

1968: The Protests

Perspectives #62 John Teevan July 19, 2024

In my first essay about 1968, I recounted how the three assassinations affected us all back then. This essay will focus on the main protests of 1967-68. I was not politically active but one suitemate 'came clean for Gene' (McCarthy) though he barely shaved. He went on to be the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Rutgers. He and I were not as clever as the guys who found the keys to the SDS office where we protested the protestors.

Another Princeton suitemate was very politically active. He was a student who came from Israel. During the Six Day War in June 1967, (school lasted until mid-June) he was beside himself and ready to (but did not) jump on a plane for Tel Aviv to deploy with the Israeli Army. Only now do I begin to realize how important that was to him.

Eight of us lived in the 14th Entry of Blair Hall over an arch (not the iconic one) where we had (unofficial) access to the flat roof of our Campus Gothic dorm. We used that roof for kite flying, snow balls, and (not often) actual studying (too bright). Once the twins got four old bed sheets from home in East Orange (pr: Arnge) NJ, which we painted on that flat roof with a clever (we imagined) protest slogan. Somehow the same guys got the keys to the Grad College (Goon Castle) tower which I recognized as the building near the first green at Springdale. One fall morning we scurried up the narrow tower steps and flung the immense sign over the side. It was a statement of great and insightful irony that narrowly missed influencing a generation of students.

Two buildings down from Blair was the U-Store (whose clever marketing people advertised "Pants Half Off" during the 2023 reunions). Then Lockhart Hall (where I became a Christian) and next door to that was a building of offices for the *Daily Prince* and various student organizations including the Students for a Democratic Society.

Ever heard of the SDS? In 1967-68 they were very active on the Columbia University campus on Manhattan Island (way north). They were an updated version of the old Intercollegiate Socialist Society founded in 1905 by Walter Lippmann, Clarence Darrow, and Jack London.

The SDS was a small, mostly obnoxious radical group that did not fit our fairly conservative campus. My friends somehow convinced me to go with them to remove the door from the SDS office and carry it down to Lake Carnegie where we tossed it. The ever-vigilant proctors somehow missed us. The proctors also missed us the night before Halloween one year when we needed to borrow a ladder from a construction site to put clown masks on some otherwise dignified statues by the arch on the old library (but not on the Jonathan Witherspoon statue). The next we knew the door was back on the SDS office with whatever we wrote on it and badly swollen with lake water.

In 1968, Paul Berman was an organizer of the SDS at Columbia University. His group seized Hamilton Hall in 1968 occupying the office of Columbia's president, Grayson Kirk, for which he was arrested. Occupying buildings and making demands was the new tactic. This led to convulsion which spread widely...even globally. It was 1968.

Today he writes about responding to Hamas. *"The instinct of a university is to think that riots or protests can be dealt with by instituting some sort of internal reform that will make the university more democratic. That happened in '68. I thought at the time and continue to think that all of that stuff is completely irrelevant. Administrators want to re-establish civility, to foster civil discourse. But I don't think that's the main problem.* (Goldstein, *Academe Today*, 5-13-2024).

"They describe the protests as a humanitarian uprising to save lives in Gaza and to advance the rights of Palestinians on the West Bank. All of that is commendable. The real meaning of the "river to the sea" is that the state of Israel should not exist...and the real meaning of "globalize the intifada" is that there should be a globalization of the events that introduced the word "intifada" to the world, namely the intifada of circa 2001, which was a mass movement to commit random acts of murderous terror.

"I blame the professors for this, not the students. I know from personal experience that students can be uninformed. But the professors have created a climate. I would advocate pardoning the students because they're not really responsible for what's happened. The professors are responsible. And I'd make clear that, within the universities, the very bad thing that's happened isn't that university life has been disrupted. The very bad thing that's happened is we have a mass movement of young people advancing horrifying ideas."

I would add that the fundamental misunderstanding of the human person as created in the image of God leads to an overconfidence in the ability of the state to get things right. The gospel has a bigger and better agenda.