

# Insight

The Daily Tar Heel

# Protest

## Protest Is Tradition Of Carolina Students

The largest demonstration ever to occur at the University came last spring when more than half of the student body took to the streets to protest President Nixon's decision to send troops into Cambodia.

But it was not the first demonstration ever to occur at "Red Hill," a name infamously given to the University by state residents when communism became a foul word back in the 1920's, and no doubt it won't be the last.

Protest has become a symbol of universities across America in the last decade as students have become much more actively involved in the events which control their lives.

However, it is often thought that protest is a rather new phenomenon to the college campus. History proves this belief to be a tenuous one, indeed.

Protests are as old as universities and the University here has been in the forefront of campus protest ever since its first decade of operation.

The nickname "Red Hill" was given fifty years ago when communism first stood for protest, liberalism and revolutionary activity. What the residents of the state called the University before then is unknown but the "generation gap" between the two which exists now existed just as surely then.

Historians have attributed this bent for campus protests to the youthful energy of the student who first begins to see life in all its hideous realities.

The classic confrontation between administrators and students is now just another newsreel on the evening news or another picture on the front page of the local newspaper, but the administrators today, no matter how loud they may object, really have it easy.

Americans have become very paranoid about such things as guns on the campus of Cornell or the battle royals involving the molotov cocktails and bricks of students against the tear gas of the police or National Guard.

And it's true that the deaths of four students at Kent State and two at Jackson State brought the dreamy quality of protest into sharp reality.

But the real difference between

protest now and then is the administrators have the upper hand in the weapons department.

The youthful revolutionary of today who bombs university buildings and occasionally kills a hapless citizen with his errant explosives really has nothing over the 19th century protestor.

Back then it was really rough for the poor Establishment.

A few examples, gleaned from an old newspaper clipping concerning 19th century student activity at UNC, bring the early university protest into much sharper focus.

The shenanigans of the early protestors included some of the following outrages:

—"setting fire to the old wood bell tower and cheering lustily while watching it burn to the ground;

—"breaking into the president's stable, cutting off his horse's tail, stealing everything that wasn't tied down, overturning the presidential outhouse and tearing down the gates around his home;

—"holding a pistol on a professor while clouting him about the head with a club;

—"filling up a brass doorknob with powder and trying to blow up a professor's home;

—"marching through the town breaking windows and stoning faculty members, wrecking classrooms and laboratory facilities, singing obscene songs in front of South Building and cutting off the mane and tail of a professor's horse, painting the horse green, and locking it up in Person Hall.

"In those raucous days many of the students owned pistols and some of them had a tendency to shoot at the slightest offense, real or imagined," continues the article.

"Professors who valued life and limb watched their tongues and administrators had to give some hard thought to rules and regulations, since a wrong move could get your house leveled."

It is easily seen who had the balance of power in those early days, and the administration would not dare be so bold as to propose that students were not mature enough to determine who should be in their places of residence and when.

But pistol beatings of professors have given way to limp

demonstrations highlighted by marches through downtown and the singing of protest songs.

Who can ascertain how much money the cafeteria workers would be making now if Sitterson, Friday and other administrators had been accorded the treatment in 1968 they would have received in 1799.

And if Lyndon Johnson had dared to even suggest a continuance of the war in Vietnam back in 1805, today he would probably be riding a green horse with no mane or tail back on the ranch in Texas.



A major difference between the protests of today and those of yesteryear are the mass scale. Today a protest on a faraway campus is brought quickly to every campus in the nation. (Staff photo by John Gellman)

## First Demonstration Was 1779...

When the University first opened its doors to students in 1795 faculty regulations demanded of the students what seems today to be a Spartan-like existence.

Life was regulated in minute detail for each student.

Dawn...rise...eight o'clock...confined to lodgings...never, repeat never, go out of sight of the buildings...or the sound of the bell.

Students were not to: "Use profane language, keep 'ardent' spirits in their rooms; associate with evil company; keep dogs or firearms; bet on horse races; use indecent gestures or speak disrespectfully of religion."

The rules were to be enforced by the faculty. Professors were designated to visit rooms twice each day for inspection.

Kemp P. Battle, author of "The History of the University of North Carolina," comments on the early University: "...But the times were

not quiet. Fighting and drinking and gambling were almost universally fashionable and of course could not be banished from the microcosm of the university.

"There was in the air a spirit of revolt against authority, divine and human, which was felt in all circles whether of youth of manhood. Universities...found their pupils inclined to recklessness and insubordination, and fathers had little correcting influence because the children were but following their example."

The University struggled along through political and financial worries only to be confronted with "troublesome times" by the first graduating class.

The first major disorder on the campus came about in the term preceding the commencement of 1799.

Battle says: "For some reason Mr. Gillaspie became personally obnoxious and the students broke

out in rebellion against the laws and the faculty. They actually beat Mr. Gillaspie personally, waylaid and stoned Mr. Webb, accosted Mr. Flinn with the intention of beating him, but were diverted from it, and at length uttered violent threats against Mr. Murphey and Mr. Caldwell, which were never put into execution."

The disorders went on for a week. At the end three of the worst offenders were dismissed from the University.

This trouble created several difficulties for the institution as parents did not want to send their children to such a place. In 1799 there were eight graduates, but the best year saw only three diplomas received.

Probably the most disastrous experiment of those early years resulted in the great rebellion of 1805.

A fiasco in college government led to the Great Secession when 41 students (a majority at that time) left the university rather than compromising their principles with The Establishment. (See story elsewhere on page.)

The educational institution struggling to get on its feet suffered another setback in the student-faculty conflicts of the rebellion of 1816.

William B. Sheppard was to make an address to the student body and, as was the custom, he submitted his speech to President Robert Chapman for approval prior to delivery.

Chapman cut from the address certain sentences of a political nature favorable to the Republican party. When Sheppard made the address, he refused to delete these and Chapman ordered him to be seated, whereupon the students shouted for him to continue, which he did.

The next day the students held a meeting in the chapel and passed a resolution upholding the rightfulness of his and their conduct.

The matter was resolved with Sheppard and a few students being asked to leave. Others were allowed to sign a statement acknowledging their misconduct and promising to abide by the laws of the university and thus remain in school.

One of the activists in this disorder was Jim Polk, who two years later was to graduate at the head of his class. He urged his fellow students to "stoop not from the true principles of honor to gain the favor of the faculty and thus succeed in your views of promotion."

This campus radical was in 1845 to become the president of the United States.

A long list of difficulties follows, including, among other things, "cafeteria" protests, a plea for

formal balls, opposition from the faculty about new buildings, compulsory prayers and the burning of the belfry.

It was in 1850, on the night of August 13, that, according to William E. Drake's "Higher Education in North Carolina before 1860," one of the most serious of the university riots occurred.

This protest began with the ringing of the college bell when three members of the faculty appeared in Old West dormitory.

"They were hailed with opprobrious language and stones and brick bats were thrown at them whenever it was possible," says Drake.

Threats of maltreatment were freely uttered. The professors fled, waited until they thought the students were calmed and returned to investigate in Old West.

"Here they were cornered in a student's room," Drake says, "where they were again assailed for more than an hour by students, with threats of 'kill them' being frequently uttered."

Lights, windows, doors were broken. One professor was forced to knock a student out of the window with a chair. Eventually the confrontation fizzled out.

by  
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"It was in these days, when the minds of many were unsettled by the protentious rumblings of the coming war and the angry passions of political strife, that in 1858 a lawless club was formed, the members pledged to stand by one another in their breaches of university rules," says Battle.

Battle continues: "Spiritous liquor was drunk, the air was filled at late hours with direful uproars and furious din, the bell was rung violently and unceasingly, or the clapper was stolen and hid, in fact all disorder committed which ingenuity could devise, and when the faculty endeavored to restore order, stones were thrown at them with dangerous accuracy."

"Finally the benches and black-boards were collected from the recitation rooms and piled for a huge bonfire. The readers were expelled and, suit being brought against them in the Superior Court of Orange, they were compelled to reimburse the university for damages sustained, about \$200..."

Shenanigans of this sort continued until after the Civil War. The war years drastically changed the atmosphere of the university.

Hard times brought problems, more seriousness and perhaps the beginnings of today's protests.

## 'Great Secession' Highlights Protests

In 1805 the Trustees of the University adopted a set of regulations which so angered the students that 41 of them, a large majority, walked off the campus.

This is known in the history books as the Great Secession.

The walkout was prompted by trustees' decision to impose a set of regulations on students requiring two, rather than one, monitor in each class.

These monitors were required to take an oath which affirmed their duty to "preserve order among the students in the College, the dining room and elsewhere, with power to suppress every species of irregularity."

"The classes were to sit together in the dining-room with monitors presiding," continued the oath.

The monitors were to be given full power to control the actions of the students.

The students refused to submit

to this order and made their feelings known to then President Caldwell.

Caldwell thought the students' protest concerned the fact of taking the oath, not the provisions within, and thus made the error of substituting a pledge of honor for the oath but not changing the provisions.

The controversy continued with the trustees over-ruling the president and then proposing restrictions even more potent than the original ones.

The students left, most never to return, and the issue ended.

But the University was greatly hampered as only three students graduated in 1805 and only four in 1806.

Some of the seceders achieved prominence in later life; one, Henry Owen, became governor, and others became judges, state senators and members of the state house.



Student Body President Tom Bello speaks before a large crowd during the student strike of spring, 1970. (Staff photo by John Gellman)