## First Amendment Rights—McCall's Evolution as Protector

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.<sup>1</sup>

So reads the First Amendment to the US Constitution. The exact meaning of this amendment has been the subject of much debate and many Supreme Court rulings since the ratification of the Constitution in 1789. The way in which the Court chooses to interpret this Amendment at any given time has a drastic effect on the way constituents choose to protest and the consequences thereof. The line between constitutionally protected rights under the First Amendment and those actions left unprotected has continually required clarification. The years of the Sixties brought great degrees of social change and, with that, many young protestors pushing the envelope on public officials and demanding the liberty to exercise their rights. One of the greatest legacies of this period is the sit-in. Originally popularized by the Civil Rights Movement, demonstrators of all persuasions adopted and made notorious this useful tool of protest. In the interest of keeping the peace, public officials were required to decide between allowing or disallowing such demonstrations of protest and dissent. Some proved themselves to be greatly in favor of the process of protest; others found it and its repercussions merely a thorn in their side. The sit-in at Johnson Hall on the University of Oregon campus in the

spring of 1970 was not among the most notorious of nation-wide protests, but it did change the way Oregonians viewed protest as well as the way public officials chose to respond to confrontation.

Tom McCall was a journalist for many years of his life and highly respected the profession. In his autobiography he asserts the importance of First Amendment rights to the field of journalism, he goes so far as to call them "the essence of what constitutes liberty for many Americans." He also admitted at least one time where he released information to the press, knowing it would bring public reaction, for the sake of the story. At the same time, he was critical of those claiming their First Amendment rights to assembly. Was he right to be so critical or was he, in fact, suppressing the liberty he fought so dearly for in the field of journalism?

In McCall's autobiography he remembered a question he frequently received soon after he became governor: "How do you like being on the other side of the microphone?" To this he responded, "People were naturally curious about the transformation from reporter and news analyst to newsmaker. They soon discovered that once a commentator, one is always a commentator. When reporters asked what I thought, I told them."

McCall was very familiar with how the media operated and wrote, "As far as we were concerned in Salem, the press was our ally, not our enemy."

Maybe this is because for him, he never stopped being a journalist. "As a journalist on loan to government, I did my best to help them."

McCall had an open-door policy with the media. One of his first items of business upon his inauguration was to make it clear to the media that he and his staff would always be dispensable. "We worked hard to carry out that pledge for eight years... We even let the press know that it could come to our staff meetings, which

we held daily. At these meetings, the germ of many ideas appeared for the first time. So the press would show up at staff policy sessions from time to time, usually on slow news days."

For protestors, however, McCall did not seem as accommodating.

The protests tore McCall in two directions. As a former journalist, McCall instinctively felt that the protestor's First Amendment rights needed to be defended, no matter their message. "Without the right of dissent, all of the newspapers, magazines and broadcast agencies would be grinding out government pap, a grisly gruel of bureaucratic jargon designed to cement the status quo," McCall said. "When your rights are gone, it makes very little difference to the prisoner exactly who it was that threw away the key. Yet when University of Oregon student organizations included profanities in their protest publications, McCall, erstwhile freedom of speech defender, grew livid. vi

McCall's chief of staff, who eventually oversaw crowd control on Oregon's university campuses, Ed Westerdhal, attested to McCall's frustration with student unrest: "He was a hothead when it came to protestors. He realized he would not think logically when it came to handling these crowds."

To help see where McCall was coming from as a politician, a quick look at what the Supreme Court has ruled regarding those rights of press, speech, and assembly that the Constitution upholds and those that are left unprotected. William Blackstone wrote in his 1872 book, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, what is "generally concluded...to be the prevailing view...and probably the understanding of those who drafted, voted for, and ratified the Amendment," viii

Every freeman has an undoubted right to lay what sentiments he pleases before the public; to forbid this, is to destroy the freedom of the press: but if he publishes what is improper, mischievous, or illegal, he must take the consequences of his own temerity. ix

A few years later, in the first case to reach the Supreme Court after World War I, Schenk v. United States, Justice Holmes introduced the ever-famous phrase "clear and present danger" in his opinion, stating "The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent." He later added to this decision saying, "The First Amendment while prohibiting legislation against free speech as such cannot have been, and obviously was not, intended to give immunity for every possible use of language." In the Sixties the distinction between use of language, actions, and the constitutionally protected "speech" became ever pressing. In a case against a young man who burned his draft card, the Court barricaded the protection of limitless expression as 'speech,' maintaining more important, rather, laws controlling actions.

We cannot accept the view that an apparently limitless variety of conduct can be labeled 'speech' whenever the person engaging in the conduct intends thereby to express an idea...This court has held that when 'speech' and 'nonspeech' elements are combined in the same course of conduct, a sufficiently important governmental interest in regulating the nonspeech element can justify incidental limitations on First Amendment freedoms.<sup>xii</sup>

Various nonspeech forms of conduct, "symbolic," "expressive," etc., are therefore subject to review by the Court.

Because all these ways of expressing oneself involve conduct—action—rather than mere speech, they are all much more subject to regulation and restriction than is simple speech. Some of them may be forbidden altogether. But to the degree that these actions are intended to communicate a point of view the First Amendment is relevant and protects some of them to a great extent."xiii

The Court clearly outlined speech elements that are subject to limitations as well. One unanimous decision reads

[I]t is well understood that the right of free speech is not absolute at all times and under all circumstances. There are certain well-defined and narrowly limited classes of speech, the prevention and punishment of which have never been thought to raise any Constitutional problem. These include the lewd and obscene, the profane, the libelous, and the insulting or 'fighting' words...<sup>xiv</sup>

More recently, in the 1964 case of New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, the Court unanimously defended the tool of protest in the pursuit of an open forum, though it may lead to "unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials," saying, "we consider this case against the background of a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open."

This was the sentiment of University of Oregon President Robert D. Clark. He adhered steadfastly to the right of students to assemble and register their protests. In the words of educator John Henry Cardinal Newman, Clark asserted that a university "is a

place where inquiry is pushed forward...and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge."xvi In a form letter, Clark responded to the many complaints from the public about the unruly students at the University. He wrote, "One cannot stop disruptive demonstrations by waving a magic wand, but we may deter students from further violence by dealing firmly, yet fairly, with situations as they arise and as the law permits. This we have done and will continue to do."xvii

This dedication to freedom and order was clearly evident in President Clark's policies regarding the students at his institution. When students assembled in the administration building on April 22, 1970, Clark allowed them to remain, even overnight and through the next day, in order to provide them with a forum for their protests. Knowing that sit-ins had a tendency to take on lives of their own and that the discomfort of the students on the hard, cold marble floors was likely to bring rise to unruliness, Clark called for the students to quit the premises at the end of the second day; but he did this only after allowing the students numerous opportunities to voice their grievances and after he saw that the sit-in was likely to become unruly. When students refused to leave the building local police came in under Clark's authority to remove them. Police officers were forced to drag students out who let their bodies become limp in a last protest. McCall, contrary to Clark's wishes, was adamant about having the National Guard available to put down any violence that may arise. A final compromise was made between the two and the National Guard was to remain outside Eugene city limits and wait for a call from the local police, should they need reinforcement. Much to everyone's chagrin, the intercom system between the police and the National Guard broke down, giving the guardsmen the impression that the situation on campus had gotten under

control. As Clark remembered the incident, the National Guard came "not marching, but running, slinging tear gas as they came." To many students and residents of Oregon McCall's reaction to the sit-in, which up until the time of evacuation had remained peaceful, was oppressive of the student's freedoms of speech, expression, and assembly. They were appalled by what they saw as a complete disregard for their rights.

Clark explained later, upon recollection of the turbulent years of his presidency at the University of Oregon, that protests ought to engage people by persuasion and not coercion and should not take over the function of the University. For Clark, students crossed the line between proper and lawful protest and unlawful menacing when they got in the way of the regular functioning of the University and when they, in the attempt to exercise a freedom, were denying others of their freedoms. McCall was also unsympathetic to those students who restricted the freedom of others in the name of purporting that very right. He referred to these students on numerous occasions as "anarchists" and "rebels." In an October 1969 speech, McCall criticized the hypocrisy of these disruptive few saying

We hear of demonstrators demanding a voice on the podium—while denying it to others.

We hear of those who call for love, using hate to get it; who demand freedom, denying it to others; who revolt against rigidity, founding another strict format of their own.<sup>xx</sup>

McCall saw these students and nonstudents, not as protestors whose rights should be protected, but as a "radical band of anarchists" that, he asserted in a speech titled "Campus Unrest in the 70s", would not be successful in its attempt to "stampede us

into curtailing the operations of our universities, to the detriment of the great majority of students—the "silent majority" if you will—who are entitled to receive the education for which they have paid." He concluded the same speech by quoting a statement issued by Bank of America after one of its branches had been the object of rioting: "Let us, as a nation, find once again our ability to distinguish between protest and revolt; between dissent and chaos; between demonstration and destruction; between non-violence and violence."

These statements help to explain why McCall seemed to be less appeasing to the crowds of protestors than President Clark proved to be. After all, McCall certainly would not have allowed students to remain overnight at Johnson Hall as Clark did. In a letter responding to a student claiming to be an innocent bystander of the sit-in, tear gassed by the overly rough and combative National Guardsmen called in by Governor McCall, he points out that "The students occupying Johnson Hall were in violation of at least three state laws regarding trespass and disturbance." He lists the transgressions of the students as "occupation and disruption, invasion and damage to state buildings, and terrorizing university and other individuals..." In response to her claim of innocence as a bystander McCall writes, "Certainly you are fully aware that the innocent or the by-stander sometimes cannot escape the effects of law-enforcing action when mob rule, rioting or other lawlessness by large groups of individuals must be dealt with." This summary of McCall's view of what took place at the Johnson Hall sit-in reveals the low regard with which he held student demonstration.

An incident from the fall of 1968 shows the same quick-to-judge behavior on McCall's part that was demonstrated in his reaction to the Johnson Hall incident. This

previous difference of opinions probably set the tone for McCall's apparent lack of tolerance for Eugene's student protestors, leading to their gradual falling out of favor with the Governor. SDS released a flyer headed by an obscene graphic cartoon, and Acting President Johnson was not the only one to receive letters of complaint from the outraged public of Oregon. The letters also reached Salem and McCall was appalled by the sight before his eyes. In an action that took Johnson by surprise, McCall released the letter he addressed to Johnson in response to the SDS flyer to the press before Johnson had a chance to read it. In this letter, McCall seemed to jump to the conclusion that the presence of groups such as the SDS on campus implied that its views were upheld by the general University population, though he wrote that he knew this to be false. He also wrote of his concern that University materials be used in the fashion he held in the many letters of complaint before him.

I understand that these dodgers are processed on an ASUO machine. The events advertised on this one were to be held, I see, at Erb Memorial and tickets were available at the SDS table there.

This seems to imply acceptance by the whole student body. I know this is not the case and must insist that this kind of depraved mischief be stopped.

There's no one more fair on free speech than I, but after seeing its abuse in these and other recent instances, I'm afraid your way-out people are inviting restrictive sanctions by the Oregon State legislature...

I plead with you to exert a measure of control so that a generally excellent campus climate is not drastically altered through an ever-gathering backlash reaction. xxiv

Faced by this obscene image, McCall seemed to forget one of the principles he held so extremely important in American society—difference. In a speech only one year after the release of the SDS flyer McCall asserted, "Many shades of political thought have lived on this ground before us and many more will. There is scope here for idea and there is hope here of intelligent change trough compromise and agreement." He then continues, quoting Charles Evans Hughes

The greater the importance of safeguarding the community from incitements to the overthrow of our institutions by force and violence, the more imperative is the need to preserve inviolate the constitutional rights of free speech, free press, and free assembly, in order to maintain the opportunity for free political ...[manuscript unreadable]... to the end that government may be responsive to the will of the people and that changes, if desired, may be obtained by peaceful means. Therein lies the security of the Republic... xxv

Johnson, however, did not require time to remember this very important principle. His response to Governor McCall's letter pointed out the irony of the situation: he was supporting those to whom he was opposed in order to protect their freedoms.

It is ironic that many of our most cherished principles must be jealously guarded by protecting the freedom of persons or groups with whom we are neither in sympathy or agreement. It is perhaps even more ironic that in this letter I find myself defending the freedom of a few student radicals who by careful and calculated design aim to discredit the university and its administration by means whose only test is whether they serve this end. \*xxvi\*

For Johnson the importance of free speech on campus took precedence over the importance appearing the residents of Oregon by censorship.

The University of Oregon cannot afford to lose the goodwill and support of the citizens of the state; but neither can it afford to solicit such support at the price of adopting policies that compromise the basic principle of freedom of expression on our campus. \*xxvii\*

The university was, after all, very important to Johnson, but only as a true university built on the values of fundamental freedoms. Anything less would be a mockery of both the university and its population.

When the issue at stake is freedom, the university ought to fight with every means at its disposal—go down in flames if need be—to resist public pressure or strict censorship. \*xxviii\*

One member of SDS defended the flyer, claiming "The SDS cartoon which we printed was obscene because it portrayed an obscene situation: the military machine devouring young American youths and defecating mold-fitting, trained killers." For McCall, this was an abuse of free speech and escaped the protection of the Constitution. As time went by, however, McCall realized more and more that student protestors were becoming a permanent fixture in society and no amount of censuring would quiet them.

Eventually, McCall's reactions to student unrest began to reflect a quotation he cited in one of his speeches, "I wonder how long it will be until educated men begin to realize that the real problem is not unrest at all. Student unrest is a reaction to—not the cause of—problems..." He began to realize that something needed to be done to bridge the great divide between anarchists and orderly citizens. He voiced this concern in his

speech "Campus Unrest in the 70s." "We are in danger of a society that could commit suicide; a society that sometimes seems to be ripping itself apart just for the masochistic pleasure of seeing the blood." This all became more evident after the tragic result of uprisings at Kent State. As the war in Viet Nam progressed and the U.S. invaded Cambodia student protestors began to get unruly. As Todd Gitlin worded it, "As the war became more militant, so did the antiwar movement—in demands, in spirit, in tactics." At Kent State, some students began to throw rocks, which angered law enforcement. Fifteen students were shot and four students were killed by gun-toting National Guardsmen.

The events at Kent State were a turning point for public officials and activists alike. Administrators had to question their methods of crowd control, students their dedication to the cause. The deaths of fellow students upped the ante for the student protestor. "...national hysteria made protest both necessary and dangerous...we had to demonstrate if civil liberties were going to be preserved." Expulsion or a few nights in jail were no longer worst-case scenarios for civil disobedience; protest became a matter of life-and-death. As Gitlin explained

[I]ncreasingly, we found our exemplars and heroes in Cuba, in China, in the Third World guerrilla movements, in Mao and Frantz Fanon and Che and Debray, most of all—decisively—in Vietnam. It no longer felt sufficient—sufficiently estranged, sufficiently furious—to say no to aggressive war; we felt driven to say yes to revolt... If the American flag was dripping napalm, the NLF flag was clean... Only true-blue believers in the promise of America could have felt so anti-American. Ours was the

fury of a lover spurned. But a fury so intense, left to itself, would have consumed us." xxxiv

Tensions were high in every corner of the country. Oregon was not an exception. The threat of violence was real and authorities were faced with the dilemma of how to prevent and react to these outbreaks. McCall realized the imminent danger of the situation and, as governor, took personal responsibility for the protection of Oregon's residents and their property. The measures McCall took in the execution of his pledge of protection were the object of both scrutiny and praise from Oregonians, as is evident by the letters he received during this turbulent time. expand here

In the summer of 1970 Oregon was labeled a hot spot on the map by the FBI and other intelligence for possible problems on the protest front. Governor McCall was determined, however, that Oregon not make its mark for violence, but rather, the prevention thereof. A People's Army demonstration being planned for fall in Portland was McCall's next hurdle in the pursuit of maintaining a peaceful State. Some accounts estimated that 50,000 young revolution-ready protestors would inundate the streets of Portland. Taking in the criticisms he received from his reaction to students at the University of Oregon, McCall and his team came up with a creative and effective diversion for the inevitable flow of youth who would come to exercise their rights to assemble and protest.

All of us who were trying to prevent this disaster had learned from the experiences of Chicago and Kent State. I vowed that every means available would be used to protect the citizens of Oregon... I was asked to make land available so that the people coming to Oregon would have a place to go and things to do other than being swept

into an angry mob. I remembered a Stanford University study which had shown that people were twice as likely to resort to violence when they were part of an emotionally charged crowd. So the idea of an alternative site had considerable merit."xxxv

In a revolutionary move, Governor McCall organized a rock concert to be held in McIver State Park, just outside of Portland. The day-park would extend its hours to be open day and night, providing camping accommodations for the large numbers. Neighbors were incensed at the idea that a bunch of long-haired hippies would be wandering around, openly consuming drugs. Lieutenant Eugene Doherty of the Oregon State Police, who McCall placed in charge of law enforcement at the festival was also concerned. When presented with the idea, he responded, "Governor, what you're asking me to do is condone a lot of unlawful activities. I'm a sworn officer and I can't do that." McCall answered, "Well, if you feel that way, as of now you're no longer assigned to the state police. You're assigned to my staff. You work for me now. And you can do as I tell you. If I tell you to ignore the law, you do it. It's as simple as that." Then it was clear to Doherty, "McCall had chosen a risky plan. Now nothing would go by the rules."

In the face of the situation, however, there were no alternatives. The FBI accounts gave him no choice but to prepare for hoards of people, many of whom, McCall was informed, would be coming to incite violence. The governor and his aides were aware of the gubernatorial election that would be held only seven weeks after the People's Army Jamboree descended on Portland. McCall also knew that whether Vortex I worked or not, he would probably loose the election because of it. "I've just committed

political suicide... But it's the right thing to do—and it's got to be done. We've got to save the people of Oregon and all these visitors from the agony of a bloody confrontation."xxxvii

Fearing this response from his constituents, and feeling that he owed them a proper explanation for his project, McCall defended himself in the first ever address to the entire state in a time of crisis.

It's a positive, effective and responsible approach to protecting the lives and property of all of Oregon. That, I believe, is what government is all about. In this situation we have prepared for the worst while hoping for the best. If the objective of averting conflict is not achieved, we are prepared to put down any violence that occurs. You may be assured that we are well prepared...Our commitment to law and order has not tempted us to infringe upon the constitutional rights of Americans for peaceful assembly, freedom of movement, and nonviolent dissent. That, too, is what government is all about. While we are prepared to *deal* with violence, keep it clear that our first priority is to *avoid* violence. It is within this framework—avoiding violence—and upon the strong urging of local, state and federal law enforcement officers that Vortex I emerged...

The goal was to avoid violence to the extent that McCall had helicopters placed on call, but rather than being filled with ammunition, they were filled with rose petals. The rose petals were to symbolize Portland, The City of Roses, and offer a friendly warning to crowds that might begin to get out of hand.

The plan worked. The only damage done by the group of 35,000 people was a single broken pane of glass on the PSU campus. Oregon had succeeded in its goal to

prevent a violent uprising, almost definitely because McCall's focus went from preventing crowds to preventing violence. He allowed himself to hope for the best, and in so doing received just that. Because of its enormous success, Vortex I won over the sentiments of Oregonians. McCall went on to win the trust and respect of conservatives and radicals alike, and, consequently, the election.

McCall's policy toward protest and protestors became more sophisticated and multi-dimensional as it became evident that times were changing and the figure of the war protestor would become a permanent fixture in society. The tragedy at Kent State marked a turning point in the realm of student unrest. The stakes were now higher than they had ever been; students risked not only being shunned from mainstream society, or expulsion as consequences for their actions at protests, but now protest was a matter of life and death. As McCall began to understand that he would not be able to merely control and disband protestors, he looked to take other preventative measures to ensure that a violent air would not develop amongst these inevitable mobs of protestors. McCall stepped up to the plate with Vortex I and he hit a home run.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution: First Amendment. Findlaw. 30 November 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/">http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>ii</sup> Tom McCall and Steve Neal. *Tom McCall: Maverick*. Binford & Mort: Portland, Oregon, 1977; p. 149.

iii Ibid. 156.

iv Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> Ibid. p. 151-2.

vi Brent Walth, *Fire at Eden's Gate: Tom McCall & the Oregon Story*. Oregon Historical Society Press: Portland, Oregon, 1994; p. 283.

vii Ibid. p. 284.

viii Freedom of Expression—Speech and Press: Adoption and the Common Law Background. Findlaw. 30 November 2003. <a href="http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/06.html#1">http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/06.html#1</a> ix Ibid.

x Ibid

xi Subsequent Punishment: Clear and Present Danger and Other Tests. Findlaw. 30 November 2003. <a href="http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/10.html#1">http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/10.html#1</a>

xiii Speech Plus—The Constitutional Law of Leafleting, Picketing, and Demonstrating. Findlaw. 30 November 2003. < http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/20.html#1>

xiv Government Restraint of Content of Expression. Findlaw. 30 November 2003.

<a href="http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/18.html#1">http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/18.html#1></a>

xv Freedom of Expression—Speech and Press: Adoption and the Common Law Background. Findlaw. 30 November 2003. < http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment01/06.html#1>

xvi Robert D. Clark, *The College Crisis*. Statement to the Assembly Committee on Education. Los Angeles, 18 December 1967.

xvii Correspondence Letters between Mrs. Mary Berwick via Governor Tom McCall and Robert D. Clark April 16, 1970- April 28, 1970; Complaints; 1969-1970; Office of the President Records; Division of Special Collections and University Archives; University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

xviii Robert D. Clark. Class Lecture. University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. 27 October 2003.

xix Ibid.

xx McCall Address to Oregon State University Charter Day Convocation October 30, 1969; Office of the Governor; 1969-1970; Office of the President Records; Division of Special Collections and University Archives; University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

xxi Excerpts from an Address by Tom McCall "Campus Unrest in the 70s" to the 46th Annual State Lions Convention May 22, 1970; Office of the Governor; 1969-1970; Office of the President Records; Division of Special Collections and University Archives; University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. xxii Ibid.

xxiii Tom McCall. Letter to Donna Reini. 12 May 1970. Governor Tom McCall Papers. Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon 97310.

xxiv Ken Metzler. *Confrontation: Te Destruction of a College President.* University of Oregon Press: Eugene, Oregon, 2001; p. 72.

xxv McCall. OSU Charter Day Convocation.

xxvi Metzler; p. 75.

xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Ibid. p. 86.

xxix Ibid. p. 79.

xxx McCall. OSU Charter day Convocation.

xxxi McCall. Campus Unrest in the 70s.

xxxii Todd Gitlin. The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage. Bantam Books: New York, 1993; p. 261.

xxxiii Ibid. p. 98.

xxxiv Ibid. p. 263

xxxv McCall. Maverick. p. 133.

xxxvi Walth; p. 293-4.

xxxvii McCall. Maverick p. 134.