

# Treasures from the Archives

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*The McAlester News-Capital predicted that the demonstrators would cross over to the establishment to become the nation's leaders. In a photo from May 8, 1970, Vietnam veteran James Todd, center, instructs a group of picketers protesting the Cambodian involvement. The mustached student leader third from left is future Oklahoma governor David Walters.*

**Twenty-five years ago,  
shots rang out  
at a place called Kent  
State, and the nation's  
campuses were never  
quite the same  
—not even in Oklahoma.**

*fifth in a series  
by David W. Levy*

**T**here have been other moments in OU's history when events on the campus annoyed large numbers of Oklahoma citizens. But it is unlikely that the University ever has been the object of such intense feeling as during a traumatic week in early May 1970.

Before then, protests against the war in Vietnam on the OU campus were relatively mild. There was a small chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society, an underground newspaper called *The Jones Family Grandchildren*, and some lively debate in *The Oklahoma Daily* over the

wisdom, morality and necessity of the war. But compared to the fevered activities on other campuses, the atmosphere in Norman seemed restrained, almost serene.

The war, in any case, seemed to be winding down: troop levels had fallen from the high of January 1969, both

**“Times are  
Particularly Tense  
Right Now”**

casualties and draft calls were down, and more of the actual fighting was being turned over to the South Vietnamese. Public opinion had turned decisively against the whole business—a Gallup poll taken in mid-year revealed that 56 percent of Americans thought that sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake, while only 36 percent believed that it had not been a mistake.

Then suddenly on April 30, President Richard Nixon announced that he had resumed the bombing of North Vietnam and ordered an extensive military operation into neutral Cambodia. To many citizens, these measures appeared to be a dramatic escalation of the war. Within hours dozens of protests took place, and hundreds more were being planned. On May 4, four students were killed at Kent State University during one such event. The combination of the Cambodian incursion and the Kent State killings caused an explosion of fury on campuses all across America.

Historian Melvin Small summarized the activity: "Between May 4 and May 8, campuses experienced an average of 100 demonstrations a day, 350 campus strikes were called with varying degrees of success, 546 colleges shut down, and 73 colleges reported significant violence in their protests. . . . By May 12, over 150 colleges were on strike. . . . Ultimately, over 450 colleges closed down for at least some of the period, and the National Guard had to be called out at least 24 times."

Spirited antiwar eruptions occurred even on conservative campuses that had never seen much activity before. One such place was the University of Oklahoma.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, May 5, about 500 demonstrators heckled a group of ROTC cadets who had marched from the Armory to their drill field on Brooks Street. The affair began gently enough, with frisbees and costumes and fine spring weather; the cadets stayed cool, nobody assaulted anybody else, nothing was thrown. Then a graduate student unfurled what everyone assumed was a Vietcong flag (actually it was South Vietnamese), and things got uglier. The police came and arrested that

student and a few others; protesters blocked the street so the police car could not leave; reinforcements arrived, and the affair ended peacefully.

There then followed a series of meetings, protest rallies, sit-ins and midnight strategy sessions. Governor Dewey Bartlett dispatched the State Highway Patrol. On Thursday the student body voted narrowly against calling a strike. Finally, on Tuesday, May 12, one week after the original incident on Brooks Street, a carefully orchestrated demonstration took place

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inside the stadium during Armed Forces Day, the annual awards ceremony for outstanding ROTC cadets. The afternoon was tense and bitter, and many everyday Oklahomans in the stands thought the protesters on the field had behaved scandalously. But when the week was over, there had been no deaths or serious injuries, little overt violence and minimal damage to University property.

Credit for the relative calm must go to a handful of wise and patient individuals: President J. Herbert Hollomon and two astute advisers, Gordon Christianson and David Burr; Chief Bill Jones of the OU police; Bill Moffitt, the first African-American president

of the student body, who had taken his office on the very day of the first incident and who conducted himself with enormous poise and good judgment; numerous faculty and student marshals.

Most state newspapers, however, chose not to focus on the fact that the campus neither closed nor suffered serious damage. Editorials from around the state, a selection of which are printed below, show that most editors were appalled by the carrying on. With a few noteworthy exceptions, they almost all argued that the demonstrations were the work of a very small minority of radicals, that most students were innocent of any interest in the war and certainly without sympathy for the unpatriotic radicals, and that irresponsible professors and incompetent administrators were as much to blame as the students. The *behavior* of the protesters was what bothered them. As will be seen, some trivialized and very few addressed seriously either the motives of the students or their reservations about the war in Vietnam.

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*The Daily Oklahoman, 5 May 1970.*

### **CAMPUSES IN TURMOIL**

President Nixon's Cambodian venture evokes the predictable new eruption of student unrest.

The student peaceniks Hanoi once described as its "dear American friends" are calling for an academic strike this week in opposition to the president's decision. . . . But the constant turmoil that student and faculty political activism has brought to the campuses has become the clear and present danger to higher education. If the Cambodian decision hadn't come along, the activists would have discovered some other excuse for their disruptive tactics. . . .

The overriding consideration from the standpoint of the university administrator ought to be the threat implicit in all this disruption to the very survival of higher education. . . . Thus the administrator above all should be in the vanguard of those insisting on the maintenance of order and classroom continuity. But the faculty and administrative example too often is in the opposite direction.

\* \* \* \*

*McAlester News-Capital, 7 May 1970.*

### **THE PROBLEM ISN'T PLEASING TO THE MAJORITY**

President Nixon was scheduled to meet today with several college presidents, who are officials of a national association of universities. The President and the university officials are sure to agree that violence on the campus should be avoided, by various means. . . . But there is another message which may also get across to the President. It is a message that is apparent at the University of Oklahoma this week. Students who are not hippies or 'bums' or even trouble-makers are wearing black arm bands. They feel this country's answer to demonstrations is shooting at students, and they think it is wrong.

Many adults, and newspaper writers as well, are satisfied to tell students if they are in a demonstration which erupts in violence they are going to get hurt. But many times no violence is planned, but a few students get out of line. This often happens at dances and parties of young people and has done so for many many years.

But as Interior Secretary Hickel cautioned, it is important to communicate with the college students. If we do not, it will only divide the country more. And after all, who is going to be running the country in the next five to 10 years? It is well to predict, however, that these same young people will be a part of the 'establishment,' by that time, and judging from present conditions, will not be trusted by the college students of that day. The young people are not completely right, of course, . . . But neither are all of them completely wrong.

\* \* \* \*

*The Daily Oklahoman, 7 May 1970.*

### **FIREBRANDS AND TINDER**

. . . Tuesday's conflict between police and demonstrators at the University of Oklahoma was an example of the irrational outbursts that occur when an atmosphere of hysteria prevails. The fracas there followed the

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*What began on May 5, 1970, as a relatively benign protest of the actions at Kent State, the bombing of Cambodia and ROTC in general quickly turned ugly when a student unfurled a flag thought to be Vietcong. Several demonstrators were arrested in the melee that followed.*

arrest of a student carrying a Viet Cong flag. In a nation which has lost over 40,000 of its young men to invading forces carrying that banner, the only purpose in waving it is to provoke reaction. The police were therefore taking a step calculated to avoid violence in removing it and its owner from the scene of possible trouble.

The attack on the police which followed was the action of a lynch mob, not a group bent on preserving free expression. To some extent, however, it was merely an omen of the attitude of many young people toward all police. The men in blue have been re-sented for stopping youthful speeders, for ferreting out the marijuana they might possess and for even more minor efforts to enforce the laws.

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*Tulsa World, 7 May 1970.*

### **THE BYSTANDER VICTIMS**

At the University of Oklahoma dem-

onstration this week some of the persons hit or pushed by police were not protesting anything. . . . But when they join the parade they also join the risk-taking. Unfortunately, when trouble develops, the movement of people and events may be swift and engulfing; often there is no time to escape. And sometimes the non-demonstrators are held in a kind of mesmerism unable to tear themselves away. . . . In effect, they have lent themselves to the purposes of the demonstration even if unintentionally—and they must take the consequences. Though innocent of wrongdoing, they have put themselves in the line of fire—the worst possible place to be.

\* \* \* \*

*Purcell Register, 7 May 1970.*

. . . The protest against that war must be continued until it is brought to a close. Mr. Nixon, the new president, promised to end the war. He told the American people, as a candidate, that he had a plan to end the war. But

now as president he seems to drift deeper and deeper into war plans that surely drove the former president out of office. The protest must, however, be lawful, respectful and logical. Any protest through violence only defeats the purpose of sincere protest.

\* \* \* \*

*The Norman Transcript, 7 May 1970.*

### **VIOLENCE NEVER FAR AWAY WHEN DISSENT GETS UNRULY**

It was inevitable, we suppose, that the spirit of lawlessness which has invaded other universities throughout the land would arrive eventually at the OU campus.

Only about 200 of the 16,000 students enrolled in the University started the demonstration Tuesday that quickly turned into an unlawful gathering that violated the rights of other persons. The ROTC cadets whose marching was mocked and whose ranks were interfered with showed admirable restraint in main-

taining their composure even though their rights were violated. . . .

We realize, of course, that the issues stirring up students today are more deadly serious than many of those that prompted campus antics in the past. One can't blame students for being apprehensive over conditions that might involve their very lives. But they are not the first young people to be so jeopardized. It happened also during World War II and during the Korean War, to name two relatively recent instances.

As Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon, OU president, pointed out in pleading for calm and understanding, there is much disagreement in our country. Times are particularly tense right now. . . .

A few instigators gather a crowd, which at first is seeking only excitement. The crowd is turned into an angry mob by impassioned oratory. The mob is goaded into defying authority. The authority is pressed to react violently. And that reaction is utilized to complete the radicalization of spectators and neutrals. All this

has been spelled out in manuals of the SDS, the Black Panthers, the New Left and others who apparently wish the destruction of the university communities as part of their blueprint for a revolution.

We don't suggest this is happening here. But it is a pattern that moderate students should recognize and be on guard against lest they be drawn into a situation far more serious than they intended. . . . As Bill Moffitt, the new Student Association president said last week, "Violence is the last resort of the incompetent." We trust the majority of students will keep this in mind.

\* \* \* \*

*Tulsa World, 9 May 1970.*

### **CAMPUS SILENT MAJORITY**

The vote taken at the University of Oklahoma gives another indicator to help put the situation in perspective. OU students voted against a proposed one-day boycott of classes, by 3,831 to

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*OU President J. Herbert Hollomon addresses a May 6, 1970, rally of approximately 3,000, who gathered on the Parrington Oval two days after the Kent State killings and a day after a mob of demonstrators heckled ROTC cadets near the OU Armory.*

3,638. That is a close margin—but nearly 9,000 students didn't even bother to vote. Obviously they were not stirred up over the issues that have divided the voting segment.

There is enough unrest—at OU, OSU and other schools in the state and nation—to be significant and to demand attention; no doubt about that. President Nixon is astute enough to realize it is not just a handful of agitators who are upset over events in Cambodia, Vietnam and at Kent State University. But the point is that we shouldn't be overwhelmed by the activists who are able to make far more noise and trouble than their numbers warrant.

They are creating the impression that all college students are yearning to break windows, curse policemen and toss firebombs at ROTC buildings. . . . The danger now is that the student activists will be so unruly and intemperate that massive anti-student, anti-college sentiment will be created in the nation. The gap between young and old Americans is already too wide; the generations cannot stand further separation. . . .

Courtesy of The Norman Transcript

\* \* \* \*

McAlester Sunday News-Capital, 10 May 1970.

### **TIME FOR STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY**

. . . The President has shown by his speech and his actions Saturday that he is just as concerned as young people are about the war in Indochina. George Nigh and Governor Bartlett have shown the same concern. . . . [T]hings have changed, the concerned young persons who do not advocate violence have been adequately assured that national and state officials share their concern. It is time for them to settle down and finish their school work and for many of them to take on their responsibility in the business world.

They have a right to be heard. But they have been heard, by the President himself. Now they must show they can accept the full responsibility of citizenship. . . . The President has shown his good will and good intentions. It is time for young people to show theirs.

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*Demonstrations at OU to protest the war in Vietnam were comparatively mild before Kent State. On May 14, 1969, students expressed their opposition to the presence of ROTC on campus as cadets march in review for Armed Forces Day.*

\* \* \* \*

Lawton Constitution, 10 May 1970.

### **HOFFMAN REJECTED**

The four faculty members of the University Speakers Committee who stood fast and rejected the demand that Abbie Hoffman be invited to speak at Oklahoma State University are to be commended and supported by those who deplore violence on college campuses. Hoffman is a convicted anarchist and a moral degenerate who has nothing constructive to offer the young people of our state. Why some college students seem determined to bring such scum to the campuses, knowing

that it will inflame many young people as well as the public, is a question not easily answered.

\* \* \* \*

Duncan Banner, 12 May 1970.

### **MOST YOUNG PEOPLE GET HIGH MARKS**

The main reason so many of us are so shocked and bewildered by the rioting and property destruction by rebellious students at hundreds of universities and colleges throughout the country is because we have difficulty in believing that there are so many young people who do not respect the opinions, rights and property of others. Thinking back over the years we remember only very few young people or boys and girls with whom we came in contact we didn't like. A newspaper employs many young persons in all departments. In addition, we have had hundreds of young independent newspaper carriers in and out of our building during the years, and it is a rare thing that any have misbehaved or have caused trouble. . . . There are some who get out of line at times but . . . when a few lose all sense of real values it is probably due in part to too

much money, too much pampering, poor guidance and a lack of responsibility placed upon them during their formative years.

\* \* \* \*

Tulsa World, 13 May 1970.

### **ACADEMIC HYPOCRISY**

[A]dministrators and faculty have flunked miserably in maintaining a proper discipline under which students either conformed or invited expulsion. . . .

Much of the trouble on U.S. campuses today is directly attributable to radical ideas inculcated by theoretical

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Courtesy of The Norman Transcript

*Bill Moffitt, right, the first African-American president of the student body at the University of Oklahoma, is credited with helping to avoid bloodshed on the campus during the tensest time of the anti-Vietnam War protests.*

and impractical idealists. Idealism is a trait to be cherished, but it is incapable of achievement through theorems and dreams. The drawing board for dreams is in the classroom—but the far more difficult job of implementation lies in the practical world of politics and human nature.

\* \* \* \*

*Lawton Constitution, 13 May 1970.*

### **EXPELLING RIOTERS**

. . . If all colleges and universities made it a firm policy to expel all who have rioted and demonstrated for any reason in the past year, they would make room for many who want to go to get an education. The corollary of such a policy would be that after admission anyone who develops into a rioter and demonstrator immediately is expelled and his place will be taken from a waiting list of the qualified. This should put an end to dissidence and discord on the campus.

\* \* \* \*

*The Daily Oklahoman, 14 May 1970.*

### **OU ESCAPES VIOLENCE**

So far has lawful dissent degenerated that people now congratulate themselves when even a foul-mouthed campus confrontation comes off without bloodshed, arson or other major violence. In this dubious light, the anti-war demonstration at the University of Oklahoma's Owen Field had a felicitous outcome, although small thanks are due the boisterous dissenters whose shouted obscenities embarrassed and affronted the assembled ROTC cadets and their relatives, war veterans and visiting dignitaries. Such despicable behavior has no place in a decent society, and least of all in academic surroundings where tolerance for all viewpoints should prevail if it is going to survive anywhere. That the ROTC awards ceremony, which was made the focal point for protest, didn't break up in a brawl is a source of

gratification but hardly an occasion for rejoicing. . . .

But of course most faculty members and students are aware of the danger and detest violence, a circumstance fully evident at OU the other day. Where violence occurs, it is provoked deliberately by a cynical minority of campus revolutionaries determined to bring down the existing order without regard for what they would put in its stead. . . .

\* \* \* \*

*Altus Times-Democrat, 15 May 1970.*

### **COLLEGES NEEDING STRONG LEADERSHIP**

While some college presidents and faculty are ready to bow to the wishes of a minority of dissidents, protestors and hate mongers. . . . it is refreshing to find a college leader who still feels that an education is the main reason most students are on the nation's campuses.

In a recent speech to the Federa-

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*A student questions one of the speakers at a May 6, 1970, rally on the north oval, called to protest the arrest of three demonstrators at the preceding day's ROTC drill.*

tion of Mothers' Clubs, A. R. Luedecke, acting president of Texas A&M University said, 'Our students are dedicated to learning about the world before they go out to change it.' He pledged that he will not allow the university to be turned into a haven for discontent. 'Texas A&M students don't have to wear beards or riot to gain attention. The overwhelming majority reject revolutionary elements,' he declared. 'We are grateful you mothers have entrusted your sons and daughters to us.' We believe the overwhelming majority of students of practically every university in the country have the same feelings as the students at Texas A&M.

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*Daily Ardmoreite, 17 May 1970.*

### **OU OFFICIALS SHOW RESTRAINT IN PROTESTS**

The demonstrations and protests on the University of Oklahoma cam-

pus during the past two weeks have resulted in considerable discussions and questions on the policies and actions of OU officials. . . . [D]id the OU officials compromise too far in allowing the demonstrators to infiltrate the ranks of the ROTC cadets in front of the Armory and in allowing the demonstrators to occupy part of the stadium parade grounds during the ROTC review? . . . and is Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon, OU president, too lenient in his dealings with the protestors on campus?

Both questions are very well answered to date by the fact that OU is one of few major public universities in the country to come through the past two weeks without major violence and disruption or being shut down. OU's incidents involving the ROTC, the attempted sit-in at the Administration Building and the campus grounds assembly of protesters must be rated as minor in comparison to events on many other campuses. The OU policies,

while not as stringent as some Oklahomans would like to see, appear to have worked well so far. . . . It may be that Hollomon is doing a better job than is generally recognized. . . . To date, we would rate the disturbances on the OU campus as bad, but not nearly as [bad as] they might have been.

\* \* \* \*

*Duncan Banner, 19 May 1970.*

### **MAYBE DR. SPOCK KNOWS**

Editor Wallace Kidd of the *Anadarko Daily News* doesn't belabor the campus protest scenes. He simply asks the question: "What ever happened to those fathers who wrote sons in college with the advice, 'Boy, if you aren't going to study and get your degree, come on home. We need you to help in the store.'"

\* \* \* \*

*McAlester News-Capital, 20 May 1970.*

### **DIFFERENT THINKING THIS YEAR ON COLLEGES?**

Normally, the problem for parents this time of year is to encourage their high school graduate to go on and obtain a college degree. But this year, the parents may be convincing their graduate to attend a smaller college, rather than OU and Oklahoma State. Student thinking usually is to "go along" with popular activities on campus, and this is nothing new. But the war protests are new. So many parents may decide their sons and daughters should not be tempted by being around the big university campuses next year.

\* \* \* \*

*Lawton Constitution, 21 May 1970.*

### **IN OKLAHOMA**

Militant students at OU agree to keep things quiet—so no one will miss hearing all their four-letter words.

*[Source: Newspaper Department, Oklahoma State Historical Society, Oklahoma City. The author also wishes to acknowledge the fascinating Ph.D. dissertation by William McKeen, Field Day: Student Dissent at the University of Oklahoma, May 5-12, 1970 (1986).]*

