

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: The eyes of Regents are upon you all the livelong day.  
The eyes of Regents are upon you, you cannot get away.  
Do not think you can escape them when you're so near the Cap'tol ground.  
The eyes of Regents are upon you 'til Longhorn liberty is downed!  
-Song anonymously written in 1944 by UT student

American students have often been rebellious. Sometimes their rebellion has been limited to their own immediate concerns, such as the conditions of work and life on campus. But, sometimes their anger has been motivated by and linked to events off campus and little connected with the immediate processes of education.

The first recorded student rebellion, according to historian Ralph Brax, occurred in 1766 at Harvard University and concerned "the poor quality of butter served in the commons." The students' battlecry was "Behold our butter stinketh!" (Brax, 1981, p. 3).

#### UT STUDENT HISTORY PRIOR TO 1960

The earliest recorded student protest at the University of Texas also concerned campus issues but, setting a pattern that would be often repeated down through the years, involved a conflict with state politicians.

The University of Texas, being a state institution, funded by the people of Texas and run by the state government, was politically controversial from its beginning. As early as the 1850's some state representatives voiced concern over the very idea of creating an institution which would produce a handful of people better educated than their numerous peers. The sons of poor men would be "scoffed and sneered at by the proud popinjays who collect thereÉ. It would build up a class of aristocrats," one roared. (Daily Texan, November 3, 1944, p. 3).

With such an anti-elitist attitude on the part of many, and with the university organized as a largely self-contained enterprise, isolated from the rest of the community, it is perhaps not surprising that most early student rebellion rarely had an ideological basis or a concern with social issues beyond the campus. Most student activists in the nineteenth century, Brax has argued, "were not interested in changing the nature of society and possessed no real political or ideological differences with their teachers and administration officials." (Brax, 1981, p. 5) As a result, their resistance to authority often involved supporting the University's administration against political attack.

The first such controversy flared up between the legislature and UT over the issue of "Yankee" professors and radicalism brewing on campus. In this case the Board of Regents mediated the state-university conflict while students, apparently, looked on. In June of 1897, a Texas House resolution demanded a probe into university affairs to discern whether or not faculty members either were in sympathy with the North or teaching "economic heresies in place of our cherished economic system" (Daily Texan, November 30, 1944, p. 3). The Board of Regents of the institution issued a long statement to the legislators in response to their concerns, explaining that only three subjects were taught which related to politics and that "the University teaches methods of study rather than conclusions," (ibid.). The central issue was that of academic autonomy from state politics.

The second such controversy exploded in 1917 and this time the students swung into action to protect their school from outside interference. In this case the recently elected populist governor James Ferguson, complaining about the "under-education of the many and the over-education of the few," decided to make some changes at the university. "Suspender-snapping 'Farmer Jim'" as he

was called, demanded that six University of Texas faculty members be fired and that social fraternities be abolished. He did not cite any reason for the purge other than his power to do so. Students went on strike and marched to the Capitol to protest the arbitrary action. They sang "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You" to the governor who responded by shaking his finger at the students and later by vetoing university appropriations. The six-month controversy ended with the impeachment of Ferguson. In this instance, student interests coincided with those of the school's administrators against those of the populist governor (Vertical File - Demonstrations, Barker Texas History Center).

The depressed economy of the 1930's and the social turmoil that boiled up in those years significantly affected students around the country. They turned outward from their insular world and became concerned with larger issues. During this decade many students opposed militarization and U.S. imperialism, studied Marxist economic thought, formed cooperatives ("co-ops") to cut living costs, and supported change in economic policy. According to a 1934 study by Theodore Brameld of students at eastern schools, a large majority agreed that future depressions would result "if capitalism continues" and indicated support for at least some nationalization of industry (Brax, 1981, notes).

This trend was also reported on the UT campus. Daily Texan editor D.B. Hardeman wrote that "the rah-rah days of the twenties are gone." The editor of the student newspaper argued that the greater use of the libraries, the increased interest of students in politics, and the de-emphasis on fraternities and athletics, show the college man is thinking more and playing less," (ibid.).

The movement reached its peak in the years 1934-6 when national Student Strikes Against War were held annually. The largest strike was held in 1936 when students reported an amazing 50% participation rate on a national level. Students at the University of Texas also participated in these student strikes to the chagrin of the administration. One dean commented that "the whole thing was started by a bunch of Russians from the East Side of New York," (ibid.).

Several national student organizations coordinated protest activities. During the mid-1930's these groups were quite militant and radical; many of the leaders were socialists. Some of the groups were the National Student League, the Young Communist League, the American Student Union and the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

Although the student movement collapsed at the end of the decade, it was significant for several reasons. First, it broke the tradition of student isolation. Second, it left a legacy which would reach through the years to influence the generation of activists in the 1960's. Many of the student protesters of the 1960's were "red-diaper babies," children of the student radicals of the 1930's. In addition the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) would turn out to be the predecessor for the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the major student organization of the late 1960's.<sup>1</sup>

In most areas of the country campuses remained relatively quiet following the beginning of World War II until 1960. However, UT students erupted on at least one occasion during the war. The entire student body went on strike in November of 1944 in protest against the heavy-handed politics of the Board of Regents, the governing body of the school. Leading up to the mass student action was a four-year conflict between the liberal UT President Homer Rainey and the regents. In 1941 Rainey had publicly opposed the conservative Board in its attempts to fire three professors for opposing them on a state labor law issue. Despite great opposition from Rainey and the faculty, the regents eventually denied tenure to the professors effectively terminating their employment. During the controversy, the regents attacked academic freedom by banning Dos Passos' USA and by threatening to censor the Daily Texan. In 1944 the conflict culminated when the regents

demanding Rainey's resignation and Rainey refused. On November 1, Rainey was fired. Two days later students closed down the campus demanding an investigation by the state. Many students called for the dismissal of the regents. Perhaps student opinion can be summed up in the following letter which appeared in the Daily Texan:

Many things have taken place on our own university campus which profoundly attack the basic principles of free democratic action. These Regents - the dictators of our University - are appointed for six-year terms [by the Governor]. At the present most of the Regents are the directors, or the attorneys of the directors, of Texas' biggest monopoly concerns. The direct purpose of these monopolies is to manipulate the educational system in such a way as to dictate the educational policies throughout the state. Thus by establishing control over the thinking of the future voters of the State of Texas they will be able to maintain control over state politics and have free reign. If the freedom and progress of education is restricted then democracy is doomed. We must not permit our educational system to be controlled ("Firing Line", Daily Texan, Oct. 5, 1944). Three of the regents resigned in protest, allowing the governor to appoint new regents and continue to control the Board. Rainey was not reinstated despite faculty and student opposition and international press coverage of the incident. (Vertical File - Demonstration, Barker Texas History Center).

Following the Rainey incident the UT campus appears to have been tranquil until the spring of 1960 when students exploded into action throughout the South in opposition to racial segregation and discrimination.<sup>2</sup> It all started in February when four black freshmen at A&T College in Greensboro, North Carolina sat in at a "whites only" lunch counter at the local Woolworth's Store. The sit-in idea spread like wildfire to students at predominantly black schools around the South (in Nashville, Atlanta, Jackson, Houston and many small towns as well). Two months later 126 student delegates from 60 centers of sit-in activities in 12 different states held a conference in Raleigh, North Carolina at Shaw University. The Raleigh conference marked the beginning of a national student movement for civil rights and a New Left organization called the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

In March of 1960 on the University of Texas campus at Austin, a group of black students picketed a meeting of the Board of Regents to protest the university's policies of racial segregation and discrimination. At the time UT refused to allow blacks in University housing, athletics, the Longhorn Band, drama productions, student employment, student teaching, the University Queen competition, among other activities.

As SNCC was getting organized, UT students were picketing segregated restaurants on Guadalupe St., a commercial street bordering the campus on the west and commonly referred to as "The Drag." The Campus Interracial Committee, which had been formed the previous year, was politically active in advocating racial equality at UT as well as in the Austin community.

## PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE OF THIS PROJECT

These activities mark the beginning of the history I am writing. Although I recognize that previous history very much effected the period after 1960, I have limited my study to this time period for the following three reasons:

- 1) The research methods for compiling the history of this period do not vary greatly whereas, a history of earlier periods would entail less precise research.
- 2) It limits the project to a workable size.
- 3) 1960 marks the beginning of the national student movement for social change.

My goal is to compile a history of student activism at UT over the years 1960-88. In

addition, I intend to contextualize and analyze this history.

My own involvement as a student activist on this campus motivated me to do this project. Several mistakes in recent years could have been avoided if we had known the history of student struggle on this campus. For the most part, the administrators and the police are much more familiar than the students activists with past events. The administration's historical knowledge empowers it and gives it a distinct advantage over the students. Thus, my purpose is to contribute to future victories on the part of students by acquainting them with the successes, tactics, failures, beliefs, activities and actors of the past.

As a fervent disbeliever in objectivity, I make no pretense to write an "objective" history. As long as the university is administered like a corporation by a handful of wealthy authoritarians, there will be an "us" and a "them." As long as there is an "us" and a "them," historians will tend to write from one perspective or the other. The ones who will receive financial and institutional support in publishing their works will write from the administrative viewpoint or some "objective" variant thereof.

Furthermore, my perspective is colored by my belief that the control of this institution by a handful of wealthy business people ensures that education will favor the interests of capital. This is what produces the students' outlook on education as a necessary evil to gain entry into the ranks of white-collar America. Unfortunately, many students internalize the elitism of the institution and see themselves as superior to those members of society who have not received a college education, further dividing the members of society who gain their livelihood by selling their labor power. Divided physically from the community, students generally do not feel a duty to better society; they seek credentials for middle class status and a \$30,000+ income level. Required course work is more often drudgery than intellectually stimulating. The students are taught not to question the authority of their teachers, but to regurgitate the information and opinions being shoved down their throats by professors. When they follow this path, students become sheep (metaphorically speaking), a trait suitable to their future roles as corporate lackeys.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, despite the forces opposed to the development of an independent critical spirit, there have always been some students who have rebelled against the subordination of their lives to the needs of business. It is their story I intend to tell here.

I offer no apologies for my political views or for writing this history from the perspective of students. But I do apologize for any errors or inconsistencies in this thesis.

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A major difference between the student movements of the 1930's and the 1960's was the role of students vis-a-vis societal change. During the Depression Era, students were part of a social movement for change which included most segments of society. Although they organized themselves as students, they were not in any way a vanguard or distinguished from other progressives and socialists of the period. The students of the 1960's are particularly significant for their revolt against liberalism during a period of economic well-being. Also important was their militancy and their break from traditional leftist organizations and tactics. This difference is

generally characterized as a change from the Old to the New Left. The New Left is defined by George Katsiaficas as an historical global movement, with the following five characteristics:

1) Opposition to racial, political and patriarchal domination as well as to economic exploitation, 2) Concept of freedom as not only freedom from material deprivation but also freedom to create new human beings, 3) The extension of the democratic process and expansion of the rights of an individual, not their constraint, 4) Enlarged base of revolution, and 5) An emphasis on direct action, (Katsiaficas, 1987, p. 23ff.).

2 I recommend further research on student activism prior to 1960, especially during the 1950's.

3 If they do not obtain corporate employment, they will generally take the roles of hard-working productive employees serving the interests of the owners of society rather than the interests of themselves and the common people.

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ce to the university community and demonstrated the lack of democracy within the university structure. The fact that th

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