

29 Years Between Protests and The Newspaper that Separates and Connects Them:

A comparison between the Register Guard's representation of the 1970 ROTC protests
and its representation of the 1999 anarchist riots of Eugene, Oregon.

by
Katie Weidman

November 21, 2003

HC 421H
The University in Peace and War
Fall 2003

For my paper, I would like to compare the rhetoric, focus, and intent of media coverage today with that of the sixties. I will discuss the stories, photographs, and editorials used by the Eugene *Register Guard* to depict the April 15, 1970 University of Oregon anti-ROTC riots, and compare them with coverage of the June 18, 1999 Anarchist riot in downtown Eugene. Specifically, I hope to find out how the *Register Guard*, as well as the culture it represents, changed (or remained the same) in regards to riots over the last forty years. Did the University of Oregon's protests of the 1970's set the standard, or create the form for the protests of 1999 to follow? What tactics do protesters and reporters continue to use, and what tactics were unique to the sixties? These are the questions to which I hope to offer some possible

answers, while looking at how local newspapers might have worked with or against rioters in both time periods. Although my research was centered around the *Register Guard*, I also read *Oregon Daily Emerald* and *Oregonian* articles, newspaper clippings in the R. D. Clark Presidential Archives, as well as books discussing the media and the sixties. The comparisons in this paper will primarily be shaped by the opinions and objectives of Eugene *Register Guard* reporters, editors, photographers, and letter-writing citizens, as well as what I perceive are the political and social views of the time.

The newspapers, for many people, are the primary source of news concerning events such as protests and riots. They are important not only to the public—who's property is often being destroyed, but also as publicity for the protesters themselves. Their photographs have the capacity to say, more clearly than a page of description, the emotion and atmosphere of a situation, as well as the ability to completely misrepresent an event by what they leave out. Opinions of the bystanders quoted in the articles are also a major influence on how we shape our views. Finally, an important aspect of newspapers, which should never be overlooked, is the debate found on the “opinions” pages surrounding events like protests.

**A REPORTER'S VIEW:
ROTC Protests of April, 1970, vs. the Anarchist Rampage, of June, 1999**

To begin with, I will compare the initial, front-page descriptions of the 1970 ROTC riots with the 1999 anarchist riots. Reporters seemed to follow a similar format in describing the 1999 riots as they did in 1970 with the ROTC riots, although the ROTC riots sound a little more dramatic.

ROTC Protests of April, 1970, according to the Register Guard

On Thursday, April 16, 1970, the Eugene *Register Guard* opens on page 1B with three photographs depicting police in riot gear clashing with angry student protesters. The article on that page, “Angry Mob Struck Twice Against ROTC,” by Mike O’Brien and Bob Newcomb, thoroughly describes the two consecutive attacks on the U of O ROTC buildings:

“The first of Wednesday’s two assaults [on ROTC buildings] was more intense and destructive, but less frightening than the second a few hours later. The first occurred almost immediately after the university faculty had decided—in a 14-vote margin—to retain ROTC as part of the university’s curriculum...

“[Around 5:45 p.m.] The offices were made a shambles in the 15 or 20 minutes that the estimated 150 young people were there. Doors were kicked in, desks and tables were overturned, shelves were pulled off walls and littered glass glittered everywhere. There was a blackened spot in one office where a fire had been started.”¹

There seems to be a subtle touch of humor in the reporters’ description here, as they mock the protesters for leaving two pro-Vietnam-war signs amidst their attack on the building itself:

“Two things the demonstrators missed were a sign saying “Resist the Draft—Enlist now,” and a peace symbol with the words, “Peace—Win in Vietnam.

“The second assault took place in the dark. It was lighted by the torches from a campus parade which ended at the ROTC building at about 8:35 p.m. The eerie effect was heightened by the half-masks worn by some of the protesters, and was completed by two people playing a quiet game of tennis in the courts just below the building...About a hundred spectators were also there when the attack began...

An unidentified man with a bullhorn...in an apparent attempt to prevent any violence, said to [the protesters], ‘Okay, brothers and sisters, you can’t see the police in the dark, but they’re all around.’ The demonstrators responded with ‘Smash ROTC, get those cameras!’ Accompanying the chant were rocks aimed at the building. For a few moments, nothing could be heard but the rocks bouncing off the walls. But when one of the few remaining window panes was shattered, a cheer went up from the demonstrators. The sound of breaking glass seemed to act as a sort of catalyst for the mob, and participants began throwing their lighted torches at the flimsy wood building.

“Besides rocks and bottles, apples, oranges and lighted torches, the young people also threw loud explosive devices against the side of the building. There was no noticeable damage, but each device—five were counted—sounded like a sonic boom. In the middle of the sounds of battle, the protesters had taken up a new chant—“Bring the war back home.”²

¹ Mike O’Brien and Bob Newcomb, “Angry Mob Struck Twice Against ROTC.” Eugene *Register Guard*, April 17, 1970. Pg. 1B.

² Ibid., Pg. 1B.

Unlike the anti-capitalism riots of 29 years later, these student-led protests happen in a matter of minutes, and the reporters' descriptions of the events are much more concise, linear, and easy to follow:

“During all this time—15 or 20 minutes—they had stayed across the street dividing the building from the ROTC parade ground, and had concentrated attention—and most of their torches—on a small porch at the side of the building...the demonstrators made a tentative approach to the building and, again, focusing their attention on the small porch, nearly succeeded in setting fire to it. Someone inside the building reached out through a shattered window of the door leading from the porch to the building and put out the fire with a fire extinguisher.

“Their fury momentarily spent, the protesters moved back to a far corner of the field to consider what to do next...there was some sporadic rock throwing during this lull...the protesters were still trying to decide what to do next when a flashgun was set off by an unidentified photographer in the area of a small shed behind the ROTC building. Apparently thinking it was a police photographer, the group rushed towards the spot chanting, ‘Pigs off campus.’

“And that was what tore it.”³

By using words such as “student,” “marchers,” “demonstrators,” “protesters,” and “the young people,” interchangeably when referring to the activists, the reporters set themselves and their “adult” audience apart from the younger age-group or generation involved in the protest. Furthermore, They accentuate this by the words they use to describe police officers—“policemen”—versus protesters—“One girl with short blonde hair:”

“A contingent of about 16 Eugene Police had been standing in the same area, and they came toward the demonstrators, hurling tear gas grenades. About 20 of the grenades went off in the parade ground and many of the spectators at first appeared to think they were just smoke bombs.

“They weren’t. Tears flowing from their eyes, the protestors vanished immediately and the field was also instantly cleared of spectators, many of them apparently in a state of disbelief. One girl, with short blonde hair, stumbled around rubbing her eyes and saying, ‘My God! That gas! On campus!’

“By the time the spectators’ eyes had been rubbed clear, a contingent of 18 sheriff’s deputies had appeared, lined up in the street, long riot sticks at the ready.

“The action, meanwhile, had shifted to a different part of the campus.”⁴

³ Mike O’Brien and Bob Newcomb, “Angry Mob Struck Twice Against ROTC.” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 17, 1970. Pg. 1B.

⁴ Mike O’Brien and Bob Newcomb, “Angry Mob Struck Twice Against ROTC.” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 17, 1970. Pg. 1B

This article goes on to say that after breaking the glass of several car windows parked along University Street, the protestors also broke two glass doors and some windows of Johnson Hall. A “double line of axe-handle wielding state police” confronted them there. Around 9:30 p.m. one of their leaders announced over a bullhorn “We think it best to leave at this time. The point has been made. The pigs are on campus.” The protestors dispersed.

The police in this story are portrayed as the keepers of calm, enforcers of the law, and protectors of property, effectively stopping the hotheaded and criminal-minded students from causing further destruction. Meanwhile, the student activists are described as a militant, unruly mob. One group left out here until later editorials and letters to the editor is the more conservative younger generation, who were not noticeably present at the protests, and who are upset that the protests are being used to represent their campus.

While the more recent June 1999 anti-capitalism anarchist riots of Eugene seem very similar in protest tactics, reporting rhetoric, and police response to the anti-ROTC riot of 1970, there is a very noticeable change in cultural views. The newspapers of 1999 are clearly from a time not troubled by war. In this aspect, there is a drastic difference between cultures and lifestyles suggested by the topics and interests of newspaper articles. The pages of 1999 newspapers reflect a more carefree time of peace, where affluence is more clearly enjoyed, especially when compared with the politically charged atmosphere of the 1970’s.

The June, 1999 anti-capitalism protest-turned riot, according to the Register Guard

The initial description of the anti-capitalism protest, a front-page article in Saturday, June 19, 1999's *Register Guard*, is as follows:

“An angry parade of anarchists and other activists broke store windows, threatened motorists, beat on cars and threw rocks at Eugene police Friday in a five- hour march downtown that began as a colorful but relatively tame protest against capitalism.”⁵

These reporters initially take a more police-based perspective than that of a community member or protester. They focus on police attempts to direct traffic and prevent destruction of property, as well as using graphic descriptions of why police are necessary in protecting both protesters from angry citizens, as well as in protecting citizens' property from angry protesters. The reporters begin their story by describing in detail the police attempts at stopping protestor violence, rather than describing the specific destruction and disruption rioters caused:

“Police, who initially directed traffic around activists and kept their distance, ultimately deployed tear gas and arrested people... Police Chief Jim Hill said his officers were outnumbered, and in a no-win situation. “I'm not very happy with how this whole thing has turned out,” he said as he stood in front of a patrol car pockmarked with strikes from rocks and bottles...

“Protesters, as many as 200 of them marching back and forth to a drumbeat through a web of downtown streets and alleys, played a cat-and-mouse game with police for hours. They stopped long enough at intersections to disrupt rush-hour traffic and anger drivers, but paraded away from officers when threatened with arrest and tear gas. Through it all, activists and police kept video cameras trained on each other...

“They screamed profanities at police and verbally battered motorists, drawing some drivers—including several senior citizens—out of their cars to confront them...

“One car, blocked by a small group of protesters, started to slowly turn from 11th Avenue onto Willamette Street and nudged one activist, prompting others to jump on the car, pounding and screaming. The car sped away. Several activists jumped off and one fell. A papier-mache mask stuck to the roof...

“Further east on Seventh, a young man got out of his car after marchers blocked and struck it. He chased a protester and struck him in the head with a wrench. Blood poured from the protester's scalp as friends rushed to help him...”⁶

⁵ Janelle Hartman and Joe Mosley, “Parade Escalates into Rampage,” Eugene *Register Guard*, Saturday, June 19, 1999. Pg. 1A.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Pg. 1A.

After initially reporting the views and opinions of those present at the protest, the article goes on to describe the riot in more detail:

“The planned demonstration started at 2:15 p.m. when some 300 people gathered at West 10th Avenue and Olive Street and began marching east on 10th.

“In a mini-version of the Oregon Country Fair, activists in colorful masks and costumes—along with a half-dozen bare-chested women in silver body paint—belly danced, beat drums and scribbled anti-government, anti-industry slogans on the pavement and brickwork, such as ‘Obey, Consume, Die.’

“More militant activists burned an American flag and smashed and kicked an old TV set, a stereo, computer, and other small appliances to bits. Most banners and placards targeted capitalism and corporate greed, although 8-year-old Megan Wilson of Eugene fashioned her own statement on a piece of corrugated cardboard. ‘Life Not Death; Love Not Sadness,’ the girl’s sign said...local activist Tim Ream eventually strode to the center of the action and called for everyone to listen. He reported that a similar ‘reclaim the streets’ rally in England had closed the London Stock Exchange for the day.

“A short time later, the protest got legs and began its long, serpentine rout through and around the downtown area...The first conflict came when a group of anarchists with dark clothes wrapped around their faces centered the South Umpqua Bank branch on East 11th Avenue. About a half-dozen police burst through the doors to head off the protesters, then someone outside threw a pair of rocks through a window above the door. Two or three other banks along the route drew protesters’ attention, although a frustrated rock-thrower failed in three attempts to break a window at Pacific Continental Bank on West Seventh. The fist-size stones bounced off the glass, scattering people gathered on the sidewalk.

“Police appeared set to break things up when marchers retreated onto the grass in the Washington-Jefferson Park blocks. But as about 30 officers in riot gear advanced from the east, they fired several canisters of tear gas toward the crowd but a westerly wind blew the white clouds back over the line of gas-masked officers instead of into the crowd...

“At Taco Bell on West Seventh, marchers sprayed anarchist-graffiti on outside walls and one man went inside, talked to employees, then walked back outside and broke two front windows. ‘He came in and told me, “Meat means death and I’m going to break your windows,”’ the 20-year-old Taco Bell employee said, still shaking his head over the incident...”⁷

Despite the similarities between this protest and the ROTC riot 29 years ago, the individual protesters’ reasons and opinions for joining the riot are much more varied and ambiguous. This is apparent in the varied targets of the activists’ rage—some target motorists, others target Eugene banks and smaller branches of large corporations, others the meat industry. They lack the one central theme the 1970 riot had—the Vietnam War—which united everyone with a passion for equality in a similar cause. The ROTC

⁷ Janelle Hartman and Joe Mosley, “Parade Escalates into Rampage,” *Eugene Register Guard*, Saturday, June 19, 1999. Pg. 1A

riots also gathered more support from the student-aged group, as they were often the ones who were the closest themselves to being drafted to be involved in this war.

The *Register Guard's* description of the 1999 riot seems less concise or coordinated between its writers. Descriptions of many events are mixed up, or are described twice or three times in the same article. There is a much greater feeling of time lapse and confusion in the 1999 article. Although the protest initially starts out as a nonviolent parade, it escalates into violence—violence directed at motorists and local branches of larger corporations. Perhaps the riot of the nineties represents a more subdued anger at forces of oppression which are not as direct or obvious as wars. The anarchists' tactics are not as direct either. It is more difficult to discern those directly responsible (working through these large corporations) for the violence done to poor communities in other countries, or to American's own workers. Both the June 18, 1999 Eugene protest and the later Seattle WTO protests share a common frustration with the oppression caused by these huge-scale government-like corporations, a frustration not unlike the anger expressed at war-supporting activities in the sixties. The second ROTC riot, however, started out with chants of "smash the ROTC," suggesting violence even from the beginning, while the anti-capitalist demonstration starts out with the intention of being peaceful.

Although it might not actually be true, participants seem to be of a younger age group than most of the police in the 1970's. Participants and police more noticeably represent two different generations in the 1970 protests. There is more of a chasm in politics and beliefs between the old and the young of that time. Meanwhile, many of the 1999 protesters (while still young) seem to be around or above the college age group, and

a good number of them may be around the same age as police officers. However, rather than referring to protesters as “young activists” or “one girl with long black hair,” the 1999 reporters describe them as “a young man with a ponytail” and “one woman [who] screamed.” Unlike the 1970 protests, young children participated in this 1999 summer parade-turned riot.

The Riot of 1970 was really the first time anything like it happened in Eugene. Tear gas had never been used on the University campus before. By 1999, however, Eugene had been the romping grounds for many riots. Since then, protesters have had more time to think about how to both hide their individuality as well as to create more of a scene to which the media is likely to show up. Both the protesters, and the media, have become more tactful, it seems. While the protesters of 1970 do not want cameras, which would probably lead to their identification and arrest, the activists of 1999 seem to try to attract media attention, even bringing their own video cameras along with them.

The reporting of the 1970 article seems much more straightforward and direct. In the 1999 articles, however, although I find the humor much more simple and direct, the reporting is much less so. Subtle connotations tend to describe and influence how a reader should judge the reporting, rather than immediately laying down the facts and describing individual opinions later. For instance, the Register Guard’s April 1999 front-page article “Parade Escalates into Rampage” nearly devotes more space to comments by police officers, the police chief, and protesters than it does to describing the unfolding of events. In the end, it describes more confrontations between protesters and the people and businesses of downtown Eugene, as well as detailing some of the vandalism occurring. In comparison to these 1999 riots, the initial description of the 1970 riot

seems much more complete, since it attempts to recreate the scene, atmosphere, and feeling rather than merely reporting the actions. Tennis players in the background, noise, tear gas, and the girl stumbling around in disbelief, all add to the at- times serious, at times confused atmosphere which the reporter describes in the 1970 article.

Another important difference is that while SDS leaders, in the 1970 protests against the ROTC program, incited their followers and the larger student group around them to violence, the opposite was true in 1999. Leaders of the anti-corporation protest had intended for their protests to be nonviolent.

FRAMING THE RIOTS **Photographs, Eugene, 1970**

In addition to the editorials and reports of the attacks on the ROTC building, it is also interesting to look at how the photographers framed their shots. In reporting an event, what a reporter chooses to include can be as important as what he or she leaves out. In the *Register Guard*, with its focus on police response to the protests, most of the pictures show police marching onto the scene, as well as police dragging students away from the scene. In the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, however, the frame tends to include more close-ups of the students involved, views of the buildings, and some of the destruction caused by the rioters.

Register Guard Photographs, 1999

The photographs in the *Register Guard* 29 years later are much clearer. From these photos we get the impression that it was a sunny summer day where many Eugeneans had nothing better to do than go downtown and riot. There are more pictures focused on rioters, and less on police intervention. The protesters at this riot want to be

shown in the media, whereas in the 1970 photos, most students who participated in the riots did not want to be identified through photographs, because they might be arrested. In comparison with the ROTC riots, these pictures give the audience a much more involved, inside impression of the protest. Many of the ROTC photographs are of peoples' backs. They mainly show the protesters who were caught and being dragged away by police. Probably one of the most dramatic pictures of Eugene's June 1999 riot is of a protester, bare-topped with t-shirt surrounding most of his head like a hood, his bare top silhouetted against the background of onlookers, his arm outstretched in a stance of defiance. Something about this picture glorifies the struggle in which the anarchists believe, at least until we read the caption and find out he's throwing a rock.

The Culture that Separates Them

Conscientious objection is important because it expresses a need, both humane and human, to stand up for what we believe in, in life, and for what we feel is worth living. As Frank Stahl, a former professor at the University of Oregon put it, "if you can't be civilly disobedient in the face of murder, there isn't much to be civilly disobedient about."⁸ In 1970, peoples' strong beliefs about the war, coupled with the draft, put a huge tension on campus life. There was also a generational disequilibrium—all around the world—as youth rioted, from Germany to Venezuela, in part because the sharing of wealth was hugely unequal. In addition to this, the sharing of power was unequal as well. It was unequal amongst those who felt they were mature enough to be part of the government and university decision making, and those who actually already had a foothold in the system.

⁸ Frank Stahl. Interview, University of Oregon campus, Eugene, Oregon. October 13, 2003.

Around this time, the University itself was changing a lot, also. As Dan Williams, a former University of Oregon President, and later the dean at Stanford for 14 years, says, “The free speech movement was a call to students to challenge their rights, then the antiwar movement further changed their views and actions.”⁹ During this time, the University structure underwent two major changes of values: the traditional respect of authority by the young faded, and the deferment of gratification dwindled (as sexuality, as well as the use of recreational and psychedelic drugs, became more commonplace). These movements were important enough that the government noticed them, and at first was not sure how to react.

University students are in a special position of power afforded only to some, making them a minority among their society. As Noam Chomsky says, “Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions.”¹⁰ They have enough leisure time, available sources of information, and the teaching necessary to find the truth “hidden behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation, ideology and class interest, through which the events of current history are presented to us.”¹¹ University-aged activists felt they needed to take responsibility to stop some of the injustices the United States was enacting towards other countries, ethnic groups, or the environment. My father often used to ask me what my college friends were saying about the war in Afghanistan, or later about the war in Iraq, and when I answered that many of us have not been paying

⁹ Dan Williams, former University of Oregon President, and dean of Stanford for 14 years. Interview, University of Oregon campus, Eugene, Oregon. Monday, October 27, 2003.

¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals.” Originally published in *The New York Review of Books*, Fe. 23, 1967, 16-26. (Found on pg. 76 of “Against the Vietnam War, Writings by Activists.” Edited by Mary Susannah Robbins, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1999.)

¹¹ Noam Chomsky, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals.” Originally published in *The New York Review of Books*, Fe. 23, 1967, 16-26. (found on pg. 76 of “Against the Vietnam War, Writings by Activists.” Edited by Mary Susannah Robbins, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1999.)

much attention to it, he would be almost in a state of disbelief. I even find myself wondering sometimes why students around me—as well as myself—do not spend more time reading the news, talking about it, or trying to be more involved in how our government is run. Perhaps, during the time my parents went to college, their classes did not place as much emphasis on grades, and they had more time to be involved outside of their studies. More importantly, however, during their time, the draft had a tremendous affect on peoples' awareness of the government's national, as well as foreign, policies.

In his essay, "The War Against the War," David Cortright says:

"In a sense, the army did me a favor. When they drafted me in the summer of 1968, I was forced to become socially aware. My attention quickly focused on the world around me, especially on the war raging in Southeast Asia. Up to this point, I had not been politically active. In college, I bounced from one major to another and spent most of my time playing music or working. My family background was conservative, Catholic, and working class. My dad was a plumber, my mom a waitress and homemaker. Nothing in my background had prepared me for political activism. When the army came knocking on my door that summer, however, the world began to turn upside down. Service in the army ironically turned me into a peace organizer."¹²

The draft made the immensity and awareness of the war central to their lives, deeply affecting their ways of life. Only relatively few in my generation seem to follow the wars (apart from the news on television) of today. Those who do disagree with today's wars tend to have followed some form of news separate from the mass media, making them much more isolated in their anger. Anarchy is one such group of citizens who are more aware and in rebellion of their cultures' downfalls—but their group is comparatively much smaller and less commonly known as an actual movement, either locally, or nationally. Today, students and the general population alike can comfortably ignore foreign policy issues, as well as the war in Iraq or Afghanistan, because they will probably never be forced to become involved. In this aspect, our culture changed only

¹² David Cortright, "The War Against the War," from "Against the Vietnam War: Writings by Activists," Edited by Mary Susannah Robbins. Syracuse, New York, 1999. Pg. 224.

temporarily, during the sixties and seventies, to become aware of greater concerns than our everyday lives. Yet the Vietnam war also made many of the folks who grew up around that time period become much more politically active and socially conscious all of their lives. As Tim Travis, a former activist on the University of Oregon campus during the seventies says:

“The spirit of the movement has never left him. ‘Every step of the way, I have wondered how my ‘old fighter’ comrades would view what I was doing.’...The world would be a better place, Travis says, if everyone considered how friends from their idealistic youth would react before they made decisions.”¹³

Some peoples’ lives will always be different to a large extent because of the Vietnam War, and their experiences with it or with protesting against it.

The Media of the Sixties

The more I read newspapers of the sixties and seventies, and compare them with articles from the nineties, the more it seems that corporations had about as much control then over the *Register Guard* then as they do now. This is contrary to my prior assumption, which was that corporations have been taking over the media mainly during the last two decades in which I have grown up. Instead, the greater struggle during the sixties and seventies seemed to be a generational power struggle, because most university students saw themselves as very easily being able to get a sufficient job whenever they needed. Today, however, many college students, and community members as well, do not feel they have quite as much power over which jobs they get. Instead, the corporations which have always existed have become more technologically advanced, employing less of the working-class citizens and consolidating larger amounts of money in the hands of fewer. The anarchists of 1999 face a struggle more hidden within the

¹³ Ed Dorsch, “A Spring of Outrage and Dismay,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Spring 1999. Page 35.

framework of American society. The *Register Guard*, which is probably funded by some large corporations as well as the general population of Eugene subscribers, represents some of this corporate power. Corporations and many large businesses have probably had control—or at least some influence and say—in how the newspaper was run, and what it published, ever since newspapers began including advertisements on a large scale. In addition to the corporate control over newspapers in 1970, however, there was a disproportionate older and more conservative age group speaking for, and being written to, in the *Register Guard*. It is this power struggle which is so evident in the way the *Register Guard* describes the police confrontations with the students. Since the majority of the older age group would probably never attack the ROTC buildings, they can see themselves as a group forever separated by the permanent quality of age. The police, in 1970 as well as the nineties, enforce a law influenced by wealthy people and corporations (designed to protect their property), and so they are seen as part of the system by the anarchists. At the same time, the *Register Guard* tactfully represents police as a part of the group of citizens rather than as opponents of the anarchists. In this way, citizens—this time separated by political and cultural beliefs rather than class struggles—might be less likely to identify with the anarchists' image of oppression.

Another aspect of our society that seems to have changed since the 1970s is the use of force by law enforcement officials to break up angry and passionate protesters. Administrators and law enforcement officials learned this during the April, 1970 Johnson Hall sit-ins (as well as at various other confrontations at other college campuses across the United States): it was an overreaction to send in the National Guard. Commenting on these decisions 30 years later, in a *Register Guard* article, former patrol division

commander for the Eugene Police Department, Pat Larion, says that bringing in the National Guardsmen was a bad idea: “They come marching up behind Johnson hall and, of course, when the crowd saw them it got really nasty. After about two minutes, I told that guy to take his men and get out of there as quick as possible.”¹⁴ Violent police tactics only incited the protesters to be more defiant, angry, or determined in their cause, rather than solving anything. It is much better to try to keep people from becoming that angry in the first place. This a valid tactic even 29 years later, during the July, 1999 anti-capitalism riots in Eugene, which is probably why the police take a more careful approach to their encounters with activists. It is also probably why the reporters try to show more support for the police than they had in 1970, where police needed only to be treated as law-enforcement officials to be generally respected. During the reporting of the 1999 riots, newspapers showed police as protectors of the community rather than as soldiers enforcing the war. Police defended their apparent slow reaction to the violence of the riot by expressing their reasons to the *Register Guard*: they tried to avoid more decisive action because they would likely have been blamed for making things worse. “Every time we tried to make an action, people would confront us,”¹⁵ The Eugene City Police Chief Jim Hill says, during the 1999 riots. Although later criticized for waiting so long to intervene during the riot, the police knew that they had better keep some distance rather than trying to immediately confront the angry mob.

The opinions and editorial pages are important—not only in communicating the activists’ ideals, but also as a forum for the less vocal or publicly visible group to debate

¹⁴ From the Associated Press. “Eugene Protests in the 1970s Not Unlike Those Today.” *Eugene Register Guard*, Wednesday, July 5, 2000.

¹⁵ Janelle Hartman and Joe Mosley, “Parade Escalates into Rampage,” *Eugene Register Guard*, Saturday, June 19, 1999. Pg. 1A

issues with other members of the community. It offers views of dissenters, as well as views of those in agreement with the cause, those comfortable with the status quo, and those who object to the idea of violent protests. They also offer us some insight into the local views and societal changes happening between the sixties and the 1999 riots. It is surprising, considering the differing nature of these two separate years of protests, how similar many of the opinions and issues remain.

EDITORIALS

The Register Guard, 1970

Rather than questioning the reasons behind student activism, or criticizing individuals for acting in such a destructive manner, the *Register Guard's* initial editorial on the ROTC subject takes an authoritative stance: "what have we done right in stopping this from getting out of hand, and what should we do now?" In an editorial dated Friday, April 17, "Cops On Campus; It Had To Be," the *Register Guard* discusses the issue of "the mindlessness of the young thugs."¹⁶ Activists who destroy other peoples' property do not really qualify as protestors, nor as demonstrators, but rather as criminals, and so the University was justified in calling the cops. Furthermore, students who participated in the riots should be arrested, and graduate students involved in the protest should be fired. This editorial argues that academic freedom itself is threatened when demonstrators are this destructive. "The real victims of Wednesday night's crimes," the editorial concludes, "are the serious students who are interested in getting an education. At most, 400 were involved in the riots."¹⁷ Most of the 400 were not even involved in the

¹⁶ Ed. "Cops On Campus; It Had To Be," *Eugene Register Guard*, April 17, 1970, p. 14A.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14A.

brawl, but were curious bystanders. “That leaves 14,000 others who were victimized because of diminished public support for the university. It is the 14,000 who must be considered.”¹⁸ The *Register Guard’s* articles, editorials, and photographs of the events on campus during April 17 emphasize the point that the University should impose stricter rules on its students (since their education is being funded through public tax dollars).

A Comparison Between the Editorials of April, 1970, and those of June, 1999

In the April 26, 1970 Sunday paper, the *Register Guard* praised the efforts of the University Oregon president and the local police forces for responding to the “violence, the obscenities, the filth, the law breaking and the general boorishness of a small minority of students.”¹⁹ The editor writes that the small band of student leaders wanted a violent confrontation, which would hopefully depict the activists as victims of police repression. He goes on to say that University of Oregon president Robert Clark did the right thing, in combination with the police efforts, to curb the student protesters once their peaceful demonstration grew violent. Unquestionably, the editor says, both the on-and off-campus community strongly supports the side of the president, holding contempt for the unruly students. This same type of argument is echoed many years later in an editorial following the anti-consumerism, “anarchists” protest-turned-riot of 1999. On Tuesday, June 22, 1999, an editorial titled “Afternoon of Anarchy” makes the statement, “The anarchists were totally without justification. An the police were, if anything, too kind...”²⁰ The editor goes on to defend the actions of the police department against their most common

¹⁸ Ed. “Cops On Campus; It Had To Be,” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 17, 1970, p. 14A.

¹⁹ Editorial, “Through it All, School Must Keep,” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 26, 1970. Pg. 10A

²⁰ Editorial, “Afternoon of Anarchy,” *Eugene Register Guard*, June 22, 1999. Pg. 10A.

public complaint of, “why didn’t the cops move in faster and harder and round these people up before they could cause all that mayhem?”²¹ Interestingly, the article goes on to contemplate how the anarchists perceive the situation:

“Meanwhile, are the anarchists proud of themselves? They caused quite a commotion, so that the goal was achieved. But those who spoke for them explained their main purpose as being to call public attention to the fact (as they see it) that the world is being destroyed by the effects of capitalism, industry and technology.

“We haven’t heard a lot of people debating that hypothesis, in spite of the riot. The only thing the rioters seem to have accomplished by way of stimulating public discussion was to renew the community debate over police tactics.”²²

While pondering this, the editor gives the “anarchists” more credit than the editorial of 1970, since he at least acknowledges that they have a purpose. In the editorial of the seventies, however, “Through it All, School Must Keep,” the editor gives the rioters less credit, mainly describing the activists as disruptive, misbehaving students.

Letters to the Editor, 1970

Letters to the editor fit into three basic categories: that the police were right and followed procedure, that the views of the activists were not adequately explained in the news media, and that of people writing in saying, “how could officials let this happen?”

The general consensus of many letter-writers is that destruction is a foolish way to go about peace-protests. One letter to the editor puts this very concisely by saying:

“I can’t help but wonder what these people are trying to obtain. These groups advocate peace and goodwill towards men but are using just the opposite method in trying to get this. Breaking in to a building and disrupting other persons’ offices does not seem to be the making of a peaceful world. Trying to force the university to drop a program that helps many young men obtain an education is not spreading goodwill to all men but is discriminatory against others. And forcing your own views on other people is trying to eliminate the system that enables a person to speak out.”²³

In another article (this one in the *Oregon Daily Emerald*), which refers to the Thursday

²¹ Ibid., Pg. 10A.

²² Editorial, “Afternoon of Anarchy,” *Eugene Register Guard*, June 22, 1999. Pg. 10A.

²³ Erik Gribskov, “Discriminatory,” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 26, 1970. Pg. 10A

night protest at the county jail (where activists gathered to protest the jailing of the ROTC riot leaders) the protesters' attitudes carry remarkable similarities with those attitudes of 1999 anti-capitalist activists. One member of the group, which had begun calling itself the "April 15th Movement," stated: "we didn't provoke any violence Wednesday night...the people were defending themselves against U.S. imperialism which causes death all over the world...we were fighting for a human society."²⁴

Although many of the responders express the same general views in their letters, I find it most interesting, as well as most descriptive, to look at an example from each group which is more of an argumentative rant than a carefully planned, mild reasoning of the issue. Many of these tend to leave a more lasting impression on readers, as well, and tend to be the subject of the more lasting "open-forum" debates. One of the bluntest of letters begins:

"I had the pleasure of being in business here in Eugene for 17 years...when the University of Oregon was a university to be proud of. Today it is a disgrace to the state of Oregon, all because of its gutless president and faculty who permit 150 to 200 anarchist students to run amuck with disregard for law and the rights of others... Communism is waiting for the day the advocates of complete surrender take over the United States, and this is being accomplished faster than many believe. The opposition to the ROTC in our many universities by anarchist students is a plan to accomplish this end. Many of today's youth, who have all had the advantages of their parents and our society can five them are bored and arrogant...No, I am not sorry I am 68; in fact I think I was born 30 years too late, but I am grateful for the squares who kept us free."²⁵

Many share in this writer's beliefs that the University of Oregon's president should immediately expel students who get out of line, as well as the belief that the ROTC program is an important part of American universities.

Other community members express a more liberal point of view, such as the letter titled, "What it Was All About." This letter writer contends that the question of whether

²⁴ John Lanier, "Debate, Discussion Fill Non-Violent Day," *Oregon Daily Emerald*, April 20, 1970. Pg. 7.

²⁵ H.J. Jones, "Disgrace to State," *Eugene Register Guard*, April 28, 1970. Pg. 18A.

the protest against the ROTC was wrong or immoral is not the issue. Rather, the issue is whether it was politically effective. He says that the protest was definitely a moral act, the damage “merely material.” More irrational or immoral were the reactions of the Eugene community:

“represented by the April 17 editorial, ‘Cops on campus, it had to be’) and of the state (Gov. Tom McCall). Was their response responsible? I don’t think so...Because the United States is the most powerful country economically, politically, and militarily, it must take the first step to yield its sovereignty to the world in order to insure equality and freedom to all men. Since the political power in this country is concentrating on maintaining and expanding its empire, it is everyone’s responsibility to eliminate the mechanisms that are used to carry out the US Government’s policy of exploitation of the third world. ROTC is a major supplier of officers in the military which is one of these mechanisms. This is what last weeks’ action was all about.”²⁶

This is one of the few letters expressing agreement with the student side of the

movement, other than those of the activists themselves, who’s articles number few and far between all of the accusations of authority figures letting activists run rampant on campus. Many also express the sense of democracy which students should appreciate rather than attacking, reminding readers that the decision to keep ROTC on campus was settled by a democratic voting process. Ignoring this idea is one editorial, printed April 28, asking for understanding of the student side of the movement. This writer asks the Eugene community to “Hear and Understand” the activist’s statement:

“Students have demonstrated peacefully many, many times (against the Vietnam War in particular) prior to the recent protest against ROTC. Can you honestly say that you took the responsibility to observe these peaceful marches and to ask yourself why; and further, what can you do yourself? Now that some violence has flared (out of frustration, the presence of police and many other factors), on-the-spot news coverage is readily available to flash to the public the terrible unlawfulness of berserk radicals. The violence was wrong; it happened. Now, please don’t further wrongdoing by closing your ears to what you may call violent radicals. They are no more different from me or you.”²⁷

The writer further states that those students who were asking, at the mercy of the law and university authorities to be heard and understood broke the law, giving up their right to be

²⁶ Stephen Chapman, “What It Was All About,” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 24, 1970.

²⁷ Eric Crockett, “Hear and Understand,” *Eugene Register Guard*, April 28, 1970. Pg. 18A

heard. Perhaps, he says, we might still understand their intentions. Meanwhile, numerous other student letters try to make it clear that as University of Oregon students, they in no way support the actions of these protesters, nor do they feel that the ROTC riots represent the University as a whole, or its students. They often use the argument that democracy is undermined when a minority tries to force its views on others based on violence.

Letters to the Editor, 1999

The letters to the editor 29 years later often replace similar phrases about democracy with the argument for freedom, stating that activists who attack and abuse other people's property are destroying other people's freedom in an attempt to gain more freedom themselves. One writer defines anarchy as ending when it begins suppressing the freedom of others through violence. He also says, "If you really believe in freedom, then you must not use violence and fear to take away freedom from those who disagree with you."²⁸ There is a paradox in these protests, not only because they use violent tactics to protest violence, but also because these generally peace-preferring groups are not noticed until they become violent. One letter, "Ignoring the Positive," states this problem about the media's delight of covering action, very provokingly:

"A priori, anarchists are stereotyped and their varying messages ignored or distorted by those in power and the press...already we can see sensationalistic and selective accounts in the Register-Guard and on local television news programs. Glaringly absent from these accounts are the necessary analyses and anarchist explanations about why people would want to march the streets, stop traffic, and smash the windows of banks. In their pro-statist bias, the news media pounce on so-called violent actions but offer little coverage of the many positive endeavors anarchists are creating in Eugene...There was no in-depth reporting of the ideas, visions, and themes discussed at the Northwest Anarchists Conference. So the news media report extravagantly on confrontations, while making feeble efforts to find out and explain why such confrontations happen. Instead of exploring the complex issues the anarchists concern themselves with—like how to create a society free from systems of domination and environmental

²⁸ Howard W. Robertson, "Discrediting Agents," *Eugene Register Guard*, June 26, 1999. Pg. 21A

degradation—the news media are content simply to remain mouthpieces for the police, the state and the alienating, exploitative status quo”²⁹

While the media are misrepresenting the anarchist movement, many “anarchists” are out in the streets misrepresenting themselves. Many of the letters—from those tentatively supporting the anti-capitalism protests to those directly involved in the march themselves—express disgust at the way the principle of anarchy is being portrayed: “Thanks again for a proper misrepresentation of anarchism. This time, though, it can’t be blamed entirely on the media or the police. Congratulations on this one go all around.”³⁰ Other arguments range from agreeing completely with how the police force handled things, to being upset at the “police brutality” they saw, to wishing that the police would have intervened sooner. Most letters concerning the police, however, commend police action, saying that they used fair tactics and gave the demonstrators plenty of opportunities to protest their beliefs in a peaceful manner before they stepped in to arrest the most destructive activists.

One of the major contrasts I find between the letters to the editor following the 1970 riots and those following the riots of 1999 is that in the later letters express many varying degrees of viewpoints and beliefs. The 1970 editorials, however, tend to have a much more dichotomous theme to them: they are either for or against the riots—and even the destruction—caused by the campus activists.

CONCLUSIONS

One thing that very strongly united everyone during the sixties and seventies was the Vietnam War, and especially the draft. The combination of these two influences on

²⁹ Ryan Foote, “Ignoring the Positive,” *Eugene Register Guard*, June 24, 1999. Pg. 12A

³⁰ Nathan Buck, “No Respect,” *Eugene Register Guard*, June 22, 1999. Pg. 10A

society brought about the greatest social and political uproar Eugene had ever seen. While the anarchist protesters of the 1999 Eugene riots also rebelled against similar governmental control and oppression of people by governments and corporate interests, they lacked the strength of national support that the Vietnam War movement created. At the same time, they draw on this former strength by using similar tactics and approaches—confrontation, rock throwing, chanting, anger at police brutality, appeal to emotion. In addition, they use the media as publicity for their cause, perhaps more tactfully than the 1970 ROTC rioters did—as a forum for showing their pictures, reporting some of their statements in an action-filled, exciting sort of way, and in urging people to question their beliefs some. However violent and disruptive the anarchists tactics were, they understand that smashing things can be effective in getting people to notice think about their cause.

Along with the culture, the media has also noticeably changed. It tended to focus more and more on individual rather than group opinions, at the same time that groups became less consistent or united in their beliefs. This change affected how events such as the 1999 protest-turned-riot were reported, because the reporters tended to include more of the views of spectators, community members, and police, rather than describing situations from a merely action-based standpoint. These changes in reporting methods, in turn, affected the way readers responded to the articles, as we can see from the opinions expressed in editorials during June of 1999. Readers tend to agree with the most convincing facts they are given, and when these facts tend to be viewpoints of others with which the *Register Guard* presents them, there are more generalized, diverse opinions of the debate going on within the newspaper.

References

“Against the Vietnam War: writings by activists.” Edited by Mary Susannah Robbins. Syracuse, NY; Syracuse University Press, 1999.

From the Associated Press. “Eugene Protests in the 1970s Not Unlike Those Today.” Eugene *Register Guard*, Wednesday, July 5, 2000.

Bolt, Greg. “Demonstration Deja Vu: Latest Protests Seem Similar to Those in the 1960s, but Some See Key Differences.” Eugene *Register Guard*, July 2, 2000. Online (11/26/3): <http://www.registerguard.com/news/20000702/1a.protest.0702.html>

Chomsky, Noam. “Understanding Power—The Indispensable Chomsky.” Edited by Peter R. Michell and John Schoeffel. New York: New Press, 2002.

Denson, Bryan. “Idealism Fuels Anarchists' Battles: A Desire to Destroy the Institutions That Impose Order Underlies the Actions of Militant Anarchists.” *The Oregonian*, Sunday, August 13, 2000. Online (11/24/3), <http://mailman.lbo-talk.org/2000/2000-August/014380.html>

Dorsch, Ed. “A Spring of Outrage and Dismay,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Spring 1999. Pp. 30-35.

Oregon Daily Emerald articles, April 15, 1970-April 30, 1970.

Ream, Tim. “Unrestrained Stories: False Police Claims of Protestor Violence.” Los Angeles Independent Media Center. August 9, 2000. Online (11/24/3), http://www.infoshop.org/news5/cop_lies.html

Register Guard articles, April 15, 1970-April 30, 1970, and June 18, 1999-June 30, 1999.

Stahl, Frank. Interview, University of Oregon campus, Eugene, Oregon. October 13, 2003.

Sullivan, Chad. “UO Radicals - 1970; the Untold story.” Online (11/24/3):

<http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~insurgnt/12.6/radicals.html>

Williams, Dan. Former University of Oregon President. Interview, University of Oregon campus, Eugene, Oregon. Monday, October 27, 2003.