

'76 Politics Fail to Disturb Campus Calm and Cynicism

BY JON NORDHEIMER
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KENT, Ohio — Harriet Begala was pleased. The Democratic Party's rally at Kent State University the other night was the best political showing on campus since 1972.

On a campus with more than 20,000 full-time students, most from working-class backgrounds, fewer than 30 students had turned out in a show of support for Jimmy Carter. And even those who came seemed nervous and wary, hesitant to volunteer their time.

"It's not like '72, when we had more than 400 student volunteers manning the phones for George McGovern," Mrs. Begala, a local Democratic worker, said later, "but it's far better than 1974 when we had to pay 10 women to make phone calls in the campaign for governor when we couldn't get student volunteers."

The fact that anyone could be pleased by such an anemic turnout was indicative of how low political activism has fallen on Kent State's campus, where National Guard troops killed four students after opening fire on an anti-Vietnam War protest demonstration in 1972.

But all across the nation this fall, not just Kent State, both rebellion and activism seem far from students' minds. Protest, to this generation of college students, is not only dead—it is "uncool."

Beer busts and R.O.T.C. are back in vogue.

The current Presidential campaign, for the most part, has a remote, detached presence on campuses where four years ago thousands of students plunged into the volunteer work of the Nixon-McGovern race. On nearly every campus, with the possible exception of schools in Georgia, campaign organizers report finding little student enthusiasm for either Mr. Carter or President Ford, the Republican incumbent.

Apathy vs. Anomie

Some observers have compared today's campus mood to the buttoned-down apathy of students in the 1950's. But the causes of the current inaction are different.

In the 50's there was apathy: Students complacently sought individual goals within the context of an ordered society that had their general approval and confidence. Today there is anomie: a general mistrust of and lack of involvement with the nation's leadership and institutions, a bewilderment and confusion over what to do, how to do it, and little faith in the effectiveness of any kind of action.

"What we are seeing today is a move toward privatism," said Prof. Sandford M. Dornbusch, a sociologist at Stanford University in California since 1959.

"Instead of joining others for change, this generation of students is giving up and saying, 'How am I going to survive?' There's a great stress on individual fulfillment rather than societal improvement."

"Politicians don't understand human feelings," remarked Jean Stone, a sophomore at Miami-Dade Junior College, the largest two-year community college in the East, "and the country is being run by big businesses that have no concern

for the average guy. I don't think I can trust either Carter or Ford."

From Palo Alto to Miami, from Boston to Los Angeles, a check with students and faculty members on a dozen campuses turned up the same theme of political alienation coupled with strivings by individuals to impose some form of structure on their personal lives.

Almost everywhere, students were en-grossed by the pursuit of grades and jobs. There was universal concern that a tight job market created by an economic turn-down, and the sheer numbers of the post-World War II baby boom generation now competing for work, would dominate their lives for years to come.

This pragmatism has created a rush in applications to business schools, and everywhere students appear to be turning away from interest in education and the humanities, areas of study that were highly popular among activist students of the 60's.

"Money is the most important value to students today," said Dr. James H. Lewis, professor of agriculture business at Colorado State University. "They are aware of the fact that the free lunch is over."

'No Atmosphere for Radicalism'

"It is not an atmosphere for bold departures in radicalism," commented Dr. Richard Smoke, a political scientist at the Wright Institute of the University of California at Berkeley, where the student rebellion took its first massive step during the Free Speech Movement in 1964.

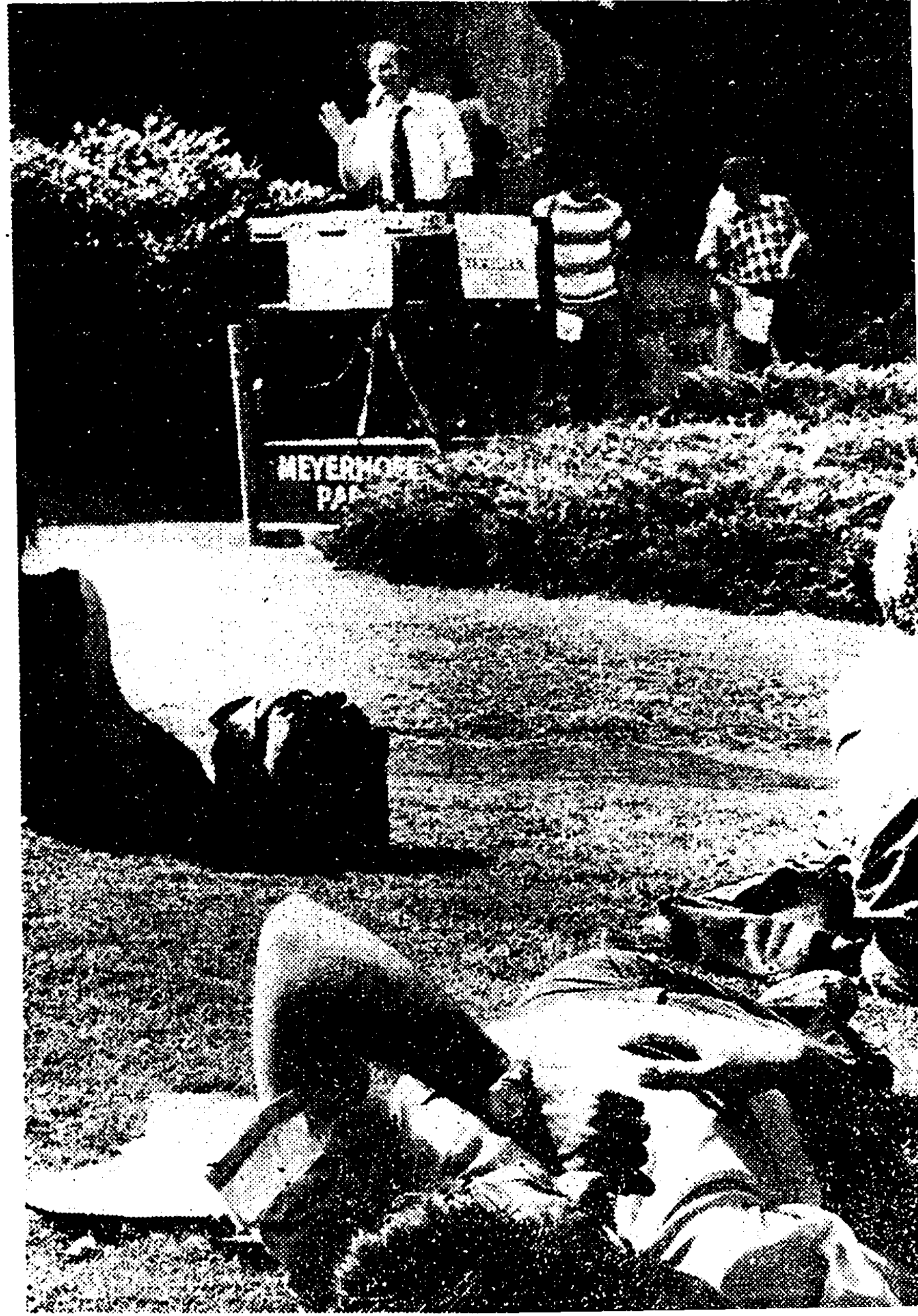
Berkeley today has a quiet, almost benign climate compared with the foment of the 60's. In Sproul Plaza, the issues nerve center of the campus, spokesmen of the radical Left are still present, but their rhetoric seems less impassioned—and their audience is almost nonexistent. Much more attention at Sproul seems focused on the advocates of religious cults.

The seniors who now face decisions about their future entered college in the fall of 1973. For the most part, they had no involvement in the years of campus rebellion and political activism. Most played no role in the McGovern campaign of 1972, and only a small minority possess emotional links to the "Keep It Clean For Gene" slogan of the 1968 Presidential campaign of Eugene McCarthy, the former Democratic Senator of Minnesota who is an independent Presidential candidate this year.

Instead, their political instincts have been shaped by the Watergate and intelligence agency scandals and by scary unemployment figures. Their common outlook is cynical and pragmatic, in the view of many who study the evolving nature of the American campus.

The Now Generation has become the Me Generation.

There are no heroes on the campus today. In scores of interviews, when the question was put to them, no student proposed the name of an individual who combined those traits worthy of universal respect and emulation: No politicians, no



The New York Times/David Stryck

A student at U.C.L.A. was more interested in an afternoon nap last week than in a speech by Gary Familian, a Democratic House candidate.

politicians, no rock stars or football heroes.

There are, however, trends on campuses that demand comparisons with the untroubled 50's. Social fraternities have rebounded from the low period of 1971-72, when they were widely seen as "not relative" to society's needs, and membership dipped to about 150,000. There are now more than 202,000 members in about 4,600 chapters across the country.

Similarly, Reserve Officer Training Corps units are flourishing nearly everywhere, with the impetus derived from three sources: Peace has eliminated much of the risk factor involved in participation, compensation (upper classmen receive \$100 a month in pay and full scholarships cover all tuition and other campus fees) helps thousands of students who otherwise could not afford a higher education and careers in the military are a part of the general craving for economic security.

Socially, the sexual and drug revolutions of the past decade have created a behavior pattern beyond anything that existed a generation ago. Open dormitories on most campuses mean that men and women students can have affairs without fear of administration or peer disapproval.

Use of alcohol—mainly beer, vodka and tequila—has returned to the campus, but the trend still keeps company with widespread use of marijuana and an assortment of other, nonaddictive drugs.

Trend Toward Frivolity

There is also a trend toward silliness: nonserious, frivolous activities with no other objective but fun. At Cornell University, for example, dances, parties, trivia contests and even campus beauty contests are in vogue.

A pronounced "preppy" look is returning to campus dress, with clothes in better repair than during the shopworn look of the radical era. There is less reluctance to wear expensive casual clothes; women on mid-American campuses are appearing more often than before in dresses, wearing bras and using more cosmetics.

There also appears to be a return to dormitory life by underclassmen, now that the sexual barriers have been eliminated. Some of the motivation is financial—it is perhaps cheaper in terms of room and board, and life there is not as dependent on transportation to classes and study halls. But observers also see in the trend the same search for structure and control, freedom from too much freedom, that appears in other modes of the new behavior.

Racial lines at most campuses are sharply drawn, with very little interracial dating or social integration. Like their white counterparts, black students today thrive in the structure and form of clubs and fraternities; they are also less likely to rise in protest when programs or privileges won during the days of revolt are diluted or withdrawn by campus administrations today.

When the National Guard troops killed the four Kent State students in the demonstration against the United States incursion in Cambodia in 1970, the incident, and the days that followed, represented perhaps the high water mark of protest on college campuses in this country.

The Kent State tragedy had a special irony because the campus, situated in the rolling hills of Ohio about 50 miles southeast of Cleveland, was a typical state-supported institution that was as representative of mid-American values and attitudes as any that could be found in the nation.

No Cult at Kent State

There is no discernible cult surrounding the shedding of student blood on the grassy knoll outside Taylor Hall on May 4 seven years ago, but Kent State students appear sensitive to the memory of the event and keep it alive as a kind of oral history. However, student activism at Kent State is as moribund as on any campus in the nation.

When the administration recently imposed rules on dormitory behavior and designated "quiet hours" and "quiet floors," there was not a hint of protest, despite the fact that the new regulations infringed on "freedoms" won during the campus revolt.

"The students," said Gary Begala, a 25-year-old Kent State graduate who is running for the State Legislature, "are turned off by political media technicians selling their candidates like soap. I'm personally offended by Carter's and Ford's staffs' telling reporters how they're going to merchandise their man and how they won't let them talk about issues. It turns everybody off."

Mr. Begala, a Democrat, had scheduled "rap sessions" at student dormitories to

discuss the election. At the first session he was the only person to show up.

John Gargin, 42, a professor of political science at Kent State, said in a recent interview:

"Most of our students are from low-to middle-income families, many Catholics and ethnics, and they are here to get the credentials they believe are central to admission to the Dream. Everyone does the rhetoric bit—fascist pig this and that—but push them and they ask you to write recommendations for jobs with banks and insurance companies."

Dr. Gargin said that this generation of college students lacks commitment to either major political party and that that fact has implications for the future that no one has fully explored.

Over at the student psychological counseling center, Dr. Richard C. Rynearson, the director, told of a new melancholy among students on campus who come to his clinic to discuss their emotional problems.

'Symptoms of Depression'

"Their symptoms look like depression but they can still handle their studies," he said. "They're coming in more frequently and asking to see older advisers. 'I don't want to talk to someone my age,' they say as though they don't trust anyone their own age. 'I want someone who's been around longer and knows more.' That's quite different than a few years ago when they feared older advisers would criticize their new life styles."

So far, no individual or group has touched a significant nerve to distract the students from their present course, however undefined and uncharted it is.

Graffiti at times can be useful in measuring a community's concern. At Kent State this fall there is an astonishing lack of it outside of the standard bathroom wall jottings. In the turbulent 60's the campus walls were covered with political graffiti, not ivy, and the slogans, however romantic or fierce, indicated movement and direction: "Power to the People!" or "Right On!"—such phrases at least showed a sense of purpose.

Outside the beer hall at the student center at Kent State today there were only a couple of scrawled lines worthy of note.

"Will the real God please stand up?" said one.

"Death must be the ultimate trip because they save it for last," read the other.

Inherent in the smudgy penciled statements was a despair that seemed so discordant for the walls of an American university.