

NYU Security Film (1968)
Student/Faculty Protest of Dow Chemical

Introduction to MIAP
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23 October 2007

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The carrier format of the copy we obtained is DVD. Previously digitized, this copy has been formatted using iMovie of Apple technologies with a menu screen detailing specifics like, “NYU Security film (1968) 22 mins./ NYU University Archives, John G. Mason Collection.” The film is black and white, and silent.

Color bars open the film with a quick cut to a title screen offering a prologue that reads:

“On March 6, 1968, members of the N.Y.U. community marched to the protest the presence of recruiters from Dow Chemical Corporation, a supplier of chemical weapons used in the Vietnam War. / The marchers crossed Washington Square Park ending in front of Vanderbilt Hall which housed University Administration at the time. / This film was taken by N.Y.U. Protection Services and is part of the University Archives Collection.”

A cut is made to a shot of the crossroads of West 3rd Street and Mercer Street, followed by a cut to students with picket signs marching toward the intersection of Mercer Street and West 3rd Street. A truck containing blockades is being unloaded and arranged on the sidewalk by NYPD officers and NYU Protection Services. Students begin marching circularly holding large picket signs that read things like “Drop Dow Not Napalm” and “Dow Shalt Not Kill.” Crowds slowly begin to form, and the video concentrates attention on pedestrians stopping to investigate the protest.

A media crew enters with a film camera, and more protestors arrive. Interviews with protestors are made by media outlets and new arrivals bring a large banner that reads “We Will Not Serve an Unjust and Immoral War.” They march away from their designated area and through NYU’s Main Building which is now called Silver Center.

The crowd proceeds to Washington Square Park heading toward Vanderbilt Hall. All protestors convene at the plaza of Vanderbilt Hall, chanting and holding signs.

A crowd of protestors occupy the steps entering Vanderbilt Hall and address the crowd with bullhorns. A guitarist begins playing and singing, and a man of prominent stature begins to address the crowd which seems to increase in size gradually. A jump cut goes inside the Vanderbilt Hall auditorium where an organized address takes place. There are microphones, chairs, and a podium set on a stage, and protestors begin taking seats on the floor where chairs have been provided. A banner in the background reads, “NYU Law Students Against the War.” An open forum takes place, with what seems to be a question and answer period between students and faculty.

The film seems to be edited for content either to maintain a designated time frame or to capture only what was important to the university’s archiving purposes. The camera work is hand-held and the editing fairly linear in terms of the progression of the protest.

Provenance of The Video

The video of the NYU anti-Dow Recruitment Protest of March 1968 exists as a copy in VHS and DVD format, both forms residing in box 5 of the John G. Mason Collection at University Archives. We were able to view a copy of the DVD. No copy of the original exists to the knowledge of University Archives. The copies came to the Archives sometime during the tenure of Nancy Cricco’s predecessor via the Student Affairs Office.

It is also hard to tell who (or what entity within the University) edited the video. It is the conjecture of the University Archives that the video was edited for the purposes of an exhibit, but there is nothing in the provenance to certify this.

Of additional interest is an audio reel-to-reel recording of a previous (and popular) NYU protest against the Dow Chemical Company which occurred the previous November 1967. University Archives unfortunately has no mechanism to listen to this recording and would have to send it out to get copied onto a different medium.

National Background on the Anti-Dow Movement

The first protests against the Dow Chemical Company took place in May 1966 when students from the Stanford Coalition for Peace in Vietnam staged a peaceful protest outside a Dow Chemical plant in Torrance, California. This began a proliferation of student protests against the Dow Chemical Company on campuses nationwide. At the most basic level, the student protests decried Dow's production of the controversial chemical weapon, napalm-b, for the U.S. military. Although some of the protests were mounted simply to denounce Dow's product, many protests, including the protests at NYU, objected to the presence of Dow Chemical recruitment officers on university campuses. It was often the case at student protests held to respond to Dow recruiters that the students were protesting the role of their university in allowing Dow to recruit on campus.

The first protest to react specifically to the presence of recruitment officers on campus was held at the University of California, Berkeley, on October 10, 1966.¹ During the next four months a number of other universities (including the University of Maine, Marquette University, Northeastern University, and the University of California, Los Angeles) staged protests, all of which were peaceful.

¹ "Student Power Crushes Dow." <http://www.studentsforbhopal.org/DowVietnam.htm>. 10/22/07

The sea change came in February 1967 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where Dow recruitment officers were conducting placement interviews. Leading the protest was the Students for a Democratic Society, who surrounded the Chemistry building where the interviews were taking place. After the initial arrest of three students on charges of “Disorderly Conduct”, a second protest was scheduled for the following day that resulted in the arrest of 19 students in all.² According to *Time* magazine, “By December of 1967, more than 500 student protests had been staged against Dow, including 119 against Dow recruiters.”³

When Dow recruiters returned to UW’s Madison campus the following semester, students came out in large numbers for a sit-in that was meant to prevent the recruitment interviews from taking place. On October 18, 1967 a crowd of approximately 1,000 students was determined by the administration to be “willfully obstructing the Dow interviews, thus breaking university rules.”⁴ The police were called in, and the protests turned violent. 47 students and 14 policemen were injured in an attempt to physically remove students from the Commerce Building, while 71 students were arrested. The unexpected violence at the UW Madison protests sparked nationwide debate about the ways in which Universities should approach the issue.

² Maraniss, David. *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace in Vietnam and America, October 1967*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 2003, excerpted in “Madison’s Stage Was Set for Revolution”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Online*. Sept 29, 2003, <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=173406>. 10/22/07

³ “Protesting Napalm” *Time*. January 5, 1968.

⁴ Maraniss, David. *The Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace in Vietnam and America, October 1967*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 2003, excerpted in “Madison’s Stage Was Set for Revolution”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Online*. Sept 29, 2003, <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=173406>. 10/22/07

In a position paper that circulated to promote attendance at the NYU Dow protests in March 1968, Amherst College history professor Henry Steele Commager cites the violence at UW Madison as evidence of the failure on the part of university administrations “for not formulating any policy which could stand the test of legal scrutiny”.⁵ He concludes his paper by stating, “If universities have refused to face the major moral issues of our day they should rejoice that they have, somehow, helped to produce students who are neither paralyzed nor timid, who are sensitive to moral issues and prepared to respond to them, however convulsively.”⁶

Student Organizations at NYU and Their Complaints

While several different leftist anti-war groups operated on NYU’s campus, the most involved and vocal in terms of the Dow protests were the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student-Faculty Committee. The SDS was involved in many major protests on and off campuses including the very visible and disruptive student actions at Columbia University. The involvement of the SDS in NYU’s anti-Dow protests was expected, as the organization was reaching its peak in 1968, more than doubling its membership by the fall semester of that year.⁷

The involvement of the Student-Faculty Committee, however, is particularly interesting as it shows the protest as a university wide, rather than purely student, action. This group collected and circulated essays in support of the March 6th protest (later collected by John G. Mason) which included both the voices of students and professors.

⁵ Commager, Henry Steele. “The University as Employment Agency”. *The New Republic*, Feb 24, 1968.

⁶ Commager, Henry Steele. “The University as Employment Agency”. *The New Republic*, Feb 24, 1968.

⁷ Walter, Edward. *The Rise and Fall of Leftists Radicalism in America*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. 1992. Pg 108.

The position of the protest is most eloquently described by Irving Sarnoff, a Professor of Psychology at the University very actively involved in the anti-war movement who said that while *all* on-campus recruitment could be argued as not beneficial to University values, it is recruitment by those “directly profiting from war-fare” which “menaces the very source of the intellect: life itself.”⁸

Thus, while there was student protest at the university against the war in Vietnam in general (as there was across the nation), the protests against Dow were concerned with a set of very specific aspects of the war, such as on-campus recruitment and University affiliation with known war profiteers. While general anti-war sentiment was a given on many campuses, action and protest taken against any University itself had to address perceived faults of the university in order to be seen as a justified protest. Protests at NYU (and across the country) against Dow were some of the more visible actions by students on issues like this, but there were also many complaints about on-campus ROTC programs, contracts with the Department of Defense that universities took on, and collusion with organizations like the CIA.

Student Action at NYU Against Dow Chemical

At the time of the DOW protest in the video, there had already been a previous anti-Dow protest at NYU in the previous winter. In November of 1967, 125 students occupied the University Placement Services Office. The Dow recruiter eventually decided to call off scheduled interviews for the day and leave.⁹ New York University administration found the action disruptive and while no students were expelled, some

⁸ “Dow Chemical: Three Views.” Spring 1968. The Papers of John G. Mason; MC 88; Box 5; Folder 13; New York University Archives, New York University Libraries.

⁹ “1968 Revisted.” NYU University Archives.

<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/collections/exhibits/arch/1967/1967-6.html>. 10/22/07

(like Leslie Cagan, the former chair of the NYU Committee to End the War in Vietnam) were placed on disciplinary probation and forbidden from holding office in University recognized student organizations (for at least the duration of the semester).¹⁰

When word spread that NYU planned on having Dow Chemical recruiters back on campus in March, fliers were distributed and calls to action announced by many student activists and committees, such as the NYU Committee to End the War in Vietnam. This is the student action portrayed in the video. With an administration fearful of having to make any unpopular decisions if the protest were to get out of control, the protests were allowed to proceed, albeit with a strong police presence. Both the NYPD as well as University Protection Services police are visible in the footage, as are the police barricades that were erected for the protesters. It was, presumably, a part of the heightened security planned for the protests that this footage was recorded.

The protest portrayed in the film also comes across as less disruptive as its predecessor protest against Dow was reported to be. And yet, it seems to have been a bit more effective in terms of affecting actual change on campus. After the protest, Chancellor Cartter revealed plans to set up a committee to review the issue of on-campus job recruitment.¹¹ While this sort of action seems to have appeased student protest at NYU in terms of Dow, it was far from the end of the anti-war movement on NYU's campus. Protests continued, particularly through the SDS, the most notable of which being the disruption of a speech by Ambassador Nguyen Huu Chi where Chi was verbally harassed, pelted with an egg, and draped in a Nazi flag. NYU, finding this incident

¹⁰ Letter from Robert F. Cushman to Leslie Cagan, March 21, 1968; Leslie Cagan Papers; Tamiment 138; Box 1; Folder 5; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

¹¹ <http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/collections/exhibits/arch/1968/1968-2.html>. 10/22/07

particularly disruptive and perhaps in light of previous warnings over protests, suspended student John Mason (of the John G. Mason collection) and expelled student Robert Kirkman.¹²

Notes on a Scandal: The Washington Square Journal

What is now called the Washington Square News was once called the Washington Square Journal, a student run publication issued twice a week on every Monday and Thursday. The record of these publications can be found at the New York University Archives in microfilm format.

Coverage regarding the war in Vietnam was heavy in the Washington Square Journal in 1968, marking a contentious period of social and political activism both on the New York University campus and throughout the nation. Looking back at issues between February and March of 1968 reveals much about the Dow Chemical protests and the concerns of the NYU student body and faculty.

Vol. 13, No. 30 of the Washington Square Journal dated on Thursday, February 29, 1968, recalls the November student protest against Dow Chemical at the NYU Placement Office which “resulted in disciplinary hearings in which six students have been placed on probation [...] and many received letters of reprimand”¹³. As a result of the protest in the previous term, planning of the March 6 protest was scrutinized closely, and covered more extensively in the paper. Articles that had to do with the statement of policy regarding student conduct were published as a result of this close scrutiny, aimed

¹² “1968 Revisited.” NYU University Archives.

<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/collections/exhibits/arch/1968/Index.html>.

¹³ ‘Dow May Not Show’ Washington Square Journal. Vol. 13, No. 30. Thursday, February 29, 1968.

to inform students of the ground rules laid down by a new disciplinary committee set up to review cases of illegal demonstration.

The protest documented in the NYU security film took place on Wednesday, March 6, 1968. Washington Square Journal printed an issue the following day, Vol.13, No.32 on Thursday, March 7, 1968. A front-page headline reads “PEACEFUL PROTEST – DOW RECRUITS 2.” Facts about the protest are detailed in the article, revealing that between 300 and 500 students and faculty rallied through campus after picketing the Dow Chemical recruitment that had been held at an off-campus site owned by NYU as a result of the previous terms protest at the NYU Placement Office. The article succinctly encapsulates the details of the protest, the very events that can be seen in the security film:

“The morning demonstration in front of 248 Mercer St. was cordoned off into a half block long picket line at the corner of Mercer and West Third Streets. The Administration had city police guard the loft building and the intersection was closed to traffic until the demonstrators left [...].

The demonstrators left Mercer Street at 10 a.m., marched through the Commerce Building and into the Main Building where they held a rally. The rally coincided with the 10:15 a.m. class break and it was difficult to get to classes.

The demonstrators-who now numbered nearly 500-then jammed the Vanderbilt Hall plaza, where they met Cartter. After statements by Cartter and some of the protest leaders the demonstrators moved to the Vanderbilt Hall auditorium to discuss recruitment with Cartter.”¹⁴

Significance of The Video Itself

This video fits well into the history of the anti-war movement in America as a primary source. The fact that several relevant historical collections can be found just next door to University Archives at the Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

¹⁴ “Peaceful Protest – Dow Recruits 2.” Washington Square Journal. Vol.13, No.32 on Thursday, March 7, 1968

(ex: Records of the Students for a Democratic Society and The Leslie Cagan Papers)
testifies to this event's place in New York, Leftist, anti-war, and protest history.

It is also of note that such a video should exist at all. There are only a handful of films of student protests from this era considering how many protests there actually were. Furthermore, while there may be plenty of photo and video documentation of anti-war protests from the 1960s, this protest particularly hit on the issues of on-campus recruitment, University collusion with a known war contractor, and the use of chemical weaponry (napalm-b) in Vietnam.

Additionally we must ask why it was filmed at all and who was it that filmed it? In the version that was cut together (we are unsure as to who edited the footage or how long after the event it was cut) there are title cards that briefly explain who, what, when, and where the students were protesting, but leaves out this lingering question. According to Leslie Cagan, a participant in the protests, the "why" is what makes the material so relevant. She stresses that in order to understand the footage, "it would need to be placed in context," otherwise it's not clear as to what was being objected to or what the message was.¹⁵

Indeed, if one were to merely read the slogans displayed in the recorded footage, (there is no evidence that accompanying audio tapes were recorded with the film material) the messages would appear unclear and confusing. Are the students protesting Dow Chemical, or the Vietnam War? Leslie Cagan believes that understanding this distinction is enormously important for historians or documentarians who could possibly use this material in the future.

¹⁵ Telephone conversation on 13 October, 2007

With the film obtained from NYU's administration, this detail indicates that there might be something to the claim made at the beginning of the film. Considering the disciplinary action which was taken against students following the NYU protest in November of 1967, as well as the spreading student unrest and incidents around the country, it seems that NYU wanted evidence on record to exculpate any actions of its own while potentially having evidence on hand for further disciplinary action against students.

If we do, then, consider the video as a product of NYU Security, then it could even be considered as a precursor to the surveillance culture of today. We live at a time where surveillance video is almost assumed. All around Greenwich Village there are security cameras, many of them probably belonging to NYU.¹⁶ The video of the March 1968 protest does not at all resemble our modern conception of surveillance footage: The camera is mobile, the footage is captured on film rather than video, cuts without a standard time lapse or time stamp. However, the sentiment behind its creation seems to be close to what we understand as the motivation behind surveillance video in our contemporary age: For purposes of security, to ensure liability, for potential prosecution. So, while the technology for surveillance video as we know it today was not available at the time, an attempt was still made to capture what we can certainly consider a surveillance film.

¹⁶ Greenwich Village is, allegedly, "The most heavily surveilled neighborhood in Manhattan." (<http://www.notbored.org/greenwich-village.html>) A map of cameras in Greenwich Village as of 2001 can be found here: <http://www.notbored.org/village-map.jpg>.

Interview With a Participant & Preservation Plan

After researching which student committees participated in the organization of the protests, we found the NYU Committee to End the War in Vietnam had been crucial in the planning and preparation of the protests by publicizing the event by and promoting awareness among students of Dow's presence on campus. We learned that Leslie Cagan was the chair of this committee when the protests took place. Her paper collection is located at the Tamiment library at NYU, and contains fliers for the protests as well as other promotional material including the Commager position paper cited above.

We spoke to Leslie about the future of the protest surveillance videos. We asked if she felt that the footage was worth preserving, and she replied that it absolutely was. She felt that it "provided an accurate historical record of what we did and how we did it,"¹⁷ and believed that it held great potential for future historians or documentarians who could use it as a way of understanding and interacting with that era and their causes. She spoke of this footage as, "a record" and as "proof", a small but tangible piece of a specific history that can be used in the service of understanding larger issues—like the Vietnam War, for example.

We believe not only that this footage should be preserved, but also that it has a very good chance of actually being accessible through additional repositories. Although the original carrier does not exist anymore, the fact that the essence has already been digitized makes it easy for the material to be added to a digital archive. Additionally, because many archives exist with the goal of collecting, preserving, and making available materials that relate specifically to the Vietnam War, the fact that this footage is directly

¹⁷ Telephone conversation with Leslie Cagan on 13 October, 2007

relevant to the American experience during the Vietnam War years is hugely beneficial to the chances of this footage being additionally preserved and disseminated.

We would like to nominate one archive in particular that we discovered and believe is a particularly good fit for the protest footage. The Texas Tech University's Vietnam Center and Archive's mission statement reads: "The mission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University is to support and encourage research and education regarding all aspects of the American Vietnam experience". The archive collects, "documents and memorabilia related to the Vietnam War and the collective experience of those involved in the war and its aftermath... The Vietnam Archive also strives to preserve the records of people indirectly involved in the conflict and those active on the home front." If we were able to obtain permission to donate this footage, the material could (provided it did not break any copyright or legal agreements) be added to the Virtual Archive. According to the Archive's website, "access to the Virtual Archive is free and allows anyone with Internet access to search and view material in the Vietnam Archive."¹⁸

We believe that this material has significant historical value, both as a part of NYU's history as well as part of American history at large. We believe that this footage should be preserved, if not in the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archive, then at a similar archive or institution which will make accessible the footage in a more explicitly historical context so that people can use it in the future.

¹⁸ Texas Tech University's "information for donors" section:
<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/vietnamarchive/donors/>

APPENDIX

Universities That Staged Protests Against Dow Chemical¹⁹

1966-1967

Stanford University
University of Michigan
University of California, Berkeley
University of Maine
Marquette University
University of California, Los Angeles
Northeastern University
University of Wisconsin, Madison
University of Chicago
Boston University
University of Illinois
University of Minnesota
Harvard University
University of Indiana
University of Connecticut
MIT
University of Rochester
New York University
University of Iowa
Brandeis University

1967-1968

Oberlin College
University of Wisconsin-River Falls
Iowa State University
Wisconsin State University, La Crosse
Holy Cross University
Syracuse University
Notre Dame
University of Washington

1968-1969

University of Manitoba
University of Saskatchewan
Rutgers University
University of Texas, Austin

¹⁹ “Student Power Crushes Dow.” Students for Bhopal. Last Updated: February 24, 2007. 22 Oct 2007. <<http://www.studentsforbhopal.org/DowVietnam.htm>>