

Prologue and Act One of

VIETNAM 101: THE WAR ON CAMPUS

a play by Rich Orloff

based on true stories of 1960's college students

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VIETNAM 101: THE WAR ON CAMPUS is designed to be presented on a minimal set by an ensemble of nine or more playing multiple roles. Music and slides have been used as effective complements to the action on stage.

All of the incidents in the play all of the details are true, as remembered by the people who lived them.

PROLOGUE

The time is the present. The cast is on stage, in isolated spots. They're people who were college-age during the 1960's. The following lines should be divided among them:

THE ENSEMBLE

It all seems so long ago.

Remember? I'm not sure I can.

Do I remember? Of course, I remember.
I still feel like one of the walking wounded.

I remember...

So many of my decisions were made by
a me I have trouble imagining today.

I remember...

I can barely distinguish one demonstration from another.

I remember...

It was either '67 or '68...

I remember...

...how young we were.

...feeling embarrassed I was so ill-informed.

...being confused all the time.

...a sense of urgency to every action,
no matter how small.

I remember heady days of power and possibilities.

The characters begin to move back in time to the 1960's.
They begin to interact with each other.

I remember feeling we could and
must create a different society.

...challenging authority and being
upset whenever anyone challenged me.

...saying soldiers wanted to "kill, kill, kill", just
because everyone around me was saying it.

...giving up friendships of people
whose politics I disagreed with.

A FEMALE STUDENT

I remember rushing to my dorm to
get back before curfew.

A FEMALE STUDENT

I remember staying in my boyfriend's
room to avoid dealing with curfew.

A FEMALE STUDENT

I remember my boyfriend becoming impatient with
me every time I disagreed with him politically.

THE ENSEMBLE

...being yelled at by my parents long-distance while
friends slipped me notes of what I should say back to them.

...sitting in the library, thinking that if I could just
find the perfect words, I myself could end the war.

A FEMALE STUDENT

I remember anxious dreams that I had gotten drafted.

...going to a Ravi Shankar concert and whiffing the smoke of pot.

...seeing friends go skinny dipping and
wishing I had the nerve.

...having to skip a major demonstration
because my mother was visiting campus that day.

I remember the taste of tear gas.

...seeing my physics professor in tears after Kent State.

...being afraid Federal troops would be
marching down the road to my college.

...the thrill of seeing the Oberlin College
banner in front of the Washington monument.

I would like it on record that not everyone during
my school's Vietnam years sided with the revolution.

We were all so serious.

I had it pretty good at Oberlin.

I remember thinking we could change *everything*.

THE ENSEMBLE

(in unison:)

This is the truth, as best as I can remember it.

* * *

ACT ONE

Some students enter.

A MALE STUDENT

I remember coming to Oberlin College, September,
1964. My hair is short, because everybody's
hair is short unless you're in a rock group.

A STUDENT

Oberlin was the first college in the United States
to admit women and blacks, and after a few
days here, I also see that Oberlin has a high
percentage of overachieving intellectual neurotics.
Which means I'm going to fit right in.

HARRY

Oberlin was my first choice, even before I was
rejected by Harvard, Stanford, Cornell and Brown.

* * *

A FEMALE STUDENT

My first night here, there's a meeting in my dorm where the house mother reminds all of us girls about social rules.

THE HOUSE MOTHER*

Freshmen girls have to be in the dorms by 11 p.m., except on Saturday night, when you're completely free – until 12:30. Men can visit you in the main lounge, but that's it – except on Sunday afternoon, when men can visit you in your room, but the door has to remain open the width of a wastebasket, and three feet must remain on the floor at all times.

(**Note:* The House Mother and other adult authority figures should be played by "students" impersonating them. In comic cases, such as the above, the casting can be cross-gender.)

A FEMALE STUDENT

First thing tomorrow, I'm going shopping for the thinnest wastebasket I can find.

* * *

HARRY

So here I am at Oberlin. I just finished my first day of classes, and already I'm two weeks behind. Of the 2700 students here, I estimate 2600 are smarter than I am. Actually, I think the other 99 are smarter than I am, too; they just don't apply themselves. I live in North Hall, with 240 other freshman boys, all horny. I can understand why they keep the girls on the opposite end of campus.

* * *

WOBC NEWSCASTER

This is WOBC-FM, the voice of Oberlin College, northeast Ohio's number one source for static. And now the news:

The Warren Commission released their final report today, finding that there was no conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy.

On the campaign trail, Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater accused President Johnson of being "soft on Communism".

In the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon, an attempted coup d'etat failed to overthrow the government of Nyugen Khanh, which is South Vietnam's fifth government in ten months.

Finally, a hearty WOBC congratulations to actress Jane Fonda, who today married French film director Roger Vadim.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, October 6, 1964:
"Student Senate concentrated on national issues
Sunday night, expressing its support for the
reelection of President Lyndon Johnson."

DAVE

When I come here my freshman year, I support
Johnson one hundred per cent. That s.o.b.
Goldwater would just love to expand the war
in Vietnam... Which is exactly what Johnson
does after the election.

LINDA

In the library, I stay up late reading journals
like *Ramparts* and *I.F. Stone's Weekly*. There's
stuff going on the newspapers aren't covering.

DAVE

A few of us start going through the dorms
door-to-door to convince students of the immorality
of the war. Some of us create a letter, to
be voted on in a campus referendum, telling
Johnson Oberlin students oppose U.S. participation
in the war. The campus defeats the letter
by a landslide.

A STUDENT

I see no reason to believe a bunch of nineteen
year-olds know more about how the country
should be run than its elected officials.

LINDA

I hear that a campus-to-campus hunger strike has
begun against the war. Students at one school fast
until the strike is picked up by another school. I like
this idea. It's non-violent but dramatic. So my friend
Dave and I decide to take up the strike for Oberlin.

DAVE

Linda and I get lots of publicity from press
and TV. We set up tables outside the dining
halls with literature about the war. Thirty
students start fasting with us.

LINDA

Most classmates eye us curiously. My
roommate leaves bags of popcorn on my bunk.

DAVE

After six days, students at nearby Kent State take up the fast – thank God! Friends ask me if I feel I've accomplished anything. I don't know, but as the nationwide movement against the war gets bigger and bigger, I know I was there at the beginning to help it grow.

LINDA

I know the government noticed. 'Cause years later I find information about the fast in my FBI file.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, April 20, 1965:
"50 Oberlin students Saturday joined the largest group ever to picket the White House. Police estimated the crowd at 15,000."

KATHY

I'm not sure I should go on the march, but Tom, my boyfriend's going, and –

TOM

I'm sure you should go on the march.

KATHY

So I pay my five dollars, and we're off on a bus to D.C. When we arrive Saturday at dawn, it's sunny and bright and the cherry trees are in bloom. We join the quickly-forming crowd of demonstrators in front of the White House.

TOM

Now walk slowly, Kathy, so you don't get too tired.

KATHY

Tom comes from an activist family and is a veteran of many marches. He keeps bumping into friends, who say things like:

TOM'S FRIEND

Tom! I haven't seen you since "Ban the Bomb" in '62!

KATHY

Organizations are handing out leaflets on every issue left and right, or at least left. One advocates the legalization of marijuana. Tom hands it back in disgust. I keep mine.

In the afternoon, I join my voice with singers like Joan Baez and Judy Collins and 20,000 others as we stream down the Mall to the Capitol Building, singing, "We Shall Overcome". The sunshine, the signs bent back in the breeze, the never-ending surge of humanity with me in the middle – I think, "This is what heaven will probably be like."

On the bus ride home, I start to, I just start –

Kathy starts to cry.

TOM

What's wrong, Kathy?

KATHY

Nothing.

TOM

Then why are you crying?

KATHY

I don't think Tom would understand my answer. I feel as if I'm finally beginning to be worthy of Jesus having come and died.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, April 27, 1965:

"According to local opinion, the number of college students smoking marijuana is rising. Among the signs of increased smoking is the growing familiarity on campus of such words as 'pot' and 'head'.

Two students said while using marijuana, they listened to music they had never heard before and felt as though they understood exactly what the composer meant to put across."

A STONED STUDENT

Bach was obviously stoned when he did the Brandenbergs.

THE STUDENT'S FRIEND:

Heavy.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, May 11, 1965: "Secretary of State Dean Rusk has been chosen to receive an honorary degree at this year's commencement."

A STUDENT EDITOR

At the *Review*, I call a meeting to decide what type of editorial we should write in response to Rusk's degree.

The following dialogue should be divided up:

VARIOUS STUDENTS

"We should boycott commencement."
"I worked four years for this; I'm not boycotting."
"We should say we disapprove, but let's not picket."
"But we have to protest! Giving an honorary degree to someone in the State Department is like condoning what they're doing."
"I know, but he was already asked by the College."
"We can't just accept everything the College does."
"But we can't do this to the man. It's cruel."
"What do you call killing the Vietnamese? Isn't that more cruel?!"

THE STUDENT EDITOR

Two hours later:

The same various students, with greater intensity:

VARIOUS STUDENTS

"But we have to boycott. The war demands it!"
"I've worked my butt off. I'm not boycotting!"
"Haven't we heard all this before?"
"Twice?"

THE STUDENT EDITOR

Okay, okay. As editor-in-chief, I'll just have to make an executive decision. Toby, write an editorial harshly denouncing the honorary degree, and Jane, write a letter to the editor harshly denouncing the editorial."

WOBC NEWSCASTER

WOBC News: President Johnson has ordered 13,000 more troops to the Dominican Republic, to join the 7,000 troops already sent there to stop the civil war that began on April 24. Johnson claimed that the rebel forces had been taken over by a band of Communist conspirators. Johnson said, "I will not have another Cuba in the Caribbean."

In sports, heavyweight Cassius Clay retained his title by knocking out Sonny Liston in less than two minutes.

Have a knockout summer, folks.

A FEMALE STUDENT

How I Spent My Summer Vacation, 1965. I spend the summer of '65 doing publicity for a summer stock company on Cape Cod. This is a big change from the summer of '64, which I spent teaching English in Saigon. My dad was stationed there as an employee of the Agency for International Development. My whole family moved there with him, but that's nothing new for us. I grew up in places like Athens and Karachi.

I loved Saigon and its people. I dated both American and Vietnamese men that summer. And I got used to going to sleep to the sound of mortar fire in the suburbs.

In the summer of '65, I watch from Cape Cod as the Saigon I know gets destroyed. A boy I know goes for a walk in a field and gets blown up walking on a Viet Cong land mine. The bachelor officers' quarters where my mom used to bring cookies is now rubble.

ZACK

When I return to college my sophomore year, I work with a community group in a nearby town. It's in a slum where there are still dirt roads. I help them organize so they can get water and sewer lines. It's so weird travelling back and forth from the comforts of college to a slum.

The people I work with, they're all against the war. "Zack," they say, "the money belongs at home. We have no right telling another country how it should think."

You know, I was raised an Army brat, and I expected after college to do a stint in the Navy and then maybe have a career in the State Department. But my childhood goals, they've become part of my childhood.

THE SAME FEMALE
STUDENT AS ABOVE

I think the Vietcong are extremely evil and extremely dangerous. Once, just to kill two Americans, they destroyed an entire movie theater filled with Vietnamese.

Most of my college friends are so opposed to U.S. policy that nobody listens to me. And in Vietnam, a guy I used to date gets drafted, and I never hear from him again.

A STUDENT

Number of U.S. military personnel in
South Vietnam, December, 1964: 23,300.

A STUDENT

Number of U.S. military personnel in
South Vietnam, December, 1965: 184,300.

TOM

February '66. I'm one of fifteen Oberlin students going down to Attalla County in Mississippi, just west of where three civil rights volunteers were killed a year earlier.

BILL

Over a hundred years ago, before the Civil War, Oberlin faculty and students rode together to rescue a runaway slave who had been captured in the nearby town of Wellington. In the early sixties, Oberlin students raised money for striking cotton workers, got arrested in civil rights protests, and went down to Mississippi to rebuild a Negro church burnt down by the local Ku Klux Klan. When I read about these students, I feel like I'm part of a tradition that isn't just talking about the issues. It's direct action in the face of oppression.

TOM

This time, we're going down to help integrate movie theaters and restaurants, and to help register Negro voters.

BILL

Most of us sleep in the homes of local Negroes, but Tom and I and three others who have some experience with guns –

TOM

One riflery class in summer camp –

BILL

We stay at the local Freedom House – an old wooden shack on a dirt road in the Negro neighborhood. There are no sidewalks around, hardly any cars, and the road to it is thick with mud from the winter rain.

TOM

It's midnight. Bill and I are on guard duty. I hold a 22-caliber rifle.

BILL

I hold a shotgun.

TOM

Two late-model cars drive by us, slowly. Then they drive by again. Then they stop.

BILL

I'm on my knees, clutching my shotgun, peering out the bottom of a window.

We hear a gun go off and glass shattering.

TOM

The men in the cars open fire. Bullets crash through the house, the walls so thin that the bullets rip right through them.

BILL

A student in the next room is shot in the chest. I dive under the nearest bed.

TOM

I dive out the front door and open fire.

BILL

I can't let Tom be alone, so I crawl onto the porch and start firing, too.

TOM

The cars speed away, their tires sliding in the mud.

BILL

I take the wounded to a doctor. Thank God, it's not serious.

TOM

I call the FBI. They don't show up till 3 a.m. When they arrive, they seem more interested in us than the attackers.

Months later, I learn the men in the car were members of the local KKK and the Mississippi Highway Patrol.

BILL

The civil rights slogan is:

BILL and TOM

Put your body on the line!

TOM

Which is why we finish out our ten days in Attalla County.

BILL

And why, when the time comes, I'll be ready to do more than just *talk* against the war.

WOBC NEWSCASTER

WOBC News: In South Vietnam, street mobs have rioted for one week in Saigon and other cities to protest the current government. Members of the mob range from students and Communist agitators to Buddhist monks and Boy Scouts.

For the first one hundred days of 1966, 1,361 Americans have died in South Vietnam, which is more than all who died there in 1965.

HARRY

I just can't make up my mind about Vietnam. My father, he has all these intelligent arguments in support of the government position. My friends, they have all these equally intelligent arguments against the government position. After awhile, the only conclusion I reach is that there's an overabundance of intelligence in the universe, very little of which has funnelled down to me.

Finally, I say, Harry, okay, maybe you're not the brightest guy on campus, but at least your desk is the one of the best organized. So I go down to the Snack Bar, to organize my thinking.

I order a bagel and coffee, and I sit down with a number two pencil and paper. I write down all of the arguments I've heard, on both sides, every one I can remember. And I just look them at them. And look at them.

A SNACK BAR EMPLOYEE

Excuse me, Harry, but the Snack Bar's closing.

HARRY

That's okay; I've made my decision... How am I going to ever explain this to my dad?!

* * *

KATHY

I really don't think of myself as a political person, but, well, when I read about what our country is doing to other people, I feel this, I don't know, this personal commitment to try to set things right that have gone wrong.

My friends and I decide to raise funds to help a Quaker group which plans to send a small boat to North Vietnam with medical supplies. The Federal government could consider this aiding and abetting the enemy, a crime punishable by five years in jail. When a Cleveland radio station interviews me, I can almost hear the prison doors closing behind me. But I still feel a personal obligation to act.

(cont'd)

KATHY (cont'd)

The "Phoenix" sails from Japan to Hanoi with medical supplies, and afterwards, one of the crew comes to Oberlin to speak. He's almost seventy, a soft-spoken Midwesterner named Horace Champney.

An older man enters.

KATHY

He tells us how American jet fighters had buzzed the boat, hoping to intimidate the crew into turning back.

After the talk, I escort him across campus.

(to the older man:)

I just want you to know how upset I am about the war. When I read about our soldiers destroying whole villages, and when I think about how corrupt that government is, I –

THE OLDER MAN

Look at the moon, Kathy. How beautiful she is.

KATHY

And I look up. And she is.

* * *

A STUDENT

Number of U.S. troops in South Vietnam,
December, 1966: 371,000.

* * *

BILL

The College Administration would like people to believe they're neutral on the war, but they're not. Corporate recruiters are stuck at the graduate placement office in the administration building, but the military gets to set up a table right in the middle of the student union lobby.

TOM

Some of us think this has to be stopped.

ZACK

When an Air Force recruiter comes in February, 1967, thirty of us surround him and his display, and we link arms.

KATHY

We're obstructing recruitment and the perpetuation of the war!

ZACK

We let nobody past us.

TOM

This totally shocks the recruiter, who remains trapped for over an hour.

BILL

Finally, he forces his way out. He goes downstairs to the Snack Bar and tries to set up shop there.

KATHY

So we follow him down, surround him again and link arms.

BILL

This really pisses off some jock-types –

A JOCK

We insist on our right to be recruited.

The jock tries to break through the line. Bill gets in his way. The two start to fight. The others pull them apart.

KATHY

Finally, the College closes the Snack Bar, eleven hours early.

TOM

Military recruiters have never been in the student union since.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, February 14, 1967:
"The College Faculty Council has asked the Administration to take "whatever steps are necessary to insure the rights of students to meet with recruiters."

ZACK

It's important to me to learn how to judge a demonstration as a success or failure. Our demonstration has caused more people to think and talk about the war than ever before. On the other hand, people are arguing about our tactics instead of focusing on the war. That's not what we want.

TOM

For the next demonstration, those of us who are hard-core activists decide we need to build up unity with what we call the "soft left": liberals, pacifists, uninformed non-ideological people with anti-war impulses, folks like that.

BILL

When Navy recruiters visit on May 18 and set up shop in the Graduate Placement Office, we devise a new kind of sit-in.

KATHY

250 students sit in a checkerboard pattern on the floor. People can get by us, but it won't be easy.

A couple of students walk through the crowd easily.

KATHY (cont'd):

Well, it wasn't supposed to be easy.

ZACK

The tactics of this demonstration offend no one. But we create no new awareness or concern. So what did we really accomplish?

TOM

When the next demonstration comes, I think we're going to have to be confrontive again.

* * *

ZACK

I can't help but notice that almost everybody who shows up at our demonstrations is white. This bothers me, and so Bill and I set up a meeting with two of the black leaders on campus. The meeting itself is a sign of how things on campus have changed in a few years.

BILL

When I started here, the first thing I did was join the Oberlin Committee Against Racism. That's gone now. The whites who were on it are pretty focused against the war. The blacks have formed their own group, to fight for more black studies and a black dorm.

ZACK

At the meeting, one guy tells me he thinks we white boys are jerking off, that nothing we do on this campus against the war means shit. The other guy says he's more concerned with the war happening in the inner cities, that there's a war going on in our own backyard.

BILL

We never do organize any demonstrations together. You know, it's embarrassing, but I have to admit I don't have any black friends on campus. In Tennessee I do, but not here.

* * *

WOBC NEWSCASTER

WOBC News: Heavyweight boxing champion Mohammed Ali, formerly Cassius Clay, has refused to report for induction into the draft. Ali said, "No Vietcong has ever called me nigger."

In Oberlin, ninety faculty members have signed a statement urging President Johnson to declare an unconditional halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.

Finally, Student Senate has voted to finance a student reporter to spend next semester in South Vietnam.

THE REPORTER

During my four months in Vietnam, I interview everyone from grunts to generals, from students in the underground to government officials. But no one affects me more profoundly than Thich Tri Quang*, leader of the country's Buddhist religion.

(*Note: The name is pronounced "Tick Tree Kwong".)

THICH TRI QUANG

Please be seated.

THE REPORTER

Thank you.

THICH TRI QUANG

I am profoundly moved by the sorrows of my country. However, I am not the least fearful about the effects of warfare on my people.

THE REPORTER

You're not?!

THICH TRI QUANG

Vietnam has been fighting for two thousand years. The faith and common sense of the people will survive, whichever side prevails. What disturbs me most about this war is the quality of rice.

THE REPORTER

Rice?

THICH TRI QUANG

Rice is the foundation of civilization in the Far East. It nourishes personal health and family life, culture and art.

THE REPORTER

But what does rice have to do with the war?

THICH TRI QUANG

Because of this war, our ground has been destroyed by bombs and chemicals. We have been forced to use imported rice, polished white rice such as you Americans eat. It is completely devoid of life and energy. If Vietnam adopts this way of eating, it will be the end of our civilization.

THE REPORTER

So where do you import your rice from?

THICH TRI QUANG

We import our rice... from Texas.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, May 2, 1967: "At midnight Sunday, 150 men ushered in May Day with a two-hour riot. The purpose was to protest several key campus issues. Another possibility was to hold the year's first panty raid. —"

A FEW MEN

Yeah!

TOM

I want to make it clear that nobody on the left had anything to do with these panty raids, and that the inclusion of this event in the play trivializes the entire left!

THE STUDENT
READING THE *REVIEW*

"The mob then noisily made their way to Talcott women's dormitory, where, responding to anguished cries of –

A FEW MEN
Panties! Panties! Panties!

THE STUDENT
READING THE *REVIEW*

– one unknown heroine tossed her red bikini underwear to the anxious crowd below."

YVONNE

So there I am, a freshman, retyping my term paper with wider margins so I can stretch it to meet the page requirement. In the next room are a bunch of "girls" on beds by the windows, bouncing and giggling at the activity below.

A FEW MEN
Panties! Panties! Panties!

YVONNE

If it means so much to them, why don't they just go downtown and buy a pair?! It's so high school, you know, where girls were supposed to be dumb and defenseless and purposely lose at games to make the boys feel good. Why can't the boys lose at games sometimes to make me feel good?

A FEW MEN
Panties! Panties! Panties!

YVONNE

I can't take this anymore!!!! So I run into a bathroom, fill a bucket with water, climb onto the fire escape and –

Yvonne douses the men.

A FEW MEN
Panties! Panties!
(as they get doused:)
Shit!!!

YVONNE

As I climb back inside, I notice some other women here and there who look as ungiggly about the whole thing as I am.

KATHY

We start to talk, about all the things that bother us about the way we're supposed to act –

LINDA

About all the ways we think life should be for men and women.

YVONNE

And I get this wonderful warm feeling, the kind you get when you discover you're not alone.

* * *

A FEMALE STUDENT

How I Spent My Summer Vacation, 1967.

In the summer of '67, I live with my sister's family in Chicago, and I work as a waitress. I also attend weekly meetings of the Young Socialist Alliance.

One night the speaker is a handsome merchant sailor, an older guy, around thirty. We strike up a "friendship" and attend meetings together. I introduce him to all my socialist friends. He's an old-fashioned guy; he insists on picking me up and bringing me home to my sister's house. My sister and her husband – they're both schoolteachers with the Chicago Public Schools – they like the guy.

I like him, too.

The next fall, he visits me at Oberlin and meets all my friends there. A week later, I receive a panicked call from my sister. She tells me my sailor friend paid them an unexpected visit. He showed them his credentials as an FBI agent. He threatened that unless I stopped my activities, they could lose their jobs.

I immediately cease my socialist pursuits, so my relatives won't be punished because I'm exercising my "freedom".

* * *

WOBC NEWSCASTER

Welcome back to campus, campers. This is WOBC-FM, audio radiance for our radio audience.

In South Vietnam's first popular election, Nguyen Van Thieu, representing the current military junta, was elected president with 27% of the vote. In the days before the election, the government closed two newspapers for being – quote – sympathetic to the enemy.

(cont'd)

WOBC NEWSCASTER (cont'd)

So far this year, 6,721 U.S. fighting men have died in Vietnam, which is more than the combined total for the last six years.

Here on campus, the faculty's Student Life Committee has rejected a Student Senate proposal which would allow each dorm section to determine its own social rules. However, the committee voted to allow, for the first time in Oberlin history, that when men visit women in their rooms, women may now shut their doors.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, October 3, 1967: "Student Senate has sent a letter to the Administration calling for an end to military recruitment on campus. Navy recruiters are scheduled to visit on October 26 and 27."

HARRY

Okay, so like by now, I've decided I'm against the war – half of my dorm section is – but now I have to deal with this military recruitment issue. So I've made my lists again, and, well, on one hand, I believe in freedom of speech and access to information, regardless of what that information is. On the other hand, recruitment is an integral part of the war machine. If I allow it, then I'm passively aiding and abetting an immoral war. God, I wish it were three years ago, when the only thing my friends argued about was who'd last longer: the Beatles or the Beach Boys... Shit, I'm late for my Philosophy 101 class.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

In today's class, I'd like –

A STUDENT

Professor Daniels?

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Yes?

THE SAME STUDENT

What do you think about military recruitment on campus?

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Well, my views on that subject, as on most things, are rather complex.

HARRY

For the next hour –

PROFESSOR DANIELS

I'd like to set out precisely what my views are, what arguments I use to support them, and what arguments I use to refute the arguments against them.

HARRY

It's amazing. Everything he says is so, so, what's the word... rational. After hearing Daniels for an hour, I've made my decision: I'm becoming a philosophy major. It's my fifth major this month.

* * *

WOBC NEWSCASTER

WOBC News: It's been a busy week for anti-war demonstrators. In Berkeley, 3500 rallied despite a court injunction against it. In Oakland, ten thousand marched on the city's draft-induction center.

In Boston Commons, four thousand gathered to protest the war. 67 men burned their draft cards.

Meanwhile, in preparation for this Saturday's march in Washington, Abbie Hoffman has asked a General Services administrator permission to raise the Pentagon three hundred feet above the ground by chanting ancient Aramaic exorcism rites. The administrator gave Hoffman permission to raise the Pentagon a maximum of ten feet.

TOM

I drive to the march with Dave and Linda in my 1957 Buick Special, which I've spray painted with anti-war slogans.

LINDA

I'm totally unprepared for the numbers of demonstrators I see in D.C. There must be fifty thousand.

DAVE

What amazes me are the signs people are carrying. They're not only demanding that the U.S. get out of Vietnam, but some call for victory for the Viet Cong.

TOM

Various radical collectives hand out fliers urging us to physically seize the Pentagon... We can do it, Dave.

DAVE

Yeah, sure, Tom.

TOM

We've got the numbers.

DAVE

Look at it, Tom. The Army has erected a hurricane fence around the entire Pentagon.

LINDA

Look on the Pentagon's roof. Soldiers are pointing machine guns at us.

TOM

You two can stay back here, but I'm joining in.

LINDA

Tom joins a group of thousands who try to tear down the fence around the Pentagon.

TOM

It takes us one minute!

LINDA

The group move towards the Pentagon doors!

DAVE

Soldiers form a line in front of the Pentagon's doors, bayonets fixed on their rifles.

LINDA

Tom, watch out!

DAVE

A G.I. knocks Tom to the ground with his billy club.

TOM

(to the G.I.:)

Why are you doing this to me?!

DAVE

The G.I. swings his club over and over. Finally, he turns away, and starts hitting someone else.

LINDA

The soldiers secure the Pentagon's doors. Thousands of us face them, pleading with them to join us.

TOM

Hour after hour we confront them, talking
to them while they stand at attention,
unable to respond in any way.

LINDA

Several people walk up and down the lines of
soldiers placing flowers in the barrels of their guns.

DAVE

And suddenly, one soldier drops his
weapon and joins us. Then another.

TOM

It's only a half-dozen, but these soldiers are
risking court martial and perhaps even firing
squad. These are the memories I'll have of
this day, of being beaten, and of seeing the
other side lay down their weapons and join us.
These are the images that will keep me going.

* * *

BILL

I'm with friends on the opposite side of the Pentagon.
I'm with thousands of others, in an area blocked
by the Pentagon on one side, by a fence on another
side, and a tall, thick hedge bordering a parking lot.
For hours the demonstration is peaceful, but after
night falls, and TV crews go away, soldiers start
charging at us from the street, trapping us inside.
People start running and shoving and crashing
through the hedge to get to the parking lot.
As I look back and see the soldiers running
at me, it suddenly hits me:

To my government, *I'm* the enemy.

ZACK

When I return from seeing friends gassed and
clubbed at the Pentagon, when I return to this
oasis called "college", I ask myself, "What am
I doing here?" Then I ask, "What *can* I do here?"

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, October 21: "Students could
not form a consensus at a meeting last night on
what tactics to use against the upcoming visit by
Navy recruiters. More meetings are scheduled."

BILL

I think it's essential to have a militant demonstration, a show of our commitment in the face of the College's refusal to take a stand on the war.

ZACK

Right, Bill. We've got to do something, but we don't want everyone in the anti-war movement thrown out of school.

LINDA

Every night for a week, we have these meetings.

TOM

I got it! Have the demonstration off-campus. Go to the streets.

KATHY

The night before the recruiter visits, I'm one of ninety students invited to a secret meeting.

ZACK

If everyone could settle down, please... Thanks. Before I go any further, I want to remind everyone that what we're doing is serious. Laws will be violated, and we expect to get arrested. What we're doing could even be considered kidnapping.

HARRY

God.

ZACK

If anyone has any doubts about their commitment, this is the time to leave.

The group looks to see if anyone has left.

TOM

Only three, not bad.

ZACK

Okay. Now let's discuss strategy...

* * *

HARRY

I don't know why I agreed to do this. I'm going to end up with an FBI record, and I'll never have the career of my choice, if I can ever figure out what that is.

A MALE STUDENT

Harry, phone call!

HARRY

Phone call? It's midnight. Who would want to call me at – Hello?... Oh, hi, Dean Fasman. Nice to hear from you... Meeting? What meeting?... Oh, the secret meeting. Yes, I was there... Um, uh, could you excuse me for a moment? My, my lava lamp is overheating.

(to us:)

He wants to know what we're planning for tomorrow. I've never lied to a dean before. And I don't even know if I support what my friends are doing. But, but I don't feel right ruining their plans. Maybe I should call Professor Daniels and ask what *he'd* do in this situation. Calm down, Harry. Just calm down.

(into the phone:)

Dean Fasman, I assure you there will be no trouble *on campus* tomorrow... You're welcome. Good night.

(to us:)

Well, I guess I've chosen sides, haven't I?

* * *

The following speeches should be divided among the entire cast (unless specifically noted otherwise):

At 6 a.m., I bicycle to the library.
I'm wearing a skirt, as skirts are supposed to be more acceptable to townspeople.

I'm in the town square, with a walkie-talkie.

I'm at the truck stop on one end of town.

All roads are covered.

At 7:55, I see the recruiter's car just pass the truck stop. I call the library.

I inform the others that they can come back into town.

THE STUDENT IN THE TOWN SQUARE

Five minutes later, I look down the road and can see him.

His car is surrounded by our cars and motorcycles.

He's right at the edge of the town square.

Our cars slow down.

He slows down.

He's going very slowly now. I walk out into the center of the road, right in front of him. I lay my hands on his front grill and walk back slowly until his car stops.

We hop out of our cars.

We form a circle –

Girls inside.

The rest of us join them.

We surround the car.

We've done it!

ZACK

I tell the Navy recruiter: If you leave town immediately and don't return, we'll let you go.

He says he's under orders, and he can't go.

So we wait.

And wait.

I'm surprised. There isn't a policeman in sight.

It's cold, and I wish I had worn gloves.

I get coffee and donuts. We all eat breakfast.

We offer coffee and donuts to the recruiter as well.

Then we wait.

And wait.

And wait.

Word reaches us that two other Navy officers drove into town by a different route and set up shop in the administration building.

I feel ridiculous.

There must be eighty of us around the car,
and five hundred watching.

Some support us, some are against us,
and some are here because we're
the best show in town.

Some look like they'd like to join us
but are too scared.

The recruiter keeps busy doing homework
for a correspondence course.

I think of the classes I'm missing,
and wonder if I'll make my 2:30 class.

HARRY

I'm beginning to have second thoughts about all this.

THE OTHERS

Harry!

HARRY

College must be a place where people can
have free access to information and ideas,
even reprehensible ones... I'm leaving the line.

We wait some more.

Still no police.

We wait some more.

Someone brings us more food.

I offer it to the Navy officer. He refuses.

A FEMALE STUDENT

He looks in his late thirties. He's kind of cute.

YVONNE

(reacting to the above:)

Oh, ick.

He asks to be let out of the car to relieve himself.

ZACK

We hold a meeting. We hadn't thought about this.

It's defeating ourselves if we let him go.

It's inhuman to keep someone trapped for so long.

Let him use a Coke bottle.

He's losing his patience. He says we're violating his civil rights and that if we don't let him go soon, he'll sue us.

ZACK

We vote.

The others raise their hands and comment as Zack says:

ZACK

Let him go?... Make him stay... He stays.

He starts fumbling with his car key.

He starts his car!

A MALE STUDENT

Get the girls out of there!

He slams the gas pedal to the floor!

We cling onto the car on all sides!

He can't see where he's going!

His car goes ten feet and rams into a reporter's car.

He missed a friend of mine by inches!

We grab the back end of the car and lift it up.

We put logs under the back tires.

He can't move now!

And we've stuck together!

We re-form our group.

TOM

He really pisses me off.

He still needs to use the bathroom.

TOM

Fuck 'im.

ZACK

People are getting mad. I don't like this.

BILL

Zack and I have a meeting.

ZACK

(to the others:)

We're going to let him go.

A FEW PEOPLE:

Why?!

ZACK

Bill and I have decided that holding the car is as much a symbol as holding the man!

YVONNE

Give me a break.

BILL

We let him out.

We watch him go to a nearby gas station.

Five minutes pass.

Slowly.

A moment of silence.

Oh my God.

In the distance, a troop of white-helmeted state troopers march down the street.

Behind the cops are fire trucks.

BILL

As the firemen hook up their hoses, I imagine the hoses of Birmingham and Selma.

They're scared. You can see it in their faces.

They don't know what to do. Neither do we.

An officer with a megaphone gives us to the count of three to disperse.

You're bluffing!

One...

ZACK

If you want to arrest us, we won't resist.

Two...

ZACK

We've discussed this last night. We won't resist arrest.

Three.

Suddenly, fire hoses turn on us!

Tear gas canisters hit the ground.

I cover my face.

I hold my breath.

I can't see.

The gas burns my skin.

Stick together.

I'm scared!

Stick together!

Tear gas is supposed to make you disperse, but –

EVERYONE

We stick together!

A steaming canister lands half-a-foot away.

I pick it up and toss it back at the police.

When they run out of gas, they stop.

EVERYONE

And we're still together!

The air is permeated.

Bystanders have suffered as much as we have.

YVONNE
Zack?

ZACK
What?

YVONNE
What do we do now?

ZACK
Good question.

BILL
We'll march to the police station
and demand they confront us!

They march arm-in-arm, singing a patriotic song,
such as "America the Beautiful".

The whole town is out.

People say they smelled gas all over campus.

ZACK
When we get to the station –

BILL
They've locked us out.

So what do we do now?

ZACK
We'll have another meeting tonight to
discuss what we've done and decide
where we go from here.

THE FEMALE STUDENT WHO
BICYCLED TO THE DEMONSTRATION

As I bicycle back to my dorm, tear gas crystals
in my socks start burning through to my skin.
I pedal as fast as I can, run to my dorm's
bathroom, strip and shower.

I sit in the dorm lounge with my friends.
We stare at each other silently through
swollen eyes.

I hear the bells of the school chapel ring.
I have just enough time to make my
2:30 class. I decide not to go.

ZACK

From this moment on, it's clear to me that one day anti-war demonstrators will be killed.

A STUDENT

I feel like I've just grown up.

As the crowd disperses, chapel bells are heard tolling.

* * *

A STUDENT

That evening, we watch ourselves on TV.

A MALE STUDENT

My father calls. He says if I ever get involved in something like this again, he'll disown me.

ZACK

The national president of SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, calls to congratulate me. He offers to send speakers and carloads of supporters for whatever we plan to do next. I tell him we can handle things ourselves.

A STUDENT

New York Times, October 30, 1967:
"In response to recent developments, Oberlin College cancelled classes today to present an all-campus think-in to discuss the problems of the war and anti-war protesting. Although attendance was voluntary, 2,000 of the school's 2700 students attended."

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, February 27, 1968:
"26 students have pleaded 'no contest' after being arrested for disorderly conduct in connection with last October's surrounding of a Navy recruiter's car. Judge D.R. Goldthorpe:

THE JUDGE

You have the option of paying a fifty dollar fine, spending ten nights in the Oberlin jail, or doing twenty hours of public service.

A STUDENT

Is it okay if I spend my twenty hours working for the Presidential peace candidate, Senator Eugene McCarthy?

THE STUDENT
READING THE *REVIEW*

"The judge considered the request – "

THE JUDGE

Inappropriate.

* * *

A FEMALE STUDENT

Not all of us who were arrested plead "no contest". I enter a plea of "not guilty". I retain a progressive ACLU lawyer from Cleveland, who agrees with my "modest request" to raise at my trial the constitutionality of the war in Vietnam. I think the other side hears about this, because on the eve of my trial, my case is dismissed.

Oh, twenty years later, I became executive director of Alliance for Justice.

ZACK

A week after the Navy recruiter incident, my father is assigned to Vietnam. While he's there, my stepmother throws me out of the family. You see, the FBI has begun asking our neighbors about me, and that sort of flips her out. Besides, her daughter, my stepsister, she just turned thirteen. And my stepmother doesn't want her to be influenced by me.

A MALE STUDENT

I read about my alma mater's Navy recruiter demonstrations in *Stars and Stripes*, while serving as an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam. I was drafted shortly after dropping out of Oberlin in '64. I didn't want to remain a private, so I volunteered to attend Officer Candidate School and Flight School. By the time I complete these courses, I'm a first lieutenant on orders to a full-blown war.

I don't like the war, but I do believe in our system of government. So if our elected representatives decide this is necessary, then I'm no better than the other thousands of troops sent over, and I have to do my best.

My friends and I are involved in many projects to help the Vietnamese in agriculture, medicine and construction. But you know, as hard as we work, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese work even harder to destroy any progress we make. While our side works hard to destroy any progress they make.

(cont'd)

A MALE STUDENT (cont'd)

The more I get to know the Vietnamese, the more I see how desperately they want to be free. But from whom? It's a quagmire, and I don't see any winners.

ZACK

I graduate in the spring of '68, and I immediately get my draft notice. I move to Boston, because in the Midwest you can get five years for draft evasion. In Massachusetts, only two.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, April 5, 1968: "Two seniors will openly disassociate themselves from the draft tomorrow in a ceremony in Fairchild Chapel. They're the first students to take such an action publicly."

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, May 14, 1968: "Four more students and one faculty member will renounce their ties to the Selective Service system at a 'service of conscience'."

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, May 24, 1968: "215 male students have signed a pledge that they will not allow themselves to be inducted into the armed forces as long as the war continues."

A MALE STUDENT

I remember the draft.

A MALE STUDENT

I remember the draft.

A MALE STUDENT

I remember the draft.

A MALE STUDENT

I remember the draft.

HARRY

I remember being in a car going home for winter vacation with Larry Delakowski and Arnie Lipskovitz, wondering if women will ever want to hyphenate their names with these guys. My very thin friend Larry says:

LARRY

I'm not worried about the draft because I know just how underweight you have to be to get a medical deferment.

HARRY

Arnie says:

ARNIE

I'm not worried because I have flat feet. So, Harry, what's wrong with you?

HARRY

Nothing. I'm in perfect health.

ARNIE and LARRY

That's too bad.

* * *

LARRY:

I just learned my draft board physical is scheduled for November 10. So I have four weeks to get thin.

(Larry takes a slip of paper out of his wallet.)

On October 15, I'm 140 pounds. A week later, I'm down to 131. A week later, I'm 126. By November 10, I'm 120.4 pounds, 1.6 pounds under the wire.

And all these years later, I still carry the record in my wallet, just so I'll remember.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT (BLACK)

On a June morning after graduation, I climb aboard a bus with other recent grads to go to the Army Induction Center in Cleveland. I spent the previous night partying, and I'm in pretty good spirits when the bus hits Cleveland. But my high vanishes when I see what looks like some of the largest mammals on the planet – black and white – lined up to go into the draft center. First, we're shown a film about the virtues of the Vietnam War. I don't think it's convincing 'cause many of us shout –

ALL THE STUDENTS
WATCHING THE FILM

Bullshit, bullshit!

THE STUDENT

– as the film reaches its climax. Then they almost shove us into the testing area, where this redneck sergeant starts yelling at us.

THE SERGEANT*

Okay, you commie faggots, strip down to your draws. I want to see if any of you have any balls.

(**Note:* Women can play the non-students in this scene.)

THE STUDENT

Despite our protests against the war, all of us students strip down to our underwear. The giant mammals strip without so much as a grunt.

One of the mammals grunts.

THE STUDENT (cont'd)

After a bunch of tests – height, weight, blood pressure – the sergeant starts yelling again.

THE SERGEANT

Okay, you social retards, drop your draws and bend over. These Army doctors need to shine a light up your ugly asses to see whether they're clean enough for this man's army.

THE STUDENT

Everyone drops their drawers and bends over. Except me. The doctors start peering up peoples' butts with their little lights. The sergeant turns around and notices me.

THE SERGEANT

Drop your draws, asshole!

THE STUDENT

Hell, no!

The sergeant's red neck almost explodes. Apparently, he's never heard the word No, and he's definitely never heard "Hell, no". He looks like he wants to hit me. His mouth starts making all kinds of funny motions. And I suddenly realize, "I'm not in the Army. He can't order me to do anything!" I want to yell at the two hundred guys in the room, "Hey, pull up your pants, they can't make us do anything!" But that gutsy I'm not.

THE SERGEANT

Go over there, maggot! And pull up your pants before you get there!

THE STUDENT

I pull up my pants and go over there... to an Army psychologist.

A WHITE MAN IN A WHITE COAT

I see you didn't take the order to drop your shorts. Why not?

THE STUDENT

Because I don't have to.

He asks more questions and more questions and fills out a long sheet.

THE MAN IN A WHITE COAT

You can go home now, son. I am classifying you I-Y.

THE STUDENT

What's I-Y?

THE MAN IN A WHITE COAT

Not fit for military duty except for a national emergency.

THE STUDENT

We're at war, but I guess that doesn't qualify as a national emergency... I decide not to quibble.

As I turn to leave, I ponder what would become a lifelong lesson to learn and relearn: The power of one individual and the true meaning of protest when your ass is literally on the line.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT

I spend the summer of '67 working in a nearby steel mill. I'm protected from the draft by my student deferment. The guys I work with, guys my age, they've got nothing to protect them. As the summer wears on, they're called up one by one. If you're not in college, the draft is a plague. Sooner or later, it'll get you. I feel guilty about that, but I don't know what to do about it. So I live with the guilt.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT

For a long time, I think about applying for Conscientious Objector status. One night, I'm studying at the library, when this working-class-looking guy walks in. He asks me where the student union is. Then he asks me what percentage of the student body is Jewish. Then he asks what percentage of the student body is black. I ask him why he's asking.

He tells me he wants to start up a campus chapter of the American Nazi party. I tell him that many of my best friends, and my girlfriend, are Jewish.

(cont'd)

A MALE STUDENT (cont'd)

He starts to walk away, but just before he leaves, he says, "You know, if I ever get in power, I'll send your girlfriend to the gas chamber."

Fury rises up in me like I've never felt before.

"If you ever get in power, watch out for me! 'Cause I'll put a bullet in your head!"

And as I hear myself say those words, I realize I can't be a conscientious objector. Yes, I could kill, if I think it's in defense of the human race.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT

When the government decides to end student deferments and institute a draft lottery, the first lottery is televised. I watch it in a dorm lounge with other students.* As each date comes out of the bingo hopper, there are sighs of relief, murmurs of anxiety, and sometimes, horrified screams. Nobody says much. We just keep watching as our futures are decided by a bingo hopper on TV.

*Starting at this point, and through the rest of the speech, we hear and maybe see someone pulling numbers:

THE PERSON CALLING THE NUMBERS:

Number one is September 14. September 14 is number one.
Number two is April 24. April 24 is number two.
Number three is December 30. December 30 is number three.
Number four is February 14. February 14 is number four.
Number five is October 18. October 18 is number five.
Number six is September 6. September 6 is number six.
Number seven is October 26. October 26 is number seven.
Number eight is September 8. September 8 is number eight.
Number nine is November 23. November 23 is number nine.
Number ten is December 6. December 6 is number ten.
Number eleven is August 31. August 31 is number eleven.
Number twelve is December 7. December 7 is number twelve.*

*After the lottery speech ends, we hear a few more numbers being read. The numbers fade as the next speech begins.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT

When I finally decide to turn in my draft card, it feels like the most major decision I'll make in my life.

My friends are very supportive. So are my parents, God bless 'em.

Three others decide to join me in a ceremony in Fairchild Chapel. I'm surprised how many people have shown up: friends, political associates, even some faculty members I would've never expected to have seen.

I'm not by nature a public speaker. I don't even raise my hand in class much. So I read from a paper what I plan to say. This is part of it

"Jail is not the greatest place in the world, but it is a viable alternative to going to a place where I'm forced to kill people I don't consider the enemy. I not only break this law; I pledge to work the rest of my life, if necessary, to get rid of it. It's up to us to make sure that the changes that happen in the world are the changes we feel *must* happen."

I'm tried and convicted on draft evasion charges. I finally win on appeal. Only then do I allow myself to feel the fear about how close I came to serving time.

* * *

A MALE STUDENT

After I finish Oberlin in '66, I'm feeling pretty desperate about what to do with my life. So I apply for the Peace Corps. After months of not hearing from them, I enlist in the Army. By the time I receive my Peace Corps acceptance, I'm already halfway through Officers Candidate School.

After a year at Fort Knox, I'm shipped to Charleston, West Virginia. Among my duties is being a Survivor Assistance Officer to widows or parents of soldiers killed in the war.

It's my job to bring the message that their husband or son has died. I'm the one who tells them of benefits eligible to survivors. I'm the one who arranges for military honors at the burials. I want to help, and I want to comfort, and sometimes I wish I had been the one killed.

At one service, when I present the flag to the parents of the dead soldier:

THE FATHER

Is this all those rich sons-of-bitches in Washington are giving us for our son's life?

THE SAME MALE STUDENT AS ABOVE

I spend '68 and '69 burying young men.

I bury my grief in alcohol, and I keep burying
myself in alcohol for another 12 years.

Some of my buddies are still buried that way.

* * *

A STUDENT

Oberlin Review, April 23, 1968: "Over 100
students gathered last night for a symbolic
funeral of the senior class. A coffin representing
all the male students was lowered into the
southwest corner of the town square. Following
the burial, female students planted flowers."

* * *

A STUDENT

June, 1968. There are now over
half a million U.S. troops in Vietnam.

The lights fade.

END OF ACT ONE

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