware of the importance of the strike, and of the issues on which it was based. Although they didn’t necessarily agree with the methods used, they were also aware that they were not the ones in charge. As previously, and as within their own group, SDS was able to put aside their differences for the most part and participate in a way that was meaningful to them without creating larger disagreements in the leadership of the strike. This is especially significant in the context of the larger antiwar

¹³⁷ Clifford Walker, Janda, *Remembering May 11, 1970*.

¹³⁸ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 110. The “hospital tent” was among the supplies donated by the community, and proved to be an important symbol for the strike.

¹³⁹ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁴⁰ John Painter, Jr., “PSU Strikers Air Illegal ‘Radio Free Portland’ To Propagandize,” *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹⁴¹ Guernsey, “Longshoremen,” 1970.

¹⁴² Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 123, Hylton, “Student Protest,” 106.

¹⁴³ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 119.

¹⁴⁴ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

movement. At a time where there was a lack of national leadership, and increasing factionalism within the antiwar movement, different groups at Portland State were able to work together despite actively disagreeing from a practical and ideological standpoint.

Adding significance to this is the explicit nonviolent attitude that was present throughout the entirety of the strike. Leaders of the strike “expressed repeatedly their commitment to nonviolence.”¹⁴⁵ They also knew that with an influx of nonstudents and people from the community, they needed to be proactive about their message of nonviolence. According to Weiskopf, a core part of the strike was also “keeping the kids from running wild and keeping the violence under control.”¹⁴⁶ As Hylton explains, especially after the events of Kent State, strike organizers went to great lengths to ensure that “supporters be careful to obey university rules and local ordinances in order to protect their credibility, as well as to avoid any pretext for retaliatory violence.”¹⁴⁷ Although there were confrontations and tensions throughout the duration of the strike, no violence was ever condoned or advocated by strike leaders, who were “aware that illegal or violent acts could alienate those they wished to attract.”¹⁴⁸ Weiskopf’s view, also widely held by the strike leaders, was that nonviolence was “morally, and tactically, the right thing to do.”¹⁴⁹

Despite organizers’ efforts, the strike ended in violence. All efforts to keep peace, to avoid confrontation, and to educate campus and the community were forcibly shut down by the city and the police on May 11th, the seventh day of the strike. Organizers had already decided that day would be the final day of the strike. Campus had reopened, and classes had begun again,

¹⁴⁵ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 98.

¹⁴⁶ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 119.

¹⁴⁸ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 18.

¹⁴⁹ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

albeit with low attendance. The barricades were still up, but weren't a physical obstacle to students attending classes. Throughout the morning, there were tensions between those on strike and those who opposed the strike and wished to attend class. Some students who wanted the barricades taken down went to City Hall to protest and speak with the mayor.¹⁵⁰

This led to talks and negotiations between students, Portland State administration, and city officials. The city, for several days, had been agitating for an end to the strike. President Wolfe, although not entirely against the strike, agreed that it had gone on for long enough, and that it was time for the strike to come to an end. Strike collective representatives talked with the city and with the police, and together they reached an agreement that the barricades would come down that day, and that strikers would dismantle them with the help of city sanitation workers. The sole exception to this was the medical tent, which had a permit valid through the next day. This permit was initially accepted by the police. However, Parks Commissioner Francis Ivancie ultimately declared the permit invalid, and ordered the medical tent to be removed.¹⁵¹

This was met with resistance from the strikers, and as arguments ensued, Portland's Tactical Operations Platoon began to move in, with orders to take the tent down by force. Strike leaders stated to the growing crowd that they planned to protest the police and stand in front of the medical tent.¹⁵² Despite threats of arrest, activists quickly linked arms and stood between the tent and the police. As police slowly closed in, bystanders, including faculty, pleaded with police to stand down. President Wolfe tried repeatedly to contact Commissioner Ivancie and stop police violence, in fear of a repeat of the events of Kent and Jackson State.¹⁵³ Weiskopf, terrified, says

¹⁵⁰ Hylton, "Student Protest," 9-18.

¹⁵¹ John Painter, Jr., "Both Sides See Broken Promises Behind Violent Confrontation Between Police, Protesters," *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹⁵² Michael McCusker, "Bloody Monday," *North Coast Times Eagle*, 2005.

¹⁵³ Hylton, "Student Protest," 217.

he accepted his fate, and turned back to yell at those not willing to take a beating to “get the hell out.”¹⁵⁴ He and other demonstrators stood their ground as the police moved in, and began beating the demonstrators with clubs. Eyewitnesses and participants recall police hitting protesters over the head, kicking them while they were down, and beating them when they attempted to help the injured. By the end, thirty-one people were injured, the tent was removed, and the student strike and occupation of the Park Blocks was effectively put to an end.

This event is remembered well by strikers and onlookers, and had a great impact, even those in opposition. The student population who opposed the strike and wanted campus to return to normalcy were appalled by the violence unleashed by the police, as were residents living near the Park Blocks.¹⁵⁵ Many “claim they were radicalized by witnessing the violence at the tent.”¹⁵⁶

This is perhaps best evidenced by the march on Portland’s City Hall the next day. Thousands attended, including those who were previously against the strike. One PSU student and Vietnam war veteran, when asked about his choice to march, said “Yesterday morning I was for the barricades being taken down and for things to get back to normality.” His mind had changed, he said, because “The police... went too far yesterday. I really believe they went too far.” When asked if he would support the strike now, he replied “Well, I paid my money to this school, and I’d like to go to this school. But if this is what it gets down to I think I would.”¹⁵⁷

Another attendant at the march, who had never attended a march or protest before, stated that he was there because he was “upset about the way police treated students at the university.”¹⁵⁸ One older woman answered “I think it’s time that the adults came forward and we helped our kids. I

¹⁵⁴ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ Hylton, “Student Protest”, 154.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Auch, Jr., Jim Blashfield, Jr., Tjerk Dusseldorp, James Joerger, Clyde Keller, Jack Sanders, Sue White, *The Seventh Day*, (1970, Portland, Oregon, Center for the Moving Image Film Unit, Portland State University), Youtube.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

think it's time we stopped... saying that they're crazy and... that they wanna be radicals. Sure, we know there's radicals in all of them, but by God Almighty... when are we gonna stop letting the kids stand up here and fight this battle by themselves?"¹⁵⁹ All of these people were harboring some sort of doubt about the antiwar movement and the strike. However, witnessing or hearing about the unprovoked violence towards activists changed their mind enough that they marched on City Hall, and reconsidered their previous beliefs.

This change in beliefs likely would not have happened if the strike was not so expressly and openly nonviolent. Strike leaders were openly and vocally committed to nonviolence, and had not tolerated anything of the sort over the course of the strike.¹⁶⁰ Even those against the strike, and wanting a return to normalcy on campus, could not help but find it unjust that students were beaten so brutally despite holding those views. The older woman interviewed, like most Portlanders, was very apprehensive of radicals and the antiwar movement. However, the idea that the police would take such actions when students were doing nothing but peacefully protesting moved her enough to join the march. It's likely that she would not have had that change of heart if the students had committed acts of violence or vandalism.

Weiskopf, when explaining his views on nonviolent protest, explained this as the police's violence "condemn[ing] them" and that their actions would "expose themselves by being on the wrong side of history."¹⁶¹ In the case of the PSU student strikes, this was absolutely the case. Regardless of whether they had been in support of the strikes, or of the war, thousands of people agreed that the violence unleashed by the police was unprovoked and wrong. Because

¹⁵⁹ Auch, *The Seventh Day*, 1970.

¹⁶⁰ Hylton, "Student Protest", 98.

¹⁶¹ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

nonviolence was a core principle of the strike, its impact ended up extending beyond PSU, and being felt all around Portland.

The student strike at Portland State is widely remembered for the way it ended. However, the story of how it ended has been told countless times and is true of countless other universities and protest movements across the country. The student strike, and the greater antiwar movement at Portland State was not unique because of the events of May 11th. Rather, it was unique because it involved people of varying perspectives on how to end the war coming together to attempt to achieve that goal. Matt Nelson of SDS did not have a commitment to nonviolence, and did not think that the student strike was politically effective. However, he, along with the SDS chapter at Portland State, still agreed to help in a way that they felt would be productive.

This is not to say that the student strike, and the antiwar movement before and after the strike, went entirely without argument. There were undoubtedly tensions, debates, and arguments among different factions. However, the ability to work together despite differences still existed on multiple levels. Factional and ideological differences existed within antiwar groups, and in larger groups, such as the strike committee. At the end of the day, there were disagreements and differences, but students still agreed to work together with a common goal of ending the war, in a way that national leadership organizations could and did not. Nowhere is this more evident than during the student strike.

That being said, just as the antiwar movement at Portland State didn't start with the student strike, it also did not end with it. Protests continued on through the summer, and activists were determined not to lose their momentum, even after the strike ended. This, and the effects of the antiwar movement in Portland, will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

The student strike was far from being the end of the antiwar movement and campus activism at Portland State. Activists viewed the summer as an opportunity to continue to protest American involvement in Southeast Asia. Even after the summer of 1970, when many of the core activists had graduated and left Portland, other movements, such as Women's and Gay Liberation groups, quickly developed at Portland State. The student strike, and the antiwar movement in general, became a catalyst for new social movements and for impactful changes, both nationally and locally.

Immediately after the strike, citizens and students alike expressed concern about what led to police violence. On one hand, many witnesses to the police violence, either in person or on television, were appalled, and in many ways, radicalized. On the other hand, several people thought the strike had gone on for too long, and was ultimately unjustified. The *Oregonian* reported on May 13th that 10 calls to the mayor's office supported police action during the strike for every call that opposed it. They also reported that calls to President Wolfe's office were about 50/50 in terms of support and opposition.¹⁶² The city conducted an investigation, and found that while students did not provoke any violence, police were ultimately not guilty. Just days after the strike ended, the *Oregonian* alleged that "confrontation probably ignited because both city officials and strikers believed that they had been double crossed" due to miscommunications about whether or not park permits were valid.¹⁶³ Ultimately, the city found this to be the case in the investigation as well, and nobody was charged.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² "Support For Police Action At PSU Running 10 to 1," *The Oregonian*, May 1970.

¹⁶³ Painter, Jr., "Both Sides See Broken Promises," 1970.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Activists, the city, and the administration all wanted to avoid another confrontation, and any repeat of the violence on May 11th.¹⁶⁵ As a result, the rest of the school year, and graduation passed uneventfully at Portland State.¹⁶⁶ However, some activists feared losing the momentum from the strike, and that things would die out completely over the summer. Weiskopf especially worried that with the amount of students leaving campuses and going home for the summer, activism would cease drastically, and that the Nixon administration would view the wave of student protest as a phase instead of as a mass movement and something to listen to.¹⁶⁷ This fear wasn't at all unfounded, especially since Weiskopf's own group had shrunk by about half with the summer's start.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, though, those that were in town and committed to a summer full of activism found out about what Weiskopf refers to as "the greatest opportunity in the world" for them.¹⁶⁹ On May 25th, 1970, newspapers announced that Richard Nixon would be speaking at the American Legion Convention in Portland in September. The remaining activists sprang into action, and planning for a demonstration quickly commenced.¹⁷⁰

Much like the strike, planning demonstrations centered around the American Legion proved to be no small feat. Early on, divisions arose between those who wanted a "militant demonstration" and those who wanted a "life festival."¹⁷¹ Still, as with the strike, different factions were able to reach an agreement, and decided to have a combination of the two. Protest activities, they decided, would last a total of five days. There would be marches protesting Nixon

¹⁶⁵ Hylton, "Student Protest," 131.

¹⁶⁶ Hylton, "Student Protest," 11.

¹⁶⁷ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 59.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

and the Legion, and music celebrations in the park. The group decided on the name “People’s Army Jamboree,” and planning continued.¹⁷²

Importantly, activists at Portland State were able to circulate news of the protest through underground newspapers across the country. Weiskopf had a friend working at the Los Angeles Free Press who was then able to get articles printed across the Liberation News Network.¹⁷³ That summer, articles appeared all over the country stating that fifty thousand people were coming to Portland to participate in the protest. This number existed for a couple reasons. One was to entice more people, and draw them in.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, activists wanted to intimidate Nixon. They wanted to make themselves, and the antiwar movement known to him, and as a result, advertised “shamelessly” that over 50,000 people were coming, without any real basis to that number.¹⁷⁵ Weiskopf especially was concerned with making Nixon feel weak and unwelcome, referred to their advertising and planned protests as “nonviolent guerilla warfare” and intended to “torment” Nixon.¹⁷⁶ Jamboree organizers used tactics of intimidation through widespread circulation to get to Nixon.

In many ways, the events of the student strike, specifically of May 11th, helped to pave the way for Jamboree organizers. Neither party, under any circumstances, wanted any violence by either the police or demonstrators. The city was especially concerned with fallout, and appointed a new Parks Commissioner. This Commissioner proved to be much more agreeable, and organizers were able to compromise with the city on many different counts. Weiskopf states that throughout the summer, Jamboree organizers and the city were on a “if you’re straight with

¹⁷² Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 59.

¹⁷³ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 73.

¹⁷⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 59.

¹⁷⁵ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

me, I'll be straight with you basis.”¹⁷⁷ This was a clear benefit. In exchange for agreeing to keep things nonviolent, organizers were able to procure all the permits they needed. However, this came with a catch. The city did not want demonstrations close to where the American Legion was meeting and refused to give permits for marches or parks nearby the Memorial Coliseum. This frustrated many activists, but they ultimately agreed to compromise- for the most part.¹⁷⁸

Organizers faced their fair share of additional challenges. Organizing five straight days of activities and planning for tens of thousands of attendees was no small feat. Many became discouraged and overwhelmed before the event had even happened. This was also partially due to burnout from the student strike, and the ever-present sense of futility at the continuation of the war. This sentiment was not just exclusive to Portland State but existed at a national level. Many involved with the antiwar movement became disillusioned with the movement, and exhausted by protesting. In some cases, this manifested as violence, but in many cases, it resulted in withdrawal from the movement.¹⁷⁹ Just as many wanted nothing to do with the antiwar movement nationally, many involved with the strike at Portland State also wanted little to do with the People's Army Jamboree, simply because they were exhausted and needed a break.¹⁸⁰

These challenges were in some ways abetted and in some ways exacerbated by a financial donation of \$10,000 by Patricia Sabin, a wealthy heiress who often supported progressive causes.¹⁸¹ This gift helped with planning and funds. Organizers bought a printing press for publications, and additional funds went to phones and supplies.¹⁸² However, that sum of money

¹⁷⁷ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 64. There is one notable exception to this compromise, which occurred the day Nixon was due to speak at the convention. There, organizers decided “all bets were off” and marched to the convention to protest.

¹⁷⁹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 126, 139.

¹⁸⁰ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 63. Nelson, Interview, 2023.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 64.

also caught the attention of the state government. Sabin stated that police watched her house for days after she made the donation, and that she believes that the money “gave the [Jamboree] enough standing” that Oregon’s Governor McCall decided action was needed.¹⁸³

The action taken by the state of Oregon manifested in an interesting way. McCall wanted to draw protesters away from the Jamboree, and was presented with the idea of sponsoring a rock concert directly outside of Portland. This would effectively draw away audiences who would otherwise be protesting, and would also be peaceful.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the festival “Vortex 1” was born. Thirty miles outside of Portland, on the same weekend the Jamboree was scheduled to be held, the State of Oregon sponsored Vortex 1. In an effort to appeal to hippie audiences, both nudity and drug use were permitted.¹⁸⁵

McCall was unsure of this decision, and worried that if the plan failed, his political career would be over. However, his plan was ultimately successful. Roughly 70,000 people attended Vortex 1 and another neighboring festival, and under 1,200 turned out for the People’s Army Jamboree. Many planned activities didn’t happen, although there were several marches and demonstrations, albeit with a lower turnout than planned. For many, this fed growing feelings of disillusionment and bitterness. Weiskopf remembers feeling “very bitter about all the kids that ran off to the rock festivals,” and ultimately “swore [he would] never be part of an organized group again” after the People’s Army Jamboree.¹⁸⁶ In the following year, several of the core activists at Portland State left Portland and moved elsewhere, sometimes to organize, and sometimes to settle down, find a job, and begin a normal life.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 64.

¹⁸⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 65.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023. and email “individual protesting” march 17th 2023

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Bernt, ‘Portland State University Antiwar Movement,’ Email, 2023.

Although many were disappointed by the lackluster turnout at the Jamboree, organizers still celebrated a great victory. Nixon had been due to speak at the event, and at the last minute, canceled his speech and sent Vice President Spiro Agnew as a replacement.¹⁸⁸ For a group that had spent the whole summer trying to intimidate Nixon, and make him aware that the antiwar movement was nowhere close to dying down, this cancellation meant total victory. Cathy Wyrick, one of the core activists at Portland State, remembers the Jamboree as “the best thing [she] ever did. It can’t be put down on a resume. Nixon canceled his speech because of us. We won.”¹⁸⁹ Weiskopf, despite his disillusionment with organized groups, also still views this as an unequivocal victory, and remains incredibly proud that Nixon was, in his words, “chased out of Portland by a bunch of snot-nosed Portland State kids.” To this day, he firmly believes that Jamboree organizers succeeded in their intimidation of Nixon, and “seriously affected the Nixon White House.”¹⁹⁰

After the People’s Army Jamboree, activism changed at Portland State. On one hand, participants were proud of the work they did, and viewed Nixon’s cancellation as a victory on their part. On the other hand, several were suffering from burnout, and became disillusioned with the movement. However, the antiwar movement didn’t die completely after the summer of 1970. Although there was no longer a strong activist core, some groups continued with the work they were doing. SDS was active at Portland State until 1972, and continued with the Speakers Committee. A radical bookstore opened in the Goose Hollow neighborhood in 1971 with the goal of providing literature to the community, and a special focus on educating incarcerated individuals on radical ideas.¹⁹¹ Additionally, both at Portland State and across the nation, the

¹⁸⁸ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023. Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 66.

¹⁸⁹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 72.

¹⁹⁰ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

¹⁹¹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 149.

antiwar movement was giving way to identity based movements, especially that of Women's Liberation.

All over, women who had been involved in the antiwar movement, and in the Civil Rights movement before that, began to notice and call out sexist behaviors and contradictions within those respective movements. Within both movements, activists were learning to “explore the meaning of equality” and develop a new “egalitarian ideology.”¹⁹² At the same time, women were still not being treated as equals within those movements. In her book *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left*, Sara Evans details the contradictions between SDS's progressive and revolutionary ideology, and the experiences that women faced within the organization. Women were often subjected to the “generally oppressive use of intellectual and verbal skills by men in SDS,” and talked over or down to. Confident and vocal women, Evans states, were viewed by men in SDS, and in New Left movements in general, as a threat instead of as an equal or an asset.¹⁹³

This was true not only in SDS, but in movements across the country, big or small. At Portland State, Cathy Wyrick, who was involved with the Yippie activist group, recalls that although her experiences weren't as bad as those of other women in the antiwar movement, there were certain expectations and assumptions being made about her because she was a woman. “People would just assume things,” she said. “If you're in a meeting, they'll just assume that if you're the only woman, you're gonna make the coffee... it's not a big thing, but it means that you're not sitting there.”¹⁹⁴ Wyrick, who aspired to become a journalist, remembers thinking that that was “totally impossible” because she was a woman. She even remembers being told “you're

¹⁹² Sara M. Evans, *Personal politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 23, 220.

¹⁹³ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 166.

¹⁹⁴ Wyrick, Interview, 2023.

such a nice girl, I didn't know you could write!" by a staff member at the Oregonian.¹⁹⁵ Still, she maintains that things weren't as bad for her personally at Portland State, both because it was such a small group of activists, and because her writing skills proved to be an asset in such a group.¹⁹⁶

Wyrick says that comparatively, her experiences were nowhere near as bad as what others went through in the movement. Many women felt sexually objectified, or outright disregarded by men in the antiwar movement. For Wyrick, it never got to that point. However, the bottom line is that within both large organizations, and within small groups who often set aside ideological differences to work together, women were still subject to sexism and inequality within movements so passionate about social justice and reform. Evans argues that for women, the antiwar movement was in many ways "more alienating, more... competitive, and sexually exploitative," and a reflection of the contradictory treatment and impossible double standards most women faced domestically. Importantly though, this treatment also "opened up the process of radicalization to thousands" and ultimately "sharpened the ideology women would eventually use to describe their own oppression."¹⁹⁷

Nationally, women had already been working towards gender equality, especially through political organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW). However, women in both the civil rights and antiwar movements' recognition of "the discrepancy between the movement's egalitarian ideology and the oppression they continued to experience within it" led to dialogue among women about their experiences within those movements.¹⁹⁸ Women all over the country decided that they needed a designated time and space, and eventually a designated

¹⁹⁵ Wyrick, Interview, 2023.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 170.

¹⁹⁸ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 220.

movement to talk about their own experiences, in both fields of activism and in life. One way in which this was done was through consciousness raising groups, where they met to discuss things like what it meant to be a woman, and how culture and socialization had affected the way they viewed themselves, their roles, and their identities.¹⁹⁹ Discussion also centered around ways for women to establish their own identities apart from men, and the need for male validation and approval. According to Evans, in examining these concepts, and in seeking to form this new identity, consciousness raising groups became “both a method for developing theory and a strategy for building up the new movement.”²⁰⁰

Essentially, these groups became the foundation for second wave feminism. Radical women all over the country had founded and set up thousands of small groups, within which women “transformed their perceptions of personal inadequacy into a political analysis of women’s oppression.”²⁰¹ This analysis was not a direct continuation of the antiwar movement. However, it did come out of the experiences women faced, and it had a huge impact, especially on academic institutions.

Portland State was no exception to this. Sandy Polishuk, the wife of faculty member and activist Steve Kosokoff, was one of the first women in Portland to bring attention to women’s issues. She encouraged women to meet in groups, and invited women over to her house to discuss issues, just as thousands of other women had across the country.²⁰² From there, dozens of other groups formed, including a student group at Portland State. Wyrick became very involved

¹⁹⁹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 165.

²⁰⁰ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 214.

²⁰¹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 222.

²⁰² Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 291.

in the women's movement, and it quickly got on the radar of other student activists, and of the administration.²⁰³

In September of 1970, women at Portland State formed a committee with the purpose of examining issues women faced while pursuing a college education. There, they decided that they wanted to do “a project that would have actual meaning.”²⁰⁴ They decided that they wanted to establish a childcare center at Portland State to help women with children get educated without having to worry about taking care of children.

As the school year commenced in 1970, women began meeting and organizing in order to protest for a childcare center. Notably, these protests also incorporated Yippie tactics similar to those used by antiwar activist groups in the years prior. Dory Hylton defines those tactics as “playful or symbolic public displays” that, although playful in nature, still expressed a serious intent and desire for change.²⁰⁵ In the case of the women's committee, that meant having “baby-ins” at President Wolfe's office, with demands for a campus daycare center. Maureen Gray, who was active in the group, recalls Wolfe walking in on her changing a diaper on his desk once.²⁰⁶ The committee even crashed the faculty reception thrown at the Wolfe home with their children. Eventually, their demands were met, and they received a grant and an allotted space in Smith Memorial Center for the first daycare at Portland State. In the same time frame, Polishuk and others helped to establish the Women's Studies program at Portland State, and the university began to offer philosophy classes on topics such as women's liberation.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Wyrick, Interview, 2023.

²⁰⁴ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 301.

²⁰⁵ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 55.

²⁰⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 301.

²⁰⁷ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 292.

The Women's Liberation movement was incredibly important and influential, both on a national and local level. However, it wasn't the only identity based movement that was finding its footing. In Portland especially, the Gay Liberation movement was emerging for the first time. This began somewhat suddenly in 1970, when an openly gay writer for the underground newspaper *Willamette Bridge* published his thoughts on gay life in Portland, and the isolation he experienced. This was the first time anyone had been so open about acknowledging not only the existence of gay people in Portland, but the need for openness and community. Ultimately, the author argued for the need for a Gay Liberation movement in order to acknowledge and overcome that caution.²⁰⁸

This article very quickly set things in motion. Soon, gay and lesbian consciousness raising groups had formed. People in the gay community met in church basements and in coffee shops to discuss what being gay meant to them, and their desire to love openly and without shame. These groups also focused on sharing personal experiences, and on self acceptance. In sharing experiences of what it meant to be gay or lesbian, many groups began to also develop a political theory and identity around that experience. Once again, this manifested at Portland State, where a gay men's group formed in 1973, and called themselves "Gay Males Together." They lived together and participated in street theater and consciousness raising groups.²⁰⁹ They also co-wrote a weekly column, which "analyzed the relationship between capitalism, sexism and homophobia."²¹⁰ Across Portland, gay and lesbian households, and an overall community formed fairly quickly, and continued to explore, through discussion and writing, what it meant to be LGBT+, and how that identity was connected to other aspects of life.

²⁰⁸ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 302-304.

²⁰⁹ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, 308.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Both these groups were important not only as developing social movements. They also forced people to think about and change their own attitudes- especially people within the antiwar movement. Weiskopf recalls the first time gay rights were brought to his awareness, and “not even knowing that there was such a thing” before witnessing the development of groups in Portland in 1970.²¹¹ Similarly, he was previously unaware of the struggles women faced within the antiwar movement, both nationally and at Portland State. Weiskopf states that he “became aware of it” after hearing the women’s committee speak on issues of sexism within the movement, and had to question his own attitude towards women for the first time.²¹² These processes were happening all over the nation, but for Portland State specifically, it marked a period of growth for students and student movements at the university. This growth, in many ways, was spurred by the antiwar movement and the student strike.

So, the antiwar movement at Portland State didn’t die completely after the summer of 1970. However, in many ways, and in many cases, both locally and nationally, it gave way to new social movements that facilitated change. Second wave feminism rose out of the antiwar movement, and more identity-based social movements soon followed. At Portland State, this resulted in the implementation of new curriculums and academic programs, the establishment of an on-campus daycare, and increased dialogue about different identities and forms of oppression. To this day, people remember the 1970s as a time where Portland State “really started to blossom.”²¹³ The legacy of the antiwar movement, and all the movements that arose after, and as a result, is still felt today.

²¹¹ Weiskopf, Interview, 2023.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

Conclusion

When asked about the events of the student strike at Portland State, both witnesses and participants, to this day, characterize the strike as a “watershed event in their lives.”²¹⁴ Hylton found that in interviews with those who participated in and witnessed the strike, many firmly believed that the strike was “significant to the institution, to the city of Portland, and in many cases to their own lives,” and “a historical event, not only as local history, but also as a local manifestation of a period of national crisis.”²¹⁵ In other words, those who were involved in some capacity with the strike still view it as impactful on nearly every level. Not only did it have a personal impact on many people, but it also marked a turning point for the university, and for the city, while also adding to national history.

This impact is still visible today, and not just in Hylton’s writing. Matt Nelson and Bill Nygren stated that one of their reasons for documenting Portland’s radical activity in the 1960s was because students at Portland State would frequently reach out to them to ask about their experiences with the antiwar movement. According to Nelson, the student strike is the most researched topic in Portland State’s library archives.²¹⁶ Every ten years, the *Portland State Magazine* mentions the year 1970, and commemorates the impact it had. The Spring 2020 issue, for instance, featured a section titled “1970: The Year That Shaped PSU.” In the issue itself, there are editorials and letters from alumni who remember the strike, a timeline titled “Year of Action,” and an article that states how the strike “helped to transform the campus from a quiet commuter school into a hotspot for social change and academic opportunity” and “shaped the campus in ways still seen and felt 50 years later.”²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Hylton, “Student Protest,” vi.

²¹⁵ Hylton, “Student Protest,” 216.

²¹⁶ Nelson and Nygren, *Radicals in the Rose City*, viii.

²¹⁷ “1970: The Year That Shaped PSU,” *Portland State Magazine*, 2020, 14-17.

This sentiment was also echoed more recently in a ceremony and plaque dedication commemorating the 50th anniversary of the events of May 11th. Aimee Shattuck, Portland State's Interim Dean of Students, gave a speech expressing her love for Portland State's community and campus, and acknowledging how much of it stemmed from student groups and campus activism.²¹⁸ In doing so, she recognized how much of a role student activism, and especially the events of the year 1970, had at Portland State. She stated that when she gives tours of campus, she always takes care to mention the year 1970, because that year was when Portland State "gelled in its identity."²¹⁹ That the events at the Park Blocks, and of 1970 as a whole are so widely remembered and lauded at Portland State speak to their impact and legacy.

Clearly, the general consensus and memory of the strike at Portland State is that it remains a point of pride, and was a turning point both for individuals and the university itself. This is especially true considering the rise of other important social movements that came out of the antiwar movement, both nationally and at Portland State. In the year following the strike, women's and gay liberation movements gained traction. Women's and Black studies programs were implemented, a daycare opened on campus, and students began advocating for things like campus accessibility to those with disabilities.²²⁰ This is also part of the legacy of the antiwar movement at Portland State, and the reason its impacts are still felt so deeply today.

This all cannot be discussed without mentioning that despite all that was occurring nationally, and despite an overwhelming sense of frustration and futility, student activists at Portland State were able to work together across varying factions and ideologies. Some had a strict commitment to nonviolence, and others were sympathetic to groups like the Weathermen.

²¹⁸ Janda, *Remembering May 11, 1970*.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ "1970," *Portland State Magazine*, 16-17.

However, because the antiwar movement was relatively small, activists prioritized cooperation over individual ideologies. This not only resulted in a nonviolent movement, it became the reason that events, especially the student strike, were so impactful for both individuals and the community.

This is an important piece of history in and of itself. The antiwar movement is largely remembered for the ways in which it fell apart, for members' sense of futility at their inability to end the war, and for how that manifested as violent action beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even activists at Portland State still view things like a lack of true national leadership at the time of the student strikes as tragic and devastating for the antiwar movement.²²¹ Portland State's antiwar movement is unique because despite the movement's leadership crumbling on a national level, and despite a national turn to violence, activists at Portland State were able to maintain that collaboration on various levels. While ideological differences effectively ended SDS, Portland State's chapter continued operating until 1972. They continued with the knowledge that they had differing perspectives, whether it was on Marxism, protest tactics, and violent actions, and they agreed collectively that despite those differences, they would still work together.

This was also true among different antiwar organizations on campus. Groups like SDS in many cases did not agree with Yippie protest tactics, and did not share their commitment to nonviolence. However, what they had in common was their desire to end the war in Vietnam, and to bring awareness of the war to the student body. In order to do that, the two factions needed to work together and compromise with one another. In the case of the strike, that meant a strict commitment to nonviolence, and a combination of tactics and goals. Yippie Life Festivals

²²¹ Nelson, Interview, 2023.

and dances and SDS teach-ins existed simultaneously, not without disagreement or tension, but with the goal of raising awareness and making a difference. Both within and outside of groups, the antiwar movement at Portland State were able to collaborate in a way that the movement nationally could not.

This ability to collaborate, and the idea that there is strength in numbers, is not just important for this specific event. Rather, the antiwar movement at Portland State is something we can learn from today. Currently, we are witnessing a student movement mobilizing as a response to the conflict in Gaza, and calling for university divestment from Israel. Universities all over the country have set up encampments, with lists of demands, activities planned, and with the hope of seeing a free Palestine in their lifetime. Along with this, we've seen hostile and aggressive responses from school administrations and from police. The parallels between what's happening now, and what happened over fifty years ago are undeniable. Because of this, there is so much value in understanding social movements like the antiwar movement at Portland State.

Cooperation despite differences makes a lasting impact, and Portland State is evidence of such.

Of course, one of the reasons the movement at Portland State was able to successfully collaborate is because it was so small. Activists felt they needed to work together in order to truly make a difference. With national and large-scale movements, this becomes substantially more difficult. However, that doesn't diminish the value of cooperation. In a time of such polarization nationally, and at a time where student movements and protest are rapidly increasing, we need to be examining social movements that united for a common goal, and that were able to come together when it mattered. While the antiwar movement at Portland State was far from perfect and never without ideological disagreements, the values behind collaboration and nonviolent protest remain important. These values were important back then, and led to

things like a change of heart by students and Portlanders previously opposed to the student strike, Nixon canceling his speech in Portland, and a lasting legacy of protest and social change that's still a point of pride today. Student movements, both in Oregon and on a national level can, and should examine and learn from this part of history, and these values.

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